

THIS IS EDEM



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Made in Nigeria

Chapter 7

Factoring Edem into the Contemporary Political Climate in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects, 1999-2016

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Abstract

Since the emergence of democratically elected government on 29th May 1999, in Nigeria, Edem Eke Odobo Ugwuinyi Areji community as a community in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State has been very inactive and apathetic in all activities directly or indirectly associated with the acquisition, sustenance and expansion of the Nigerian state power. By this, the elites in Edem have completely failed to uplift Edem as one political unit. Because of this, Edem has remained politically dormant among other communities in the current democratic era in Nigeria. With this, this work investigates the political status of Edem as one political unit using the theory of Elitism. From this, some challenges which have hindered political recognition of Edem in the contemporary political era are outlined. This is advanced with the analysis of the prospects of Edem as one community reclaiming her lost political status. The work then ends with a recommendation that Edem needs to be reconceptualized as one indivisible political unit in order to be politically vibrant and relevant in the existing democratic project in Nigeria.

Introduction

Since the transition from military rule to democratic rule in Nigeria on 29th May, 1999, political analysts have been focusing their attentions on the wave of Nigerian democratization processes. In this sector, much academic works have been written on the Nigerian politics especially on the nature and character of current democratization in Nigeria (Coleman: 1956; Dudley: 1966, 1973; Sodaro: 2008, Nnoli: 2006; Jega: 2007 and others). It is in line with these works that frantic efforts were made by some scholars cum analysts to assess the place of Edem in Nigeria (Ezema, 2006 and others). But in all their endeavours, nothing much tangible seems to have been done. For instance, Ezema (2006) in his singular attempt to analyze Edem approached the issue from a historical perspective. By this effort, he only succeeded in making what may be regarded as a quasi assessment of the political status of Edem. For that, the political status of Edem was not adequately given much political attention especially in the contemporary

political era that started in 1999 till date. This is the gap which this current study intends to bridge. This work then intends to investigate the socio-political existence of the entity called Edem, and then uses such to examine its political relevance and standing in the current Nigerian democratic government. This work, therefore, assesses the political status of Edem Community as one indivisible entity within the context of the contemporary Nigerian democratic government. With this, one is bound to ask the following questions: Does the entity Edem community still exist? If it exists, what form does it take? What is the political standing of Edem Community in the contemporary Nigerian democratic government? What are the challenges and prospects of Edem community in the current democratic government in Nigeria?

Edem: A Corporate and Indivisible Community

The entity called Edem has been subjected to all manner of representations by people from various sections of the world. Because of this, questions of her existence are timely and needs to be addressed from the multi-dimensional perspectives in which the contemporary generation conceptualizes Edem as a community. Here, some natives and non-natives of Edem refer to the community as Edem Ani and as such accept it in all their dealings. For them, the existence of Edem Nru in Nsukka and Edem Iheakpu Awka in Igbo Eze South gave credence for Edem to be referred to as Edem Ani. But those from other sections of Edem reject this and accept Edem as Edem by asserting the corporate and indivisible entity of the community (Asogwa: 2010). However, the tripartite perspective denied the indivisible character of Edem. In their view, the partitioning of Edem into three major autonomous communities in 2002 by the Enugu State Government under Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani finally put to an end the corporate existence of Edem. The group maintained that these autonomous communities Ozi Edem, Akpa Edem, and Edem Ani by the Legislative Act that constituted them made them to be 'politically sovereign entities' and for that reason exist on their own, and can differently organize their individual units as such (Onyishi: 2010).

It is in the context of these contradictions that some traditional elements recently came up with their own viewpoints. According to them, Edem exists in its entire socio-traditional setting and should be generally accepted as such (Ugwu: 2010). To them, Onyishi Edem and his Council of Oha Edem as the custodian of the culture, and tradition of Edem community still remains the collective symbol of the traditional cum religious existence of Edem. This view, in any case, is in line with the views of Christian theocratic leaders. The Christian theocrats led by the then Catholic Priest of St. Michael's Parish, Edem, Reverend Father Patrick Ndum Ujah to maintain that Edem as a community still exists. To him, his institution and other religious institutions in Edem collectively represent Edem in their various capacities. Reverend Father Ujah through his personal

initiation and sponsorship of some projects which directly addressed issues of paramount communal significance in a particular community called Edem strongly believes in Edem community as one indispensable socio-religious entity (Ujah: 2010).

Going by these trends of contradictions and counter contradictions, it is my personal view to affirm in this work that Edem as a community still exists as a total and unipolar community. This can be inferred from the linguistic, demographic, geographic and trade-cultural perspectives. With this, one can rightly say that Edem community is a distinct community whose people not only territorially inhabit a particular area but also share a homogeneous religio-cultural background with a similar linguistic affiliation tracing their collective origin from one ancestor, projecting and sustaining one economic cum political affinity in its own specific ways. It is on this framework that this work will be assessing Edem in the current democratic administration in Nigeria.

The Contemporary Political Climate in Nigeria

Having established the basis of this work, it becomes paramount to reiterate the era which is referred to as the contemporary evolutionary period in the Nigerian political circle. Here, the so-called contemporary political evolution in Nigeria cannot be conceptualized outside the fundamental political institutions of the Nigerian State. And the fundamental political institutions in Nigeria had their origins from the persistent dominance of Nigeria's socio-economic cum political milieu by the military. By this, it became known that the military had enveloped the Nigerian State until 29th May, 1999 when the then military Government of General Abdulsallam Abubakar handed over political leadership to the democratically elected government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Since then, democracy as a system of government based on the principle of rule of law and general participation of the people in the socio-economic cum political affairs of the state became institutionalized and Nigerian political system moved from militarism to liberal democracy. With this development, it became expedient to say that any effort to factor or locate Edem into the contemporary political evolution in Nigeria demands examining the political personality of Edem in the Current democratic system. And factoring Edem into the current democratic system in Nigeria requires the scientific explanation of the place of elites of Edem since 29th May, 1999 till date. This scientific explanation will be within the context of the theory of Elitism.

The Theoretical Framework

The *theory of Elitism* states that in every society there are consistent desires by some individuals to control, determine and subsequently sustain state power in order to achieve their interests. These individuals in the words of Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939) and Robert Michels (1955) are referred to as the political Elite.

The Elites are then the hierarchical class in any society that mainly rely on their status to control, determine and also sustain the political super structure of the society. It is, indeed, through their social standing that they control and sustain the nature and character of the political life of the society. Put differently, they give meaning and directions to political activities of the society. By this, they represent the society and the society exists for the total maximization of their interests. Because of this, the elites in the pursuit of their political interests directly or indirectly pursue the general interests of the society. It is from this that one can infer that in any society where the Elites are politically active in the pursuit of their interest, such society will also be politically vibrant. But where contrary exists, such society will be docile and dormant. By this, the elites represent the entire Edem community and the whole community is a mere expression of the socio-political relevance of the elite.

So, the two are socially and politically complimentary. Here, the elite as the mirror of the community remains Edem community, and Edem community remains the elite. Therefore, factoring Edem into the contemporary political climate in Nigeria is nothing but assessing the elite and how they have been essentially but not exclusively controlling, determining and sustaining State power in the current democratic system in Nigeria. In accordance with this, the question is then posed; have the Elites of Edem been controlling, dominating and determining the trends of democratic activities in Nigeria? Put differently, one is compelled to ask, what is the political status of the Elite of Edem community in the current democratic government in Nigeria? Answers to this question are as many as scholars of politics are. But for purposes of clarity, this work will make a precise political history of Edem in order to ascertain the political integrity of the Elite of Edem in the present democratic structure in Nigeria.

Going by this, it became known that in the pre-colonial and colonial eras, Edem Elite had been a superlative force which Elite of other communities depended on for their social and political recognition. This trend continued with Nigeria's attainment of political sovereignty on 1st October, 1960. So, throughout the 1st Republic of Nigeria, Edem through their Elite was at the centre - piece of the Nigerian politics as her Elite not only determined who gets what, when and how but also authoritatively allocated values.

However, the sudden interventions of the military on 15th January 1966 and 29th July, 1966 coupled with the Nigerian-Biafran civil war that started in 1967 structurally incapacitated the Elite of Edem community in maintaining their status in the Nigerian political setting. After the civil war, the military administration continued until 1978 when the ban on political activities was lifted by the then military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo. This act launched Nigeria into the 2nd Republic and subsequently led to the re-emergence of Edem Elite into the political stage of Nigeria. With this, Edem rolled out two vibrant but highly charismatic political gladiators in the persons of Chief Frank Ugwu of the Nigeria

People's Party and Prince David Agu Ogan of the Great Nigeria People's Party to contest for the representation of Nsukka Federal constituency in the House of Representatives. Frank Ugwu won but it was never a tea party.

Later in 1983, Frank was returned but he could not continue for the second tenure as the military struck on 31st December, 1983. The coming back of the military led to the demise of the Second Republic and all the democratic institutions were also abolished by the head of the Military Junta, General Mohammadu Buhari and his Deputy, Brigadier Tunde Idiagbon. Buhari's regime could not advance as it was overthrown on 27th August 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida then instituted a Transition Programme that launched Nigeria into a controversial 3rd Republic. The transition programme was started with the conduct of Local Government Election in 1989 on a non-party structure. This singular act gave the Elite of Edem the opportunity to restore her political status by fronting Okenwa Bala Ugwu for the chairmanship position of Nsukka Local Government. Though he failed to win, he remained the only Edem man that ever aspired for such post since the emergence of the Nsukka Province till date.

As Okenwa could not have his way, Edem Elite went further in 1991 to present two illustrious but radically oriented candidates to contest for the Nsukka West Constituency Election into the Enugu State House of Assembly. The two political giants were Chief Emmanuel Ugwuowo of the Social Democratic Party and late Honourable Julius Ugwuanyi of the National Republican Convention. After the election, Ugwuanyi won and remained politically active until 17th November, 1993 when General Sani Abacha took over the government from Chief Ernest Shonekan, the then head of Interim National Government.

Abacha in his Machiavellian way instituted a new transition programme which was abruptly terminated with his death on 8th June 1998. With his death, General Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed the mantle of leadership and then brought out another transition programme. This transition programme returned Nigeria to the current political setting with the election and subsequent swearing in of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the 2nd Executive President of Nigeria on 29th May, 1999. The current political era became known as 4th Republic of Nigeria and is characterized by the institutionalization of democratic system in Nigeria.

Edem Community in the Contemporary Democratic Rule in Nigeria

The emergence of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the 2nd Executive President of Nigeria on 29th May, 1999 gave credence to stable democratization process in Nigeria. By this, the tempo of democratic activities increased and was subsequently expanded following the conduct of general elections in 2003, 2007, 2011 and recently 2015. As the democratic exercise has entered into stages and has come into 2015, it can be observed that some communities through their elite have continued to consolidate their political dominance and hegemony while others have remained inactive and irrelevant in the democratic project. Edem is one of

the communities which through her hills have become inactive and apathetic. This has created a problem of recognition of Edem Community in the contemporary democratic era. Here, it becomes imperative to state that Edem as a community is ten miles behind other communities in the political ranking of Nigerian communities in the current democratic era. From historical analysis, there is no outstanding stakeholder from Edem as one indivisible community. To worsen it, since 1999 till date, there is no person from Edem who is occupying or had occupied any strategic elective position in Nsukka Local Government, Enugu State and Nigeria at large. By this, it should be noted that apart from Nwigbo Anene Nwigbo who in 2007 under All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) defied all contrary forces from Edem elite and contested for an Honourable position in the Enugu State Legislative body, the highest elective position which Edem man had occupied was between 1999 to 2001 when Mr. Ibebuike Ajibo was elected as the Vice Chairman of Nsukka Local Government under the Chairmanship of Dr. Dan Shere. While Dan Shere had held many positions and desired for governorship of Enugu state in 2011 election, Ibebuike has retired to his poultry farm as a farmer. As Ibebuike retired to his farm, our own political Amazon, Ms. Chinwe Ugwu who intended to uplift the political status of the womenfolk ended up in continually printing Nsukka Deje Calendar and accepting the position of chairperson of Nsukka West Development Council. However, in 2011, people from the community were highly optimistic that the recent emergence and re-emergence of the likes of Ms Ugwu Chinwe (Nsukka Deje woman), Ifeanyi Silas (Baba Edem), Enete Aloysius, Eze Ifunanya (Bamanga), Ogbu Lazarus, Hon. Ezema Vitus and Barrister Ezema Jude all from Edem competing for the primaries of various political parties for the 2011 General Elections with people from other sections of Nsukka geo-political zone would have registered the name of Edem in the current Nigerian political Book of Guinness. On this move towards 2011 general elections some analysts thought that the pre-election and election periods would have been a significant era in which the Elite in Edem would have drawn the community into the current political map in Nigeria. But the move proved totally abortive and the status quo was maintained. The move was triggered off by two influential sons of the community who came out and made bold moves to contest for primary elections in diverse political parties as a means of becoming the flagbearers of the 2011 general elections. These two prominent sons are Chief Silas Ifeanyi (Baba Edem) and Engineer Aloysius Enete. Chief Ifeanyi aspired for the PDP ticket for the Nsukka-Igboeze South Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives while Engineer Enete went for Nsukka West Constituency in Enugu House of Assembly. The two gave good accounts of themselves in printing good and well-coloured posters but lacked good knowledge of the elements of Nigerian politics. Chief Silas on his side structurally and institutionally miscalculated the powers of the Elites and caucus politics in Nigerian politics. By this, he could not distinguish between the

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Engr. Enete on his part maintained the motion in spite of suffering the same fate as Silas. Here the secretariat of the PDP shut its gate when the identity of Engr. Enete could not be attested to by the chieftains of the party. As a result, he moved and contested under the Labour Party in which he woefully failed to create any influential impact because of his political naivety and immaturity. He has since then gone into political oblivion. With this, some keen observers are now apprehensive of what will individually and collectively be the political fate of Edem community in this 2015 political era.

With this, political theorists have been searching for the place of Edem Community and its Elite in the contemporary year with a different trend. However there is a slight shift in the Local government election in Enugu State. In the 2013 Local Government Election in Enugu State, a political gladiator in the person of Ogbu Chidoze advanced from the post of Senior Special Assistant to the former Chairman of Nsukka Local Government, Barr. Tony Ugwu, to be elected as the Vice Chairman of Nsukka Local Government Area, under the chairmanship of Mr Charles Ugwu. Since 2014, Ogbu has been occupying the post and by this had remained the second Edem son to occupy the same post since emergence of democratic rule in 1999. As could be observed, Ogbu never operated form outside as others did. Rather, he has been one of the inner disciples of the influential political Elite at all levels of government in Nigeria. It was this privilege which made him not only to have unfettered interactions with members of the political elites and other hierarchical members of the ruling political party but also to comprehend the dynamics of Nigerian politics which none of the contemporary Edem Elite had ever exploited.

Following this seeming leeway by Hon. Ogbu, some vibrant youths from Edem rose to front themselves in the 2015 General Elections. The first poster to be seen was that of Chief Oscar Okwume and the second was Engineer Edwin Ajibo. On the same plane, they aspired to represent Nsukka| Igbo Eze South Federal constituency in the House of Representatives under the Peoples' Democratic Party ticket. Caucus and leaders in their peculiar ways could not read any meaning out of the political curriculum vitae of the two aspirants. After all they were operating from outside and lacked good knowledge and understanding of the principles of the party politics. However, Chief Oscar Okwume remained in the struggle within the party even when it appeared that he was not succeeding. But his steadfastness paid off as he is now a Senior Special Assistant to the Governor of Enugu State, Chief Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi. In deed Edem has remained in the dark politically for quite a long time.

And then...

By a quirk of providence, fate, and destiny, the same Edem that has been in an endless political incubator was visited with the historic appointment of Professor (Mrs.) Roseline Onah, a Professor of Public Administration and Local Government (PALG) as the Caretaker Committee Chairman of Nsukka Local Government Council by the Executive Governor of Enugu State, Rt. Honourable Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi in 2015. This appointment is a historic twist in the history of Edem and Nsukka in general. The Erudite Professor has thus entered the historical records as the first female to rule Nsukka Local Government Area, the first female professor of Public Administration and Local government to chairman a local government in Nigeria and in deed in West Africa. We thank His Excellency the governor for his favour on our people.

Challenges

Having discovered that it is politically cumbersome to picture Edem as a moving political force in the present democratic structure in Nigeria, one is bound to examine the fundamental challenges which have hindered the pragmatic operations of Edem and her Elite in the 4th Republic of Nigeria. In giving assessment to this section, it is expedient to assess the issues from a scientific point of view. And in this there are many challenges which have directly or indirectly hindered the consistent political operations of Edem in the current democratic era in Nigeria. Here, I am approaching the issues from the participant observer's perspective.

With this, one of the challenges has been the ever increasing rate of political apathy among the Elites. The Elites generally give meaning and directions to political activities, and where they are politically active, the community will be politically vibrant but where they are docile and dormant, the entire community will be totally disinterested and will exhibit unconcerned attitude towards political issues. In fact, Edem lacks the political Elites with the required political will-power necessary for the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. In an ordinary language, Edem does not have the political stakeholders with much political determination for operation in the Nigerian state and this affects the political recognition of the entire community.

Apart from this, the current fragmentation of Edem into three politically uncoordinated communities, has in itself created the challenge of political unity and oneness in the new democratic era. In the current era of globalization, the world is tagged a global village in which nations and peoples of the world are less emphatic on their independence but rather emphatic on their inter-dependence. In this globalized system of unity and cooperation, Edem and her Elite have remained committed to issues of sectionalism to the detriment of issues of communalism. By this, Edem continues to sustain the Elites that lack the sense of

communal integration and interdependence required for the current democratic practice in Nigeria. To worsen it, Edem now maintains a cult of egocentric individuals who are neither village champions nor communal generals.

In the light of this, the total lack of confidence in our individual cum collective selves as Edem people has remained one of the factors militating against the political recognition of the entire community by various segments of the Nigerian society especially among different communities in Nsukka geo-political zone. Based on this, it is very difficult for an Edem man to identify himself with the socio-philosophical uniqueness of Edem community and then exhibit the practical doggedness the community was historically known for. The implication of this is that each and every 'modern' Edem man hardly thinks Edem, talks Edem and acts Edem in any of his life's dealings. This act is quite contrary to the pragmatic and philosophical orientation and exhibitions of the people of Aku, Ede-Oballa, Eba-Alumona, Obimo, Lejja, Opi, Ukehe and others who in all their personal and communal acts with others tenaciously proclaim, assert and then authoritatively compel others to consciously and unconsciously know them, think them, talk them and rightly act them. To these communities and their people, their communal philosophical ways of life prevail and dominate in every aspect of their dealings with others.

In relation to this, the total inadequacy of resources among the politically conscious Edem youths has remained a challenge militating against a holistic participation of the Edem youths in the new political setting in Nigeria. Here, the increasing roles of political godfathers in the Nigerian political activities cannot be underestimated. The so-called godfathers overtly or covertly sponsor their so called political sons into political positions, for the sons to pay back when they win. In Edem, such relationship does not exist and it affects the rate of political participation among the politically conscious ones who do not have the resources needed for political engagements.

Lastly, the non-existence of a strong centralized Pan-Edem socio-cultural association hinders a smooth interaction among all segments of Edem community. Edem at present does not have an all-embracing socio-cultural organisation like other communities, and the absence of this association promotes the existence of multi-sectional associations which lack the political structure necessary for operations in the current democratic setting in Nigeria. In all, the resultant effect of this is the absence of a united leader who would have directed, planned and executed collective issues of paramount importance to all the people of Edem. These and other factors directly and indirectly affect the political relevance of Edem in the contemporary Nigerian democratic dispensation. It is on the basis of these challenges that the prospects shall be outlined.

Prospects

Is there any sense of optimism with regard to re-launching Edem into the contemporary democratic government in Nigeria? Yes! There are veritable hopes of uplifting Edem from her current pariah status to the apogee of political prominence in Nigeria. Edem has all it takes to move higher politically. The appointment of Professor (Mrs.) Onah and her proficiency in the management of Nsukka Local Government is a prelude to better things to come from Edem even beyond political appointments. This means that Edem can be restored to her previous dignified political status if she will rightly adhere to the tenets of practical politicking. Practical politicking in the Nigerian context entails direct and indirect involvement of all in all the activities directly or indirectly associated with the acquisition, sustenance and expansion of state power. This in itself requires total exhibition of higher sense of political radicalism coupled with the necessary will-power to compete with people from other sections of the country. This then abhors political isolationism or undue anxiety but political activism and integration.

In addition to this, Edem can bounce back into the Nigerian political front if her indigenous people will recognize Edem as a corporate and indivisible unit. Here, the partitioning of Edem into three autonomous communities should not be seen as a means of political segregation among the people. Rather we should see such as a way of maintaining and expressing our cultural cum political homogeneity. After all, Aku, Obimo, Lejja, Ukehe and other communities that were divided see themselves as one political family and then pursue their collective interests in such a unified form before other communities.

Going by this, we should increase the current educational advancement of Edem, as education remains the only way of realizing the fundamental objectives and directive principles of any community or nation. By this trend, all the educational institutions in Edem should be morally and financially consolidated to enable them operate maximally for the general good of Edem. Also, financially privileged ones should be awarding scholarship to less privileged ones. It is only through such that Edem will be geo-politically relocated in the new democratic territory of Nigeria.

In relation to this, the religious institutions in Edem should be strengthened as they remain both the Godly and physical symbols of our unity. In any case, these religious institutions need to brace up to the task of propagating the gospel of love, peace, kindness, brotherhood unity and tolerance among the people of Edem.

In all, there should be a total and holistic Edemization of all sectors of the Nigerian state. This involves a general incorporation of all the people in every available position an Edem man or woman finds him/herself in the Nigerian society. This means employing Edem people in statutory establishments any Edem person finds him/herself in. It is through these measures that Edem can

regain her strategic political status in the contemporary political evolution in Nigeria and then operate as other communities have been operating since the emergence of democratic governance in Nigeria.

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