

Community Conflicts and the Politics of Creating New Districts and Chiefdoms in Bauchi State



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Abstract

The history of community conflicts in Bauchi state reached its climax in 1991 when the major uprising by the Sayawa minority tribe occurred in the Tafawa Balewa local government area. The inability of the Bauchi state government to implement most of the recommendations of various investigation committees led to periodic outbreaks of lawlessness in the area between 1995 and 2012. Recently, Governor Isa Yuguda approved the recommendation for the creation of new districts and Sayawa chiefdom in the state. He also approved the relocation of the Tafawa Balewa local government headquarters to Bununu town as a temporary peace arrangement. However, the location of the chiefdom headquarters in Bogoro local government area did not resolve the dispute over the ownership of Tafawa Balewa town, between the Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani tribes. In order to resolve the problem and restore permanent peace in the area, the government should address the question of the ownership of Tafawa Balewa town through the appointment and posting of a ruler, return of the local government headquarters to its original place and pursue vigorously the process of resettling all the displaced people in line with constitutional provisions.

Keywords: Community Conflicts, Politics, New Districts, Chiefdoms, Sayawa, Hausa-Fulani

Introduction

Since 1999, there has emerged an upsurge of various forms of conflicts and crises across Nigeria, relative to the periods before. These crises have not only over heated the polity, but have also threatened to uproot the very foundations and pillars of our nationhood. The most prominent of these conflicts have been ethnically based, and there has also been the agency of religion. Scholars have argued that these conflicts are not entirely new, and that they have their roots and antecedents in aspects of our political history (Ibrahim 2002, Egwu, 2011). However, the current resurgence of ethnic and religious conflicts throughout the country, has taken different forms

and dimensions in most cases linked to the growth in population, thereby growth in the need for food and housing. Further, the development of new channels of communication, which have widened the political and economic awareness of the people of Nigeria has encouraged new generations of agitators and players in both the politics and administration of the country. It has been pointed out by different scholars (Ibrahim 2002, Hashim 2004, Mukhtar 2007, and Egwu 2011) that Nigeria is the most plural country in Africa, and modernity has encouraged different groups to struggle and preserve their respective cultures, customs and norms. Their unique identities encourage them to openly contest and aspire to hold and sustain equal power, and demand equal respect, and equality in wealth and development, most especially within domains they see as their autochthonous base. The kind of pluralism found in Nigeria is comparable only to the Indian federation and the United States of America. However, unlike the United States and Indian federation where such forms of pluralism have become a great source of national strength and to some extent stability, in Nigeria, the reverse is the case.

In Bauchi state in particular, ethnic and religious differences have polarized the state, since the beginning of the 1990s, when major uprisings such as the Sayawa ethnic group crisis in Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area (LGA), located some 82 kilometers away from the state capital. This work intends to look at this conflict, considering the history and present agitations/intentions of the various actors, in order to understand why, despite several efforts by the Bauchi State Government to deliberately work towards peace, a well-resolved and lasting peace has not been achieved in the area.

For clarity, this work focuses on the Sayawa people in Tafawa Balewa LGA and their “self-determination” struggle in Bauchi state. The study, therefore, looks at the political implications of the conflict in Tafawa Balewa LGA, being one of the few culturally and ethnically varied areas of the state. The fact that the area presents a case of Cultural plurality encourages the work to focus on power sharing and how this affects state harmony. Cultural Pluralism best describes the dynamics of groups that share power in politics, administration and determination of public policy and access to shared resources.

According to Young (1976) and Egwu (2004), ethnicity is fluid and can dynamically be influenced by various factors, whether social, geographical or environmental. The model bases its analytical gear on the existence of groups vying for influence, control and domination. These groups are seen as culturally distinct from each other on the basis of language, social organization, values, beliefs and other cultural characteristics. In Nigeria, before the advent of colonial rule, disparate ethnic groups existed and functioned as separate self-contained communities but when colonial powers forced them to co-exist under centralized political systems; the relationship between them became one of competition

for the allocation of resources and other forms of colonial favors. On independence, the struggle and competition among the groups became very tense indeed. Larger groups attempted to ensure their dominance over others by controlling the key governmental institutions while minority groups struggled for recognition and a fair deal in the distribution of the national resources. Such was the case with the Sayawa minority group in Bauchi state.

Background to The Sayawa Uprisings in Tafawa Balewa

The roots of the recurrent Sayawa uprisings in Tafawa Balewa have a long chain of history. It can be linked to events in the area as far back as 1948 (Ashafa, 2004; Mukhtar, 2007). The bone of contention leading to the frequent clashes has to do with the twin issues of chieftaincy and land ownership between the main contending groups (Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani). The climax of the conflict was in 1991 when a major disturbance broke out in the area which later affected other parts of the state. The trigger then was the controversy over the use of a public abattoir to slaughter pigs and the sale of pork in the market. The crisis led to the loss of hundreds of lives and property worth millions of Naira destroyed (Gar, 1992; Mukhtar, 2007).

In July 1995, another crisis broke out in Tafawa Balewa Town, when some Sayawa Women staged a protest against a proposed reception in honor of the newly appointed commissioner representing Tafawa Balewa Local Government in the person of Alhaji Ibrahim Musa a Hausa man who was appointed to replace Mr. J.K. Manzoa Sayawa man (Tell, 1996). The protest later developed into a full-scale war which claimed several lives.

In 2001, another crisis broke out in the area when a group of Sayawa Youths staged a demonstration in protest against the implementation of Sharia by the Bauchi state government. The crisis lasted for ten days and it affected several villages around Tafawa Balewa. As if these were not enough, conflict occurred again in 2005, 2010, 2011 and 2012. As part of its efforts to find a lasting solution to the recurrent ethno-religious conflicts in the area, the Bauchi state government last year created the Sayawa chieftdom along with new districts and relocated Tafawa Balewa Local Government Headquarters to Bununu town through an Assembly Legislation. Rather than solving the problem, the creation of the chieftdom and the relocation of the council's headquarters attracted mixed reactions from the contending groups. While the majority of the non-Sayawa groups welcomed the decision, the Sayawa had rightly condemned the relocation of the council headquarters and described it as unconstitutional. They also rejected the citing of the chieftdom at Bogoro rather than Tafawa Balewa. According to a Sayawa leader, Rev. Halilu D. Malar of the COCIN Church Tafawa Balewa, "the move was an attempt to deny the Sayawa ownership of Tafawa Balewa Town". All these, have spewed various contending issues such as:

Claims to Ownership of Tafawa Balewa

What seems glaring about the conflict in Tafawa Balewa is the controversy over the ownership of Tafawa Balewa town.

According to Ashafa et al (2004), the ownership of the town was claimed by both the Sayawa and the Hausa/Fulani, thus leading to conflict between them. These claims came out vividly first in 1991 when the Sayawa requested for chieftdom with headquarters in Tafawa Balewa town during the proceedings of the 1992 Babalakin Commission of Enquiry, and more recently in the series of write-ups to Governor Isa Yuguda reminding him about the issue and his campaign promise to that effect.

The Sayawa claimed that they were the founders of Tafawa Balewa and that all other ethnic groups later joined them and were, therefore, strangers. The name "Tafawa Balewa" is derived from the Sayawa word Puji meaning 'black stone'. Other historical evidence such as the presence of grinding trough marks on the rocks in all their settlements including Tafawa Balewa town was cited. And that it was the Sayawa chief Sunkur, who hosted the first district head, appointed and posted to Tafawa Balewa in 1906 in the person of Malam Attahiru I. Sunkur's house then became the house of district heads that ever lived in Tafawa Balewa. The Sayawa further claimed that as the Fulani were migrant pastoralists they always moved in and out of the place with their cattle.

On the other hand, the Hausa/Fulani claimed that the town was founded by a Fulani man known as Abubakar Goje as a grazing area for their cattle because of its green vegetation all year round and the availability of water at the foot of the rock. However, due to their nomadic nature, the specific date and century their parents settled there, could not be ascertained. They too use historical evidence to buttress their claims. They said that when Ajiya Attahiru I came to the town in 1906, he met the Fulani and the Kanuri and encouraged intermarriages between them and other ethnic groups in the area. They also make reference to S.J. Hobgen's book titled *The Muhammedan Emirates* published in 1930 and the colonial Residence, Mr. Howards' note of 1808 that the Sayawa headquarters was Bogoro. Another book, *The Right Honorable Gentleman* written in memory of the late Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, published in 1991 that the Fulani made a permanent abode beside the rock which was a few kilometers from a "pagan" settlement, the Sayawa, in the 18th century.

Ashafa (2004) further maintained that, 'the issue of Tafawa Balewa Township was so mysterious that the actual first settlers could not be ascertained. Since this was the case, then only the constitution would resolve that controversy. We must look at the constitution, especially section 315 (1999 Constitution) which has vested the ownership of all land in the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a whole, and not in any

ethnic group or community. The contending groups must therefore learn to live together because Tafawa Balewa belongs to all of them.

The Issue of Chieftaincy (Creation of Sayawa Chieftaincy).

The second major problem then and now was the question of chieftaincy in the area. Historical records have shown that before the advent of colonial rule, the Sayawa people had signed a treaty of peace with the Bauchi Emirate after the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in 1805 under Emir Yakubu (Ashafa et al, 2004). Things began to change after the death of Emir Yakubu in 1900. Yakubu's successor, Emir Umaru went and captured Rukan Dole - a Sayawa suburb and enslaved the whole village. This was regarded by the Sayawa as a breach of the peace treaty (Ibid).

With the introduction of indirect rule; new districts were created among which was the Lere District which covers the entire Sayawa land. In 1906, Attahiru Aliyu I, a Fulani was appointed by the Emir of Bauchi as the first district head of Lere. The appointment of district heads and the new method of tax collection used under the indirect rule, system, brought about disaffection and dissent against the traditional rulers.

According to Ashafa et al. (2004), "the intermittent collection of taxes in the form of farm produce, cash and animals among others and the dehumanizing treatment meted out to the defaulters, made the Sayawa want to return to their self-governing traditional system, hence the renewed call for self-governance". Ashafa et al. (2004) added that "The introduction of the emirate judicial system presided over by the Alkalis disempowered the Sayawa traditional judicial system". Prior to the introduction of the native court system by the colonial masters, the Sayawa used their local courts and adjudication to resolve conflicts. The head of the judicial system was usually the Chief Priest in the locality known as Sunkur.

With the advent of Western education, the Sayawa were enlightened and developed a consciousness against the exploitative and manipulative administrative system of the emirate council. These coupled with the return of ex-servicemen from the Second World War further, encouraged the quest for self-determination among them (Ibid). Consequently, the Sayawa formed the council of elders known as Zauren Gonto under a popular figure called Mr. Peter Gonto, who led the struggle for the emancipation of the Sayawa people in 1948. As a sign of protest, the Sayawa joined the then-opposition Action Group Party in 1959 and placed Mr. Peter Gonto to contest an election against the late Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Balewawon. But as a result of a reconciliation, the Sayawa voted for the ruling NPC in 1965 on the promise that, they would be given an indigenous district head.

However, the military coup of January 15, 1966, prevented the actualization of that promise. Accordingly, the Sayawa struggle continued through a series of petitions to all subsequent military

and civilian administrations in Bauchi state. It was in 1970 that the first indigenous district head in person of Aliyu Wulumba Dadi was appointed only to be removed in 1976 on the allegation of misappropriation of public funds. The action was regarded by the Sayawa as a conspiracy to deny them the rulership of their community because the person that was appointed to replace Wulumba as district head (Mal. Haruna Yakubu), himself, a Sayawa man was three months later posted to the newly created Bogoro district and a Fulani man (Mal. Abubakar Bawa) was appointed to be the district head of Lere. The Sayawa protested vehemently and in the violence that followed, the district head was assassinated in September, 1977.

In a bid to resolve the un-ending conflict between the Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani in the Lere district, the emirate decided to democratize the succession of the district head of Lere in 1978. Subsequently, the post was vied for by two candidates, Muhammadu Lulu, a Fulani from the Ajiya family and Forki Sara, a Sayawa man. The election was conducted through an electoral College of 140 people. Alh. Muhammadu Lulu won by 72 votes against Mr. Forki Sara who polled 68 votes. The Sayawa reluctantly accepted the outcome of the election, as they never believed in the fairness of its conduct.

The area enjoyed relative peace from 1978 up to 1990. However, renewed violence occurred in 1991 at the time when the first Sayawa man, Mr. William Wadni was ruling as an elected chairman of Tafawa Balewa local government. The trigger then was the dispute over a piece of meat (popularly called Suya in Hausa). After the crisis, the Federal Government set up a Commission of Enquiry to look into the causes of the disturbances, under Mr. Justice Babalakin. What appeared to be central at the sittings of the commission was the issue of a Sayawa chiefdom. The Babalakin Commission recommended among other things, the creation of a Sayawa chiefdom in Tafawa Balewa as a way of resolving the conflict in the area. The Federal Government approved the recommendation and directed the Bauchi State government to implement it. A committee was then set up by the state government under Alhaji Shehu Awak to work out the details for the creation of the Sayawa chiefdom, an action which the Sayawa believed was a delay tactic. The delay in the creation of the chiefdom led to another crisis in 1995. Since then, all attempts to resolve the problem under subsequent administrations in the state (both military and civilian) proved abortive.

Violence continued in the area at intervals, up to the present time. In 2011 however, the current governor of the state, Malam Isa Yuguda approved the creation of the Sayawa Chiefdom with a temporary Headquarters at Bogoro, and the promise to build a permanent palace for the chief at Martin Giji in the newly created Lere South district. Since that was not what the Sayawa wanted, they rejected the location of the Chiefdom at Bogoro rather than Tafawa Balewa.

Creation of New Districts and Sayawa Chiefdom in Bauchi State

In its bid to carry all the people along and also address the grievances of alienated communities in the state particularly the quest for a separate Chiefdom for the Sayawa minority tribe, the Bauchi State government approved the creation of the Sayawa Chiefdom and over one hundred (100) new districts across the state. The creation of the chiefdom and the districts came through a bill passed by the Bauchi state House of Assembly on June 9, 2011, which was signed into law by the governor, Malam Isa Yuguda on August, 8 2011. As earlier indicated the state government cited the headquarters of the newly created Sayawa Chiefdom, at Martin Gijiin Lere south, but would operate temporarily in Bogoro until a new palace and access road are provided. This development followed the recommendation of a committee set up earlier by the state government, under the chair of Rtd. Gen. Ibrahim Sabo.

The action of the government was received with mixed reactions in Bauchi. This was because the affected communities or people have differently interpreted the actions of the state government. To the majority of Hausa and Fulani and even other tribes, the action of the government was a welcome development and demonstrated a genuine desire for peace in the state. Some government officials even believed that the decision was a bold one and a great achievement on the part of the governor, Mal. Isa Yuguda. However, to the Sayawa people, the action of the state government fell short of addressing their grievances especially the issue of Tafawa Balewa town ownership. The citing of the headquarters of the new Chiefdom, at Bogoro was totally condemned by the Sayawa who desired to keep Tafawa Balewa as their ancestral land.

In a bid to stop the move the Sayawa Council of Elders on October 25, 2011, sued the Bauchi state government in court over the citing of the headquarters of the Sayawa Chiefdom at Martin Giji in Lere south, instead of Tafawa Balewa town. Mr. Bukata Zhyadi, Mr Ehud Simon, Captain Daniel Dodo (Rtd.), and Gung Iliya filed the suit with number BA/191/2011, in the state High Court on behalf of Sayawa ethnic group (Vanguard Oct.26, 2011). The plaintiffs prayed to the court to stop the government from implementing the provision of the recent law creating the Sayawa Chiefdom with the districts and villages pending the determination of the suit. It is this action that is now delaying the implementation of the government decision on the Chiefdom.

The proposed Sayawa chiefdom consisted of five districts and 124 village areas as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1**Newly Created Sayawa Chiefdom**

S/N	New Districts	Number of Villages
1	Bogoro	42 Village Areas
2	Boi	23 Village Areas
3	Lusa	24 Village Areas
4	Lere South	15 Village Areas
4	Tapshin	20 Village Areas
	Total	124

Source: Bauchi state government whitepaper on the creation of Sayawa chiefdom, 2011 (Appendix A).

On the other hand, the state government has also approved the appointments of new district heads in the six existing Emirates in the state in the following order.

Table 2**Newly Created Districts in Bauchi State**

2	Bauchi Emirate	54 Districts
2	Katagum Emirate	34 Districts
3	Misau Emirate	16 Districts
4	Jama'are Emirate	05 Districts
5	Ningi Emirate	17 Districts
5	Dass Emirate	06 Districts
	Total	133 Districts

Source: Bauchi state government white work on the creation of additional districts, 2011 (Appendix B).

Since the matter concerning the creation of Sayawa chiefdom is before a court of law one will only hope that the decision of the court will be in the best interest of the state and its peace-loving people.

The Relocation of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Council Headquarters to Bununu

Another thorny issue that has generated debate in the state today is the relocation of the headquarters of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area to Bununu in 2012, in the wake of renewed fighting in Tafawa Balewa between the Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani. The relocation of the council was used as a last option by the state government in its bid to end the controversy over the ownership of Tafawa Balewa town.

Like the issue of the creation of Sayawa Chiefdom, the relocation also attracted mixed reactions. Some of the communities, particularly the Sayawa saw the relocation as an act against the 1999 constitution, a conspiracy and totally discriminatory against them. The secretary of the Sayawa Council of Elders Mr Bukata Zhadi observed in the following words: "there is a conspiracy in what the government did in the relocation of the council headquarters from Tafawa Balewa town". According to him, the decision was very unfair and it shows that Governor Isa Yuguda, has violated his oath of office by which he pledged to "carry all along without discrimination" (Vanguard May 1, 2012).

However, to the Hausa/Fulani community and other tribes in the area, the relocation of the council to Bununu was a welcome development, and a right decision in the right direction to end the controversy over Tafawa Balewa. The same view is shared within the government cycle. In a Vanguard News work comment, the speaker of the Bauchi state House of Assembly, Hon. Yahaya Mohammed Miya, defended the decision of the government and said the action of the House was backed by due recognition of the sanctity of the fundamental human rights as contained in chapter 5 of the 1999 constitution as amended.

When asked about the issues of protection of lives and property and the right of every citizen to move freely and reside anywhere in Nigeria, he said section 4 of the Bauchi state bylaw 2007, stated that it is possible to relocate a state local government council if there is persistent security breach in that local government. Moreover, their action was a temporary measure to end the crisis in the area. He further said that it is only the headquarters of the local government that was relocated but the name remains Tafawa Balewa as contained in the 1999 constitution (Vanguard May 1, 2012). Also speaking in the same vein, the state Deputy Governor, Alhaji Sagir Aminu Saleh said the decision of the government to relocate the head-quarters of the Tafawa Balewa Local Government from the crises area to Bununu town was made in good faith and aimed at providing lasting peace and development in the area and the state as well (Ibid).

Here one needs to ask some questions: was the relocation the best option for the state government; was there not enough security or law enforcement agents to maintain the peace in the area; and looking at other places where there is a similar problem, were they resolved through relocation of council or state headquarters. One will, therefore, say that the state government was too fast in relocating the council headquarters without resolving the issue of citing the Sayawa Chiefdom headquarters.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the issue of land ownership and the creation of Sayawa chiefdom has resulted in the present protracted crisis. The area has not known peace since the return of hostilities in 1991. The contending parties in the crises have refused to lay down their arms despite several reconciliatory efforts. The question of where to locate the Chiefdom headquarters would not be a problem but for the plurality of the area and the struggles for primacy and power. Furthermore, citing the Chiefdom at Tafawa Balewa or anywhere else will not change the fact that Bauchi as a state is a predominantly Muslim Hausa/Fulani state. Giving the Sayawa a fraction will go a long way to foster peace. The State Government should not shy away from its responsibility of being representative of all. It must not allow a few disgruntled elements to destroy our society. The law enforcement agents should rise to the challenges of peace and security in our land. The issue of peace is beyond politics, we must therefore work together to build a peaceful society.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need on the part of the Bauchi state government and Tafawa Balewa local government to re-unite the communities in Tafawa Balewa through a formal reconciliation effort. This could be achieved by resettling all the displaced persons who are scattered in hundreds within the surrounding local government areas. As of today, there is no single Hausa/Fulani family living in Tafawa Balewa town since the crisis that accompanied the relocation of the council to Bununu in May 2012.
2. Although the resolution of the Bauchi state government to create the Sayawa chiefdom is quite commendable, the government should re-consider her decision on the citing of the Sayawa chiefdom in Bogoro rather than Tafawa Balewa. The Sayawa may be allowed to have Tafawa Balewa town serve as their chiefdom seat in the interest of peace. The state government is also advised to emulate the example of the Kaduna state government where 17 new chiefdoms and 170 districts were created in the year 2000 to address the grievances of minority groups in the state for self-determination (Mukhtar, 2007). The government should not be seen to be siding with one ethnic or religious group in preference to others.
3. There is a need for increased inter-religious communication and dialogue for proper understanding and mutual co-existence in Tafawa Balewa. Religious bodies should constantly and closely monitor the conduct of some religious leaders who deviate from the right teachings of Islam and Christianity to avoid unnecessary confrontations among religious faiths.

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