

**THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE GERONTOCRATIC STOOL OF ADIDE
INYENIMURE: THE MOST DEVASTATING IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON
AKINIMA (ELIABI) IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The statement that “the colonial rule spoilt Africa and indeed Nigeria in no small measure by historians” is also prominently evidenced in the manner the gerontocratic stool of Adide Inyenimure of Akinima (Eliabi) in the Niger Delta went to oblivion. The European explorers, traders, writers and anthropologists who wrote early Nigerian history did not only ignore some salient aspects of the people culture and traditions but deliberately refused to recognize them. One of such typical examples was the non-documentation of the superlative gerontocratic stool of Adide Inyenimure of Akinima (Eliabi) in any of their records. The gerontocratic stool of Adide Inyenimure was deified hence overwhelmingly established undiluted sustainable social-political hegemony, religious and cultural-consciousness prior to the colonial era. This paper will exhume how the Adide Inyenimure emerged, his roles, privileges, limitations and how the stool finally disintegrated. It concluded that the frequent change of leadership in Akinima (Eliabi) is a result of the absence of the gerontocratic stool of Adide Inyenimure.

Keywords: Akinima, gerontocratic stool, impact, colonialism.

Introduction

‘Adide-Inyenimure’ was a divine traditional Chieftaincy stool of the religious and political leader of Akinima (Eliabi) in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State. There are two traditions of origin of Akinima (Eliabi). According to the more popular and acceptable traditions, the people of Akinima (Eliabi) migrated from old Benin empire between 13th and 14th centuries under the leadership of Umunowei father of Obidi founder of Omu-Agenimo compound. Umunowei the traditional continue was assisted by Eliabi a mystic who direct the movement and led the migrants mystically to settle at Akinima (Eliabi). Subsequently, some powerful women witches who were also among the migrants made the settlement rancorous. He therefore offered himself, expunged the powerful women witches, and gave the people the injunction to call his name Eliabi at times of danger or war, hence Eliabi was adopted as the name of the new settlement. Later Eliabi came to be known as Akinima which is an adulteration of the name “Akininyanama” meaning a village that I have nobody (probably friend) by the Nembe and Elem-Kalabari who traded along Egene (Eganny) River.

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The first Adide Inyenimure was traceable to Umunowei leader of the first settlers in Akinima (Eliabi). The Adide Inyenimure and members of his council were generally referred to as Inyenimure. Also each of the members of the Council were officially designated with the title Inyenimure. These titles according to tradition were said to have originated from old Benin Empire where the people migrated from or forged by the early settlers. Be it as may, the existence of this institution enhanced the power and prestige of the Adide-Inyenimure who held a deified position. In addition, these institutions are believed to have been responsible for the long survival of Akinima (Eliabi) despite some minor and major migrations that took place at different times. This was so because the deified position of the Adide-Inyenimure, enhanced his power, prestige and control over the community. Subsequently, however, the Adide-Inyenimure stool disappeared in the trado-political history of Akinima (Eliabi). The ultimate disappearance was as a result of the influence of Christian Religion, Western Education coupled with the colonization of the then oil rivers protectorate.

The Pre-colonial System of Government in Akinima (eliabi) Conditions for the Stool of Adide-inyenimure

Though the people applied a gerontocratic system of government, the nature and process were complex, unique and elaborate. Thus, one has to satisfy three basic conditions before could qualify for the office of Adide-Inyenimure. The conditions include: -

- The oldest man whose ancestors from both patrilineal and matrilineal families were not of servile origin. By implication therefore, one could attain the position of the oldest man but would not qualify if any of his ancestors were of servile origin.
- The oldest man who satisfied the above condition and as well do not suffer any outstanding physical disability or deformity. As earlier stated, the Abide-Inyemure served as both political and religious leader. As a religious leader, it was his function to offer and perform series of sacrifices and consultations with the community's famous deities such as Eliabi, Oto-odawu, Ekpesu, Ewu and Agwo, at different occasions.
- According to the tradition, it was generally believed that the gods (deities) do not punish physically deformed or disabled person even when guilty but transfer such punishment to the children and or relatives, hence do not as well accept sacrifices offered directly by such a person acting as her priest. Therefore to qualify for these important spiritual services (priest) one may not necessarily be the oldest with ancestors none of slave origin but must be physically sound too.
- Provision of a live sizable Bush pig (OFAO) before the Coronation. This comes immediately after the two conditions have been met. Bringing a live bush pig without satisfying the above is therefore not enough to qualify an aspirant as every other person could as well afford alive bush pig during hunting expedition or otherwise.

Originally, according to tradition, the Adide-Inyenimure to be was expected to use his spiritual or physical prowess to singularly catch or spiritually command this live bush pig for the ceremony as a symbol of his capability to lead. Subsequently however, the emphasis on catching alive bush pig by the Adide-Inyenimure himself dwindled and was finally dropped. In the alternative, alive bush pig bought by the Adide-Inyenimure was accepted as not to unnecessarily delay or defer the periods meant for such installation which could only be done once a year and in a particular season (eburu) too when the flood is reseeding in Egene River.

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The pig according to the tradition was meant for the council of (Iyenimure) and occasionally the members of EBURABO SOCIETY. Who served as an organ for checks and balance and also as a military class (commanders) that both defended and saw to the proper implementation of community's laws, norms and traditions. The Eburabo consisted of the very strong able bodied and highly intelligent men of reputable character who were noted for their salient personal achievements usually at wars, wrestling contests and the possession of wealth and are between the ages of forty and above. It should however be noted that satisfaction of the above conditions alone does not immediately confer on the Adide-Inyenimure the prerogative and right to pour libation to the deities and seat on the Royal stool. Pouring of libation at this time was therefore done by the oldest man among the council of Inyenimure (Elder) until all the formal rites were performed. However, the oldest man too was absolutely restricted from performing sacrifices of any kind to any of the five deities except on the day of coronation as that was an exclusive function of the Adide-Inyenimure.

The Installation and Coronation Ceremony of Adide-inyenimure

The ceremony for the coronation of the Adide-Inyenimure lasted for two days which was collectively announced five days earlier by the council of Inyenimure to enable him spread his invitation to friends and relations and above all to prepare for the entertainment of the general crowd that would be in attendance. On the first day, the Programme began with the killing and eating of the live bush pig by the council of Inyenimure and Eburabo. For the enthusiastic public to know that the ceremony has officially began, the usual Horns blown before a substantive Adide-Inyenimure would eat are blown before the Inyenumure in council, ate this food after some rituals. At the hearing of this special horns, the wives, relations, friends and indeed the entire adults in Akinima (Eliabi) who were anxiously waiting would shout various slogans of blessing and praises to the Adide-Iyenimure from wherever they are: After the council of Inyenimure must have dined with the Adide-Inyenimure, he was led to his residence with the Eburabo taken absolute security of him and members of his council by the display of their heroic expertise, fortification of their body and also warding people away from the scene. However others were meant to stay in their houses to allow the smooth passage and the performances of some important rituals during the procession. As the Adide-Inyenimure entered his residence, he was not expected for spiritual reasons to communicate, with others except his first wife and to be boldly seen outside until at the middle of the ceremony in the night. Meanwhile, the Adide-Inyenimure by this time was expected to have concluded all arrangements for the entertainment of his entire guest and the entire crowd in the evening and early morning of the following day. The items for such entertainment included, Okia (Goat(s), Ezeni (Fish), Edia (Yams), Ekire (Cocoyam) of all variety, Akpukuro (fuufuu), Ebili-ake (Palm wine) and Ezin (Local gin) etc, quantity according to the capability of aspiring Adide-Inyenimure. In the night before the coronation day there was an all night wake-keeping celebrated in honour of the anticipated Adide-Inyenimure. The night occasion was usually announced three songs and dancing styles prior to his arrival. The significance of the announcement was to create awareness, give chance for the Adide-Inyenimure to dance and to enable the people prepare themselves with whichever gifts they have to present to the Adide-Iyenimure. These gifts of congratulations included assorted cloths, paraphinelia, shirts, beads, crown, manilas, money, etc. At the end of the congratulatory gifts, the Adide-Inyenimure was led to the house by the same crowd usually made up of wives, immediate relations and friends and members of the Eburabo cult. In the morning, the Adide-Inyenimure puts on his royal paraphinelia and present the assorted food items he has prepared for the entertainment of the celebrants. It should be noted that slaves were not permitted to partake in the preparation of the food and the eating with others. After the morning entertainment's, while the public went back to their houses to prepare to watch and witness the installation proper, members of the council of Inyenimure and Adide-Inyenimure got themselves

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ready and in a procession, move to the shrine of AGWO after having visited and performed some necessary rituals in the vicinity of Oto-Odua, Ekpesu, Ewu and Eliabi.

In the shrine of Agwo, the Adide-Inyenimure will be directed to spread a locally made mat (uta-agiri) on a specially designed inmoveable seat made of clay (ukpo) and then the oldest Inyenimure asked the Adide-Inyenimure to climb up and seat on it. The Inyenimures then take their seats arranged according to their age in two rows each side facing the other, a little distance away from the Adide-Inyenimure. At this juncture, the acting oldest Inyenimure in council will begin to invite the presence of the deities and ancestors of Akinima (Eliabi) by the way of incantations, pouring of libations, prayers and offering of sacrifices in the shrine of Agwo soliciting for their support, recognition, protection and approval of the Adide-Inyenimure. By the end of these rituals, he would then crown the Inyenimure with the traditional hat and also spiritual and political staff of mandate-whose presence like the mace make all decision binding on all and also serve as an instrument for settling dispute. He was then decorated with the biggest stock of beads around his neck and both hands. This was immediately followed by the usual blowing of the horn (opi) to invite Eliabi deity. The members of the Inyenimure would then stand for the installed Adide-Inyenimure. Each of the members before taking their seat greet the rest members of the council beginning from the oldest in this way; "Inyenimure Binekia" while the rest answer "Iyaa." At the end of this greeting the Adide-Inyenimure was now led to his residence by a very thick crowd, who were watching the coronation at a short distance.

All these having been done, the Adide-Inyenimure now assumed the position as both the political and religious leader of the people of Akinima (Eliabi)

The roles of Adide-inyenimure

A duly installed Adide-Inyenimure is expected to perform the following roles;

- Preside over all the meetings both that of the Inyenimure in council and the general congress. He speaks last and therefore is regarded as the final arbiter in any matter or deliberation before him.
 - Settled disputes of all kinds between and among members of the community, and families when reported to him. Also, in the case of quarrelling parties, he was said to have intervened by way of raising his royal staff while passing between the quarrelling parties to end up the quarrels. According to tradition, should any of the parties involved dare ignored the Adide-Inyenimure's intervention, the whole community then rise against such party no matter their claims in the matter beginning with those who witnessed the intervention.
 - Served as the priest of the popular deities of Eliabi, Ekpesu, Oto-Odau, Ewu and Agwo. As a priest, he performed consultative roles in matters relating to wrestling, wars, fulfillment of pledges and offering sacrifices of all kinds to the deities on behalf of the people whenever the need arise.
 - Responsible for the pouring of libation to the deities and ancestors of Akinima (Eliabi) at various occasions.
 - He dispensed oaths of different kinds to oath recipients on different occasions.
 - Ratify the appointment of any public officers to serve in any portfolio in the community e.g. Inyenimures and Eburabos.
 - He gave both moral and financial support to the subjects who were faced with natural disasters and social problem.
 - He and the council of the Inyenimure and the members of the community would collectively share the responsibility to repair and build a new shrine for the Agwo (always with thatches). The building of Agwo does not customarily see the next day and usually without rain.
 - A custodian/encyclopedia of the people's culture, legends and traditions.
- Ordering of fishing periods and festivals in the community and sacrifices associated with the fishing.

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-He spiritually brought about the stoppage of rains when activities of ritual, wars and festivals are not wanted to be disrupted.

-He recognized Eburabo society (group of prominent, powerful and wealthy men) who in turn took instructions from him on vital matters.

These roles notwithstanding, an Adide-Inyenumure was not autocratic. He ruled with the full cooperation of the Council of Inyenumures.

Limitations of the Adide-inyenumure

Some limitations of the Adide-Inyenumure include;

-Abstaining from taking food without fish or meat to supplement his diet.

-Abstaining from eating overnight food.

-Do not sleep overnight outside his house no matter the circumstances and reasons.

-Do not engage in disputes of any kind with any of his subjects.

-He was not to be drunk in all cases.

-He alone could remove or take dried/smoked fish/meat from his specially made local basket (Okuma) with lead on the altar.

The privileges of the Adide-inyenumure

Despite the obnoxious limitations already mentioned, the Adide-Inyenumure enjoyed certain attractive privileges as well. The privilege includes.

-The people are compelled to stand for him whenever he appeared in any public gathering and/or seen at any instance.

-His decisions were not challenged as he was feared and believed to have been directed by the deities whom he served as a priest.

-Horns were blown before taking his meal. In this case, some servants were employed with this duty.

-He customarily owned the three ribs of the side of the animal that fell to the ground ranging from gazelle (uyou) to an elephant (adogbor) killed by any members of the community and others living within the territory of Akinima (Eliabi). Also, parts of fish and farm produce were traditionally design for the Adide-Inyenumure. Sometimes too, he received pleasantries from relations, friends and well wishers.

-He owned and controlled the tapping of palm wine in the freshwater swamp rafia palm vegetation immediately after Ushiogina- "Otua-Eruwa".

-The Adide-Inyenumure has the prerogative to take from any of his subject, such materials as thatches, ropes, bamboo poles, etc. found in the subject's environment without questioning.

-The Adide-Inyenumure is for life except found wanting on many grounds after several warning by the people and the deities with symbols. The tradition however do not give account of any deposed Adide-Inyenumure.

-The corps of the Adide-Inyenumure was not to be seen by the slaves and the disabled and to be buried after seven days with local preservation. By this therefore, the respect and honour given to the Adide-Inyenumure can only be terminated at the grave. There is a popular song first used by the Ojo dance which translated the respect and honour given to the Adide-Inyenumure in respect of the above. It is sang thus:

"Anigbo na yia o, oya! oya! (slave should not come close)
Anigbo na yia o, oya! Oya!
Anigbo na yia, Ani-Inyenumure deiya (Adide-Inyenumure is dead)
na oto, Anigbo na yia, giri, giri, onyowushi." (go back slaves)

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Factors responsible for the Discontinuance of the Stool of Adide-inyenimure

In spite of the defied position, respect and dread that surrounded the stool of the Adide-Inyenimure and the high degree of peace and unity it fostered, the stool after so many centuries of existence began to lose its value gradually among the people of Akinima (Eliabi). According to tradition, the values and desires for Adide-Inyenimure began to sink after the reign of Egina who ruled until 1934. Until to the grave however, Egina was said to have enjoyed all except the total political privileges of Adide-Inyenimure despite the terrible wind that threatened its survival. "There is always a period in history when it seems as if a chasm had opened, separating all that gone before from all that came after!!" (Asuadu et al., 1984). The quotation above aptly described the situation which occurred in Akinima (Eliabi) after the reign of Egina 1934. A number of reasons which include religious, political and western education combined to give rise to the discontinuance and disintegration of the stool of the Adide-Inyenimure whose impacts are still felt today by the people of Akinima (Eliabi).

Religious Factors

The stool of the Adide-Inyenimure of Akinima (Eliabi) was based on traditional religious practices and the cult of the ancestors. It was therefore obligatory on every citizen of the Community to respect, promote and ensure the continues existence of all the religious, social, economic, political and traditional institutions. By 1904 when Christians Missionary Society (CMS) under the auspices of Mr. Johnson Cycloff Briggs opened a church in Mark Ekuru Ekekwas's residence in Akinima (Eliabi), a good number of people were converted to Christian Religion. According to Newington intelligent report (1938), "in many villages all the people are professing Christians and even where pagans still exist they are in a majority in their respective villages". Infact it was this numerous converts well exposed and poised with the spirit of evangelization that spread its tentacles to Akinima (Eliabi). Christianity and its new doctrines rejected and utterly condemned this ideas of Adide-Inyenimure and its attendant practices, weakened the dread, respect and value of the Adide-Inyenimure. Precisely, the early Christian converts who were by this time poise with faith and ambitions publicly condemned aspects of the stool as superstitious and occasionally showed resentments against some of these practices. Though this attacks abnitio were not left unpunished but by this attitude, the general acceptability of the roles, privileges, integrity and authority of the Adide-Inyenimure where being psychologically paralyzed. In a more serious note, the attitude of the early Christian converts greatly weakens the existing social bounds, customs and traditions of the people.

Educational Reasons

The residence of Mark Ekuru Ekekwa acquired to kick-start the Church was simultaneously used to begin the pioneer school in Akinima (Eliabi) by the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) in 1904. The pioneer scholars and graduands of the school and others established in Egena and elsewhere in Degema, Brass and Kalabari began to condemn the respect, honour, privileges and most of the traditions associated with the stool of the Adide-Inyenimure. Subsequently, this new brand of educated elite began to withdrew from active participation in certain ceremonies, festivals and indeed anything associated with the culture and traditions of the people. these attitude no doubt also culminated to the fragility of the genogratc stool of the Adide-Inyenimure.

Political Factors

The effects of the colonization of Rivers State which began effectively in 1885 as part of the Oil Rivers Protectorate by the British (Sorgwe 1976) were subsequently extended to Akinima (Eliabi). Like other parts of the Country, British colonization and establishment of colonial administrative courts which engage the educated elite undermined and greatly affected trado-political institutions

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and ideals of the people of Akinima (Eliabi). To enlarge extent, the power, prestige and the values of the Adide-Inyemure stool which was popular among the people of Akinima (Eliabi) waned gradually into oblivion. Consequently, the political metamorphosis therefore had a deep matched cut on the Trado-Political Authority and stability of Akinima (Eliabi) and instituted Western Political Culture in the community.

Conclusion

The gerontocratic stool of the Adide-Inyemure was a very unique and superlative institution that kept the people of Akinima (Eliabi) United socially, religiously, economically and politically before the Colonial and Christian missionary invasion in Egene. Despite the strict adherence to traditional and customary rules surrounding the institution of the Adide-Inyemure, the people generally were satisfied and enjoyed a peaceful and sustainable political system and transition devoid of abuse of power and premature overthrow of the leadership as experienced. In fact there was no record of the dethronement of Adide-Inyemure in the history of the Community during the pre-colonial era. Though the death of Egina did not immediately led to the end of gerontocratic process of selection of the Adide-inyemure but totally expunged in particular the spiritual roles and some of the privileges attached to it. This is the reason why the family of Egina and or the oldest man in the Community are responsible for the divination, performance of sacrifices, fulfillment of pledges and pouring of libation to the Community's deities to this day. It is our opinion that the people of Akinima (Eliabi) and other nationality should study how the system operated, identify the salient issues, modify and adopt them to their present system in order to make the tenure of their paramount rulers more enduring.

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List of Adide-Inyemure

1. Umunowei Agenimo
2. Agwo (1st)
3. Agenimobo
4. Ikpo
5. Okoriba
6. Egina - 1860 - 1934
7. Agwo (2nd) - 1834 - 1935
8. Arepha - 1935 -1936
9. Odikaima - 1936 - 1937
10. Emem - 1937 – 1939
11. Okoni - 1939 – 1950
12. Oginabo Tamuno - 1950 – 1956
13. Adose Brown - 1956 – 1962
14. Lazarus Okorogu - 1962 – 1963
15. Thompson Iwekalo - 1964 – 1984
16. Alexander Ugborogu - 1984 – 1992
17. Eferebo Clifford - 1992 – 1997
18. Alfred Emem - 1997
19. Maurice J. Egum - 1998 – 1999
20. Philip Alfred - 1999 – 2001
21. Aleiwurivo Nason Gallies - 2001 – 2005
22. Wison Ovie Okocha - 2005 – 2008
23. Dimkpa Yellow Mazi - 2009 – 2015
24. Onisojikume Amachree - April 2015 – July 2015
25. Udiomine Sunday Charlee - 2015 – 2016
26. Okereke Benet C. - 2016 - 2017
27. Reuben Moses - 2018 (2 weeks)
28. Belema Afuashi - 2018 - 2021
29. Okereke Benet C. - December 2020 – June 2021
30. Levi Osuoka Isaac - July 2021 – December 2021
31. Mark Amachree Roman - 2020 till date

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Oral interview:

NAME	AGE	SEX	PROFESSION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
Abiobio, Humphrey Toribofa	79	M	Fishing	Akinima	18/06/1989
Alapiki Philemon Gaga	89	M	Farming	Akinima	13/08/2018
Awari, James Nduka	64	M	Retiree	Akinima	01/02/1990
Charlie, Sunday	83	M	Farmer	Akinima	17/11/1998
Eferebor, Clifford Moses	81	M	Craftsman	Akinima	22/09/1988
Obu, Beneiah	87	M	Trader	Akinima	16/12/1985
Ogborie, Gilbert	91	M	Retiree	Akinima	11/02/1986
Okoni, Winston Brother	73	M	Retiree	Akinima	04/10/1987
Owuchekwa Sylvanus	68	M	Businessman	Akinima	22/10/2021

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