

Political Activities in Ado - Ekiti during Colonial Era

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Abstract

This paper examines the political activities of the people of Ado-Ekiti during the colonial period. It shows the lifestyle in Ado-Ekiti prior to the advent of colonialism when the family compounds were known by the names of the ancestral chieftaincies. The study highlights the nature of the British military officers, the role played by Captain R. L Bower who clamped down on Ekitiparapo war chiefs up till 1894. The control of Ado-Ekiti fell on Mr. G. E. Humphery in January 1st 1913 as the first British political officer of Ekiti District. Basic facilities were provided, native court was established at Oke Barracks, and religious activities were introduced (Islam and Christianity 1894 and 1897 respectively). By 1940s, modern political activities have been extended by politicians took politics to places like Ado-Ekiti. The political activities engendered the grass root development and promoted peace and development in the area of study. Data for this research was obtained through oral interview, focus group discussion complimented with secondary sources obtained through conference proceedings and journal articles.

Keywords: Nigeria, Colonial Administration, Politics, Ado-Ekiti, Religion

Introduction

Ado-Ekiti, lies almost exactly at the Centre of Ekiti Division/Ekiti State and could be reached from the borders. People of Ado lived in large compounds i.e. each family, husband, wife or wives, children and slaves lived in one big house which was separated from the buildings of the other families by thick bush. As the children advanced in years and took wives the compounds became extended. These compounds usually became known by the names of the ancestral chieftaincies, e.g. Ile-Odofofin, Ile-Edemo, Ile-EgbediApempe, Ile-Odogun, Ile-Akogun etc. The people became Ebi and the site they occupied became their agboile (lineage/ family compound). These sites occupied by Edemo became Idemo quarters and that of Odofofin, Odofofin quarters, etc. The group of new buildings became sub-quarters or “Ogbon”². However, Oloidi Funmilayo opined that the buildings were all bungalows and were built in compounds known as agbo-ile (a group of houses). The compound was divided into several compartments serving the needs of all families and their dependants. In the open space in the Centre of the compound (*aede*) were kept goats and sheep at night to prevent wild animals: leopard from preying on them³.

However, Adebisi opined that Ekiti people speak the same dialect with some variations in intonation. They eat the same type of food, their dressing is the same to those of other Yorubas and their houses were built in the same design generally found in Yoruba communities. Such houses were in built in circles with roof of thatch and each house was called Akodi and each Akodi could be occupied by about ten landlords⁴.

Occupation

Ekiti is a topographic description⁵ and well watered with regular rainfall in early part of the year. The original Ado settlers came from the Benin forest as farmers and hunters. The inhabitants were industrious on the vacant land where they settled the people of Ado-Ekiti originally planted crops such as maize, plantain and yams for consumption while some other crops such as cocoyam, rice, cassava, maize (the last two by Portuguese) were later introduced by the returning slaves. Rice was introduced in the 1940s. The pre-colonial Ekiti was a completely agricultural society, ... with very few and simple agricultural implements like cutlass, hoe and axe, the Ekiti farmers were able to produce more than enough food for their families and the people⁶. Women in Ado-Ekiti were involved in the socio-economic activities of the town. They planted various crops like cow peas (pakala, otilli, feregede, etc. and cotton. They also helped their husbands in carrying yam sets, harvesting of crops like okros, and weaving the cloths, mats, baskets, hand fans, etc. Weaving was done on broad loom and this cloth is referred to as kiijipa, aso-oke, of varying in sizes, two- piece, three-pieces are called “Ikeji and Iketa”. Ikeji was used by women as wrapper and as cover-cloth at night by young men and Iketa was normally reserved for the elderly and wealthy people such as the chiefs and the Obas. Cocoa seeds were introduced by returning ex-slaves from America via Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, now Ghana. Also, indigenous kolanuts (*cola ocumilata*) were planted; it is essentially associated with the life, customs and tradition of people of Ado-Ekiti⁷.

Ekiti under the British Military Officers before Colonial Administration

Prior to the British Colonial rule in Nigeria, the British were apparently calling the shots demonstrating their capacity for exercising power and authority everywhere. This was demonstrated by Governor G.T Carter

conqueror his posture at the camps of Ijebu in May 1892 during his march through western Yorubaland and his posture at the camps in March 1893. In order to enforce the peace, the British had mid-wifed in the hinterland; Captain R.L Bower had been appointed as traveling commissioner for the whole Yoruba inter-land region⁸. In 1893 and 1894 Bower bestrode the entire present day Oyo, Osun and most of Ekiti community like colossus, enforcing the British peace and compliance with government (whitemen's) proclamations, prohibiting words, the use of weapons to settle grievances, human sacrifice, trial by ordeal and slave trade.

Olomola noted that Captain R.L Bower compiled a least of principals war chiefs who were regarded as troublesome spirits defying government peace initiative or efforts in Ibadan and Ekitiparapo communities. British administration under the auspices of Bower climbed down on every form of violence, brigandage and rapine which had characterized the period of slave wars. The war chiefs continued to leave the life of traditional potentates and military aristocrat, as was their habit since about the 1850s. They were demobilized in March 1893, these celebrities' war boys and private armies were still attached to them and the committed appalling atrocities in the communities and country sizes⁹.

In June 1894, Captain Bower arrested Ogedengbe during a meeting at Owa's palace in Ilesha. Bower took him (Ogedengbe) to Ibadan and he prisoned him there Ijesha authorities protested against the place of incarceration and Ogedengbe was transfer to Iwo. A few weeks later, Captain Reeve Tucker, garrison commander at OdoOtin led 30 "Hausa" soldiers into Imesi Lasigidi, arrested Aduloju and took him to the garrison post where he was questioned about the activities of his war boys, his stock of arms, showed an array of European weapons and they prodded him in the ribs with some of them. He was warned to desist from defying government orders and released. In August 1894, Captain Hawtagne, Bower's lieutenant, ordered Captain Tucker to arrest Fabunmi at his home in Igbo Odo. Tucker took him to Odo Otin, drilled him, sternly warned him to keep the peace and released him. Many other local war chiefs were similarly dealt with.

The arrests and intimidation of the prominent war chiefs into keeping the peace caused awesome fear of the white men throughout the hinterland. The humiliation of the war veterans and the destruction of their local militias enhanced the prestige of the British for, the generality of the people concluded that the whitemen and their armies were invincible and that no one was beyond arrest and discipline by the British Officers¹⁰.

The British officers impressed on the various communities the desire (determination) of the British to enforce the peace and compliance to the treaty terms. They visited traditional sovereign/paramount authorities, assembled the subordinate rulers/bales, enquired into and sought to sustain the old suzerainties. For instance, during the 1894 tours of Ekiti, the commissioner whom were escorted by his lieutenants/soldiers assembled the traditional heads of the various communities in Ado, at the palace of the Ewi where reprimanded and inflicted fines on the Olosi and the Onijan, while Ogotun and Igbara-Odo which engaged themselves in border clashes, were, in February, 1898, on the orders of Lt. A.O.C Scott of Akure Garrison, fined £5 (Ogun Oke 400,000 cowries, (OkeKan was 5/-, five shilling, a bagful of cowry currency was 200,000) was a huge sum of money in those days¹¹. In 1897 the acting residence from his base in Ibadan toured Ijesha and Ekiti land and advised the protectorate authorities of Lagos and Yoruba hinterland was rather too vast to be effectively pacified from Ibadan and thus, to begin with, a garrison post was established at Akure. Lt. A.O. Scott, known throughout Ekiti as Omi Ata, was in charge, he had a detachment of soldiers under his command, and his duty was to oversee the territory (of protectorate of Lagos and Yorubaland) from Akure to the northern boundary with the Royal Niger Company fixed by Bower and Lugard between December, 1894 and January, 1895. This garrison was in pace for about 3years up to March, 1900; the last of the 8 officers in charge of the garrison, Captain Cochran formally handed over the garrison over the garrison and detachment of troops to Major Reeve Tucker in June, 1900¹².

However, Major Reeve Tucker formerly garrison commander at Odo-Otin, was the first district/traveling commissioner. His duties included the maintenance of law and order, dispensing justice, fixing of boundaries with other colonial administrative units, inspection of public works, enforcement of an compliance with treaty obligations etc. the district administration took off in November, 1899, the district commissioner toured his district between November, 1899 and February 1900¹³.

The tours seemed to have opened the eyes of the colonial authorities to the incongruousness of assuming that Ekiti and Ijesha constituted a single social and political unit; the Commissioner realized the multi-state nature of Ekitiparapo. During the tour the commission abandoned the original plan to set up a joint/single Ekitiparapo council of traditional rulers; instead, he created separated councils, one for Ijesaland and another for Ekiti. That of Ekiti land consisted of 15 (fifteen) paramount rulers, hence it was designated among the Ekiti as pelupelu (a convocation of eminent rulers). The pelupelu was convened at Oke-Umo headquarters on 21st June, 1900.

According to Olomola those present included:

Oore of Otun, Ewi of Ado, Owál'obbo of Obbo, Ajero of Ijero;
Alara of Aramoko; Deji of Akure; Alaaye of Efon; Arinjale of Ise;
Olojudo of Ido; Oloye of Oye; Ologotun of Ogotun, Ogoga of
Ikere, OlojaOke of Okemesi (former Igbo Odo now Okemesi Ekiti)

Onitaji of Itaji, Onisan of Isan, and Atta of Aiyede¹⁴

The commissioner used the occasion to solicit the cooperation of traditional rulers for the strict compliance of their people to the Forestry Ordinance, cultivation of export produce and for the provision of labour for road construction in the district. It was gathered that the first and the last pelu-pelu held in the district was in June and August, 1900¹⁵.

However, it is important to note that the economic interests constituted the tap roots of British policy drive in the colonial empire and the promotion and growth of legitimate trade represented the desired goals of the British in Yoruba hinterland of the prohibitions inherent in the various agreements the British signed with the traditional authorities. The British administration of the District took definite step to promote the cultivation of food and cash crops, by the introduction of British coin and paper currency and monetization of the economy. These increased internal trade in local produce and products of domestic industries. The opening of deport and marts in a few places especially at Agbabu in Ikaaland and Ejinirin in Ijebu waterside opened avenue to traders, men and women in hinterland districts of Ekiti and Ijesaland to traverse the long distance to and from these deport. They carried local produce-such as Palm oil to the deports and there from purchased imported merchandise such as European cloths, padlocks, traps, enamel bowls, sewing machine etc. More so, the districts administration initiated motor road construction in 1903. The commissioner, Reeve Tucker, while addressing the pelupelu in 1900 mentioned of the need for roads and appeal to the traditional authorities for maximum cooperation in the construction of the required quota of men for road construction whenever they are called upon to do so. The pace of these road construction by hand and with local implements with token government – provided equipment was slow indeed, for by 1912, no direct road link Ilesa with Efon Alaaye and Roman Catholic Priests who were on their way to Usi Ekiti from Ibadan made it up to Ilesa and returned with their mission unaccomplished.

Eventually, on December 31st 1912 the protectorate of Southern Nigeria wound up the administration of the Northeastern District at OkeUmo. The Ijesa Unit was emerged with Ife and Ila to constitute a district with headquarters in Ile Ife while Ekiti, less the kingdom of Otun and Obbo constituted a new district with headquarters in Ado - Ekiti

British Colonial Administration in Ado Ekiti 1913 to 1942

British colonial administration in Nigeria has remained an important epoch in the socio-political evolution of the country. As in the other parts of the country, Yoruba land came under British colonial administration at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most western development of important aspects Britain Administration the second decade of the century were the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria on 1st January, 1914. The actual birth of Nigeria as one country dated from November, 1913 which unified the southern and northern protectorates as a colony and protectorate of Nigeria. Ado-Ekiti came under British colonial administration in January 1st, 1913 when Mr. G.E Humpery the first British political officer took over the administration of Ekiti District and was posted to Ado-Ekiti, the administrative headquarters of Ekiti.

In January 1913, Ekiti was created a separate administrative division and it should be recalled that on the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates on the 1st day of 1914, the headquarters of Ekiti Division was situated at Ado Ekiti. A number of reasons have been fingered for the choice of the town, as seat of the district administration. Earliest records from Christian missionaries especially Bishops James Johnson and Charles Philips in 1894 represented Ado Ekiti, as the largest town in Ekiti. Records show that MR.G.E.H.Humpery was the first district commissioner and he was to be assisted by MR.A.R.W Living Stone.

The British colonial master adopted two distinctive administrative methods in its administration of Yoruba land. The Lagos territory (Island, Ikorodu, Epe, and Badagry districts) was administered in the tradition of the British crown colony while the Yoruba hinterland (remote areas far away from the coast) fell under the British protectorate type

Thus, traditional institutions and rulers became both servants and partners of the British administration, especially in the execution of colonial policies and programmes¹². Before the advent of the British colonial rule, the responsibility of governing Ado-Ekiti and its villages rested solely on the Ewi and the Ewi-in-Council (Agba-Ilu). The Elegbes were the traditional police or soldiers of the town. Towns and villages were to the Ewi what a farm was to the farmer. They had no direct contact with the Ewi. They paid homage and spoke to the Ewi through the *olori-marun* who resided in the mother town, Ado-Ekiti.

The introduction of British rule removed the veil and the Ewi could see and be seen by his subjects, no longer only at *udiroko* or other days of festival. Sequel to the new administrative system set up by the British administration, the Native Court Ordinance was introduced in June, 1915 and a Grade 'C' court was opened in Ado Ekiti. The native courts were properly organized Native Authorities. The administration was placed on a stronger financial footing by the introduction of direct taxation. Before colonial police was introduced to Ado – Ekiti, Ewi and his Bales received no stipends, but dues tributes especially in kind. Yams, palm-wine, kola nuts etc were the usual homage dues paid once in a year to the Ewi by his sub-towns. The servants of the Ewi had the

privilege of taking from farms and market (erekesin or oja-oba). However, with the advent of colonial rule into Ado-Ekiti, some of these privileges were withdrawn and another method of taking care of Ewi was introduced – i.e payment of spends . Ewi Oba Agunsoye Adewumi 1910-1937 was the first Ewi to receive salary.

At the meeting of Obas (pelupelu) the levy of a tax of six shillings was approved by the Obas; each adult tax payer paid poll tax (owoile) one of the effects of the poll tax under British colonial rule was the establishment of the native authority treasury .

Native Courts

As it was mentioned earlier, before the introduction of British rule, civil cases were tried by quarter chiefs or Bales. But when British Judicial system was introduced, three Native Courts commissioned namely; Ado, Ikole and Ijero .Olomola noted that the generality of the Yoruba were grieved when the colonial administration fully implemented the indirect rule and its Native Authority, Native Treasury (Poll tax) and Native Court (Divorce etc) in the second half of the 1910s. These were not provided for by traditional laws and customs. This led to disparities between the Obas and their subjects. They referred to them as stooges of colonial British Authorities.

Prior to the establishment of native court by the British government into Ado-Ekiti, offences were reported to the chiefs who would first ask elegbes (traditional police) to make primary investigation. During the hearing, any chief could ask questions. If the Ewi (king) was present, he delivered judgment. Punishments were inflicted by Elegbes and compensations were also demanded by them .If the culprit could not pay, his/her family members were expected to help him/her. Appeals could be made directly to Ewi. Severally they handled civil matters including land dispute, chieftaincy conflict, trespass, matrimony and debt recovery among others.

However Ado-Ekiti court was raised to grade “B” in 1917.The Odofin of Odo-Ado was appointed president of the native court. The Resident Commissioner, Captain, A.W, Buffer wart later recommended that sectional courts should be opened at Igbara-odo, and Aisegba, though, Ewi of Ado-Ekiti frowned at the move. Oba Adewumi expressed the fear that the step would lessen his hold on his subjects. Arguably, certain changes occurred during colonial rule that unintentionally brought complications into the traditional institutional matters in Ado-Ekiti as the establishment of native court lessened the Ewi’s power on his district court while some civil matters went to courts .When law of divorce was established by the British government, a woman could free herself by the refund of dowry. Subsequently, ... reports shows that many who went to farm in the morning with the intention of returning home for a good meal, returned home only to meet a piece of paper instead of their meals .The piece of paper stated the place and the time of court . Meanwhile, the native court ordinance conferred excessive political powers on the traditional institutions, as most of them became over bearing and despotic in their actions contrary to what traditional political institutions permitted. This triggered violent reactions on regular bases between 1916 and early 1930s in most parts of the southern provinces and Ado-Ekiti was not an exception.

However, in the meantime, the British colonial authorities collected significant information about the people with the aim of understanding the political, social economic system and to create model for enforcing the administrative policy. The British activities or polices aided the growth and development of cash crop in Ado-Ekiti, the headquarters of Ekiti land .This also led to a new commercial class, who were known as middlemen. They became wealthy and were able to sponsor their wards to colonial schools. These middlemen in Ado-Ekiti took over the gains and benefits of the farmers and acted as intermediaries, even they later took up the position of producers as well as traders and this led to the boycott of the market and encourages the building of store/ware houses.

Transportation and communication

Before the coming of the colonial masters into Ado-Ekiti, there were no motor roads, cars, or even bicycles. There were no camels and horses. Ado-Ekiti was connected to other villages by means of bush tracks. Fruits were generally left on the road side for sale. With the advent of the British rule, there was a lot of improvement of roads, although a majority were badly damaged by heavy rains during the months of June to October which made most of them unemforable and hence having an adverse effect on commercial activities as most of the food growing villages were completely cut off . Moreover, without a plan of road construction in Ado-Ekiti ,it would not be possible to tap the resources of the area satisfactorily. The construction of colonial roads started in the early 1903 from Iyapa (Ayetoro) through Ado – Ekiti to Igbara – Oke junction. Colonial bridges were also constructed e.g. Elemi bridge, Omosuo – Iworoko, Ogbese Ado-Ijan roads were constructed by men who built (worked) on roads, for use, and to facilitated the commercial transports of foods from rural farms or areas to the city of Ado-Ekiti up till 1930. Because of the availabilities of roads, people as well as traders were able to make frequent visits to market and their relations either to buy or sell or for important reasons. Up to early 1940, head porterage was the vogue. Road construction in Ado-Ekiti by the colonial administration gradually replaced head porterage and increased the influx of people i.e. merchants or commercialist from far and near to the kingdom of Ado-Ekiti . Colonial government imposed its money economy from the 1920s. They regarded cowries’ shells as

an inefficient currency and that it would retard the growth and development of the economy. Generally, people frowned at the British idea that they wanted a change, and that they were sure that currency was not better than cowry shells.

Subtly, British coins currencies were integrated to Ekiti in 1918 as legal tenders. The people accepted the currency because of its size and stability. Payment could be made to the administrators with British currency. It was so easier to carry large amount in the pocket. The acceptance of the British currency eventually stimulated trade in the markets, just as the coins were durable. People were able to accumulate wealth by selling goods and keeping the money.

In 1939, Ado-Ekiti native authority passed bye-laws which prohibited the creation of market except by the approval of the Resident commissioner of Ondo province in which Ado-Ekiti was a part. It was the duty of the district officers to inspect the markets and stipulate that traders should pay for the stall erected by the district authority. They were erected with corrugated iron sheets.

Ado-Ekiti District Council had the responsibility of administrating trade activities within the municipality in accordance with the bye-laws. It was empowered to authorize the creation of stalls and authorized persons who could trade in the market. The official heads of the market were market masters employed by Ado-District council. There were officials who collected dues and rents from people. These officials replaced Ewi's agents of both the market masters and local policemen helped to maintain law and order in the town.

Under the British colonial administration, Ado-Ekiti council provided some basic infrastructural facilities such as pipe-borne water and toilet which were built in public places like Erekesin market and Oke-Barracks". This aided the sales of goods in Ado - Ekiti and resulted in expansion of trade in the town.

Religious activities in Ado-Ekiti during Colonial Rule

Before the advent of British colonial rule in Ado-Ekiti, late I.A. Babamuboni introduced Christianity to Ado-Ekiti kingdom. A temporary shed was erected at Mogundegbe (known as post office area), as first place of worship while the first catechist arrived Ado-Ekiti in May 1896. As at this period, missionary schools were established in Ado-Ekiti. By 1913, Mr. G.E.H Humphrey, the first British political officer was posted to Ado-Ekiti.

By 1916, the Roman Catholic Mission arrived in Ado-Ekiti led by Rev. Father Mathew Wouter and he became the first Rev. Father to be stationed in Ado-Ekiti. In September, 1917, Rev Father George succeeded father Wouter and he stayed in Ado-Ekiti till 1930

Islam as a religion was also introduced to Ado-Ekiti between the year 1894 and 1897, by freed ex-slaves, though, history shows that EwiAtewogboyebetween (1886 -1910) who was a Muslim and many of his princes were Muslims and they bore Muslim names. The first Chief Imam of Ado-Ekiti was Alfa SaliuAye ni . Notable among the followers were; Alfa Egunjobi, Alfa Momodu (Alararin's son) Alfa Awolusi Kolorogun (Eyegba's son) who got Converted to Islam in Nupeland when he was a soldier Ikare areas. Also Oladimeji of Ereguru, (chief Rawa's compound) was one of the first Muslims that led prayers in Ado. Information shows that the first mosque was built at Oke Age/ori agree (date unknown), the second Mosque was at Idolofin in front of the present mosque while another mosque was built at Erekesan market and latter upgraded to the standard central mosque.

To avoid conflict or rift among the Muslims in Ado-Ekiti at that time, the Muslim community allocated the chieftaincies as follows:

- i. Chief Imam was allocated to Odofofin family in Odo-Ado
- ii. Balogun was allocated to the royal families at Oke-Ewi
- iii. Iya-Sunna was allocated to Edemo family, Idemo quarters, Odo-Ado, Ado-Ekiti
- iv. OtunImole was shared to Erunwon family and,
- v. Seriki was allocated to Alararin family, Okella, Ado-Ekiti.

Prior to the advent of the two alien religions, the dominant religion in Ado-Ekiti was traditional religion (80%), Christianity probably (5%) and Islam (4%). While by 1930, traditional religion declined to (50%), Christianity (20%) and Islam (15%). The two alien religious groups provided western educational facilities without disruption or direct intervention of the British government until the 1930s. With the assistance of Ewi, the European missionaries built the first school and Emmanuel church in Ado-Ekiti. It was officially commissioned on March 16, 1896 and built up in 1915 by all Ekiti C.M.S members

However, each of these religions has its tradition and culture within the context of which its adherents operate in its dealings and actions. Since the belief system of the indigenous religion is generally incompatible with Islam and Christianity. Among the people of Ado-Ekiti, there is tendency to practice more than one religion, hence the adage:

*Igagbo inkamos'oroulera
Christianity or Islam could not prevent the*

Celebration of indigenous rite.

Hence, it was very common to find Christians and Muslims who participated actively in traditional religious rites. Some Egungun (masquerade) cult members were church and mosque goers up to the 1970s while an overwhelming of those entertained by the masquerades were Muslim and Christians. Though, the only legitimate form of recreation in those days in Ado-Ekiti was Egungun, all the areas dedicated to the Egungun cult were subsequently passed to the church or school in 1940s and 1950s. Before the coming of the Europeans, traditional societies had prisons, for the restriction and punishment of social deviants. But British colonial authorities' institutionalized prisons. Prisons were formed to suppress the indigenous Nigerian people of their rights to self-determination and self-rule of their territory. It was established to serve as punishment to offenders found guilty of colonial laws. It was formed to deal with any person who resisted colonial regulations in Ado-Ekiti district.

Ado-Ekiti prison was the second prison established in 1894, in Nigeria under the surveillance of the British colonial district officers³⁴. From the foregoing, it should be noted that British colonial government had far-reaching impact on the socio-political and economic life of Ado-Ekiti. In the first instance, the status and role of the Ewi changed as he became more of a ruler under the supervision of white colonial officers. Fortunately however, the growth of schools, introduction of money economy and the activities of Christian and Islamic missions in Ado-Ekiti all combined to lay the foundation for the future growth and modernization of Ado-Ekiti.

Modernization began to set in when Association of farmers was formed in Ado-Ekiti. It was aimed to be an asset to successful farmers; local Authority farm, the dairy cattle, the veterinary Department in the town, as well as the Rice and Corn mills. For over decades, Egbiras from Okene were used as laborers on these farms. Ado Ekiti Township as at 1930s could boast of one hundred and ninety seven tailors, the private shopkeepers were more than one hundred and thirty carpenters, mason, weavers, shoemakers, goldsmith, and blacksmith etc.

Political Activities in Ekiti, 1944-1960

Ekiti is one of sub-ethnic units of Yoruba speaking ethnic group/nations, one of the largest ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Ado-Ekiti was the Divisional Headquarters of Ekiti, it consists of three but acknowledging a common ruler, the Ewi. Ado-Ekiti had undergone series of changes especially since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914. In January 1915, Ondo province was created and Ekiti was one of the two components Districts. Due to introduction of western education into Ekiti District, a very large number of Ekiti citizens embraced western education and joined the expanding ranked Nigerian elites in the 1940s and 1950s.

However, among the various forms of indigenous political activities in Nigeria, that of the nationalists parties of the then British West African colonies was not just a mere peasant revolt, it was led and spearheaded by the so-called detribalized individuals, who were western educated, middle-class intellectuals and professional Africans, by those whose terms of improved status and materials standard of living have benefited most from colonialism; in other words, by those who have come closer to the western world but have been denied entry on full term equality.

The Nationalist/Politicians turned their European ways of life together with the British colonial governments/administrations, drew up new regulations and party faithful were elected to power by ballot in order to secure or retain power, politicians took politics to rural areas where modern politics scarcely existed and Ekiti District was of these backward areas. The first political party in Nigeria was the People's Union founded by Orisadipe Obasa in 1904. Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1923 by Herbert Macaulay in order to benefit from 1922 Clifford constitution and to contest election in Lagos and Calabar. Its objective was to achieve self-government within the British Empire. Similarly, Lagos Youth Movement (LYM), was founded in 1934 by J.C Vanghan, Ernest Ikoli, Samuel Akisanya and others. The Lagos Youth Movement attacked the NNDP as too gradualist and demanded immediate self-government. Its motive was complete autonomy within the British Empire. In 1936, LYM metamorphosed into the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). Two years later (1938), NYM defeated the NNDP in the elections to the Legislative Council.

Modern political activities began in Ekiti towards the end of the 1940s by some members of Western-educated personalities from Ekiti who were active in the public service. Worthy of note, were staff and members of Ekiti Native Administration like Mr. Arokodare, teachers, such as J.O. Osuntokun, J.E. Babatola, B.A. Ajayi, Akomolafe, Okeya, etc some traders/merchants such as chief J.A. Ajibade, the Egbedi, primary school masters such as A.A. Abiodun, Z. Olokesusi, etc, dignitaries such as Ifamiloni (Ido), some grown-up pupils who had some education (rising intelligentsia) or who could read and understand available newspapers, returnees from Lagos happily, these eagerly and willingly joined their contemporaries at home to take part in partisan politics. Though, Ekiti was at this period/stage seen as a very remote area in terms of political developments, most of these people understood little about the politics of the national liberation. The older political parties heard of in Ekiti, was the NCNC formed in 1944. But the AG AND NPC came about in 1951. Although NCNC was not a political party to start with but soon had many affiliated groups. Most of the radical nationalists had been engaged in the struggle against colonialism from the beginning of nationalist agitation in

Nigeria

However, Ekiti People saw and regarded Nigerian Peoples' Congress (NPC) as a 'Northerners' political party to pursue Northern goals or agenda while the Action Group (AG)⁴³ was a Yoruba political party, with cliché Afenifere, with tentacles spread to all parts of the Northern Region. On this note, each of these political parties derived its strength, i.e financial and numerical support from one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Moreover, during the period of African majority rule in the 1950s, the Action Group gained the support of a large section of the Yoruba. AG leaders were leading Yoruba elites, prosperous lawyers, teachers and business men etc. AG continued to maintain its regular contact with the people through Obas and wealthy supporters. Notable among these were Chief Joshua Ajibade the Egbedi and Madam Oguntubi, to mention a few.

The leader and founder of Action Group, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was installed as 'Ajagunla' of Ado-Ekiti in early 1955 while he introduced his pan-Yoruba group called Egbe-Omo-Oduduwa formed in the mid 1940s to Ado-Ekiti in 1950. In addition, non-elections were held all over western Region in August and September, 1951 to elect members of the western House of Assembly. This was carried in line with the Macpherson Constitution, 1951. Most of these public debates/discussions were conducted by members of the growing educated and politically-conscious elite etc. However, political parties went to the field to campaign or canvass for support and obtain votes from the masses. This political motive led the National leader of NCNC, Dr. Azikiwe to Ado-Ekiti. His visit to Ado-Ekiti was unannounced but the rumours of his arrival, together with spectacle of a fleet of large American cars draped with party flags, and produced an audience of about 500 young men in courthouse where he had his audience.

Dr. Azikiwe was accompanied by party faithful he spoke on the need to provide social services in Ado-Ekiti. Party songs were sung by members and party membership cards were sold at special prices. After two or more meetings, the fortunes of NCNC declined in Ado-Ekiti. Notable citizens of Ado-Ekiti suddenly changed from NCNC into Ekiti Peoples Party (EPP). This new political party was founded by Chief G.B Akinyede of Ode- Ekiti. Ekiti elites, some said, to divide the NCNC's votes at the 1954 polls into the Federal parliament. While the Yoruba party, Action Group treated Ekiti Peoples Party as NCNC's political affiliate. Ekiti Peoples' Party did not make any meaningful impact at the poll; it was proved that Ekiti Peoples Party only existed in Gboyin Area, Ado-Ekiti District.

According to Olomola, Ekiti Peoples Party had no well-packaged programme other than a few promises concerning western education and a desire that Ekiti would stop playing a second fiddle to other sub-ethnic divisions of the Yoruba.

In addition, Ekiti Peoples Party had no proper slogan and its logo/symbol was a footballer with a football at his feet. On the other hand, the Action Group sent two young men (secretaries) in a car to Ado-Ekiti but they only met a few people at their meeting point/venue. The spokespersons were seriously criticized by some well-educated Ado-Ekiti people for visiting some settlements and villages before coming to Ado - Ekiti, where they thought that decision ought to be made. Ado people condemned the party representatives for their failure not to have led to the discord between the AG supporters in Ado-Ekiti and the party delegation. The two secretaries were told that "...policies which suited the Ijebus (Awolowo country's home) would not suit the Ekitis. After this, there were no public meetings, congresses, campaign etc, of the party not until appeal was made privately/secretly to the Ekiti Obas and notable personalities for support.

According to J.E., Babatola as cited by Jadesola,

I got the assistance of Chief Adepoju Akomolafe among others to be elected as the Action Group constituency leader for Ado and Ido/Osi Districts. This enable me to have a firm grip on party members in the Ado District council area which was divided into four zones in November 1955 based on my proposal for a workable political arrangement.

Action group emerged as a force to be reckoned with in Ekiti politics. The leaders of the party knew what they wanted and how to go about it. They were determined not to leave any stone unturned to mobilize the masses/the people behind them.

Qualifications for Appointments/Selection

In Ado-Ekiti, the highest qualification necessary for the selection/appointment of candidates/aspirants contesting an election, be it councillorship, chairmanship, house of assembly, obaship position or chieftaincy title or position, was a good record of service to their compound, villages, communities, town, etc., or those that had outstanding records in the area of education. Although, some people claimed that the choice was severally limited by the lack of educated men who had retained close ties with their home, people, many remote settlements had never even produced a man with full secondary school education, while on the other hand, some

people put forward to discuss their moral character than political talent. During their final election, many candidates from Ado-Ekiti produced handbills, manifestoes and few posters, these contained their records of public service, and these included some returnees from Lagos, Ibadan and other cities within and outside Nigeria.

In Ado-Ekiti, one man (name unknown), claimed to be a member of the executive committee of Egbe Omo-Oduduwa, while another man (name unknown) who eventually won the poll, was a member of Action Group, but failed to emphasize or tell the masses that he was a member of Egbe-Omo-Oduduwa, was alleged and the party loyalty reduced his number of votes. For the purposes of 1954 Federal Elections into Federal Parliament in the two Federal Constituencies; i.e. South and North, The election was a struggle between NCNC and AG. During this election, notable personalities from Ado-Ekiti publicly or openly supported the campaign platform of Action Group (AG). Mr. Babatola, J.E. (later chief) canvassed for support to ensure the victory of Action Group. He made certain efforts that led to the victory of Chief B.A, Ajayi to the Federal House of Representatives. However, the attempt made by Babatola and other politicians from Ado during this campaign paved way for him among his contemporaries and politicians from Action Group acknowledged him.

Babatola, one of Ado indigenes who participated actively in Ekiti politics was nominated as the first chairman of Ado District council, but he stepped down for Mr. (later Professor) Sam Aluko, an Ode Ekiti indigene, to allow a non-Ado Ekiti indigene become chairman and thereby ensure fairness in council politics at a time when Ado was council headquarters. Samuel Aluko's administration as District council chairman was frustrated by the minority NCNC opposition party. Babatola was always tackled by the opposition party in order not to frustrate the ruling party, Action Group.

Also, in 1955, there was a political contest in Ado-Ekiti District council where Awodumila, (Ode-Ekiti), Familoni (Ido-Ekiti), and J.E. Babatola (Ado-Ekiti) contested for the preliminary election which was an intra-party struggle. Babatola (Ado-Ekiti) emerged as the flag bearer under Action Group. Electorates were drawn up with the party on the basis of the zonal arrangement of the number of votes for the Action Group. Furthermore, there were notions that the intention of the NCNC members and supporters were mainly on the personality of Azikiwe and this led to the decline of the party in Yoruba towns and cities. According to Chief Adeleye Fasuba, the Oisa of Ado-Ekiti;

NCNC was a popular party in Ado-Ekiti that people supported the party. The likes of Ajibola from Irona quarters, was a prominent number and many others. NCNC's campaigns were against British rule, they canvassed that "We" Yorubas will appoint our own leaders (District officers), Governors, from ourselves and send the British away

The above comment depicts the extent to which Ado people participated in NCNC but the reverse was the case when the party rescheduled her campaign activities in Ado-Ekiti for the second time, where only three people attended the rally. This situation in Ado-Ekiti was repeated in many Yoruba centers. NCNC was in an unpleasant situation. The party failed to even publish a definite list of its candidates for the election. Alhaji Sodeeq Ogunjobi Apempe (Baba eleja), one of the NCNC's supporters adduced the reasons why the party failed during its second campaign in Ado-Ekiti to the parochial politics played by the Yorubas and EgbeOmo-Oduduwa. An Ekiti person believes that it was better for them to join hand with people of their ethnic background.

The Action Group declared that it had established over 200 branches in Western Region with enrolment of 20,000 followers. The party began to spread by a series of rallies organized by its field secretaries. Arifalo claimed that AG held more than ten successful meetings or congresses in Ekiti Division. It was gathered that meetings held in places where traditional rulers presided over them. Within a short time, the AG became well known as a party with a good plan while Zik and the party (NCNC) regarded the issuing of a party activities as an attempt to deceive the masses. During campaigns, in Ado-Ekiti, the Action Group made use of its strong link with the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the National Youth Movement (NYM) to strengthen itself against the (NCNC).

One of these songs goes thus:

Oyeleyele akiko yeleyele o ye di ope
Ope subu yakata.....
E me sun kiiegbeopeya se jukan
yabayejee.....
Sugboagbekii aye daralakikomoi se

ooooo

Ado-Ekiti district council was under Action Group and constituent leader was Ehinafe Babatola, his intention was to bring the entire district under his party's control. During the Federal elections in Nigeria, Babatola publicly campaigned for Action Group (AG) and assisted to ensure the victory of Action Group and

Chief B.A. Ajayi to the federal House of Representatives being a number of the party .

Politicians carried their campaigns to places like market squares e.t.c which were targeted audience for them. Continuous political campaign activities interrupted marketing activities as some of the small markets had to stop operation as a result of political campaigns. Thus, of these campaigns, Erekesin or Oja-Oba was the major rendezvous of all politicians as it was the biggest and it serve as a base. Ado-Ekiti people were predominantly members of NCNC . While the Action Group leaders relied on the votes from the subordinate villages around Ado-Ekiti.

This was corroborated by Chief Babatola, J.E;

“I won the election to the western House of Assembly by 15,447 votes against Chief Akinyemi Abiodun who polled 11,205 votes; Action Group scored just 4000 in my home town, Ado-Ekiti, and farmsteads as against Chief Abiodun’s with over 7,000 votes.

Babatola added that;

I polled an overwhelming victory at Iyin-Ekiti, Are-Ekiti and Ido/Osi, Ido-Ekiti, gave me 3,010 votes as against Abiodun who scored only 17 votes. The NCNC on its part gained relative majority votes at Iworoko-Ekiti, Ilu-Omoba-Ekiti and Ilogbo-Ekiti, villages apart from Ado-Ekiti .

Similarly, Chief Adeleye Fasuba was of the opinion that Ado-Ekiti people were supporters of Action Group, he submitted that NCNC members always tried to force their way because the Action Group flag bearer earnestly mounted a rigorous campaign against his NCNC rival, Chief A.A, Abiodun, Pius Apenpe, Pa. Osamika, Ben. Ajibola, etc, these could be described as “a doughty political fighter”. He started his campaign from February 1956 to a day preceding the general election of 26th May, 1956 . During these electioneering campaigns, in Ekiti, people in Ado District went about with local musical bands.

Singing lyric songs e.g.

Solo: Oraoni la akuniku, ege

Refrain: Oraoni la kuniku, ege

Solo: In momojiisobogba lera o, ege

Refrain: Oraonilaakunniku, ege

(Trans)

Solo and Refrain: One has himself/herself and kin to depend on when the hcips are down.

Solo: We must prevent the Urhobos from taking over our land.

Refrain: One has him/herself and kin to depend on when the chips are down.

The NCNC on the other hand, especially in Ado-Ekiti made many lyric songs based on the party symbols thus;

Akiko eleye eye
Akiko eleye eye
Opemogbo’rukus’ aye mi o
maajehunmo se

(Trans)

Cockerel, great object of beauty
Palm tree; don’t pour sand into my life
Let me enjoy the fruit of my labours, etc.

However, political parties invited the heads of each guild for meetings in order to win them to their side. Many of the leaders of these associations were the first to become guild members to foster the growth and development of their political party.

Good examples of these people were Madam Oguntubi, Mrs. Odeku and Chief Joshua Ajibade, the Egbedi of Orere-Owu, Ado-Ekiti who were prominent traders and the two women, Mrs. Odeku and Mrs. Oguntubi were female activists. Mrs. Odeku was then woman councilor for Ado-Ekiti . Though, the election in the town witnessed various disagreements during 1959 council elections under the auspices of party leaders who preferred certain candidates to others and attempted to impose their stooges on the party without due process. Politicians from Ado-Ekiti were mainly NCNC supporters but the sub-towns were supporters of Action Group.

Under Action Group and its leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Ekiti people benefited from the construction of many miles of tarred roads, free education policy, etc. Also concerted efforts made by the people or politicians from Ekiti yielded the Ekiti District in securing allocations to rehabilitate and construct feeder roads in the Division. Notable Ekiti or eminent personalities including Chief Eyinafe Babatola, Chief J.O. Osuntokun, B.A. Ajayi ,etc, held high positions in the Government .

Ado-Ekiti said to have attracted by the package and promises given by the party during electioneering

campaigns. The likes of Chief Famuagun (Secretary), Chief Adeleye Fasuba (Welfare Secretary), S.A, Akeredolu, Adepoju Akomolafe, J.A, Anisuwowo, etc, were well known political actors in Ekiti politics .

Conclusion

In the 1950s and 1960s, modern political activities were so exciting that hopes and fears were expressed, talents were displayed and ingenuities exercised, while on the other hand, anger, bitterness, intrigues and sabotage were frightening. Up to early 1960s, Ado - Ekiti District Council under the leadership of later professor S.O Aluko as the Chairman and J. B Olanipekun as Secretary stood impressive not only in Ekiti but Ado Ekiti District came second only after Ibadan in internal revenue generation with western region; if provided virtually all its required manpower to service. The prospect improved thereafter in number and quantity.

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