

WAR OF THE ROSES: INTERROGATING THE 1873 PRE-COLONIAL CIVIL WAR IN LAFIA EMIRATES

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Abstracts

Towards the end of the third quarter of the 19th Century a momentous events of historical significance took place in Lafia Emirate that change the course of its history, altered the fate and destiny of its people (either for good or bad) and tremendously raise the profile of its historical trajectory. This very event was the climax of a series of other events related or otherwise that preceded it; which also has their root in the discovery, emergence and development of the emirate. The emirate having been founded by people of Kanuri extraction that migrates from Kanem-Bornu at the beginning of the third quarter of the 18th Century in search of a habitable and accommodating environment were led by one Mohammadu Dunama. The paper study the structural defects in the leadership question of the emirate and the inherent contradiction engendered by greed, dominance, insecurity, bad leadership and high-handedness a combination of which made it impossible for harmonious co-existence expected of a pre-colonial African Muslims society. Both contexts are closely related and are mutually re-enforcing. This paper will explore the civil war as it occurs, its remotes and immediate causes. It will also study its far reaching impact on the later development in the Emirate using both thematic and descriptive methods as tools of historical study.

Key words: *Civil. War. Pre-colonial. Tactics. Strategy.*

Introduction

The period between 1868 when Umar became the Emir of Lafia and 1873, when he was ousted from power and forced to flee. This was a period of intense anxiety, tension and mutual suspicion. The end of that era saw the outbreak of war between Lafia under Umar and Bayero's forces which included some elements of Lafia Ruling House led by Bahago and his brother Mohammadu Agwai. This war occurred as a result of the conflict between Emir Umar and Bayero the son of Sultan Abubakar Atiku who felt insulted by the tune and wardens' of the letter Emir Umar sent to him at Keffi urging and inviting him to come and see that 'Little calf' which he derisongly referred to some

years back when he came on a condolence visit to late Emir Abdullah Dallah who lost his first son Dauda. In the letter Umar pride himself as the new Emir of Lafia. This did not sit well with Bayero who viewed it as arrogant and insolent thus, it became the immediate cause that triggered the conflict.

Therefore, this Bayero factor coalesced with the age old pent up anger, resentment and feeling of historical injustices in which the Aliyu Ari's descendants would only feel satisfy when the then historical realities are properly place in their good new context and perspective which was creating the enabling environment by accommodating their claims of entitlement as bonafide sons of the ruling house with legal and moral right to aspire to the throne that their father was initially out manoeuvred by extraneous forces. Mammadi chillum also participated in the war because of his claim to the same throne after he was promised same by Bayero.

Therefore, the civil war was shape by the realities of Lafia historical trajectory especially those that concern power relation and the nuances of its realities. It also continues to influence subsequent events relating to leadership question whose destiny it had already altered. The war that broke out was the anti-climax of months of anxiety between Umar and Bayero on the one hand, Umar and Bahago on the other hand.

After some period of sustain battles and resounding defeat suffered by Umar's forces and the suddenness of its occurrence raised the question the issues of not only bad and unpopular leadership, but one that was exclusive, disrespectful and not accommodating. This paper aimed at discussing the civil war fought in Lafia, its nature, character and shape; the battle, the dimension and the agreement that has continue to echo through decades if not centuries in the affairs of Lafia.

Background history of Lafia Emirate

The Emirate of Lafia was founded by a coterie of migrant people of Kanuri origin who migrated from Kanem - Bornu at the beginning of the third quarter of 18th Century. There were various accounts put forward by historians and scholars as to the reason why this migration took place. Although it is not the focus of our study but at least it will provide us with the background upon which our study will rest on. State formation in Africa was in a state of flux and transition during the pre-colonial era. Kenem - Borno became stable only after the year 1000 AD with all the paraphernalia of a royal kingdom crested on Islamic pedigree as established (Lavers, 990: Pp.188–191). This Kingdom that became established in AD 1000 was first mentioned by an Arab

Geographer Al-Yakubi in 891 AD (Alkali, 2005: p.203), when it had shown some elaborate sign of a full blown state.

Although, this empire against all odds continue to thrive and flourish but kept tottering until its final collapse in 1846 after the death of Mai Ali (Lavers, 1990: p.187). The collapse can also be attributed to factors both internal and external that are linked together and are mutually reinforcing. There was considerable instability and population movement (Lavers 1990: p.206) in the period between 1750 - 1791 which led to changes in the demographic pattern in the Kingdom. (Lavers, 1990: p.206).

Perhaps, one can conveniently argue that those instability and population movements could be the reasons why Muhammadu Dunama whom together with his followers founded Lafia also left Kanem - Borno in search of a new habitat. Although Yakubu Othman (Late Ubangarin Lafia) a descendant of Dunama in his book (1999) Kafuwar Daular Sefewa A Lafiyan Bare Bari advanced the argument that it was because of misunderstanding among the royal princes (Othman, 1999: pp.2-4), and other factors such as the predictions that the empire would collapse and the capital will be in ruins that prompted Muhammadu Dunama and his followers to leave.

However, Dunama and his followers wandered around and finally settled in Lafia and established an emirate under his leadership, but his rulership though hereditary was succeeded by Regents who acted on behalf his young children Aliyu (Ari) and Abdullahi (Dallah). Both were too young to succeed their father but when they became matured enough to succeed to the throne, Aliyu the eldest son was bypassed through manipulations and Abdullahi Dallah who was almost twenty years younger was enthroned. Aliyu suspected a connivance and a gang up against him suspected to have been orchestrated by Mallam Maina. What happened was that the two sons of Dunama had both indicated their interest to occupy the stool of their father including Ari Son of Lamino the thid regent. To avoid crisis since the two kingmakers had each supported a candidate, it was agreed that three papers be brought, one would have emir written on it while the remaining two would be blank. Whosoever was lucky to pick the one Emir was written on should then become the Emir (Othman, 1999: p.22). All the contestants agreed(Othman, 1999). Behold Abdullahi picked the right one and was declared the Emir.

Meanwhile, Aliyu became suspicious of Mallam Maina the Senior Kingmaker. He believed that Abdullahi was given the right paper that contained Emir written on it the previous day but took a blank paper along with them in order to hide what was in actual

fact happening. Upon this realization, Aliyu also retorted by saying that ‘my children would retaliate this humiliation done to me’ (Othman, 1999: p.22), and indeed, his children Abdullahi Bahago and Mohammadu Agwai were with him when he was returning home from the venue of the selection and they all heard what their father uttered.

Although this provided the background of this paper, the main thrust of the paper is the civil war in Lafia which occurred during the reign of Umar Abdullahi. Being a civil war, it was not a war between two different kingdoms but rather it was a battle between one adversarial family fighting against each other for the control of power. Instigated and triggered by forces from outside. Like all wars, its bears it own character, its conducts are guided by its norms, its scale are measured by the nuances of its outcome. In the pre-colonial time, the sword was the sole determinant of power and war was nothing but the continuation of political intercourse with a mixture of other means as Clausewitz rightly pointed out (Clausewitz, 1984: p.84).

Civil war within the royal family or even between them has never been an isolated phenomenon, it has been a recurrent decimal. It may vary according to the time, variables and circumstances. It is always cause by greed, manipulation and the desire to dominate. These three variegated and independent variables can be found in almost all the civil wars fought in history. The battle of the Roses fought between the House of York and the House of Lancaster (both of whom belonged to Plantagenet royal house) from 1455 to 1485 witnessed a horrific carnage (British History, 2009). like the British version, the Kano civil war also broke out in December 1893 and lasted up till September 1894. it was a war between the House of Abdullahi Maje Karofi and the House of Mohammad Bello both of whom came from the House of Ibrahim Dabo (Abba and Mohammed: Pp.125-129).

Lafia Civil war of 1873: Planning, Tactics and Strategy

The civil war in Lafia took the same character, nature and shape, it was pernicious, ferocious, bloody and merciless. Like all other family civil wars, no slave was taken as expected and no prisoner of war was captured. The golden rule remain that the victorious side would kill maim and sent into exile the defeated because of Blood affinity.

Like most civil war in modern history, the civil war of 1873 in Lafia was not devoid of planning, tactics and strategies; side by side with these was diplomatic manoeuvring

and large-scale military preparations. Even though not much was written on Lafia emirate let along on issue such as this, this paper tried to access the scanty but scattered materials available at the disposal of researcher like the work of Mr. John Stevenson the District Officer (DO) of Lafia District from 1935 to 1947. he wrote a short history of Lafia emirate and its traditional institutions.

The Enemy's plan and strategy

The planning for the civil war began when Bayero the son of Sultan Abubakar Atiku Mai Rabah received an insulting letter at Keffi from Sarkin Lafia Umar. The letter reminded Bayero of the altercation he had with Umar at the Emir's palace in Lafia (Othman, 1999: p.26), during his previous visit. Immediately after he read the letter Bayero, also visited places Like Doma, Kadarko, Keana galvanizing and mobilizing forces hostile to Lafia so as to help him form a coalition and wage war against Lafia. Bayero also approached Obi, Kwandare Assakio, the people of Agwatasthi and the Mighili (Koro) wherever, he visited, the message of mobilization was that people should come and join him to chase these Kanuri strangers out. in his camped at Sansanin Mata (Othman, 1999, p.26), Bayero continued with his planning and mobilization. After a successful outing, he then moved his camped to Tudun Kawari an outskirts of Lafia with all his warriors, band of supporters, leaving only women and children at his former camp.

Surprisingly Bayero at kawari camp received intelligence information that it would be impossible for him and his band of ethnic forces to fight and conquer Lafia if those battle tested war heroes are very much around and their support was not solicited. However, this information made Bayero to change tactics and finetune his war plans, tactics and battle strategy to include the three arrow heads of Lafia war machine i.e. Abdullahi Bahago, Mohammed Agwai both children of Late Aliyu Dunama who was earlier rigged out from becoming the emir in 1844 in favour of his junior brother Abdullah Dallah. Muhammad Chillum the son of the fourth regent was also consulted to support the cause.

In order to win the support and corporation of Bahago and his supporters including in junior brother Mohammadu Agwai. To woo Bahago to his side, Bayero ordered his trumpeter to greet Bahago every morning after morning prayers by blowing the trumpet saying 'Magajin mallam Bayero na gaishe ka' meaning successor of Mallam, Bayero is greeting you (Othman, 1999: p.27). This lasted for seven days until the Emir understood the message and sued for peace by sending delegation headed by same Bahago to ask

Bayero to list his demand and it shall be granted. For three days Bayero continue to parried such a request and demanded to know if Bahago was not eligible to be the Emir of Lafia too? After answering in the affirmative and agreed to corporate with Bayero, a new dimension in the conflict was introduced. Meanwhile, Bayero also had secret agreement with Mammadi Chillum with the understanding that Mammadi Chillum would support Bayero to wage war against Lafia and in the event of success Chillum was also promised to be made the Emir of Lafia (Othman, 1999: pp.28-29).

Bayero's Tactical strategy, military campaign and overwhelming capabilities

The Lafia civil war had witnessed the application of tactics and strategy deployed by Bayero who happens to be the overall leader of the campaign. The fact that Bayero mobilizes different forces and cultivated their support in his grand strategic plan to defeat and conquer Lafia and cause a regime change was not a small feat. To succeed he kept all the secret to himself as Chillum was not aware that Bahago was also consulted so also Bahago too was not privy to the discussion that went on between Bayero and Chillum; so was it with all, the praetorian guards he assembled for the military adventure.

What then is strategy? It originally came from the Greek word 'strategos' meaning the art or skill of the general (Griess, 1985: p.5) Griess (1985) further expand the meaning of latching on the west point military history definition that broadly said: strategy is the planning for coordination of the concerted use of multiple means and resources available to an alliance, a nation, a political group or commander, for the purpose of gaining an advantage over a rival (Griess, 1985: p.5). Bayero though not an emir with a territorial area neither was he a military commander with an organized military force but was able to galvanize enough force to launch a war against an established state. In strict military terms Paret captured its essence when he said: 'strategy is the use of military force to achieve military objective and by extension, the political purpose of the war' (Paret as cited in Griess, 1985: p.5). There is no denying the fact that in deed Bayero had not only achieved the military objective of defeating and conquering Lafia both also the political purpose of regime changes in which he succeeded in chasing out Umar Abdullahi Dallah from not only the throne of his ancestors but from Lafia as a whole.

The tactics involved in this campaign gave Bayero all the necessary advantage. Emir Umar was unaware of the happenings around him, he was not privy to the secret agreement freely entered into between bayero and some elements in Lafia, it was a

water tight understanding between Bayero and Bahago. So also was chillum and Bayero, the emir was aware of the strong force, arranged against him and the level of cooperation between some elements in Lafia and Bayero. It was because of this corporation and agreement that Lafia easily capitulated when the war began. The tactics was that Bayero's forces, Bahago and chillum supporters would use cavalry forces and archers to attack Umar and his supporters as the first wave of strike capability while the infantry force will come later in what is call mop up operation to finish the process. The tactics was however not concern with the whole situation but rather was planned on how to win the battle.

To avoid miscalculation and friendly attack, an elaborate plan was hatched between Bayero on one hand, Bahago on the other hand, and even Mammadi Chillum was accorded similar plans. The plans were that Bahago's supporters would tie white clothes a top their heads and sometimes their weapons, while Chillum and his supporters would as well tie black cloths on their heads and on their weapons. This would indicate to Bayero's forces that the two groups were friendly forces and therefore should not be attack (Othman, 1999: p.29).

This was reminiscence of the white badge and the red badge used by the House of York and the House of Lancaster during the British civil war of 1455. Behold, the number of forces arrayed against Umar were overwhelmingly superior in both their numerical strength and in weaponry; their organization, logistic and discipline were far beyond that of Umar. The combination of this factors gave them easy victory over Umar forces where many were killed and much more were captured into slavery. Emir Umar himself fled to Bauchi where he spent the rest of his life (Othman, 1999: p.29), while Abdullahi Bahago was installed as the new emir of Lafia without a whimper.

Conduct and Weapons of the Civil War

The conduct of the war was principally an infantry coordinated battles by the three groups against Emir Umar forces who were outnumbered. Although the evolution of warfare not only in the Nigerian area but in the whole of Africa depends not just on the advancement of weaponry but on the institution of the military force. Unlike the modern military force, the soldiers used in conducting Lafia Civil war were citizen's army mostly volunteers who participated in the war in order to defend their territory and or, to settle score. Some of the combatants were praetorian guards mostly found with the emir as defenders of traditional institution but could not adequately protect him when the forces arrayed against them became overwhelming. It should however, be noted that, the weapons used during battles were primitive arms mostly swords, horses, slings,

Bows and Arrows, spears, clubs etc. Bayero who should have by then assumed to be more sophisticated by virtue of his exposure should have been in possession of at least the modern weapon of that age such as Muskets, riffle, elephant guns that shot harpoons with flaming tips. These specific guns are procure mostly from Lokoja, Bida (Abba and Mohammed: p.127), and Yoruba land. There was no evidence to suggest that any of these modern weapons were ever use during battles since at that time, there was no contact with the Europeans neither was there any way the people of the Emirate can access those type of weaponry.

Causes and effects of the civil war

No two wars are the same, they must differ in content, character and shape so was the civil war in Lafia of 1873. The war was unique including all the personalities involved. It was a war that had greatly altered the course of history and the destiny of those personalities who instigated and participated in its battles. It has always been the last resort of politics, it is a very serious gamble, unpredictable (Elaigwu, 1994: p.3), and above all destructive.

What then were the causes of Lafia civil war? The causes are both remote and immediate. They were, despite independently related and mutually reinforcing. The causes were also the very reasons why the forces of Umar were easily defeated. It can easily be argued that, the combination of both internal and external dynamics coalesced and threw up victory on the side of the invading forces. On this note therefore, the causes of the civil war can be enumerated as follows: (a) the feelings of injustice and the impression it created in the minds of the family of Aliyu Dunama concerning the stool of the Emir. (b) the insolence with which Umar treated Bayero before and after he became Emir. (c) the plan and attempt by Emir Umar to have Bahago Murdered by his guards right inside the palace. (d) Emir Umar's penchant at murdering anyone who dared challenge his authority or held contrary views (like the murdered of Mamman Ladi). (e) Removal of the traditional title of Sarkin Pada Abubakar from their family so also the removal and banishment of Alkali (judge) Ibrahim. (f) the tyrannical way with which Umar ruled Lafia made these nobles, members of the royal houses and the commoners uncomfortable with his rulership hence their nonchalant disposition or lack of commitment towards defending him when the plot to remove him thickened and when the war broke out.

The balance of military forces weighed in favour of the allied powers in both tactical and strategic respects. Emir Umar became acutely aware that victory was absolutely impossible for him and that even the opportunity for him to canvass for peaceful

settlement was not accorded, if he had not fled both Bahago and Chillum forces would have killed him or Bayero would have enslaved him. Therefore, the resounding victory gave birth to three basic phenomena namely; (1) it resulted to regime change. (2) the historical injustice committed in the past was eventually corrected where Bahago the son of Aliyu Dunama became the Emir after their father was denied almost forty year earlier. (3) the political landscape was also greatly change. But, meanwhile, another element was introduced into the political leadership equation in Lafia as the people came to sharp realization that, to gain access to power, one had to apply force or at least conspire with an outsider to plot the fall of the reigning monarch as it happened again in 1881 when Mohammadu Agwai forced himself into power as against due process and normal procedure. So also, in 1886 when Agwai was chased out of Laifa and he too fled to Bauchi by Chillum and his band of supporters.

Conclusion

Lafia under Emir Umar Dallah did not offer any strong resistance to the invading forces arrayed against them, it had no strategy nor military plans in place. Bayero had all the aces and had seize all the initiatives of the campaign. He was sure footed and was in control of the planning, and execution of the military campaign both at the tactical and strategic level. Umar's attempt to dissuade Bayero from embarking on this military campaign by offering to provide him with all that he wanted fell flat on its arrival. The absence of resistance (not even a feeble one was register) by the people of Lafia went a long way to show case the level of Emir Umar's popularity.

However, Lafia or rather (Umar) lost both the battles and the war as Lafia was defeated. It lost not so much because it failed to fight or resist but more because the adversary possessed the capabilities that it deployed to neutralize Lafia resistance, and effectively capitalized on some of its vulnerabilities.

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