

REPRESENTATION WITHOUT PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ILORIN DIVISION, NIGERIA, 1947 – 1954.

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ABSTRACT

The world over, one of the major phases in the evolution of a modern civilized system of government is the representational phase. Implicit in that concept is the objective of participation, by the generality of the people, in their administration through their representatives who, more often than not, are chosen through one form of election or another. In the course of nurturing its colonial dependencies in tropical Africa, as elsewhere, on the path to modern governmental system, the British government introduced and operated representative government in the dependencies. This study has taken a critical look at the process of representative government as it was introduced and operated at the level of Ilorin Division of Northern Nigeria between 1947 and 1954.

KEY WORDS: Representation, Participation, Emirates, Reforms, Agitation

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the nineteenth century, the inevitable military preoccupation of the authorities of Ilorin Emirate made it impossible for them to exercise effective control over their conquered subjects in the southern areas of the emirate. These conquered subjects comprised the Igbomina, Ekiti and Ibolo speaking Yoruba dialectal sub-groups. Beyond exacting tributes and military contingents from the people, they were left by and large to continue running their affairs as during the pre-conquest and pre-emirate days. The pre-colonial situation in Ilorin Emirate was however similar, in some respects, and dissimilar in other respects, to what obtained in most emirates of the then northern Nigerian region. For instance, like the Fulani dynasties in most other emirates, the Fulani Emirs of Ilorin ruled an ethnically distinct majority, in this case, a Yoruba ethnic majority (Dudley, 1968; Whitaker, 1970). In those other emirates, however, the minority Fulani dynasties had assimilated themselves culturally and linguistically with their demographically predominant conquered subjects. That assimilation had been achieved through a substantial period of peaceful Fulani co-existence with the people ever before they conquered them during the Fulani Jihad of early

nineteenth century. The peculiar political circumstances which had led to the establishment of Ilorin Emirate had, however, precluded the possibility of such assimilation between the Fulani rulers of Ilorin Emirate and their subjects (Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna, NNAK, 1952; Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966). The result was that the Fulani rulers and their Yoruba subjects remained by and large culturally distinct entities at the beginning of British colonial rule in the emirate during the early twentieth century. That situation was to greatly affect the issue of representation and participation in local government within the emirate during British colonial rule, unlike what was the case in most other emirates. That was to be more so because in the classic Hausa-Fulani emirates, social organization was arranged in horizontal stratification according to class and resultant rank, with the Emirs as absolute monarchs, whereas in Yoruba culture, social organization was more of vertical segmentation based on kinship ties, and with the king ruling as a limited monarch through some democratic and representative institutions (Sklar, 1963; Ellis, 1976; Munoz, 1977; Fadipe, 1978; Atanda, 1980).

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With respect to the issue of representation, "representative government", broadly speaking, is a system of government whereby major legislative and executive decisions are deliberated upon and taken by a group of people who are supposed to represent the society at large. The basic objective of representative government the world over has always been to ensure participation in government by the people or the governed. The degree of participation however often varies according to the nature and scope of representation, while representation and participation are invariably best achieved through one form of election or another. As was the case initially in the other emirates of Northern Nigeria, British colonial administration in Ilorin Emirate precluded representativeness of the local government. That was because the administration greatly enhanced and strengthened the pre-colonial authoritarian powers of the Emirs through instituting the Native Authority (N.A.) system of local government. The people of the southern districts of Ilorin Emirate therefore engaged in a prolonged agitation for participation in their local government. Owing to that and some extraneous post-World War II factors, the British colonial government introduced some reforms, between the late 1940s and mid-1950s, into local government administration in Ilorin Emirate and indeed in the entire Northern Region. That was apparently with a view to making the administration representative and therefore participatory, as desired by the agitating people. This study takes a critical look at the developments which led to those reforms; the theoretical stipulations of the reforms; and the practical implications of their application, with respect to the issue of participatory representation in governance. The choice of Ilorin Division for this study is particularly appropriate in view of the fact that since the pre-colonial period, Ilorin Emirate (tagged "Ilorin Division" or "Ilorin N.A." by the colonial government) had, unlike most other emirates, harboured so much inflammatory political material that it had earned the appellation of the "soft underbelly" of the Fulani Emirates of the Nigerian region (Whitaker, 1970).

THE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH LED TO THE REFORMS

The pre-colonial Ilorin Emirate consisted of two broad politico-cultural sections. These were Ilorin (the headquarters of the emirate)-

cum-the-areas to the north of the emirate. Those two areas were inhabited by, in addition to some Yoruba-speaking people, a substantial Hausa-Fulani culture group who were predominantly Muslims. As such, these people shared the racial and cultural characteristics of the emirate ruling elite who were Hausa-Fulani and Muslims. Furthermore, those northern areas were incorporated into the emirate during the nineteenth century through peaceful means, such as through immigration and settlement there of Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani people from Ilorin. As such, the northern areas together with Ilorin constituted the metropolitan section of the emirate. In contrast to that were the Igbomina, Ekiti, and Ibolo dialectal sub-groups of the Yoruba culture group, who were basically adherents of African traditional religions, in the southern areas of the emirate. These people had been incorporated into the emirate between the 1830s – 1850s through conquest. As conquered subjects, they constituted the non-metropolitan peoples of the emirate. (Yahaya, 1980).

After its conquest of the emirate in 1900, the British government took steps to establish its direct colonial control over the emirate just as it was busy doing in other parts of the Nigerian region. The colonial government designated the emirate as "Ilorin Division" or "Ilorin Native Authority" with a view to having a uniform nomenclature with local government units in other parts of colonial Nigeria. In line with its colonial local government policy of indirect rule in the emirates of Northern Nigeria, the government built its local government system in Ilorin Division on the pre-existing emirate system of government whereby the Emir was, theoretically, the political, judicial, fiscal, and spiritual head of the emirate. Towards that end, the Emir of Ilorin was constituted into the Sole Native Authority for the Division, thus making him the sole indigenous agent of colonial local government in the Division. To enable him effectively perform that role, the colonial government vested the Emir with wide-ranging political, fiscal, legislative and executive powers over all the people and other traditional rulers in the Division (Lugard, 1970). That was done through a series of Proclamations and Ordinances, such as the Native Courts Proclamation, 1900; Native Revenue Proclamation, 1904; and Native Authority Police Proclamation, 1907. The government also established some machineries within which the Emir was to perform his functions and exercise his powers. Chief among the machineries was

the Ilorin Native Authority Council (also called "Emir's Council") which had the Emir as its Chairman. When the Council was initially constituted during the first decade of the twentieth century, it comprised essentially the Emir and the four *Balogun* (that is, pre-colonial war-lords) in Ilorin. It was that Council, which did not contain any representative of the non-metropolitan southern districts (with a population almost half that of the entire Division) which was responsible for all legislative and executive matters concerning the administration of the Division on behalf of the colonial government.

The first modification to that councilial composition was made in 1913 as an aftermath of widespread protest and civil disorder in and around Ilorin metropolis in that year. The disturbances were caused partly by an increase in taxes payable and partly by restiveness of the pre-colonial, pre-emirate Yoruba focus of power in metropolitan Ilorin, that is, the Afonja House. After colonial troops had been called in to quell the disturbances, the government decided to allow the Ilorin-Yoruba Afonja House some representation on the N.A. Council. The membership of the Council was therefore expanded to include two appointed representatives of the Afonja House namely, the *Mogaji Aare* and *Baba Isale* Chieftaincy holders, on a permanent basis to ensure stability of the divisional administration. Owing to similar political disturbances as above in 1937, the Council was further enlarged to ten members. Since the three additional members were once more drawn from metropolitan Ilorin, it meant that the non-metropolitan southern districts were still excluded from representation on the N.A. Council and, therefore, from participation in the divisional administration.

The political situation in those southern districts all that while next deserves a brief examination at this juncture. Right from the inception of colonial administrative grouping in Nigeria in 1900 – 1901, the people of the southern districts of Ilorin Division had objected, on cultural grounds, to their having been grouped with the predominantly Hausa-Fulani culture group in the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria while the mainstream of their Yoruba-speaking kith and kin had been grouped within the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The objection and resentment of the people naturally increased when the unrepresentative machinery of local government in Ilorin Division, the N.A. Council, was subsequently put in place. The people

therefore engaged in a vigorous agitation against the authoritarian nature of the Council and the near-exclusiveness of its membership to the Hausa-Fulani *sarauta* (notables or title-holders) in Ilorin metropolis, and demanded that they should be allowed participation in the divisional administration. Owing to the same factor, the people later embarked on a dual agitation for administrative separation from the Northern Protectorate and a merger with the Southern Protectorate instead (Dudley, 1968; Whitaker, 1970). According to Sir John Macpherson during his Governor-Generalship of Nigeria, those agitations arose "from dissatisfaction with the Native Authority pattern of local government in that area and with the place in it of dissatisfied parties." (NNAK, 1952). Similarly, the Minorities Commission which was subsequently appointed by the government admitted in its Report that one of the major reasons for the separatist agitation was the perception, and rightly too, of the people of the southern districts, that the system of local government in the Division was undemocratic, unrepresentative, and therefore non-participatory (NNAK, 1952).

In pursuing that separatist aspiration, the people had employed both passive and active resistance strategies such as migration, riots, and the writing of petitions and memoranda to the colonial authorities. The political discontent in the southern districts, it must be noted, was reinforced by the cultural factor. The people in the southern districts, unlike the Hausa-Fulani political elite in the metropolis of the Division, belonged to the Yoruba culture group among whom, as earlier discussed, a considerable measure of representativeness and democracy had been the norm in their indigenous, pre-colonial system of government. Out of resentment with the N.A. system, therefore, the people demanded that they should be granted either participation in the divisional administration or else administrative separation from the Division. In the event of the latter alternative, they requested for either administrative autonomy within Northern Nigeria or merger with the Yoruba-dominated Western Region of Southern Nigeria where colonial local government bodies had already been reformed along elective principles (Ikime, 1984). The separatist agitation in Ilorin Division which was engendered by resentment against the N.A. system differed from similar separatist agitations against the system in other parts of colonial Northern Nigeria, such as among the Tiv and Kilba of Plateau Province and

Adamawa area respectively, in the sense that the agitation in Ilorin Division escalated into a demand for a merger with another Region of the country. It was against the background of the virulence of that agitation that the colonial government resolved to undertake a reform of the local government system in Ilorin Division.

THE REFORMED LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

As from the latter 1940s, considerable reforms were undertaken in local government administration throughout British dependencies. That change of gear was due to a combination of factors, particularly the World War II. That war had far-reaching consequences which drastically hastened the demise of colonialism globally. There were two of those consequences which were the most salient to the thrust of this study. One was the mentally-liberating impact of war-time experiences and propaganda on the colonial subjects. Particularly noteworthy in this respect was the third Clause of the Atlantic Charter by Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Britain while explaining to the world why the Allied Forces were fighting the war against the Axis Forces. That Clause centred on “ . . . the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live . . . ” (COLEMAN, 1960). That Clause had gone a long way in whetting the appetite of the colonial subjects about their being granted the right to self-determination if the Allies won the war. The subsequent qualifications to that Clause (to make its provisions exclude colonial subjects) after the Allies had won the war and the often-repeated “no liquidation of the British Empire” remark by Sir Winston Churchill merely served to intensify nationalist sentiment among colonial subjects.

The second salient consequence was the strongly anti-colonial stance of the United States of America, a member of the Allies whose military support had been decisive in effecting the victory of the Allied Forces in the World War II. Owing by and large to its historical antecedents, the United States was very much anti-colonialism. Apart from the bitter memories of its colonial past, there was also the need for the United States, which had undoubtedly become a force to reckon with in the global political arena, to establish a firm footing and presence, ideologically and otherwise, in the colonial continents of the world. For as long as those continents remained, however, under European colonialism with its protectionist imperial policies in every facet of life,

the United States could not possibly make that much-desired in-road into those colonies. As a result of these and other factors, the United States adopted a strongly anti-colonial stance after the World War II. It engaged in a virile and sustained criticism of colonialism and began, for instance, to pressurize Britain to de-imperialize in its colonies. Consequent upon the foregoing developments, the major colonial powers globally, viz, Britain and France, had to adopt the principle of self-determination in their colonies after the World War II. To the international challenge and pressure must be added the impact of the ascendancy in British politics of the Labour Party, which was willing to confer self-government on its colonies in the nearest future. The right to self-determination had to be prosecuted at at least two levels namely, the central and local government levels.

The following reforms in local government administration in Ilorin Division of Northern Nigeria, which have been critically analyzed in this study, should be seen in the light of the foregoing international developments with respect to the principle of self-determination. In setting the stage for the requisite reforms in its African colonies, the then British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. (later Sir) Arthur Creech-Jones, had issued in 1947 his now famous Despatch to colonial Governors throughout British Africa. In it, he stated, for the first time, the intention of the British government to fashion a democratic and representative local government system in its African colonies. Accordingly, general directives about reforms were despatched to the British officials in all the African colonies, Nigeria inclusive. It was in response to those directives that reforms were undertaken, between 1947-1954, in the local government system in Ilorin Division. The first step towards the reform of the Ilorin N.A. Council was taken by the government in 1947. Its membership was increased to twenty-seven and, more significantly, representatives of the southern districts were now included, for the first time. In that respect, the 1947 reforms represented a marked departure from the existing local government system. Initially, the southern districts were allowed a total of eight nominated members, which was subsequently increased to ten within six months. Those representatives however got to the Council through nomination by the Emir, and subject to the approval of the Resident for Ilorin Division. The Emir, naturally, nominated only members of the traditional elite in

the southern districts who were his "yes-men". As such, that apparently welcome development in the reforms did not lead to any meaningful participation in the divisional administration by the people of the southern districts.

The 1947 development was carried a step further in the December 1951 reforms whereby the membership of the Council was increased to thirty. The noteworthy point now was the introduction, at last, of the elective principle into representation on the N.A. Council. Of the thirty members, the southern districts were allocated fifteen - ten of whom were nominated and five "elected". The five were "elected" through indirect election using the subordinate Village and District Councils as Electoral Colleges. Those Subordinate Councils were composed wholly of traditional members. The result was that those who emerged as "elected" members were all traditional members, such as district heads and Native Court members who had, as it were, nominated one another (Whitaker, 1970). Such a prevalence of members of the traditional elite among the "elected" members of the governing bodies at the local government and regional levels, it must be remarked, was a common feature throughout Northern Nigeria primarily because the society was a highly status-differentiated one. For instance, out of the ninety members who were elected in 1951 into the Northern Regional House of Assembly, "18.7% were sons, brothers, cousins and nephews of ruling Emirs, 30% were district heads, 26% were District Alkalis (District Judges), 6% were Chief Alkalis..." (Dudley, 1968). Even in 1952 when the Ilorin N.A. Council membership was increased to thirty-four "elected" and fourteen nominated (that is, an "elected" majority), the basic principle used for the election was still the same as before. As such, the result remained unchanged - an array of traditional members rather than progressive Western-educated elite. The effect was that the meetings and decisions of the Council continued to be conducted as hitherto, that is, with the members serving by and large as mere rubber-stamps to the wishes and decisions of the Emir of Ilorin.

Thus, in spite of the introduction of the elective principle into the representation of the people of the southern districts on the N.A. Council, the people were still far from being effectively involved in participation in the divisional administration, hence their agitation persisted. The government responded further with a spate of reforms in the system. Altogether,

three groups worked on the latest reforms. They included Messrs J.R. Bird and J.A. Clewley, both Assistant District Officers, who did preliminary investigative work and submitted their Reports and Recommendations on the Igbomina and Ekiti respectively. Their work was climaxed by that of the more well-known Michie Committee, which included the Ibolo and was more comprehensive. The colonial government set up, late in 1953, a six-man Local Government Reform Committee, headed by Mr. C.W. Michie, the Senior District Officer for Ilorin Division. Among the other members were three hand-picked representatives - all traditional rulers, to represent the southern districts on the Committee (NNAK, 1954). The Committee was set up, according to the government, mainly in the expectation that the resultant reforms would satisfy the desire of the people of the southern districts "...for a measure of expression and direct control over their affairs and will forestall separatist tendencies which endanger the present structure of the Emirate." (NNAK 1949 & NNAK, 1954).

The Committee conducted investigations, *inter alia*, as to what form of local government the people wanted at both their local (district) and Ilorin divisional levels. In the course of its extensive investigations, the Committee held meetings at the headquarters of most of the Village and Ward Areas in the southern districts. The meetings were well publicized by the government. They were therefore well attended by the people, for instance, by up to 90 per cent of the resident able-bodied adult male population at the time of the visit in some cases (NNAK, 1954). From the views expressed by the people, the Committee arrived at the conclusion that what the people wanted were local government bodies with elected majorities. The people were of course considerably influenced in their views by developments in adjacent Yoruba-speaking areas of Western Region where the Western Region Local Government Law of 1952 had introduced Local Government Councils with three quarters of their membership being elected. The Committee submitted its Report and Recommendations by mid-1954.

Only the two major results of the reforms which are relevant to the focus of this study will be touched upon here. Village Group and Central or Area Councils were set up in the southern districts as umbrella bodies supposedly in charge of administration at their grassroots level, and to serve as a link between the people and the N.A.

Council. Unlike most N. As. in Northern Nigeria at that time, the two bodies had “elected” majorities. Election was indirect, using subordinate Councils as Electoral Colleges. Interestingly, however, the Village Group and Central Councils were neither given any executive powers, statutorily, in the reforms, nor could they initiate policies even on issues pertaining to their levels. For that, they had to depend on the initiative of the Ilorin N.A. Council. They were merely delegated some administrative, judicial, and advisory functions by the N.A. Council. Their relationship with that Council, which must similarly be at the initiative of the Council, was purely advisory. Moreover, the mode of election had ensured that it was the traditional members who got “elected” onto the Village Group and Central Councils. In other words, the reforms in Ilorin Division, as was the case with contemporaneous reforms in other parts of Northern Nigeria, fell short of meaningful participatory local government.

Secondly, the people of the southern districts were allowed to “elect” some representatives, still by indirect election via their Village Group Councils, to the N.A. Council. That was in contrast to the 1952 development in the Western Region where election into the N.A. Councils had become by universal adult suffrage. The basis of that representation into the Ilorin N.A. Council was one representative per every two thousand tax-payers. Applying that formula, the southern districts had a total of nineteen representatives – again virtually all traditional elite – on the forty-nine member N.A. Council (NNAK, 1954). Three traditional rulers, the *Olomu* of Omu-Aran, *Oloro* of Afin-Oro - both Igbomina, and *Owal’Obo* of Obo-Aiyegunle, from among the Ekiti, were later added to the Council through indirect election. The foregoing were welcome developments, since they gave the people of the southern districts an unprecedented degree of “elective” representation on the N.A. Council. For a full understanding of the practical implications of those developments, however, a closer and critical look is called for.

By the powers vested in the Emir, the traditional political elite in the southern districts held their positions at his pleasure. There was therefore a serious limit to which they could effectively pursue the interests of their people, which invariably ran counter to those of the Emir, on the N.A. Council. Secondly, at that time, the traditional elite were generally conservative, a fact which the colonial government itself admitted (NNAK, 1954). Consequently, the representatives

of the southern districts on the N.A. Council continued to serve mainly as rubber-stamps to, and not participants in, the decisions taken during Council meetings. In essence, then, in spite of the elective representation of the people of the southern districts on the N.A. Council, the people still had hardly any meaningful participation or say in the administration of the Division. The real legislative and executive power in the Division still lay with the Hausa-Fulani elite in Ilorin metropolis, the “inner caucus”, as it were, whose monopoly of the Council persisted in spite of the latest spate of reforms. That “inner caucus” of Councillors (including the Emir, of course) constituted, informally, what was termed the “*majalisar dare*” meaning “Council of the night”, who conducted their deliberations and took crucial decisions at informal meetings outside the regular Council meetings and merely confronted the official and larger body with the *fait accompli* to be rubber-stamped (Whitaker, 1970). Moreover, the reforms were supposed, according to the Northern Regional Native Authority Law of 1954, to reform the N.A. system through a reduction of the authoritarianism of the Emirs by changing their status from Sole N. As. to either Chiefs-in-Council or Chiefs-and-Council, with the former being statutorily more powerful than the latter - having veto power over the Council. In actual practice, however, it was very difficult, due to the sociological impact of Islam on obedience to constituted authority, to discern any difference between the two types (Orewa & Adewumi, 1983). It can thus be concluded that the latest reforms were no more than mere window-dressing. The factors which were responsible for that state of affairs were not far-fetched.

In deciding to undertake the reforms, the colonial government found itself in a fix. It desired to introduce reforms which would “...give the people a type of administration more like that of the Western Provinces (of Nigeria) and one in which they themselves play a greater part...” (NNAK, 1951). That was with a view to stemming the tide of their separatist agitation for a regrouping with the then Western Provinces. The government was however simultaneously preoccupied with ensuring that the resultant reforms should “...strengthen rather than weaken the Native Authority”, and, in essence, the Emir (NNAK, 1954). Surely, such conflicting preoccupations could not have produced a genuinely representative and participatory local government system as desired by the agitating people of the southern districts. That basic

contradiction in objectives was in fact symptomatic of an inherent contradiction in the views of principal officials at the Colonial Office in London, such as Lord Hailey, who favoured modernization and democratization, and field colonial officials in Northern Nigeria, who clung to a protective attitude to the *status quo* in the emirates. Invariably, the field officers, being closer to the grassroots, saw their way through. Furthermore, to have allowed the non-metropolitan people of the southern districts effective or meaningful representation and participation in running the affairs of the Division was considered by the field officers as being tantamount to weakening the authority of the N.A. in its collaborative role with the colonial authorities as exploiters of the people. Such a development was certainly unwelcome to the field colonial officials; hence they ensured that the practical implementation of the reforms did not lead to that.

As for the overall impact of the reforms on the people of the southern districts, the government did not succeed in fooling them with the half-hearted reforms. The people rightly saw the reforms for what they were - mere window-dressing. As such, it can be concluded that the reforms were counter-productive. That was in view of the fact that the widespread publicity and investigations which preceded the reforms, as earlier discussed, had whetted the appetite of the people and given them high expectations from the proposed reforms. The disappointment which ultimately resulted from dashing those initial expectations merely served to accentuate their dissatisfaction with, and criticism of the N.A. system, and to intensify their separatist agitations and activities, as is evident from archival records.

CONCLUSION

Right from the beginning of British colonial administration in Ilorin Division of Northern Nigeria, the non-metropolitan people of the southern districts of the Division had engaged in a virile and prolonged agitation against the unrepresentative and undemocratic nature of local government administration in the Division. Some minor reforms were introduced into the system between 1913 and 1937. Then, the colonial government decided to forestall the agitations by introducing, between 1947-1954, some fundamental reforms. Those reforms allowed the people, for the first time, elective representation on the N.A. Council. Ironically,

however, the reforms turned out to be ineffective and therefore counter-productive as they failed to either give the people any meaningful participation in the divisional administration or stem the tide of their separatist agitation.

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