

THE TAKUM CRISIS: A HISTORICAL AND ETHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the persistent intergenerational trauma in Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria, stemming from historical chieftaincy disputes, ethnic exclusion, colonial distortions, and recent political maneuvers. Using ethical generalism, particularly Bentham's utilitarianism as a theoretical lens, and drawing on generational trauma theory, the study explores how colonial and postcolonial governance structures continue to inflict psychological, cultural, and social harm across generations. The analysis reveals that political actions such as the 2023 repeal of the legal framework recognising the Ukwe Takum throne viewed by many Kuteb as a direct assault on their identity represent more than administrative

change; they are symbolic wounds that deepen communal divides. Key findings underscore the erosion of moral authority in religious institutions, a deepening mistrust in government structures, and the amplification of ethnic narratives rooted in victimhood. The study argues that sustainable peace in Takum requires moral leadership, inclusive governance, restorative justice, and deliberate efforts to reweave the social fabric through acknowledgment, memorialisation, and cross-ethnic dialogue. By confronting the historical roots of conflict and embracing culturally sensitive reconciliation mechanisms, the region may begin to heal and transcend its cycle of generational pain.

Introduction

Whenever the phrase “**generational pain**” is evoked, a prophetic declaration made by a well-known servant of God who hails from Takum Local Government Area in Taraba State is recalled. According to local sources, this prophecy was pronounced in the context of the 2023 gubernatorial election in Taraba. The clergyman explicitly warned that the governorship should not go to a candidate from the southern part of the state, specifically if the candidate was from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Despite early indications that the PDP would indeed present a southerner as their candidate, he maintained that allowing such an outcome would bring about what he described as “generational pain.”

At the time, many dismissed the prophecy as unfounded and politically motivated. However, following the emergence of Governor Agbu Kefas, a southerner, a pastor, and a professed Christian, some observers revisited the prophecy with renewed interest. The expectation was that a Christian leader, especially one in spiritual leadership, would prioritise justice, unity, and peace. Nevertheless, the prophecy did not specify the exact nature of the suffering to come, leaving it open to interpretation.

Today, the political climate in Takum Local Government Area provides a lens through which that prophecy can be reexamined. The unfolding events,

especially surrounding the chieftaincy institution and the Ukwe Takum stool, appear to validate the prophecy in the eyes of some community members. The recent repeal by the Taraba State House of Assembly of the legal framework that had long recognised the ancient throne of Ukwe Takum has intensified historical tensions between ethnic groups in the area (Taraba State House of Assembly, 2023).

These chieftaincy disputes date back to the colonial era, particularly around 1963, when various regional and federal committees sought to determine the rightful heir to the Takum throne. Although the 1963 *Northern Nigeria Gazette* recognised the Kuteb as the legitimate custodians of the Ukwe Takum title, the 1973 recommendations though less clear, were never fully implemented. This ambiguity created a vacuum that successive governments have struggled to fill (Northern Nigeria Gazette 1963; Ahmadu and Irambaya 122).

The recent repeal of this foundational chieftaincy law, viewed by many Kuteb people as a direct attack on their historical rights, is widely regarded as a political decision with long-term consequences. While the current administration may perceive this move as a step toward administrative clarity or political neutrality, history suggests otherwise. A similar situation in Kano State, where former Governor Abdullahi Ganduje deposed the Emir of Kano in 2020, eventually led to unrest and political instability (*Daily Trust*). The reinstatement of the previous emir by a subsequent government demonstrated how temporary political victories can result in long-standing societal fractures.

What is unfolding in Takum may, therefore, become another instance of historical grievances compounded by

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political insensitivity. The cycle of appointing and deposing traditional rulers based on political convenience rather than historical legitimacy deepens ethnic tensions and hinders community cohesion. In a multiethnic setting like Takum, the preservation of cultural balance and mutual respect is critical to ensuring peaceful coexistence (Lederach 29). This paper seeks to explore the origins and persistence of generational pain in Takum, particularly through the lens of chieftaincy disputes, colonial legacies, and contemporary political decisions. By employing both historical analysis and ethical frameworks, the paper aims to uncover the roots of conflict and to propose morally grounded pathways for reconciliation and peace building.

Conceptual Framework: Generational Pain

Generational pain, also termed intergenerational trauma, refers to psychological and emotional harm inherited across generations due to past atrocities or systemic injustices. Such trauma can stem from war, colonisation, slavery, or communal conflict. It does not only affect those who directly experienced the original events but also shapes the worldview and emotional health of subsequent generations.

Studies, such as those conducted on Holocaust survivors and descendants, demonstrate how trauma can manifest in increased psychiatric disorders and persistent emotional distress among later generations. In African contexts, collective experiences of colonisation, forced migration, and internal conflicts have similarly led to inherited patterns of mistrust, fear, and hostility. Takum's history mirrors this phenomenon (Yehuda 3).

Theoretical Foundation: Ethical Generalism

Ethical generalism, particularly as interpreted through utilitarian philosophy, emphasises the moral worth of actions based on their consequences. Jeremy Bentham's principle of utility underscores the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Applying this lens to the Takum conflict, one must assess the implications of historical and political decisions on the collective well-being of affected communities.

Bentham posits that humans are governed by pleasure and pain; thus, any social or political action that perpetuates suffering rather than resolving it must be ethically interrogated. The manipulation of traditional institutions, ethnic exclusion, and unresolved injustices all violate this principle and require moral redress (Geisler 50).

Historical Roots Of Trauma In Takum

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Encounters

According to local oral histories and scholarly records, the earliest point of conflict in Takum traces back to the arrival of the Chamba group, who were met with hostility by the indigenous Kuteb. This rejection allegedly led to warfare, with the Chamba establishing defensive structures and retaliatory raids. The Kuteb recall these actions as aggressive intrusions into their ancestral lands, while the Chamba remember being denied refuge during their flight from Fulani jihadists. This mutual resentment has been passed down over generations (Hassan 88).

Slave Raids and Social Disruption

Accounts by historians such as I.M. Ahmadu and M.I. Irambaya detail incidents of banditry and abduction of women by Chamba groups. These acts, interpreted as violations of communal norms and dignity, continue to evoke deep emotional wounds. Forced marriages and sexual violence are particularly traumatising, with descendants carrying the shame and pain of these memories.

Colonial Administration and Traditional Institutions

British colonial policy contributed significantly to the structural division in Takum. Ethnically-based districting and the oscillation of chieftaincy control created political instability. The 1963 Northern Nigeria Gazette formally recognised the Kuteb as the legitimate custodians of the Ukwé Takum throne. However, this decision was repealed in 1973, sowing further discord. The deposition of Chamba leaders involved in the slave trade and the subsequent reconstitution of the chieftdom were seen by both groups as political maneuvering. Each perceived themselves as victims of exclusion or injustice, reinforcing a cycle of trauma (Irambaya 24).

4.4 Contemporary Political Actions

Recent political events, particularly the 2023 decision by Governor Agbu Kefas to alter the traditional hierarchy by creating multiple chieftaincies and sidelining the historic Ukwé Takum throne, reignited old wounds. For many Kuteb, this act symbolises a strategic erasure of their cultural legacy. The ongoing litigation and judicial interventions signal unresolved tensions that, if not carefully handled, could perpetuate further division.

Moral Implications And Social Consequences

The conflict in Takum is not merely a contest over traditional rulership or political dominance; it is a profound ethical dilemma that challenges the foundations of leadership, justice, and collective memory. The decisions taken by political elites especially those that disregard the cultural histories and traumas of

communities carry not only administrative consequences but also moral weight. In a pluralistic society like Takum, where history is written in the scars of ethnic rivalry and colonial distortion, any action that ignores these realities risks compounding generational wounds.

Historical Injustice and Moral Responsibility

The repeated manipulation of traditional structures, especially the discontinuation of legal recognition for the Ukwe Takum throne, raises deep questions about historical justice. When the state invalidates a century-old institution without due consultation or reconciliation, it essentially rewrites history from a position of power. This revisionism, whether intended or not, is a form of symbolic violence, one that delegitimises the experiences and identities of the Kuteb people (Galtung 173).

Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian ethics, which emphasise actions that promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number, would find such unilateral decisions deeply problematic. If a policy decision, such as creating multiple chieftaincies or repealing recognised titles, leads to communal alienation, then it fails the test of utility. Rather than producing harmony, it sustains division and resentment (Bentham 14). In essence, moral leadership requires foresight and fairness, especially in contexts where histories are contested and identities politicised.

Political Exclusion and Erosion of Trust

The seeming continued sidelining of the Kuteb people in the governance of Takum echoes broader patterns of ethnic marginalisation across Nigeria. As Mamdani argues in his work on colonial legacies, the modern African state often inherits structures that perpetuate "decentralised despotism" where certain groups are empowered while others are permanently relegated to the background (Mamdani 24). In Takum, the withdrawal of recognition from the Ukwe Takum throne is interpreted not only as a legal action but as a signal that one ethnic narrative is being prioritised over others.

Such exclusionary politics erode the fragile social contract between communities and the state. When citizens perceive the government as partial or manipulative in matters as sacred as traditional rulership, trust dissolves. This has direct consequences on peace building efforts. Community cooperation becomes difficult, development initiatives face resistance, and inter-ethnic relations deteriorate.

Ethical Failures of Religious Institutions

Perhaps most disheartening is the perceived complicity

of religious institutions in this unfolding crisis. In a region where Christianity is not just a faith but a moral compass, the silence or worse, partisan involvement of the church in the chieftaincy conflict reflects a serious ethical lapse. The fragmentation of EKAS LADIN Takum, reportedly influenced by religious actors aligned with political interests, represents a betrayal of public trust.

According to Reinhold Niebuhr, the church must stand as a check on political power, not as an extension of it. "Wherever the church ceases to challenge injustice," he writes, "it becomes indistinguishable from the very systems of sin it was meant to confront" (Niebuhr 78). By participating in or legitimising political decisions that exacerbate ethnic divisions, religious leaders risk compromising their prophetic voice and undermining their credibility as agents of reconciliation.

Social Consequences: Fragmentation and Trauma

The ethical failures of both state and church have social consequences that extend beyond political unrest. They contribute to what scholars term "moral injury", a deep psychological wound caused not by personal wrongdoing, but by betrayal by those in positions of trust or authority (Shay 4). In Takum, entire generations grow up hearing conflicting narratives of who belongs and who does not, who rules legitimately and who usurps power. These narratives are internalised and transmitted, creating a collective psyche marked by mistrust, fear, and a persistent sense of injustice.

Such fragmentation makes reconciliation more difficult. Rather than seeing their neighbors as fellow citizens, individuals may view them as historical adversaries. Even well-intentioned development projects, peace forums, or interfaith dialogues can be met with suspicion if past injustices remain unaddressed. Thus, moral failure at the leadership level ripples outward, destabilising the very fabric of social cohesion.

A Call for Ethical Leadership

What Takum requires now is not merely legal reform or political negotiation, but ethical leadership, leaders who recognise that moral legitimacy is as important as electoral or legal authority. This involves an honest reckoning with the past, a commitment to inclusive governance, and a deliberate effort to restore dignity to marginalised communities.

As John Paul Lederach notes, sustainable peace emerges not from imposed solutions but from a "moral imagination" that seeks to restore relationships and reweave the social fabric torn by conflict (Lederach 34). Moral imagination entails envisioning a future where

historical enemies live as neighbours, where traditional institutions are shared rather than weaponised, and where justice is not a privilege of the powerful but a right of all.

Towards Healing And Reconciliation: Addressing Inter-generational Pains In Takum

The persistent trauma afflicting Takum Local Government Area in Taraba State is not merely political; it is a complex legacy of historical exclusion, ethnic marginalisation, and systemic neglect. Healing such deeply embedded wounds requires more than administrative reforms or judicial interventions; it demands a collective reckoning with the past and a visionary commitment to justice in both form and substance.

According to Yehuda et al., trauma transmitted across generations can influence group identity, memory, and psychological well-being, even in the absence of direct experience of the original harm (Yehuda et al. 1071). This holds especially true for communities like the Kuteb and Chamba in Takum, whose memories of colonial-era betrayals, interethnic conflict, and perceived erasure of cultural legitimacy have become central to their narratives of self and other. The following are suggested:

Acknowledgment as the First Step

Healing begins with acknowledgment both symbolic and substantive. Symbolic acknowledgment includes public apologies, commemorative ceremonies, and acts of remembrance that affirm the reality of historical suffering. As suggested by Lederach, peace building in deeply divided societies requires “narrative inclusion,” wherein the voices of marginalised groups are brought into the national or local conversation (Lederach 28).

For Takum, this means formally recognising the disruptions caused by the colonial restructuring of traditional institutions, such as the ambiguous application and repeal of the 1963 and 1973 gazettes concerning the Ukwé Takum throne. These documents, which alternately legitimated and delegitimised the authority of specific ethnic groups, have left lingering questions about rightful leadership and ethnic recognition (*Northern Nigeria Gazette* 1963).

Institutional Redesign and Power Redistribution

To move forward, there must be a deliberate restructuring of traditional and political institutions to reflect the pluralistic reality of Takum's demographic and cultural makeup. Equitable power-sharing in traditional

institutions is not merely a political strategy it is an ethical imperative. As Bentham's utilitarian principle posits, policies must aim to secure “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” (Bentham 14). In the context of Takum, decisions that disproportionately empower one ethnic group at the expense of others are not only unjust but unsustainable.

Establishing inclusive councils where Kuteb, Chamba, Hausa, Tiv, and other groups are equitably represented in the governance of traditional affairs would mark a significant shift. Such reforms can also prevent a repeat of actions like the 2023 decision by Governor Agbu Kefas to alter chieftaincy laws without comprehensive community consultation, a move many viewed as a continuation of historical marginalisation (Daily Trust).

Cross-Ethnic Dialogue and Cultural Education

A sustainable peace must be rooted in mutual understanding. Encouraging interethnic dialogue especially among youths can help dismantle the inherited narratives of fear and hostility that sustain division. Schools and civic organisations should incorporate inclusive history curricula that present multiple perspectives on Takum's past, not simply the dominant narrative.

As psychologist Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart observes in her study of Indigenous trauma in the U.S., “cultural reconnection” plays a vital role in healing intergenerational wounds (Brave Heart 288). In Takum, this could involve community-based storytelling events, language preservation projects, and festivals that celebrate ethnic diversity rather than exacerbate it.

Memorialisation and Cultural Reckoning

Communities must also honour the pains of the past while forging a shared future. The erection of memorials or the formation of local truth and reconciliation commissions can serve as platforms for truth-telling and accountability. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission remains one of the most referenced global examples of how moral healing can be institutionalised (Tutu 45).

For Takum, a locally rooted commission that documents oral histories, investigates past injustices (such as the historical slave raids, forced marriages, and dethronement of traditional rulers), and proposes compensatory measures could provide closure to many families. Importantly, such a process should be culturally sensitive and led by neutral figures drawn from academia, traditional councils, and religious bodies.

Role of Religious and Moral Leadership

Given the strong Christian presence in Southern Taraba, the church must transcend its role as a silent observer or, worse, a partisan player. Its moral authority positions it uniquely to mediate disputes and champion restorative justice. Yet, recent actions such as the fragmentation of EKAS LADIN Takum have eroded public trust in religious institutions (Vanguard Nigeria).

To regain moral credibility, religious leaders must publicly affirm their neutrality, denounce political manipulation, and actively engage in peace building. As political theologian Reinhold Niebuhr argued, the church must “speak truth to power, especially when power manipulates faith for its own ends” (Niebuhr 112).

Restorative Justice Beyond Legal Remedies

Legal rulings alone cannot repair the emotional and cultural damage inflicted over decades. While courts can determine rightful heirs or affirm statutory legitimacy, they cannot rebuild trust between groups whose ancestors suffered from policies of divide-and-rule. Hence, justice in Takum must be restorative.

Restorative justice frameworks prioritise healing over punishment and emphasise accountability, restitution, and reconciliation. They involve all stakeholders' victims, offenders, and the broader community in a collective process aimed at truth and healing (Zehr 31). Applied in Takum, such mechanisms could include compensation for families affected by past abuses, public reintegration of ostracised leaders, or symbolic gestures such as the joint renovation of sacred sites.

Findings*Political Decisions Intensify Historical Pain*

The 2023 decision by the Taraba State Government to restructure the traditional leadership system effectively nullifying the Ukwé Takum throne was not an isolated administrative act. It revived historical grievances related to the perceived marginalisation of the Kuteb people and echoed unresolved tensions from the 1963 and 1973 legal frameworks. These decisions illustrate how governance, when divorced from historical context and communal engagement, can produce moral injury and re-traumatisation (Shay 4; Galtung 173).

Religious Institutions Have Failed in Their Prophetic Role

Once viewed as moral compasses, Christian institutions in Takum have, in recent years, have been complicit in or silence about political decisions that affect traditional and ethnic identities. The fragmentation of EKAS LADIN Takum, influenced by political affiliations

within the church, has weakened public trust and obscured the church's capacity to mediate justice (Niebuhr 78).

Ethnic Fragmentation Undermines Social Cohesion

Deep-seated ethnic rivalries, fueled by contested historical narratives and modern political manipulation, have created a psychological environment where fear and distrust are transmitted generationally. These collective memories shape social identities and contribute to the exclusion of communities from participatory governance and interethnic cooperation (Yehuda et al. 1071; Lederach 29).

Legal Remedies Are Insufficient for Cultural Healing

While courts may provide legal clarity on the legitimacy of traditional rulership, they cannot restore the fractured relationships between Takum's diverse ethnic groups. True justice in this context must be restorative prioritising dialogue, acknowledgment, and symbolic reconciliation over punitive or merely procedural outcomes (Zehr 31).

Healing Requires Culturally Grounded, Ethical Interventions

Addressing generational pain in Takum demands holistic measures, including symbolic acknowledgment (e.g., public apologies or commemorations), and inclusive restructuring of traditional institutions; it also demands educational reforms to promote pluralistic history, and community-driven reconciliation efforts. Memorialisation and truth-telling, akin to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, could play a pivotal role in restoring dignity and fostering peace (Tutu 45).

Conclusion

The case of Takum illuminates the enduring legacy of colonial disruptions, the moral failures of contemporary governance, and the deep psychic wounds inflicted by systemic injustice. Generational pain in this region is not merely an echo of the past but a living reality shaped by institutional betrayal, exclusionary politics, and the suppression of historical truths. The conflict surrounding the Ukwé Takum stool is emblematic of a broader struggle over memory, identity, and moral legitimacy.

There must be a radical rethinking of leadership, justice, and communal belonging for Takum to transcend its current tensions. Political authorities must embrace ethical decision-making rooted in fairness and historical awareness. Religious institutions must reclaim their role as moral arbiters rather than political tools. And the

communities themselves – Kuteb, Chamba, Hausa, Tiv, and others must engage in difficult but necessary conversations about their shared histories and collective futures.

This paper affirms that healing is possible, but it must begin with truth: truth about the past, truth about the pain, and truth about the responsibilities of those in power. Only then can Takum begin to build a society where traditional institutions serve as symbols of unity, not instruments of division. As Bentham reminds us, the greatest good lies not in short-term victories but in long-term justice and the collective flourishing of all people (Bentham 14).

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