

THE POST-PLEBISCITE CONFLICT OF 1982 AND NON-HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN SARDAUNA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARE OF TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

(KONFLIK PASCA-PLEBISIT 1982 DAN INTERVENSI BUKAN KEMANUSIAAN DI KERAJAAN TEMPATAN SARDAUNA, NEGERI TARABA, NIGERIA)

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Abstract

After about two decades, since the United Nations plebiscite of 1961, in the former British Cameroons, the long enjoyed peaceful and cordial climate eluded the Mamilla Plateau Saradauna Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to examine why and how the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 failed to receive humanitarian intervention from the relevant agencies. The work examines the nature of the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982. Furthermore, it discusses the roles of the three tiers of government (Local, State, and Federal). The study adopts the qualitative-cum-historical methodology and uses primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources comprised oral interviews, a report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry, and archival materials. Secondary sources included journals, newspapers, conference papers, dissertations, and theses. The research findings revealed that the conflict was more inter-ethnic than political between the Mambilla and Panso/Kambu ethnic groups. It uncovered that besides, the security intervention, the three tiers of government failed to make any modicum of humanitarian intervention towards the Panso/Kambu who were the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the refugees who fled into the Republic of Cameroon for safety. In conclusion, the study suggests that since the Mambilla, the three tiers of government, and relevant agencies were liable, compensation and written apologies should be tendered to the IDPs and the refugees or their respective communities as a way of genuine reconciliation and a true mark of healing the wounds of the past.

Keywords: Panso/Kambu, Mambilla, Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees, Non-humanitarian intervention, Nigeria

Abstrak

Selepas lebih kurang dua dekad, sejak plebisit Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu pada tahun 1961, di bekas Wilayah Cameroon British, keamanan yang lama dinikmati dan iklim mesra terhalang di Kawasan Kerajaan Tempatan Mamilla, Daerah Kerajaan Tempatan Saradauna, Negeri Taraba, Nigeria. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat mengapa dan bagaimana konflik pasca-plebisit 1982 gagal menerima intervensi kemanusiaan daripada agensi yang berkaitan. Kajian ini mengkaji sifat konflik pasca-plebisit 1982. Selain itu, ia membincangkan peranan tiga peringkat kerajaan (Tempatan, Negeri dan Persekutuan). Kajian ini mengambil kaedah kualitatif-sejarah dan menggunakan sumber data primer dan sekunder. Sumber data primer merangkumi temu bual lisan, laporan Suruhanjaya Penyiasatan Keadilan, dan bahan

arkib. Sumber sekunder termasuk jurnal, akhbar, kertas persidangan, disertasi, dan tesis. Penemuan kajian menunjukkan bahawa konflik lebih bersifat antara-etnik daripada politik antara kumpulan etnik Mambilla dan Panso/Kambu. Ia menemui bahawa selain intervensi keselamatan, tiga peringkat kerajaan gagal membuat sebarang bentuk intervensi kemanusiaan terhadap Panso/Kambu yang merupakan Orang Kurang Upaya Dalaman (IDP) dan pelarian yang melarikan diri ke Republik Cameroon untuk keselamatan. Kesimpulannya, kajian mengesyorkan bahawa kerana Mambilla, tiga peringkat kerajaan, dan agensi berkaitan bertanggungjawab, pampasan dan permohonan maaf bertulis harus diberikan kepada IDP dan pelarian atau komuniti masing-masing sebagai cara rekonsiliasi yang jujur dan tanda sebenar menyembuhkan luka-luka masa lalu.

Kata Kunci: Panso/Kambu, Mambilla, Orang Kurang Upaya Dalaman, pelarian, intervensi bukan kemanusiaan, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Sardauna Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria, also known as the Mambilla plateau is located in the south-eastern part and falls within the central geo-political zone of the State. It is one out of the 16 Local Government Areas. It became a Local Government Area in 1976 with Gembu as the headquarters. Geographically it lies between 6^o 30^o and 7^o North longitudes and 11^o and 11^o 30^o East latitudes and covers an area of about 9,386 square kilometres (Olojede and Ezekiel 1985). See Figure 2. The major ethnic groups are the Mambilla, Kaka, Fulbe, Panso and Kambu. Gembu was the theatre of the first major post-plebiscite conflict in 1982. Sezah (1985) stated that the conflict broke out on 11 September 1982 between the Mambilla and the Panso/Kambu ethnic groups. He added that the conflict was a result of the political differences between the supporters of GNPP and NPN. In 1979 Nigeria, under the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo witnessed a transition to civilian rule. This ushered in the Second Republic as the ban on politics was lifted and political activities were held. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was established and saddled with the responsibility of registering political parties and coordinating the general elections among other things.

Therefore, FEDECO registered the following political parties that took part in the elections, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), and People's Redemption Party (PRP) (Ojiako 1983). However, the parties that had national acceptance and popularity nationwide were the NPN and GNPP. Meanwhile, it was a similar situation in Sardauna LGA with the majority supporting either the NPN or GNPP. The majority of the Mambilla supported GNPP and the Panso/Kambu, Kaka, and Fulbe/Hausa favoured NPN. This dichotomy which could threaten the Mambilla's interest during the polls provoked them, hence the outbreak of the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982.

The objective of the study is to find out why and how the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 failed to receive humanitarian intervention from the relevant agencies. The way and manner this conflict was handled largely suggests that the humanitarian situation suffered severe neglect. In light of the above, this study attempts to address the following key questions. Firstly, what was the nature of the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 in Sardauna LGA of Taraba State, Nigeria? Secondly, what were the roles of the three tiers of government (Local, State, and Federal)? What were the possible reasons and implications for the non-humanitarian intervention in the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982? and then the conclusion.

Historical Background

Sardauna LGA was a part of the United Nations (UN) Trusteeship territory which chose to join the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the plebiscite of 1961. Ab initio, it was a German colony known as the German Kamerun from 1902 (Grant and Temperley 1927). But the outbreak of World War I led to the seizure of the colony, and it became a Mandate of the League of Nations. During the

Versailles Peace Conference of 1919, the colony was handed over to Britain and France to supervise it on behalf of the League of Nations. To administer it, Britain and France divided it into two namely, the West Cameroons and the East Cameroons (Cameroons Mandated Territories 1927). Therefore, Britain administered the West Cameroons and France administered the East Cameroons. Britain administered the territory alongside its colony of Nigeria, while France administered its portion alongside its colony of Central Africa. Britain further divided the West Cameroons into two and referred to them, as the British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons (Cameroons under the United Kingdom Administration 1956). See figure 1.

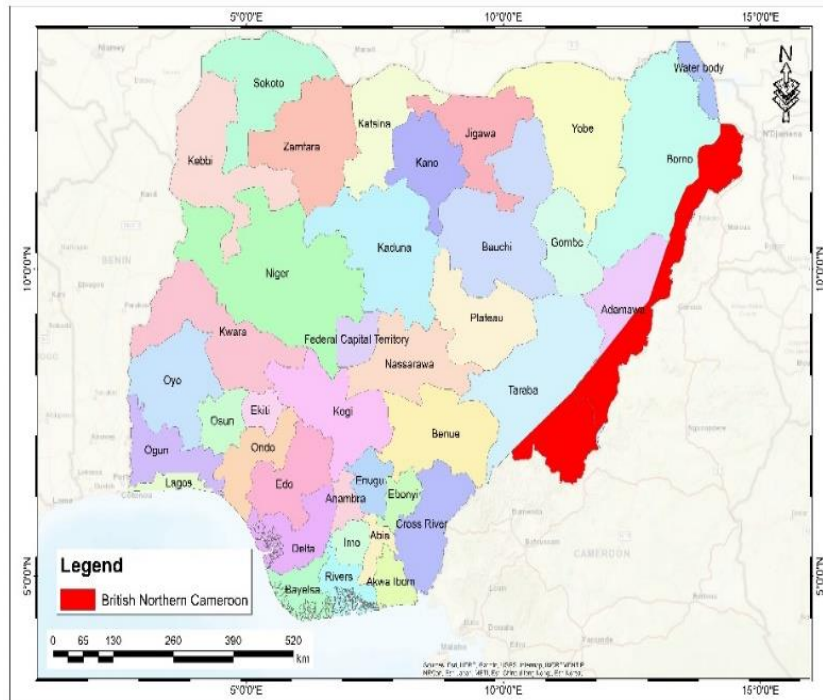


Figure 1. Map showing the British Northern Cameroons

Moreover, Kirk-Greene (1967) added that the outbreak of World War II 1939-1945 led to the demise of the League of Nations. This paved the way for the creation of the United Nations Organisation (UN) on 24 October 1945. This resulted in the transformation of the Mandateship Council to the Trusteeship Council. Incidentally, the springing of nationalist activities in the various colonies became a matter of concern. As such colonialism started retrogressing and giving way to independence in different parts of the world including the African continent from the 1950s. This made Britain grant Nigeria independence by 1st October 1960 (Tata 1987). In addition, Britain also informed the UN of its intention to end the trusteeship in the Cameroons after granting Nigeria independence. Similarly, the Pan-African Movement also mounted pressure on the UN concerning the fate of the trust territory. Tata (1987) further added that the matter was therefore resolved by the UN General Assembly that the trust territory be granted the right to self-determination. As such it was decided that on 11 February 1959, a plebiscite should be conducted in the Northern Cameroons to ascertain the wishes of the people.

To carry out the above mission, the UN appointed Dr Djalal Abdoh, the plebiscite commissioner to coordinate and oversee the entire process. According to Kirk-Greene (1967) the questions presented to the electorates were these: (i) Do you wish the Northern Cameroons to be part of the Northern Region of Nigeria when the Federation of Nigeria becomes independent on 1st October 1960? (ii) Are you in favour of deciding the future of Northern Cameroons at a later date? The outcome indicates that 42,788 voted for Nigeria and 70,546 voted against Nigeria. See Table 1.

Table 1. Shows the result of the 1959 plebiscite in Northern Cameroons

Plebiscite Area	Votes for Nigeria	Votes against Nigeria	Total Votes
Dikwa North	7575	7197	14772
Dikwa Central	8891	11988	20879
Gwoza	3356	6773	10129
Madagali/Chubunawa	4247	9818	14065
Mubi	6120	13578	19698
Chamba	4539	11651	16190
Toungo/Gashaka	2252	2099	4351
Mambilla	2745	7353	10098
United Hills	3063	89	3252
Total	42,788	70,546	113,334

Source: Trusteeship Committee Report on the Plebiscite of 1959 (U.N document T/1491 of November 1959).

From the above result, it is clear that the electorates expressed their wish to decide their future separately and not to join the Federation of Nigeria. This implies that the electorates preferred their autonomy or independence. However, the plebiscite of 1959 was cancelled by the UN, and another was rescheduled for 11 February 1961. According to Kirk-Greene (1967), the cancellation was due to the petitions by the Emir of Adamawa (Traditional ruler) Province and Sir Ahmadu Bello the Premier of Northern Nigeria, and also the UN consultation of the political leaders of Southern Cameroons.

Meanwhile, the second plebiscite was successfully conducted by Dr Djalal Abdoh the plebiscite commissioner, and his team on 11 February 1961. The questions presented to the electorates were: - (i) Do you wish to attend independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon? or (ii) Do you wish to attend independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria? (Kirk-Greene 1967). The result indicates that in the Northern Cameroons, 146,299 electorates voted for Nigeria and 97,659 chose the Republic of Cameroon. While in the Southern Cameroons 233, 571 electorates voted for the Republic of Cameroon and 97,741 chose Nigeria. See Table 1.2 for the plebiscite result in the Northern Cameroons which is the area of interest for this study.

Table 1.2. Showing the result of the 1961 plebiscite in Northern Cameroons

Constituency	Votes for Nigeria	Votes for Cameroon	Total Votes
Dikwa North	22,765	10,562	33,327
Dikwa Central	28,697	24,203	52,900
Gwoza	18,115	2,554	20,672
Madagali/Chubunawa	16,904	13,299	30,203
Mubi	23,798	11,132	34,930
Chamba	9,704	25,177	34,881
Toungo/Gashaka	4,999	3,108	8,107
Mambilla	13,523	7,467	20,900
United Hills	7,791	157	7,948
Total	146,299	97,659	243,958

Source: Trusteeship Committee Report, United Nations Document T/1556 of April 1961.

The outcome of the second plebiscite in Northern Cameroons shows that Nigeria had a total vote of 146, 299, while the Republic of Cameroon only had 97,659 votes. This implies that Nigeria won in Northern Cameroons, while the Republic of Cameroon lost in Northern Cameroons. However, Tata (1987) observed that the Republic of Cameroon protested the result from Northern

Cameroons alleging that it was marked by irregularities and went to the International Court of Justice at the Hague, but it could not succeed. Therefore, the UN General Assembly went on and endorse the result of the plebiscite on 21 April 1961. Ahmadu and Joseph (2012) noted that this consequently led to the termination of the trusteeship and the takeover of Northern Cameroons by Nigeria.

The Nature of the Post-Plebiscite Conflict of 1982 in Sardauna LGA of Taraba State, Nigeria

The conflict of 1982 between the Mambilla and Panso/Kambu ethnic groups was the first major post-plebiscite conflict witnessed in Sardauna LGA. However, Sezah (1985) pointed out that two other clashes occurred earlier in 1961 and 1962 between some Mambilla and Fulbe. The clash resulted in cattle of Fulbe being attacked and macheted for encroaching into the farms of some Mambilla at Nbuh, and Tangana villages and also in Warwar, Mbamga, Mbar, Tamnya, Titong, Kara, Mbanso Kuma, and other villages (Sezah 1985). Joseph, Auye, and Ngah (2016) pointed out that these incidents signified the beginning of a rift and the gradual nurturing of ill feelings and hatred among members of these ethnic groups.

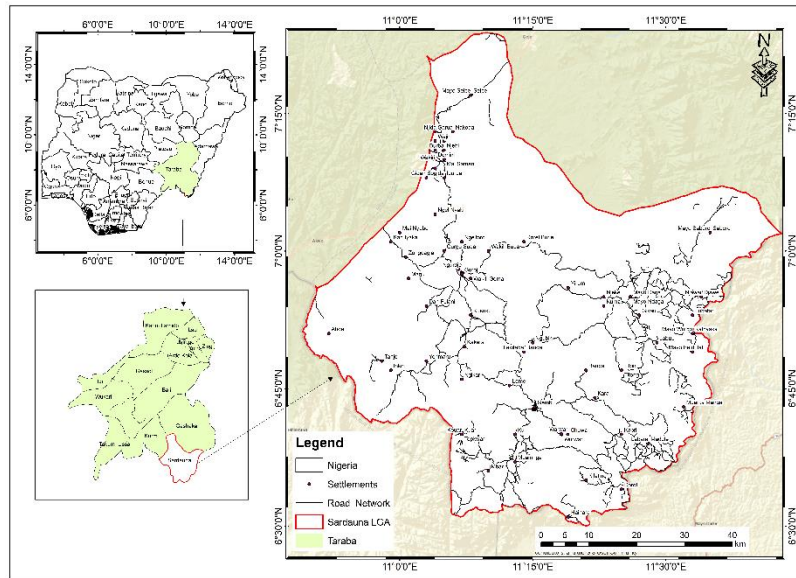


Figure 2. Map showing Sardauna LGA and its location within Taraba State and Nigeria.

Joseph (2000) noted that by 1982 the Mambilla and Panso/Kambu conflict broke out. The situation started with the setting ablaze of the (FEDECO) office on Saturday 11th September 1982 at about 10:50 pm. The fire destroyed the FEDECO materials, mostly voter registration cards. The perpetrators of this act were not caught. Nevertheless, a suspect named Samson Isaac Tunwi who happens to be from the Kaka ethnic group was arrested (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). The police reported that he was seen loitering around the area, during the early investigation. The news of the situation like wildfire spread all over the villages in Sardauna LGA that same night.

On the 12th of September 1982 the Panso/Kambu, who were mostly Christians, left to worship at their respective churches during the morning hours. It was later noticed that at about 9:00 a.m., men and women from the Mambilla ethnic group had marched into Gembu town, the headquarters. They came from the various villages in large numbers and were armed with all kinds of dangerous weapons such as spears, bows, arrows, shields, knives, cutlasses, and catapults (Joseph 2000). The Mambilla mob gathered near the Gembu motor car park and then proceeded to the police station and demanded the release of a Mambilla man who was detained. His offence was that he had beaten a Panso woman in her beer parlour (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987).

The mob, however, told the Police Divisional Officer (DPO) that the arrest of the Mambilla man was a mere camouflage and that the suspects were the top-notch (NPN) political party. Notwithstanding, the DPO promised them that an investigation was being carried out and those involved would face the law. From the police station, the Mambilla mob moved to the commercial hub of Gembu town, along Ahmadu Way and Lagos Street. They also moved to Panso and Kambu quarters and began to attack the Panso and Kambu and to destroy, burn, and loot their shops (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). The news got to the police station, and policemen were dispatched to stop the Mambilla militia. However, the policemen arrived at the scene supposedly to quell the disturbances and restore peace and order. Nonetheless, the police clamped down on the group and made some arrests who were detained at the police station.

The report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) stated at this juncture, Alh Mohammadu Mansur the Chief of Mambilla (Traditional ruler of Sardauna LGA) summoned an emergency meeting and invited the DPO., Chairman, and Secretary of Sardauna LGA and Councillors of Traditional Council and Local Government Council. The Chief of Mambilla, however, pleaded that the DPO should release those arrested during the mourning disturbances to appease the Mambilla and end the crisis. The DPO promised to consider the request after interrogation and to obtain the statements of the detainees (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). It was also agreed that the Chief of Mambilla, the Chairman, and the Secretary should move around Gembu town and appeal to the Mambilla militia to desist from further violence. So, the meeting ended and the DPO and his men returned to the station and began to take the detainees' statements. At this point, the Mambilla mob appeared at the police station with armed weapons. When the police noticed that they were bent on attacking the station, especially when they attempted to snatch the gun of an officer who was returning from his duty post, the police decided to use tear gas to disperse the mob (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987).

In addition, Joseph (2000) states that after being dispersed from the station, the angry mob returned to the town and continued to wreck more damage and loot of shops of the Panso and Kambu for most of them forsook their houses and took refuge in the police station and also the women and children in the palace of the Chief of Mambilla. Some Fulbe and Hausa neighbours also received some of them into their houses. On 13 September, the Chief of Mambilla sent a message to the DPO that the Mambilla were planning to attack the police station (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). Moreover, the Chief summoned for another emergency meeting and invited the DPO and other stakeholders. Because of the tension, the DPO was not present but delegated his subordinates. The Chief of Mambilla disclosed to them that the Panso/Kambu had sent a message saying that they would retaliate against what the Mambilla were doing since action was not taken to stop them (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). It was finally resolved then that the Chief of Mambilla and the Chairman of Sardauna LGA should still move around the town and talk to the people. While the meeting was in progress, the message reached them that the Panso/Kambu had gathered at the market square and the Mambilla at the motor park. Without wasting time, the Chief and his team, in the company of some policemen quickly moved to the market square and pleaded with the Panso and Kambu, to forsake the retaliation. But they refused and insisted they would not leave unless the Mambilla militia dispersed. When the team moved to plead with the Mambilla militia, they equally insisted that the Panso and Kambu should disperse before they would do so (Sezah 1985). With this deadlock situation, the Chief and his team withdrew back to the police station to decide on what to do next.

Meanwhile, as the Chief and other stakeholders were contemplating the next line of action, the news reached them that the two camps had clashed at the market square. The situation had gone bad before the DPO, and his team arrived at the scene. What they saw on arrival at the scene of the incident were dead bodies and many injured victims. It was reported that seven people died, while some say it was ten (Tapidi 1982). Similarly, in a bid to vent their fury on the Panso/Kambu, some members of the Mambilla militia headed to the police station in their multitude. When the DPO saw it, he appointed one of the policemen to address them in the local dialect to leave the premises. When they ignored the warning and were advancing to attack the station, the DPO then gave a command for the use of rifles since they were no longer safe. After several shots were

fired, the mob dispersed and returned to the commercial nerve centre of the town to damage or loot the houses and shops of Panso and Kambu (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). It is important to note that the crisis also spread to eleven (11) other towns and villages on the plateau. This included: - Bang-three-corner, Tamnya, Mbamnga, Yerimaru, Tep-Kwar, Kakara, Kakara, Tunga Damaina, Lekitaba, War-war, and Zongo-Ajiya.

The above scenario, clearly suggests or shows several actions which seem to indicate that the Mambilla might have had or were having a preconceived plan possibly to attack the Panso/Kambu. The report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) admits that the secretariat fire incident was a mere alibi and disguised by the Mambilla to perpetuate their evil plan. What tangible evidence did the Mambilla have as proof to show that the Panso/Kambu were responsible for the fire that engulfed the secretariat building? Moreover, Benjamin (2022) observed that some of the Panso/Kambu who belong to the GNPP (the Mambilla-dominated party) were also attacked by the Mambilla militia. Therefore, it is clear and certain such action was nothing more than the pursuit of an ethnic agenda.

The second area to consider based on the action of the Mambilla is the various elements that constituted the membership of the NPN party. The supporters of NPN were drawn largely from among the Fulbe/Hausa, Kaka, Panso, and Kambu ethnic groups. The Panso and Kambu were singled out as a target by the Mambilla mob to accomplish their preconceived plan (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). The display of ethnic chauvinism was attested to by the self-claim that Mambilla were the owners of the land while the Panso/Kambu groups were settlers or foreigners (Lenshie and Johnson 2012). In addition, and closely linked to the above which also bolstered the inter-ethnic persuasion was the egregious looting and destruction of the property and wealth of the Panso/Kambu (Tapidi 1982).

Another area indicative of the ethnic bigotry by the Mambilla was expressed in the reckless invasion of the Panso/Kambu Quarters or settlements in Gembu and other surrounding villages (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). Unfortunately, the actions and attitude of the officials of the Saradauna LGA predominantly Mambilla were nonchalant or indifferent except for the Chief of Mambilla who was a Fulbe. This cauterous situation made the Panso/Kambu resolve to act in self-defence because of the looting and destruction of their property and attack from the Mambilla. Here is the submission of the Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) after examining the remote causes of the conflict:

“...it is the considered opinion of the commission that remote causes of the 1982 riot on the Mambilla plateau were the combination of political, economic and ethnic disparities which were played upon by the political opportunists for their selfish ends. Be it as it may, it must be pointed out that the riot was not a political riot, but that politics was merely used as a vehicle through which it was perpetuated”

The above statement indicates that some politicians among the Mambilla based on their selfish interest masterminded the conflict of 1982. That was achieved by employing ethnic coloration and persuasion. This transformed the conflict into an inter-ethnic conflict. From the foregoing, it is unambiguous that the actions of the Mambilla contextually connote that the conflict was inter-ethnic in tone or colour and more or less divorce from political posture.

The roles of the three tiers of Government (Local, State, and Federal).

Expectedly the outbreak of the post-plebiscite conflict made the government at various levels take certain measures to curtail or de-escalate tension. In other words, the Local Council, State, and Federal governments swing into action at various levels to end or resolve the conflict. The role covered three stages namely: - before, during, and after the conflict. The role carried out by the three tiers of government was more prominent in the following areas: - security situation reports,

security clampdowns, calming of conflicting parties, and the government constitution of a judicial panel of inquiry.

The first major step before the outbreak of the post-plebiscite was the security situation report directly under the control of the Federal/State government. The primary aim of this has to do with the generation, coordination, and cooperation in the management of security information collected from flashpoints. In other words, the various security agencies such as the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the State Security Service (SSS), Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), and others are supposed to have provided security information before the outbreak of the 1982 conflict. Unfortunately, expected measures were not put in place to avert the outbreak of the conflict.

During the outbreak of the post-plebiscite conflict, the security clampdown approach was employed by the NPF. This was the direct use of force and devices to prevent or scare away the mob and bring the situation under control and normalcy. However, this stage was compelled by the attitude of the Mambilla militia who resorted to the police station for the second time in their multitudes (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). They began to press for the release of the arrested suspects when their statements were being taken. The NPF had to use canisters of teargas to disperse the crowd from the premises of the police station. Unfortunately, their response and reaction only grew wild and more ferocious as the militia decided to move into the Panso/Kambu Quarters or settlements for more looting of shops and houses as well as burning of valuables items like vehicles, motor bicycles, and electrical gadgets. The NPF had to square up and dispatch its men to various parts of the town. This made it possible for more of the members of the Mambilla militias to be arrested and yet it could not end the conflict and the destruction.

Joseph (2000) stated that the situation made the Panso/Kambu resolve to act in self-defence since the Mambilla militia were having a field day, looting and setting their property ablaze. Before embarking on the self-defence, the Panso/Kambu informed the Chief of Mambilla and stated their reason that it was because no action was taken to prevent the Mambilla militia from attacking and destroying their property. When the Chief and his team approached and pleaded with the Panso/Kambu group at the market square to restrain from their action they refused (Sezah 1985). When the Chief and his team went to the Mambilla mob at the motorcar park pleading they also refused to drop their hatchets. The situation came to a deadlock and the Chief, and his team withdrew to the police station to think of the next step to take.

During this moment the Mambilla militia began to advance from their base at the motorcar park towards the market square where the Panso/Kambu were gathered. Joseph (2000) described that the Mambilla employed the car horn tactics of warfare attack similar to Shaka the Zulu type and enclosed the Panso/Kambu from behind. This became a decisive moment as the two groups clashed in a fierce and deadly encounter. The fatal consequences were the loss of lives deep cuts and injuries sustained by victims with severe bleeding and the whole environment flooding with blood (Sezah 1985). Upon the arrival of the police team, they discovered the fatal scene created by the clash of the two groups. Nevertheless, the Mambilla militia pursued the Panso/Kambu who retreated during their clash and took refuge in the police station. When the DPO warned the Mambilla militia to vacate the premises of the police station they refused but were bent on attacking the station. The Report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) states that the DPO issued directives for the life rifles to be fired in the open so as to disperse the mob.

The role of the defunct Gongola State (now Adamawa) government in resolving the post-plebiscite conflict after quelling the conflict was the constitution of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate the immediate and remote causes of the conflict as well as make appropriate recommendations. The conflict occurred in 1982 but the judicial panel of inquiry was only constituted in 1986. Why did it take about four years before a judicial panel was formed to investigate the conflict? It may be probably because the GNPP government was in power in Gongola State then and the Mambilla political elites continue to occupy important positions in

government due to their numerical strength. However, the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) was concerned about it and advanced that:

“...it can be safely inferred that when the team [led by Commissioner of Special Duties] visited Gembu and submitted its report the extent of the damage done to life and property was such that any investigation of the incidence was likely to affect the Mambilla people. The Government then, did not want to commit political suicide by causing an investigation to be made into the riot.”

The above statement suggests that political interest or influence may have been the reason why the investigation of the conflict lingered. However, the political interest or influence was with focus on the Mambilla probably due to its numerical strength which was a valuable asset for the then GNPP government and politicians.

Meanwhile, the Judicial Commission of Inquiry was Chaired by Justice Joseph Dike Gwam. The panel held it sitting in Gembu and Yola the Capital of the defunct Gongola State. It received memorandums from members of the public, collected exhibits, cross-examined individuals alleged to have been involved in the conflict, listened to testimonies of heads of government agencies, and so on. The panel concluded its work and submitted the full report to the government by February 1987. However, the problem faced by the report was the lack of implementation of its recommendations which addresses the issues responsible for the conflict.

It is obvious from the above that the tiers of governments took various measures to prevent or bring under control the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982. Nevertheless, the measures were not effective enough to either prevent or quickly put an end to the conflict. It is equally clear that the concentration was fully on the security aspect and neglected the humanitarian aspect by not doing anything concerning the IDPs and the refugees. In short, even the report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry is completely silent about the IDPs and the refugees. Why was this so?

The Possible Reasons and Implications for the Non-humanitarian Intervention in the Post-Plebiscite Conflict of 1982

The reason why the humanitarian situation of the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 was unattended to was due to the allegation label against the Panso/Kambu by the Mambilla that they were not citizens of Nigeria (Lenshie and Johnson 2012). Besides, this also informed the reason for their action and reaction during the conflict as discussed above. This was bolstered by some of the Mambilla political elites (Pa Ngah 2021). Unfortunately, the Mambilla group who were largely non-literate were gullible to this bet. That was why all the Mambillas responded to the clarion call and conveyed at Gembu on 12 September 1982 to drive away or evict the foreigners or Cameroonians from their land. Sad enough they failed to discern whether the Panso/Kambu were responsible for the fire incident at the secretariat office or not. The activities of the Mambilla political elites were succinctly captured in these words:

“The Mambilla political leaders promised their people that when voted into power, they would use their positions to effect a dramatic change in the status quo by distributing the land to Mambilla whose birthright had been denied them by aliens. From the evidence before the commission, it was this promise of change that intoxicated the Mambilla and consequently led to the 1982 riot...” (Report of Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987)

Furthermore, the reason for the non-humanitarian intervention was that the Mambilla people planned and strategized the outbreak of the conflict. This could be inferred from the prompt response from all the Mambilla villages particularly when and how the news of the secretariat fire incident got to them. Unfortunately, the security agencies could not uncover the plan

early or report it. This is unambiguously expressed by the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) in these words:

“the commission discovered a serious shortcoming on the part of the SSS before the riot and that it is failure to become privy to the elaborate plan to burn the Local Government Secretariat and consequently loot and damage property of the Bansa [Panso] and Kambu people of Mambilla plateau. The commission contends that the wanton destruction of lives and property occasioned by the riot of 1982 could have been averted had the SSS reported the plan of the Mambilla to riot.”

A victim of the conflict Maria (2021) from the Panso/Kambu group narrated her ordeal in deep emotional pain. She was attacked and severely wounded having a fracture on one of her legs. She stated that it was her daughter from the city who came and took her for treatment in the hospital. She spent about four months in the hospital in Jos, Plateau State and no help or assistance was rendered by any agency. This was her response regarding the non-humanitarian intervention. According to Maria (2021), the Panso/Kambu were overshadowed by the Mambilla, which made it difficult for them to receive assistance from the government.

Some of the implications for the non-humanitarian intervention in the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 include the following: - Panso/Kambu were foreigners, Mambilla were mischievous, government violation of citizen's rights of the Panso/Kambu and the non-action of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). A major effect of the non-humanitarian intervention in the post-plebiscite conflict shows that the Panso/Kambu were not citizens of Nigeria. This was because of the alarm raised by the Mambilla people and therefore propagated and trumpeted it all over. Unfortunately, most people simply believe the falsehood of the Mambilla. It was the Judicial Commission of Inquiry (1987) that rolled away the lies being peddled by the Mambilla when it made this declaration:

“...it is the view of the commission that the status of the people of Northern Cameroon Trust Territory has been taken care of very well by the 1963 constitution and that from that time on, these people are Nigerians. Since these people had already acquired Nigerian citizenship by the plebiscite, it can be safely argued that no special provision should be made for them as if they were a special class of Nigerians. In supreme law of the land, i.e., the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 provides that no Nigerian should be subjected to any disability on the grounds of region, ethnicity, sex, etc.”

The pronouncement of the commission exposed the lies peddled by the Mambilla about the Panso/Kambu. This holds therefore that the Mambilla are liable for the defamation of character of the Panso/Kambu people that they were foreigners. Before the law defamation or character assassination is not a trivial matter when proven beyond all reasonable doubt.

Another implication for the non-humanitarian intervention is that the Mambilla were mischievous to the Panso/Kambu. This could be seen as evidenced in the manner of the Mambilla plan as well as the implementation during the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982. They plan to loot and destroy the property of the Panso/Kambu (Judicial Commission of Inquiry 1987). The implication is that a mischievous case when proven before the law holds some penalties for the guilty person.

Equally worthy of note is the violation of the citizenship rights of the Panso/Kambu by the Government of Nigeria by not rendering them any humanitarian assistance as IDPs and refugees (Lenshie and Inalegwu 2012). It is clear from above that the three tiers of government only concentrated on the security intervention thereby neglecting the humanitarian intervention which is also a key priority in conflict management and resolution. The commissioner of Special Duties and his team merely visited, and nothing came out of the visit to provide some assistance or succour to

helpless women and children displaced from their homes and country. Even though the effort of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry is commended it failed to make mention of this blatant error made by the Government of the entire country to her citizens. A responsible government needs to revisit this dark chapter of the Panso/Kambu history for posterity purposes.

The non-humanitarian intervention also has implications for the UNHCR Nigeria and Cameroon. Fabian (2021) stated that this is an agency whose primary duty among other things is to quickly lend a helping hand to the victims of conflict and war who are seeking safety. UNHCR Nigeria was silent about it when newspaper headlines were showing to the public the situation of the Mambilla plateau Sardauna LGA9 (Tapidi 1982). This simply suggests that UNHCR Nigeria was not keen enough to report happenings within the Nigerian borders as it relates to conflict during that time. If UNHCR Nigeria was sleeping what about the UNHCR Cameroon? Is it that they did not care to get information on citizens of Nigeria entering Cameroon due to a conflict from the border area of the Mambilla plateau Sardauna LGA? What could be inferred is that the UNHCR Nigeria and Cameroon if already in existence were negligent in their duties.

From the foregoing, it is certain and clear that the non-humanitarian intervention in the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 was due to the extraordinary influence of the Mambilla political elites in the then government of the defunct Gongola State. However, the implications are enormous as discussed above, and should be redressed by the concerned agencies and levels of government for a genuine peacebuilding process and better posterity.

CONCLUSION

The study has covered the theme of the post-plebiscite conflict of 1982 and the non-humanitarian intervention. This was achieved by examining the nature of the post-plebiscite conflict, discussing the roles of the three tiers of government (Local Council, State, and Federal), and also by taking a look at the reasons and implications for the non-humanitarian intervention. The study concludes that the conflict was more of an inter-ethnic conflict rather than political and that the non-humanitarian intervention has profound implications for concerned agencies and levels of government. The study suggests that based on the implications of the non-humanitarian intervention concerned parties and groups should be addressed to initiate an effective peacebuilding that directly promotes genuine reconciliation for a better future for all in the study area.

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