

# Socio-political Conflicts and Violence in Nigeria's Democracy in the Fourth Republic: The Case of Ekiti State

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study examined socio-political conflicts in Ekiti State, especially since the re-emergence of civilian democracy in 1999. It explained why minor socio-political disagreements in Ekiti State often degenerate into tenuous, violent and intractable communal upheavals of blood-letting proportions. As usual, for a work of this nature, examples were drawn from conflicts of the past and some lingering situations still begging for permanent resolution. While it may be true that economic poverty, elite manipulation or competition for scarce resources and underdeveloped political class are factors which always compound the Ekiti State problem, the study also draws attention to the fact that Ekiti State is not as homogeneous as often glibly assumed. The write - up goes ahead to suggest ways and means of achieving maximum homogeneity and social integration of the Ekiti society, as desirable steps for future resolution of socio-political conflicts. Keywords: Homogeneous, homestead, hegemonic, poverty, pervasive, conflictual.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The minor disagreement over the permanent site of a social amenity within the neighbouring towns of Ise and Emure Ekiti gradually snowballed into a tense, dangerous and war-like situation between the two fraternal communities. Before the problem could be realized, trailer-loads of petitions and counter accusations kept arriving at the Presidency with precision and regularity. Before the first Peace Team from Abuja could reach Ondo State (then), minor spark had turned the disagreement into a small scale civil war, with human and economic casualties on both fronts. All suggestions proffered, in good intentions, to douse the rage and fury of the people, were cynically turned into gun-powder for the local combatants. In the end, when every neutral and intelligent effort had failed, the government was forced to bifurcate and create two separate local Government Authorities for the two small towns. As scholars and students, we have read of situations aptly described as 'flight of reason and moment of temporary insanity' but the sustained and prolonged period of irreconcilable antagonism and pervasive mutual hatred between Ekiti kinsmen defies social logic and common sense. It calls for serious social research (Aboyade, 2002). The crisis which Professor Ojetunji Aboyade described did not occur in the fourth republic but in the early years of President Ibrahim Babangida, when Ekiti State was still part of the old Ondo State. It is obvious, therefore, that these socio-political conflicts, of volatile and volcanic nature, had been with Ekiti for some long time. What is it that makes conflict resolution so arduous in Ekiti? Why are the people given to this winner-takes-all position which is quite antithetic to the democratic logic of give and take? Why should politics (which is a jaw-jaw vocation) often descend into exchange of fists and violence in Ekiti?

Or, would it be appropriate to say that Ekitis are bellicose, belligerent and given to irrationality of action in situations of competition? Only a thorough and painstaking research into the psyche and social sync of Ekiti can answer these questions. It would be a sad commentary to dismiss and rubbish such an intelligent sub-race or paint them in the odious colours of irrationality and belligerence. This study was triggered off by the innocent but perceptive question of a final year Political Science student in College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, when she observed that: "contrary to the expectations from homogeneous societies, Ekiti State has produced more civilian governors than the heterogeneous states around her and has been involved in more complex and intractable social conflicts than most states. Why?"

Straight away, the question raised four fundamental issues: (a) How homogeneous is Ekiti State? (b) Why do normal disagreements and differences lead to deep rooted antagonisms in Ekiti State? (c) Are we sure that factual history, sociology and anthropology support the "assumed oneness" of Ekitis, despite the linguistic linkage between all Ekiti towns and homesteads? (d) How come politics tends to descend to volatile atavistic pursuit in Ekiti State? As preliminary effort, this study hopes to situate and explain the reasons for the tenuous, rigid relationships between political actors in Ekiti State. The study would shed light on the sociological composition of the towns within the State and show why complete homogeneity or maximum social cohesion has proved elusive, thus far, but remains a feasible realizable aspiration of all Ekitis. Above all, the "centre-periphery" postulation of the Latin American political economists is especially true of Ekiti. A cursory look at the place of Ekiti in the political and economic structure of the South-West may possibly explain the acute and pervasive poverty of the Ekitis vis-à-vis their ethno-siblings in Lagos, Oyo and Ogun States.

***Socio-political Realities in Ekiti State:*** In just twelve years of the fourth civilian democratic government in Nigeria, Ekiti State has the solid distinction of having the highest turn-over on the governorship seat. In eleven years, eight (8) different persons have been on the seat for varying lengths of time. Akinaso (2009) calls it "the highest attrition rate in any civilian political office in Africa, since 1960, an indication of a malignant cancerous affliction, begging for the surgeon's scalpel." Within eleven short years, the following persons have governed Ekiti State as civilian Governors, some for few days, some for few months: Otunba Niyi Adebayo, Mr. Ayo Fayose, Chief Friday Aderemi, Rtd. General Olurin, Mr. Tope Ademiluyi, Engr. Segun Oni, Chief Tunji Odeyemi and Dr. Kayode Fayemi. What a long list! In many States of the federation, only two persons have occupied similar office, thus far. As if this were not enough, Ekiti State has also witnessed its own Spate of political assassinations and violence, especially during the time of Ayo Fayose as governor. Four of the deaths recorded during the period were declared by the Police as political homicides. These include Dr Ayo Daramola of Ijan-Ekiti; Kehinde Fasuba of Ado-Ekiti; Tunde Omojola of Ifaki-Ekiti; and Segun Ayaga of Ilawe-Ekiti. There were other violent clashes which led to amputation of legs and arms at Ise-Ekiti and Oye-Ekiti. As rightly and poignantly pointed out by Aboyade (2002), Emure Ekiti became a one-community local government authority because of intractable, perennial problem with Ise Ekiti. The same with Ise which also became a single town Local Government Authority. The historical rivalry between

Ado Ekiti and Ikere Ekiti has been gravely documented in many books (Aboyade, 2002; Aina, 2006; Morakinyo, 2006; Shonubi, 2005, Fasuan and Alabi, 2001; Taiwo, 2011 and Tandbrook, 1982). Ikere-Ekiti today is also a single town local government entity. Efon Alaaye had to become one community local authority when Okemesi was removed, for peace-sake to Ekiti West. The implication of the fore-going is that history attests to the deep-seated rivalry or animosity between several towns in Ekiti State, often living at very close proximity. The last major wars in the Yoruba land created a situation whereby fleeing people were forced to resettle around the same areas with people who mutually distrusted themselves. The years of trans-Atlantic slavery also exacerbated the crisis of trust in that rival communities were accused of capturing and selling off kit and kins of neighbouring communities (Ade-Ajayi, 1978).

***Sociological Composition of Ekiti Homestead Explanation:*** Any attempt to trace and explain the crises in Ekiti politics through the over-flogged paradigms of colonialism and military intervention would be futile. Indeed, it would be as childish as simply explaining all the problems of Israel through the prisms of Adolf Hitler's phobia or the radicalism of HAMAS alone! (Aluko, 1992). Granted, there are scholars like Tyoden and Amuku, who interpret virtually all social crises from the angle that military rule led to the general militarization of the peoples psyche; and that this militarized psyche tends to promote violence and hardened spirit in Nigerians' approach to issues (Morakinyo, 2006; Iboghere, 2009). Ordinarily, this hypothesis appears to have some credit but, as explanation for Ekiti violence and conflict, it fails completely. Indeed, this thesis cannot explain the unsurpassable role of Ekitis in the "operation wetie" of 1966; neither can it be used for the 1983 arson after the Ajasin-Omoboriowo political face-off.

The Arthur Gunder Frank (1990) exposition on the Center-Periphery theory holds some promise here. The sea port and the airport in Lagos provide a minimum of one thousand jobs everyday for unskilled and unregistered labour. The mega warehouses in Apapa and Ikeja further provide daily livelihood for additional thousand (Aina, 2006). The natural beaches in Lagos and the horde of visitors further reduce economic poverty in Lagos, the center of the South West. Ekiti, on the other hand, is the farthest away from the center; opportunities are rare and there are no natural landmarks like sea and beaches for exploitation. Poverty is not only pervasive, it is an everyday fact-of-life capable of diminishing the finer human attributes of generosity, humanitarianism, accommodation and open-mindedness. Therefore, wherever an opportunity comes to Ekiti, the competition is usually stiff and steep as all the segments of the society get involved in the competition, from the affluent to the poorest, the Kabiyesi to the layman, the educated to the unlettered.

Recently, the location of the Federal University in Ekiti cost a serving senator his seat, not to talk about the months of tension and hostility between Oye Ekiti and Ikole Ekiti which only subsided when some courses and programmes were ceded to Ikole, as mini campus. The Games theory and Power doctrine of Political Science do not capture the reality of Ekiti case and neither successfully explains the problems of conflict in the State. In the first instance, the political leaders and opinion moulders in Ekiti State are always helpless in situations of violent conflicts, knowing that such conflicts even threaten

their respective political relevance. Consequently, further analysis may yield better results if our intellectual searchlight is directed more toward the history and sociology of the people. Right from the onset, we must clearly reiterate the sociological fact that Ekiti is not as homogeneous as erroneously propagated but Ekiti stands a chance of becoming the least heterogeneous, if carefully managed. We now know, as a fact, that the suffix "Ekiti" which follows the name of every town in the state is a geographical term referring to the mountainous terrain and not a sociological brand (Balogun and Ayandele, 1999). Indeed, Ekiti State people are extractions from Ife, Egba, Ijebu, Oyo, Ijesha, Kabba, returnees from Benin and some old indigenous Ekitis. Efon Alaaye is directly from Ife while Okemesi is an extraction of Ilesha. The first Alaaye of Efon was actually recalled back to Ife, as the 14th Ooni of Ile-Ife. Ilogbo, Ido and Ora have a high dose of Oyo settlers while Ado, Ikere, Ijan, Ilu Omooba are traced to original returnees from Benin. Iyin, Ilawe and Igede have a heavy population of persons known to have migrated from Osogbo.

Usi Ekiti, orally, claims superiority over Ile-Ife, saying that Orunmila (the god of wisdom) stayed in Usi before migrating to Ife. Erio, Orun, Ijelu and Ire claim to have been on their sites before new settlers and war-displaced people joined them. Aisegba and Agbado are undeniable extractions from the Egba-sub nation. Omuo-oke is sociologically different from Omuo as the former claims to have migrated from Kabba while the latter is traced to Ife. The implication of the fore going is profound. Since these people are offshoots of different sub-nations within the Yoruba nationality, quarrels and disagreement can easily take violent and uncaring paths, resulting into obdurate intransigence and bloodshed. The Ekitis were the last of the Yoruba race to accept politics as superior calling. For a long time, they regarded iron-smithing, weaving, farming and the military as superior professions and vocations. It has been argued, rather successfully, that the Ekiti Parapo war lasted for fifteen years (1878-1893) because the Ekitis did not have the political class to negotiate the terms of the armistice even when the Ekiti soldiers had won the war after eight years. The war came to an end only when the political class of Oyo, Ife, and the British Colonial power stepped in. (Morakinyo, 2006) Right after the war, the Ekitis went into preferred isolationism, just like the Americans did after their war of liberation.

In the same way as the Yankees were compelled by circumstances to come out of isolation, the Ekiti nation too has had to retrace its steps and grudgingly accept politics (Adetoye and Ajayi, 2006). The implication of this history is instructive in that it shows clearly that Ekitis are not yet expert politicians. It is only natural that the political class will make mistakes of conflicts learn from the conflicts and even use the crises as necessary stumbles which would lead to further purification of Ekiti politics and history (Shonubi, 2005). Historically, it has been discovered that while some towns came together to form bigger units, some towns opted for bifurcation and splitting as they were becoming big. Ikole, Ikere, Ilupeju and Iyemero belong to the first group while Orin, Igbara, Ayede belong to the second category. These historical and sociological differences also show clearly how external forces could easily gain footholds in the politics of Ekiti State. The Oyo can penetrate through Ilogbo axis while Kogi politics may easily find accommodation

in Omuo Oke and Kota. Opposition groups can readily establish satellite bases in Ekiti because of its sociology and thereby turn minimum problems into maximum chaos. That is where good leadership, suffused in full understanding of the social environment becomes imperative.

***Absence of Hegemonic Leadership:*** Our excursion into the history and sociology of Ekiti State further reveals that Ekiti is probably the only Yoruba sub-nation that has, so far, not produced a strong hegemonic leader. In classical political science theories, hegemonic leaderships are considered negative for democracies but experience has shown that hegemonic leaderships have played positive roles in the democracies of the third world, especially in Africa. In the sixties, Chief Akintola of Ogbomosho provided hegemonic leadership in Oyo province. Adelabu (Penkelemesi), Adelokun and Adedibu followed serially in Ibadan politics. In Ogun State, Adegbenro, Abiola and Obasanjo, at different times, provided hegemonic leadership which guaranteed stability. Ajasin in Ondo, Jakande in Lagos, Enahoro, Ogbemudia and Anenih in Edo politics, Saraki in Kwara and Late Obafemi Awolowo for the entire Yoruba land. Ekiti has never produced a hegemonic leadership under a politically sophisticated person. This absence in Ekiti politics has always led to a cacophony of boastful and inexperienced politicians, parading themselves as leaders. A dominant political figure may not be ideal for robust democracies but the stabilizing and tranquil effect of such a leader in a heterogeneous polity cannot be quantified. At any rate, Nigerian politics is yet to become robust!

***Absence of Strong Juridical Group in Ekiti:*** If no man had been formidable enough to establish his hegemony, the failure of a strong, decisive, semi-judicial leadership group that can boast of controlling 60% of Ekiti minds is sorely regrettable. In ages gone by, cult groups and age-grades did the work. In several sub-nations of the Yoruba stalk, some potent and powerful societies were reformed and transported to the modern day living. In Egba and Ijebu lands, the Ogboni Cult metamorphosed into Refined Ogboni Confraternity and local Rosicrucians with strong control and instant justice over cantankerous and unruly indigenes of Ijebuland and Egbaland. The Oyomesi and the Are of the old Oyo transited into powerful societies that still hold Ibadan and Oyo in check. As cosmopolitan as Lagos is, Isale Eko which is regarded as the traditional home of authentic Lagosians continues to monitor families and offsprings through the Igunu society. This society had developed modern machinery for controlling riotous, restive and combusive agitating Lagos children and adults. Unfortunately, there is no such traditional leadership group or society in Ekiti to exercise prerogative of peace during conflict situations.

Taken together, this paper has attempted to establish the foundation of conflicts in Ekiti State politics. Socio-Political conflicts of violent and dangerous proportions have been with Ekiti for a long time. The operation 'weties' of 1966, the 1983 Omoboriowo Vs Ajasin face-off, the Ise-Emure conflict, the 1997 tension over the creation of new local authorities and the political assassinations of the fourth republic are mere pointers to the lack of capacity of the Ekiti sub-nation to deal with major disagreement through homegrown native arrangements. Many of the well known theories which deal with conflict and competition do not completely explain the Ekiti menace. In this respect, neither the Games

theory nor the Power Doctrine can reasonably explain all the dimensions of Ekiti conflicts. The Latin American political economists' theory has been helpful in analysis but not as full explanation. In the light of this shortcoming, the study looked at sociological and historical background of the people for more clues. Ekiti State is not as homogeneous as generally believed. From the sociological composition of the people and their legendary, we can authoritatively confirm that Ekiti State is peopled by extractions of various Yoruba sub-nations: Egba, Ijebu, Oyo, Ijesha, Ibadan, Osogbo, Benin, Kabba etc. In spite of the dialectical affinity, the people still do not see themselves as one. Homogeneity would only be achieved later, through progressive and sound leadership. As of today, Ekiti State is not made up of one solid sub-nation but a plethora of sub-nations, with conflicting aspirations, living in close proximity.

Acute and pervasive poverty adds to the hardening of positions during conflictual or competitive situations in Ekiti. There is no doubt that occasional opportunities for development and self transformation are contested as if none would come again. Project sites and appointments of townsmen into rosy positions assume a new meaning in the state because of the general poverty of opportunities, especially when compared to their fellow neighbouring states in the South West. The Ijebu man from Ogun State can claim both Ogun and Lagos as state of origin. The same applies to the Egba, but for Ekiti, the only opportunity for career advancement is essentially within Ekiti State.

In terms of experience, conversance with terrain and years of practice, Ekitis are still relatively new in real power politics. Since they were the last to reluctantly accept politics, they are bound to make the usual mistakes and blunders of beginners. Politics is not really "the pitch for pastors and righteous persons". Truth cannot always be guaranteed and politicians have been known to manufacture stories, twist facts, bend truths, break promises and prevaricate even on oaths. The average Ekiti person, whose word is his bound of honour, is only just getting to realize that politics may, indeed, be an extremely perfidious field. It is only when such knowledge sinks deep enough and becomes pervasive enough that the tendency to go violent on political matters will diminish.

The absence of strong and revered individual leadership in Ekiti as well as the absence of active societies that can discipline unruly behaviour means that the state would continue to find it difficult to control deviant, violent behaviour amongst citizens. So far, no hegemonic leader has emerged from Ekiti and the potent Ogboni society which has vast operations in other Yoruba states has only minimal presence in Ekiti State. Late Chief Bola Ige singularly stopped the 'brewing war' between Esa Oke and Ijebu Jesa in 1976. A similar feat was achieved by Anthony Enahoro in the 1981 crisis between two Esan towns of Igueben and Uromi. In Ekiti, nobody commands such respect and followership.

The complexities and contradictions which have been highlighted in this study have been within the Ekiti society for ages and have tended to obfuscate many intelligent suggestions, especially during conflict periods, because these issues have not been attended to for a long time. Ekiti state's penchant for violent conflict has now become the task of massive social mobilization project, which must be rooted in profound analyses, substantiated by facts of history, sociology and politics (Specter and Robbins, 2000).

Such a social engineering enterprise would not only sanitize the state, it would also build necessary infrastructure. Most important assignment for Ekiti leadership is to squarely face the poverty index in the state. A progressive systematic transformation of the economic base of the lives of the people would surely make a major impact on the people's tendency and inclination towards violence in the settlement of political disagreement. Ekiti State leadership cannot afford the diversion of 60% of the official allocation to waste and corruption which Iboghere (2009) proves to be the case at Federal and State levels. Such a huge proportion of official allocation if deployed to real developmental projects would transform the lives of citizens, open more opportunities for Ekiti people and gradually reduce the hardened posturing of the constituent components of the Ekiti society. The give-and-take attitude is possible only in an environment where basic needs have been met, and, that must be the target of governance in Ekiti State if it intends to eliminate violent conflicts and political conflagrations from its polity. It is obvious however, that a time will come when an Ekiti son or daughter shall rise above all the petty local sentiments and contradictions to become a strong hegemonic force that can help diffuse tense conflicts in the state.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Socio-political conflicts have been recorded in virtually all the thirty-six states of the federation but the violent and often irreconcilable disagreements are becoming typical of a few states, Ekiti being one. There are those who point to the constitutional arrangement and the political system of winner-takes-all as the main reason for political violence and trench mentality in Nigeria's democracy. Some have argued that the long years of Military rule led to the militarization of the general psyche of Nigerians and perhaps explain why dialogue and mutual concessions are in short supply (Achebe, 1983). The Ekiti version of socio-political violent conflicts had been traced beyond these initial hypotheses, as an indepth look at the history and sociology of the people further shed light on other factors which appear to be responsible for the hardening of spirits in Ekiti State. All these notwithstanding, there is abundant hope that the people will sooner or later overcome this problem of political violence if steps identified by this study are considered for implementation.

In this democratic dispensation, the political parties operating in Ekiti State must take its task of selecting candidates for political office very seriously. The emergence of neophyte, inexperienced and (often) immature persons as candidates for top positions in government is a direct indictment of the political parties' operators in Ekiti State. Helmsmen in Ekiti need to be sensitive, experienced and knowledgeable in the history and sociology of the people. At both the executive and legislative platforms, the past twelve years of Ekiti politics have been characterized by the election of those described as "Ekiti Returnees" and "Ekiti Tokunbos" as Governors and Speakers of the State House of Assembly. Many of them did not live up to peoples' expectations and some even showed signs of not really knowing their subjects. The political parties should henceforth be alert to its duty of weeding, assessing and selecting capable candidates for elections and subsequent governance. Hegemonic leadership is not a project that can be magically conjured or manufactured.

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