



“While We are Here to Help and Guide”; The Creation of the Pengana Chieftaincy on the Northern Jos Plateau, Nigeria, 1952-55.

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[Link to Map](#)

Almost two generations after independence, many now see Africa as the continent of “failed states”. The large scale political structures which have emerged from the colonial era have seldom worked well. Analysts debate whether the post-colonial state is excessively strong or excessively weak. The melancholy conclusion may be that it has been feeble in promoting the welfare of ordinary people, but effective in enriching small elites, and oppressive in maintaining their supremacy against internal challenges. In this it has, perhaps, indigenised colonial practice. At the end of the nineteenth century Europeans drew lines on their maps. These have remained remarkably unchanged, and have defined the political spaces within which Africans have had to live and work. While these borders divided fewer groups than is usually thought, they did force peoples with greatly different cultures, traditions, and ways of doing things to work together in contexts which they would not themselves have chosen.

The colonies which became the states of independent Africa were the products of European assumptions about how the world should be organised and compartmentalised. European principles were those of simplicity: clearly defined borders enclosing areas of unchallenged sovereignty within which there is administrative uniformity and everything clearly and permanently set out on paper. Some have seen part of the answer to Africa’s present problems as lying in a revival and development of more indigenous and authentically African political systems. This is not as easy as it may at first seem. Africa differs from Europe most obviously in its greater cultural diversity. Much more than Europeans, Africans situated themselves in complex and cross-cutting systems of social and political relations: age-grade, section, descent group, clan, ward, village, cult, network of joking relations, links of exogamy, secret society, craft guild, polity. Africans seldom related to other Africans in a single simple manner.

While the external frontiers of the colonial and post-colonial state have been inflexible, Africans did have more say over its internal boundaries and political organisation. Of course it would be wrong to present local attachments as primordial or as authentic in some timeless sense. “Tribes” and “chiefs” were also products of the colonial era, but they were not so in the same way, or to the same extent, as was the central administration which the nationalists of the fifties and sixties would eventually take over. Certainly Europeans did try to organise their colonies internally in line with their principles of territorial demarcation, administrative simplicity, and written rules. They created provinces and districts and village areas, and designated towns as centres of local government. Nevertheless, as is well known, Europeans and their educated African agents were never so numerous that they could run the show themselves. Instead, they

had to work through men of influence who could sustain claims to local legitimacy. European rule therefore required bargains between the colonial authority and local big men. Support from the government might create a chief and enhance his authority, but his usefulness depended on his continued acceptance by his people. Away from the centre there were always two sides to the equation.

The process of adjustment between European assumptions and often changing African realities continued throughout the colonial period, and indeed beyond. At first the colonisers acted in pretty arbitrary ways. In some places, especially in the Islamic emirates of Northern Nigeria, it was relatively easy for the conquerors to identify the structures and institutions which could be adapted for their overrule. Elsewhere, decisions were rough and ready, especially in “pagan” areas with small scale societies. These were carved up and lumped together mainly for administrative convenience. New boundaries encompassed disparate groups at the local level as well as at the intercolonial. Forceful men who thrust themselves forward were acknowledged as natural, if not as traditional, rulers. By the 1920s British thinking was changing. Lugard’s successors in Nigeria rejected what they saw as his pro-Islamic and authoritarian biases. Clifford and Cameron tried as much as possible to withdraw “pagan” peoples from the control of Muslim rulers, and to organise local administration on the basis of conciliar patterns, which they considered more genuinely African than the concentration of power in the hands of a single chief.

On these grounds Clifford urged, and in 1926 secured, the establishment of a new Plateau Province in Central Nigeria. He had high hopes for this new creation, which would “invest the problem of pagan administration with new significance and importance”, and “provide in a very real sense a school of pagan administration functioning in an atmosphere undisturbed by the alien influences of the Emirates”. Government here would have to be more direct than in the Islamic states, as little confidence “can properly be placed in the petty Headmen of Pagan communities”, and none were “in the least fitted to exercise any save the most narrowly limited powers of trial and punishment ...” Above all, the British would have to employ “special qualities of firmness, sympathy and humour, if the prejudices of shy and barbarous peoples are to be successfully overcome”¹.

The outbreak of the “Women’s War” in Eastern Nigeria underlined the urgency of a change of approach. Arbitrarily appointed and often oppressive and exploitative “warrant chiefs” were repudiated by a mass popular movement. The British response, vigorously urged by Cameron, was intensive investigation into the “traditional” forms of political organisation which allegedly had been ignored or pushed to one side in the early years of colonial rule. This might provide the basis of a new system of local administration. Research would be the key to reform. As Margery Perham, one of Cameron’s most enthusiastic publicists, explained: “Sir Donald envisages three separate stages in the formation of an Administration: the investigation which discloses the existence or reveals

¹ Clifford to Colonial Office, despatch 83, 29 Jan 1925, CO583/132, Colonial Office archives, Public Record Office, Kew, England

the character of the authority, the willing acceptance of that authority to-day by the people, and the legalization of that authority by the Government”².

All this would take time, especially on the Plateau, peopled as it was by “naked savages ... requiring generations of paternal government....³” But time was just what the British thought they had. In Nigeria there would be a long “interval within which to build up, as a foundation for unity and democracy, that wide and active citizenship which we neglected to prepare in India”⁴. In Asia the British were acting under the pressure of events which they could no longer entirely control. In Africa in the 1930s no such pressure was felt. Up until 1950 British officials expected to complete their careers in Nigeria, and, notoriously, Tony Kirk-Greene believed that his pioneering research into the history of Adamawa would benefit a long succession of sympathetic, paternalistic Residents at Yola⁵.

Meanwhile there was much work to be done. The 1930s were the age of the Intelligence Report throughout Nigeria. Perham particularly praised the investigations carried out among the Tiv of the Benue valley, whom she eulogised as the best type of “pagan”⁶. On the Plateau itself the British had less success. There the largest group are the Berom, living to the south of Jos. They were divided into many villages tenuously linked by a common language, by traditions of origin, and by ritual cycles. The Resident, Mr Syngé, hoped to discover a traditional paramount ruler, and found him in one of the claimants to the title of ritual chief of Riyom, a village at the centre of many Berom traditions of origin and still of ritual significance, but then little more than a decayed collection of huts. Any “traditional” suzerainty which Riyom might have exercised had passed well before living memory. Syngé’s artificial, almost antiquarian solution failed to win popular acceptance, and was soon abandoned⁷.

² Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria*, London, 1937, pp. 334-5.

³ *Ibid*, p. 344.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.360, cf. C.W. Alexander (lieutenant Governor, Northern Provinces, Nigeria), memorandum, June 1932: “A single Nigeria comprised of components each of which has developed in accordance with its own traditional and cultural background offers ... greater promise of a natural and peaceful constitutional evolution than the measures by which under pressure and after years of strife, His Majesty’s Government is today endeavouring to find a solution to the problems of British India”. CO583/184/2.

⁵ Jeremy White, *Central Administration in Nigeria, 1914-1948, The Problem of Polarity*, London, 1981, p. 285; A Kirk-Greene,

⁶ Perham, *Native Administration*, pp. 152-9.

⁷ Our analysis of Berom history is largely dependent on the work of our former colleague, C.C. Jacobs, whose recent death is a great loss to the historiography of Central Nigeria. We are particularly indebted to his, “The creation of the Gbong Gwom Institution to the Election of Rwang Pam 1947”, unpublished paper presented to the Jos University History Association Workshop, University of Jos, Nigeria, September, 1988. Syngé’s Intelligence Report is Jos Prof. 2/26/284/1934, National Archives, Kaduna, Nigeria. The people prefer the spelling “Berom”, but the form “Biom” was more usual in colonial times and was used as the name of a Native Authority. In this paper, “Berom” is used for the ethnic group, while “Biom” refers to the N.A. This usage is particularly appropriate in that the Biom Native Authority included groups which were not Berom. Riyom has improved somewhat since Syngé’s day. While still small, it occupies a scenic position on the main road out of Jos to the southwest, and its name is given to a Local Government Area.

To the north of the Berom, and southwest of Jos, were the Irigwe. They were divided into some twenty-five sections, but the population was concentrated into two large towns: the “parent” settlement of Kwon south of the Ngell river, and the “child” settlement of Miango to the north. The Irigwe had neither chieftaincy nor periodic initiation ceremonies, but cultural unity was maintained through annual celebrations of heroes whose trophies were placed in elaborate shrine houses (*rebranyi*)⁸. To the north of the Irigwe, the Rukuba were also divided into sections, but the population was dispersed into many small settlements. Chiefs had important ritual functions, and shrine houses with the remains of powerful and dangerous animals were prominent, but initiation was also practised⁹.

Finally, to the north of the Rukuba, and connected with them in several respects, were the peoples with whom this paper is directly concerned¹⁰. As yet they had no recognised collective name. Their political organisation appeared more simply territorial than those of the Rukuba or Irigwe. Chieftaincy was quite well developed with political chiefs (*ogomo* in Buji and Jere) distinguished from ritual ones (*chope* in Buji and Jere). While shrine houses existed, they did not have the prominence of those in Rukuba or Irigwe, and the paramount, defining rituals were those of circumcision and initiation. With the establishment of Plateau Province in 1926 three districts were established in this area: Amo, Buji, and Jere¹¹.

Of the areas that we have noted it might be thought that this northernmost one, with its relatively simple territorial organisation and comparatively well developed chieftaincies might have been the easiest to assimilate to European patterns of administration. This would not prove to be the case. The area was occupied by many distinct groups with complex and changing histories, and the unifying factors were weaker than those in Berom, Rukuba, and Irigwe. Of the three districts, Amo alone seems to have worked reasonably well. The Amo language is significantly different from the others, and the primacy of the village and chief of Ketara over the area was well recognised, even by the Janji, who had recently emerged as a distinct group after the assimilation of elements from Piti and Kurama. Moreover, the Ugo Amon Ketara, Mallam Sambo, was a man of

⁸ For the Irigwe we are largely dependent on the excellent work of Walter H. Sangree, including “Irigwe Shrine Houses (*Rebranyi*) and Irigwe Concepts of the Sacred (*Tede*)”, *Savanna, A Journal of the Environmental and Social Sciences Published at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria*, vol. 6:2 (Dec. 1977), pp. 105-17; “Tribal ritual, leadership, and the mortality rate in Irigwe, Northern Nigeria”, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 26 (1970).

⁹ For the Rukuba we are largely dependent on the colonial anthropological accounts: C.G. Ames, *Gazetteer of the Plateau Province*, Jos, 1932, pp. 89-96; H.D. Gunn, *Peoples of the Plateau Area of Northern Nigeria*, London, 1953, pp. 42-3. Our field research shows that the Rukuba are rapidly re-interpreting their traditions in terms of more clearly geographically based village/section divisions.

¹⁰ For a more detailed examination of the traditions and precolonial history of the Pengana peoples: John Garah Nengel, *Precolonial African Intergroup Relations in the Kauru and Pengana Polities of Central Nigerian Highlands 1800-1900*, European University Studies, series 3, History and Allied Studies, vol. 814, Frankfurt am Main, 1999.

¹¹ Prior to 1926 there was in Jos Division “no Native Authority worth speaking of...,” Resident to District Officer, Jos Division, 20 Nov. 1926, Jos Native Reorganisation Archive File 211/1920, quoted in Leonard Plotnicov, *Strangers to the City, Urban Man in Jos, Nigeria*, Pittsburgh, 1967, p. 44.

formidable and forceful personality. The two other districts were much more artificial, as the District Officer's reorganisation report of the late 1930s recognised:

... Terea [Tariya] and Gurum were joined with Buji in one district because they formed a convenient geographical unit; the Amo villages were recognised to constitute traditionally a self-contained unit; the other villages were all put in Jere District because this was convenient geographically and because for some two years they had a combined court under the presidency of the Chief of Jere¹².

The two heterogeneous districts created for administrative convenience out of geographical contiguity did not work as well as Amo.

At this point some fuller, but still greatly simplified account of the peoples needs to be given. Their traditions indicate a mixture between groups claiming autochthonicity and others which migrated from the northeast. This division cuts through the groups as they are presently constituted. The autochthones claim descent from a giant, Turu, who led them out of the Obare-gallah cave and founded a large settlement, Aturu, which was eventually destroyed in war forcing the dispersal of the people. The Tariya, who are sharply distinct both culturally and linguistically, are the only group which claims to be entirely autochthonous. The other descendants of Turu have been absorbed by groups which have traditions of later migration into the area, and are now represented by the Akwuereh sections of the Jere and Buji, the Ananliki section of the Amo, the Kishi section of the Rukuba, Du in Berom, and also a section of the Anaguta to the northeast of Jos. Most of the other peoples claim to have come from the northeast, ultimately from Gba in the Kwondon Kaya hills. The Kinidek section of Rukuba migrated directly to near its present site, but the Buji, Amo, Janji, Jere, Lemoro, Gusu, along with the Ribina (who have no tradition of having been at Gba) established a large settlement at Pengana, which was abandoned, probably in the eighteenth century, when the groups are believed to have moved into their present areas. Two other groups, the Chokobo and Kurama, claim to have migrated from the south of Kano, but now speak a Western Plateau language like all the other groups apart from the Tariya.

The area where these groups settled, to the north and west of Jos, was profoundly influenced by the nineteenth century Sokoto *jihad* and the subsequent wars. Some groups, such as the Sanga, Lemoro, Chokobo, Gusu, and parts of Buji and Kurama, entered into subordinate tributary relations (*amana*) with the new Islamic sub-emirates, while others, such as the Amo, Janji, Tariya, Jere, and parts of the Buji and Kurama managed to maintain their independence. Peoples from other groups to the east, most notably Ribina and Duguza, fleeing from the *jihad* settled especially in the Buji non-*amana* villages of Gurum and Jan Tudu where the Akwuereh element was strong. These people retained their sense of separate identity, and a large portion of them would return to their original homes after the colonial conquest in the twentieth century. In the *amana* polities, but also to a lesser degree in the non-*amana* ones, the powers of chiefs (*agama*) increased in the

¹² E.H.M. Counsell (D.O.) "Reorganisation of Amo, Buji and Jere Districts of Jos Division", Jos Prof. 407, file July 1937-40.

nineteenth century because of the influence of the emirates and their patterns of political organisation. At the same time Hausa political titles such as *madaki*, *ciroma*, *galadima*, and *wambai* were also adopted.

For the British the problem was to overcome the political fragmentation of the region and to create an area of sufficient size for convenient administration. Little attention was paid to these northern Plateau peoples until the late 1930s, when the impetus of Cameron's reform movement was beginning to dissipate¹³. The reorganisation report would continue the existing arrangements in Amo, with the authority being the "Ugo Amo and Council". Attempts by Tariya and Gurum to secede were rejected, and the boundaries of Buji and Jere were maintained, but it was proposed that these districts should now function as federations of village heads without the paramountcy of the *agama* of Ekekon and Jere, which was perceived as having been autocratic. The colonial authority hoped for an eventual federation of the three districts, and tried to encourage more general meetings, but this was resisted by the Amo, "who said that they were different from the others and that no good would come of meeting them". The District Officer concluded that

such meetings should be held when convenient, and that the Amo should be encouraged to take part in them, and that if they appear to be successful they should be regarded as the first step towards a federation of all the villages and the establishment of a superior Native Authority for the whole area.

Meanwhile, the districts would remain part of the Jos Native Administration and share the Treasury and other central institutions with Birom and Rukuba¹⁴. The war came soon after, and it is not clear how much, if any, of these recommendations were implemented. Buji and Jere still had District heads in 1952.

In the 1930s the British could still consider the problems of local administration in Nigeria in terms of a balance between the demands of their own convenience, which called for relatively large areas controlled from a central and easily accessible town, and the desirability of respecting what were believed to be the traditional arrangements of the different peoples. After the war, by the late 1940s, the colonial authorities found themselves confronted with new problems and new demands. In his memoirs Sir Rex Niven noted the change. Previously the Plateau "pagans" had been regarded as "pets" with an endearing comic streak,

But now they were educated – up to a point. They were particularly upset about mining and miners and things like dams and new roads; also they did not care for Forest Reserves. I quite agreed with them on

¹³ Alvin Magid, "Political Traditionalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Secret Societies and Dance Groups in Local Government", *Africa (Journal of the International African Institute)*, vol. 42 (1972), p. 296.

¹⁴ Counsell, "Reorganisation of Amo, Buji and Jere", Jos Prof. 407

many of these points, but they tended to be obstinate and unreasonable and so lost sympathy¹⁵.

Whereas before the war it had been mainly the British who wanted powerful chiefs for administrative convenience, and had had to give way in the face of popular protest, now chiefs were increasingly demanded by groups such as the Tiv, the Idoma, and the Berom, which either had not had them, or had resisted British attempts to create them. The politics were different in the different areas, but on the Plateau the demand came initially from the emergent Western educated elite, which did not see its future in small villages, and which wanted the wider group to have effective spokesmen. Village Heads and similar “traditional” authorities were initially slow to support a movement which might curtail their local authority.

The Berom were the most populous group on the Plateau, with a comparatively large educated elite and a growing list of grievances against the colonial authorities. In 1947 they revived the chieftaincy which they had repudiated in 1941. The new Gbong Gwom, Rwang Pam, had no previous title, but was the headmaster of the vocational school at Riyom, and had already been selected to represent the indigenous Plateau peoples in the Northern Nigeria House of Assembly. The next year he also succeeded the Hausa Isiaku as Sarkin Jos. While acceptable to the existing *bedagwon*, Rwang Pam was not expected to function as a “traditional” ruler had. The Berom explained that they did not want a powerful head chief, but rather “a permanent president of the tribal council who would be able to represent the tribe in discussions with Government both locally and in the House of Assembly, and advise the council in regard to current political and economic problems”¹⁶.

These developments strongly attracted some of the neighbouring Buji, who urged amalgamation with the Berom. This was firmly resisted by the other groups, and was divisive even among the Buji. A demonstration against amalgamation in 1952 was broken up by the local police in Buji. They seriously injured two men, Baiba and Nasamu, and others were sent to prison for three months. The alternative which was now advanced was a federation of Amo, Buji, and Jere. At a meeting of the Northern Districts Court at the beginning of August, the A.D.O. was told that the people “wish to come together and have a single District Head”. The idea was that this headship would rotate between the three established chiefs on a three monthly basis. The British considered this clumsy and thought that “it might be possible to have one man elected by the court for the post of D.H. or possibly someone like Ugo Amo injected by the admin”¹⁷.

It was indeed decided that there would be a permanent chief. At first it was thought that, like Rwang Pam, he might be someone from the educated elite, but, whether

¹⁵ Sir Rex Niven, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope, Memoirs of a Colonial Servant*, London, 1982, p. 212.

¹⁶ Jacobs, “Gbong Gwom Institution”, pp. 16-19, quotation from Wreford (Acting Resident) to Secretary Northern Provinces, 1 Oct. 1947, “Townships – Future Policy Regarding 1934-1948”, C252/25, Jos Prof. 5/1/c&9.

¹⁷ A.T. Weatherhead, (Assistant D.O.) minute, 7 Aug. 1952, “Amo, Buji and Jere District Reorganisation”, Jos Prof. 407 (quotation); Jere Branch, United Middle Belt People Congress to Senior D.O., 1 July 1955, Pengana NA Council Minutes, NAC/16, Jos Prof.

prompted by the British or not, Mallam Sambo, the Ugo Amon Ketara, successfully pushed himself forward. In November the three District heads and twelve other signers proposed his installation as Babban Sarkin Kasar Areawa (Paramount Chief of the Northern Districts). He would take the title Sarkin Pengana after the settlement from which most of the groups had migrated, and a palace would be built for him at the Jere town of Jengre, which was a large market centre. However, his administration was to be in consultation with the three District Heads, who would keep their own courts and advise the new chief as President of the Federal Court¹⁸.

Mallam Sambo had been a ruler for a quarter of a century and had a remarkably strong personality. Favoured by the British, he was unlikely to be closely bound by his pledges of collegiality. He is remembered as having had the first bicycle in the area, and as having left a permanent mark when he rode it over an exposed patch of rock¹⁹. He required women to abandon their simple costumes of leaves. Nevertheless, this first attempt to establish a Pengana chieftaincy quickly ended in “disaster”. An illiterate, Mallam Sambo depended on his court clerk, Mallam Sule. The area was small, only 28,641 persons by the 1952 census, and “Shortage of Administrative staff precluded the government posting of an A.D.O to Jengre to supervise and guide the N.A....” By July 1954 the Native Authority had broken down and Sambo and Sule had both been convicted and imprisoned for embezzlement on a large scale. The District Officer, Bird, did not want to maintain the chieftaincy. It was too small, and to appoint a colonial official “not only to supervise closely all the work of the N.A. but to do a great deal of that work himself, was also at variance with the present policy of local government development and devolution of responsibility to N.A.s”. He felt that the only real solution was “some form of federation or amalgamation with the Birom N.A., whereby the resources of staff and experience of the two N.A.s, meagre though they are, could be pooled”²⁰.

This solution continued to attract the Buji, but was still resisted by the other groups, who did not want to come “under the heel” of the Berom²¹. By now the question was bound up with that of the introduction of modern politics into Northern Nigeria²². At first that had been a matter of educated elites, who formed the Northern Elements Progressive Association²³. This was initially resisted by the colonial authorities, who tried, but failed to suppress it. Once it became clear that the North could no longer be isolated from the twentieth century, the British swung behind the Northern Peoples Congress, which

¹⁸ Weatherhead memo., 28 Nov. 1952, enclosing declaration signed by fifteen chiefs, s.d., “Amo, Buji and Jere Reorganisation”, Jos Prof. 407

¹⁹ We visited this site in 1988, but failed to observe any marks.

²⁰ J.R. Bird to Resident and S.N.P, 18 Jan. 1955, NAC/16, Jos Prof.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² This account is based on: B.J. Dudley, *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, London, 1968; Frederick A. O. Schwartz, Jr, *Nigeria, The Tribes the Nation, or the Race – The Politics of Independence*, Cambridge Mass, 1965; and Monday Yakiban Mangvwat, “Oral Sources and the Reconstruction of Party Politics on the Jos Plateau, 1950-1960”, in Yusufu Bala Usman & George Amale Kwanashie, eds., *Inside Nigerian History 1950-1970, Events, Issues and Sources, The Presidential Panel on Nigeria Since Independence History Project*, Zaria, 1995, pp. 293-308.

²³ In August 1950 the NEPA merged into the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU).

became a political party reflecting the interests of the established Islamic rulers, to whom effective power would eventually be devolved. All this posed challenges and created opportunities for the representatives of the “pagan” peoples. The politics of the NonMoslem or Middle Belt movement would soon become complicated. While a degree of unity was clearly desirable, ethnic differences and personal rivalries would make this difficult and precarious. Even when formally united, factionalism was irrepressible. Issues of principle and policy were at stake. Some looked to an alliance with the NEPU, and perhaps with southern parties such as the National Congress of Nigeria and Cameroons, as the forces most likely to promote rapid change and development. Others considered that the interests of the Middle Belt peoples would better be served by working with the NPC, which was much more likely to emerge as the dominant force in the North.

Whatever happened, it was now clear that the British would soon leave, but they hoped at last to establish a permanent, viable system of local government in the Jos area “while we are available to help and guide”. However, they still could not persuade the Amo and the Jere to agree to immediate federation with the Birom N.A. The hard core of opposition came from Mallam Idi, the Jere scribe. He gained the support of the chiefs, who protested directly to the Northern government in Kaduna. Eventually the British would have to accept that the first step to federation with the Berom had to be the revival of the Pengana chieftaincy²⁴.

Now there could be no question of an illiterate chief. It seemed that the time of the educated elite had come. The United Middle Belt Congress put forward three candidates. Mallam Idi with the backing of the Jere council appeared as the principal one. Mallam Amasa, an Akwuereh from Gurum was endorsed by Buji. Amo nominated Mallam Garinwani, who was in fact a Buji, but was the headmaster of the primary school which had been established in Katako in 1953. Meanwhile Bird continued to press for agreement to eventual union with Birom. A joint meeting between the two Native Authorities was, by Bird’s later admission, “almost disastrous”. He had to turn to Rwang Pam and to the Council Secretary to win over some of the junior Buji chiefs and to approach the Amo through their Rukuba relatives. Eventually this diplomacy and British obduracy had their effect. At a second meeting at Fuskan Mata on 6 December federation was accepted in principle, provided the Northern Districts Council and the Pengana chieftaincy were preserved. Mallam Idi appeared isolated in his opposition. In the subsequent weeks the details were worked out and explained to a large meeting, which also included Hausa and Fulani representatives, at Fuskan Mata on 14 January 1955²⁵.

By this time even Mallam Idi seemed reconciled to the merger, but his prolonged opposition evidently cost him support. When the election was held Mallam Amasa was clearly the principal candidate of the UMBC and the educated elite. However, another candidate had by then entered the field. He was the one literate chief, Mallam Akinga Kasuwa, the Aima Gurum, who, like Mallam Amasa, was a member of the Akwuereh clan. At the January meeting at Fuskan Mata he had been elected as the Northern

²⁴ Bird, 18 Jan. 1955, NAC/16 Jos Prof.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Districts representative on the Judicial Committee of the Jos Native Authority²⁶. When the Pengana Council met on 15 June 1955, the District Officer, Warren, said that only a candidate with a two thirds majority could be recommended for appointment. Four were nominated, but two were eliminated on the first ballot. The Council members then consulted again before the second ballot, in which Akinga Kasuwa received 10 out of 16 votes, which Weatherhead considered was “sufficient to recommend him”²⁷.

Although no-one seems to have noticed that 10/16 is less than 2/3, the result was bitterly contested, especially by the new Ugo Amon Ketara and the UMBC led by Mallam Lambari, a lay preacher of the Sudan Interior Mission Church at Zabolu north of Jos²⁸. The UMBC claimed that Mallam Akinga had replaced Mallams Zagi and Lambari, who were the choice of the people and chiefs of Buji, with Mallam Ahmadu (an Amo who worked for the N.A. as a scribe in Buji and Jere) and Oga of Tariya, while another Buji delegate, Mallam Auta Jamaka, was denied a vote. As already noted, the UMBC candidates had each been approved by their respective districts, and the Congress claimed that in a meeting with Bird the previous year, “we, the Talakawa (working peasants) agreed and settled on Amasa as the choice of the three Districts” They charged that some of the chiefs had “betrayed their Talakawa, and broke the agreement they wrote with us”²⁹

From the language of the letter of protest against the appointment of Mallam Akinga it is clear that the UMBC in Pengana inclined to the radicalism of the NEPU. This did not much sway the colonial authorities, who judged that the “basis of the opposition to him is the fear that if appointed he would attempt to rescind the agreement to merge with the Birom N.A. to form the new Jos N.A.”, a fear which had some grounding in that Mallam Akinga had been involved in the 1952 protest against amalgamation. Rwang Pam was again brought in to use his “influence, tact and patient explanation”. He insisted that Akinga Kasuwa was the best available man “being literate, of strong character and with an understanding of the present day affairs and ideas”. In a meeting at Jengre on 1 July the Ugo Amon Ketara agreed to accept Mallam Akinga provided he swore to act only on the decision of the Pengana Council (which was in any case a legal requirement), pledged allegiance to the Jos N.A. Council, and was on probation for six months. The other delegates were then presented with this option or a complete new election from hamlet level supervised by the British, which would greatly delay the formation of the Pengana N.A. and its merger with the Jos N.A. Rwang Pam spoke strongly in favour of the first alternative, and appeared at least to moderate the UMBC opposition. The D.O. judged that “the overwhelming majority of the Village heads and a large proportion of the

²⁶ At the same time Mallam Jatau Chokobo was elected as the Northern Districts representative on the Executive Council. *Ibid.*

²⁷ K.D. Warren (D.O. i/c Pengana N.A.) min., 16 June 1955, NAC/16, Jos Prof., “Pengana N.A. Council”.

²⁸ Mallam Lambari was also supported by Pastor Goje of the Zabolu S.I.M., Warren, to Resident, 4 July 1955, “Appointment of Sarkin Pengana”.

²⁹ UMBC, Jere, to S.D.O, 1 July 1955, NAC/16, Jos Prof., original in Hausa, our translation.

‘talakawa’ are in favour of the appointment of Aima Gurum”, and the meeting endorsed him³⁰.

These decisions would have long-term consequences. The revived Pengana chieftaincy has endured to the present day, and is now, with Rukuba and Irigwe, one of the three constituent units of the Bassa Local Government Area in Plateau State. Akinga Kasuwa remained the chief until his death on 29 April 1993 at the age of 84. One can see the emergence of this chieftaincy as part of a process of colonial imposition and manipulation. Administrative convenience had much to do with the creation of the original districts and their eventual merger. Clifford’s vision of pagan administration was never realised. Far from being an example, Plateau Province remained a backwater, as more ambitious officials sought careers in the emirates. The Cameron inspired reorganisation evidently was not carried through in what would become Pengana. Eventually, in the last stage of colonial rule, a chieftaincy was established which had no basis in tradition. The most obvious reading of the few available documents strongly suggests that the British used their opportunity to “help and guide” to block the candidates of the educated elite and to secure the installation of traditional rulers who would fit more easily into the conservative political order which they would leave behind in Northern Nigeria.

However, this would be a partial reading of the evidence. The demand for a chieftaincy came from within Pengana and arose out of the development of local politics. It succeeded because it gained the support of the village heads, and that they provided the first two chiefs was probably more the result of their own efforts than of British manipulation. The colonial authorities did have influence and did use it, perhaps unfairly, but their main concern seems to have been to ensure that the process ended with the integration of the Northern Districts into the Jos Native Authority. Meanwhile the process of establishing the chieftaincy, selecting its leader, and settling the terms of its relationship with Birom brought large numbers of local people into a political process with real implications for their lives. No doubt decisions would ultimately be made by chiefs, but the villages were small, and it is unlikely that the forcefully expressed opinion of an important villager could be entirely ignored. The issues had repeatedly to be debated, and the amalgamation proposals were considered not only by Village Heads but also, at the second meeting at Fuskan Mata, by “a mixed crowd of 400-500 people....”³¹ It was an irresistible popular demand that ensured the survival of the chieftaincy after the “disaster” of 1954. Despite its lack of traditional roots, the Pengana chieftaincy had local legitimacy from the beginning, and is a completely accepted political space for the peoples of the area.

³⁰ Warren to Resident, 4 July 1955, “Appointment of Sarkin Pengana”. NAC/16, Jos Prof., “Pengana N.A. Council”. Mallam Akinga had also been accused of malpractice in the payment of land compensation and misappropriation of funds. This was investigated by the colonial authorities, who exonerated him. *Ibid.*

³¹ Bird memo, 18 Jan. 1955, NAC/16 Jos Prof.