

THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTONOMY AND IDENTITY IN LATE COLONIAL NIGERIA: YOUNG ELITE OF KABBA DIVISION, 1946 -1966

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ABSTRACT

The gradual march towards the attainment of self-government in Nigeria from the mid 1940s increased the tempo of party politics. The early local champions of the socio-political developments were those who had acquired western education. The role of these emergent elite in forming associations to champion the cause of their people tends to earn them a voice in their grassroots politics. The Kabba Divisional Union (KDU) formed in 1964, which attempted to sever the political allegiance of the area from the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), and change the political history of the Division was one of such associations. The focus of this work is on the remarkable role of the western educated elite in the socio-political developments of Kabba Division. It highlights the dynamics of socio-political change in Kabba Division. Attempt is made through this discourse to provide a better appreciation of developments at grassroots and regional levels. The paper contends that the failure of the NPC – controlled regional government to seriously enhance the socio-political and economic status of Kabba people in the region, caused a major shift in the political leaning of the people of Kabba Division. The paper concludes that general competing interests notwithstanding, the western educated elite in Kabba helped to overcome the traditional isolation of the area by providing the organizational vehicle through which the Division participated meaningfully in the wider Nigerian political system.

INTRODUCTION

Kabba Division was one of the four divisions of the then Kabba Province in Northern Nigeria. It comprised of the Yoruba speaking areas of Owe, Ijumu, Bunu, East and West Yagba and the southern section of Oworo. They are popularly referred to as O-kun Yoruba¹ and presently constitute the Kabba/Bunu, Yagba West, Yagba East and Mopa/Amuro Local Government Areas of Kogi State. The emergence of a new elite in colonial Nigeria has been discussed extensively.² Suffice to say here that

they emerged under colonial settings and were products of Western education which was largely provided by Christian missionary organizations. The British colonial government had kept the various Christian missionaries out of Islamic northern Nigeria. The predominantly non-Muslim Provinces of the Middle Belt of Northern Nigeria (which included Kabba Division) were exempted from this policy. This colonial idea transformed the Middle Belt into fertile ground for Christian missionary enterprises, leading to a differential in the impact of western education between the Islamic north and the non-Muslim areas of Northern Nigeria.³ Kabba Division being on the border of Yoruba country of the Southern provinces had the dual advantage of being easily accessible to missionary influence from the south, as well as its indigenes being able to move across to the south in quest of western education. This meant for her, a relatively earlier contact with the missionaries – the earliest agents of western education.

The Missionaries became the main agent of westernization. Due to limited financial resources and manpower, the colonial government was interested in schools only as factories for producing various categories of minor functionaries (clerks, junior technicians, inspectors etc). Until the late 1930s, the educational field in Kabba Division was left to the missions. The first government attempt to provide educational institutions, first in 1914 and later in 1930 failed.⁴ The Niger Middle School Bida, remained the only channel through which promising pupils from Kabba Province could proceed to the Secondary School at Katsina. The overall impact of the missionary efforts was the emergence (from the mid 1930s), of a body of western education elite in Kabba with keen socio-political interest in the development of the Division. Several missionaries bodies⁵ operated in Kabba Division. The Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) however, remained the largest and most dominant. More importantly, the S.I.M had a rather liberal theology, it was more favorable to formal education if it was Christ centred. Others were more evangelical and more interested in direct preaching of the gospel than in establishing schools. This accounted for the kind of liberal minded western educated elite that emerged in the area.

The first generation of young elite in the area were men and women of vision, towering optimism, and imbued with enthusiasm for the development of the Division. As visionaries, E.A. Ijagbemi declared “they dreamed dreams, and fashioned out plans, some of which were patently utopia.”⁶ The new elite comprising of teachers, clerks (in the commercial and in the British colonial administration), traders and returnees⁷ from the southern provinces perceived developments at home from a wider perspective, by comparing them with development in the south. Their exposure and wide-travels contributed to shaping

their mind and attitude for modernization. They were not mere dreamers, they were also men of practical action. As the tempo of politics in Nigeria increased from the mid 1940s, the elections that followed gave the western educated elite in the Division the opportunity to be involved in issues of local and national interests.

Developments (particularly political development) in Kabba Division, as in many other communities, are historically linked to social and related developments. Writing on this relationship, Adeboye declared that Christianity “held the hope of socio-economic advancement through the acquisition of western education and literacy.”⁸ As visionaries of a ‘New Order’, the western educated elite as opposed to the traditional elite were a new phenomenon in the development process. This brings into focus the complex though not necessarily conflictual relationships between the western educated elite of Kabba Division and the traditional elite. Both related at multiple levels. Common to both groups was not only the desire for recognition in the pre-colonial dispensation but also the desire for participatory role.⁹ The western educated elite did not shy away from approaching and striking bargains with the traditional elite when the need arises. The traditional elite have also maintained and expanded the size of their number by co-opting the western-educated elite into their groups by granting them honorific titles, recruiting them into offices as lawyers, doctors e.t.c.¹⁰ The two groups possess conflicting strategies for addressing issues. As Otoiede remarked, their strategies were in certain respects mutually antagonistic, without necessarily desiring the collapse of the system.¹¹ However, the young elite in Kabba Division became the instrument through which the area responded to the challenges of party politics and elections of the 1950s.

PARTY POLITICS AND ELECTIONS IN KABBA DIVISION

The question of who represented the people in the Federal and Regional House of Representatives became a very volatile issue. This was because the Kabba people were divided along two lines – the emergent educated elite, and the traditional elite and their likes. While the western educated elite wanted vocal representatives who through their influence and activities would force the government to undertake development programmes, the traditional elite preferred representatives loyal to the government and who by their loyalty hasten government’s developmental efforts in the area. These facts are crucial, as both groups of elite believed they were working for the progress of the area. These issues were reflected in their campaign programs. Moreover, the western educated elite allied themselves with

political parties which they believed would improve their socio-political conditions. But the issue of political grouping and regrouping further compounded the division among the people, as will be seen shortly in this discussion. Political development in the country brought the western educated elite into the mainstream where they also participated in the larger issues. Elections also gave the unions and the people of the Division the opportunity to be involved in issues of local and national interests.

The gradual march towards the attainment of self-government in Nigeria had, from the mid 1940s, increased the tempo of party politics in Nigeria. Three major political parties emerged in the country. These were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, NCNC (1944); the Action Group, AG (1950); and the Northern People's Congress, NPC (1951).¹² The three parties were regionally and ethnically based. The traditional political organisation of these parties, by and large, became inseparable from their respective cultural organizations. The NCNC was inseparable from the Ibo State Union inaugurated by the politically conscious Ibo intelligentsia. As for the AG, it emerged from a cultural organisation, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. In respect of the NPC, the first nationalistic political consciousness in Northern Nigeria received its first expression in 1948 when the politically inclined old boys of Kastina College (1938), represented by informal groups, crystallized into a region – wide organization called the NPC (Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa).¹³ This feature was not peculiar to Nigeria. Similar cases of political parties emerging from or finding allies in cultural organizations were common in other parts of Africa.¹⁴

In response to the post-World War II political developments, especially in the area of constitution building and elections, the parties sought to enlist the co-operation of the people. They therefore engaged in systematic mass organisation of the peasantry through the utilization of customary institutions. In the process therefore, the cultural associations became the key instrument of mobilization. The association between the two (the parties and the unions) was not difficult to establish and maintain. This was so because, rather than repudiate the political leadership of their emergent elite class, the communities accepted the western educated elite who had more or less become the voice of the people. These enlightened corps of people constituted the majority in the unions and cultural associations. In this way it was not difficult for the unions to be used by the parties for grassroots mobilization. Hence, the growth of nationalist political organizations and their respective affiliate ethnic organizations went hand-in-hand, especially as the elections approached.

The Macpherson Constitution came into effect on January 1, 1951. It made provision for election into the three Regional Houses of Assembly - North, East and West. The three electoral stages began with primary elections in which all adult male tax payers or their representatives were eligible to vote. From among these representatives were delegates chosen to the Kabba Provincial Electoral College. This in turn elected members to the Regional House of Assembly. The constitution stipulated further that each division of the Western and Eastern regions be represented at their various Houses of Assembly by at least two elected members. The provisions in respect of the Northern Regional House was different. Here, each province (not division) was to be represented in the House by at least two members.¹⁵ As the Constitution took effect, an announcement was made of the impending elections in September of the same year. The elections were based on population. Population therefore became a major determinant of which Division in Kabba Province got its candidate elected into the Northern House of Assembly. From the mid 1940s, the provinces recorded gradual increase in population. In 1944, the provincial population was 485, 956. This increased to 498, 264; 543,378; and 550,634 in 1945, 1946 and 1947 respectively. Though a breakdown of the figures by Division was not available, the increase was confined to only two Divisions – Igbirra and Igala. As for Kabba Division, the period witnessed a decrease in the number of adult males and females since migration to the Southern towns in search of employment continued. For instance, Yagba, a major component of the Division, recorded the following downward trends in population: 42,000 in the 1930s; 40,000 in 1940 and 39,000 by the early 1950s.¹⁶ In the case of Kotonkarfi Division, the adult population was practically static while the number of children decreased. With the population increase in Igbirra and Igala Divisions, the number factor became a major handicap for Kabba Division in the 1951 election into the Northern Regional House of Assembly, which was the first election in the area.

The announcement of the impending elections set in motion yet another episode of participation by the emergent elite in both local and national politics. The Ijumu Progressive Union (IPU) was now gradually and increasingly making its inroad into, and impact on the political affairs of Ijumuland. The western educated elite who formed the IPU during this period, by way of appeal, constant contact and discussion with the Oba in Ijumu, coordinated the meetings of the Ijumu Council and educated the people on the electoral processes. Thus, in contrast to the seemingly never-ending Ijumu chieftaincy dispute, the district Electoral College was able, through the effort of the IPU, to elect its two delegates to the Electoral College without a single dissenting voice. Among the Yagba sub-group, the western educated elite who had formed an organisation, the Yagba Federal League (YFL) in 1936, like the Igbirra Tribal

Union (ITU) in Igbirra Division –went into full action, educating and organizing the people, and canvassing for votes. The emergent elite realized that they could not do it all alone. They sought the cooperation of the traditional elite. Two prominent figures responsible for this at this period were H. O. Dada and D. S. Moody. Both were SIM – trained. H. O. Dada had only primary education but was well-traveled. As a trader, he frequently visited places like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Zaria and Bida. His exposure was a motivating factor for his activities. D. S. Moody received further training at the SIM Theological Seminary, Igbaja, between 1941 and 1943. By 1946 he was already a Pastor at Ejiba, very dynamic and vocal.

The education and organisation strategy of the YFL was indeed very penetrating. A participant in the whole exercise, H. O. Dada, indicated that in company of D. S. Moody and others, meetings were held with the chiefs, elders and Native Authority staff, giving them necessary information on what was going on as well as seeking their opinions. According to him, they trekked to nearly all the villages in the area for this purpose.¹⁷ Thus they helped to absorb and synthesize some of the new democratic values. The YFL sponsored candidate, D. S. Moody, revealed in a discussion thus: “my success in the primaries down to the provincial college, Lokoja, was directly dependent on the YFL”. Explaining further, he said his selection was also facilitated by the support he received from the Oba and the S.I.M. The Oba had great influence, and they knew their people well. The Oba had known and appreciated Moody’s activities in the area since his days in the Yagba Progressive Union. For instance, the Olu of Eri (District Head of West Yagba), Oba Mark Dada, a Standard Six Certificate holder, was able to discuss freely with the administrative officer who visited him. The visit of Mr. Connish, the District Officer, to him in early 1951 was partly to inquire about the confidence the Oba reposed in some intending delegates – D. S. Moody inclusive. In respect of the mission’s support, whenever the District Officer was in Egbe, he visited and dined with the missionaries, asking series of questions with the aim of getting vital information on issues. As it is, the opinion of the missionaries about D. S. Moody at the time was quite favorable. Above all however, the support of the YFL was a prime factor.

In respect of the number of delegates from each Division, the Igbirra Native Electoral College selected 10 members to the provincial college, Igala selected 12, Lokoja 1, and Kupa 3. Kabba Native Authority selected 2, Bunu 1, Ijumu 2, Oworo 1, and East and West Yagba selected 3. Altogether there were 9 delegates from Kabba Division out of a total of 35 delegates at the Provincial College, Lokoja. The college was to elect three members to represent the province in the House of Assembly. At the

college however, success depended on the game of number being indirectly based on tribal majority. Yet considering the population of Kabba Division vis-a vis the other divisions in the province, Kabba was bound to face some difficulties. At the provincial College Lokoja, tribal loyalty and affinities were thrown overboard as lobbying and alliances cut across divisional boundaries or barriers. The delegates with low number of representatives such as Yagba, Ijumu, Bunu, Kabba, Oworo and Lokoja, were lobbied and eventually made to team up with those from largely populated divisions of Igbirra and Igala. The Bunu delegate pitched camp with those of Kabba and succumbed to pressures and overtures from Igbirra delegates. On the other side, Lokoja, Oworo, Bassange as well as Ijumu delegates pitched tent with Igala delegates. Of course, the Yagba delegates to the college could definitely not have remained neutral.¹⁸ The inclination of Kabba district delegates to Igbirra was due to the influence and connection that its leader, G. A. Dare, had with the Igbirra. First, he was a friend of the Attah, the traditional ruler of Igbiraland. Secondly, he was a very rich transporter who also had investments in cocoa and had many customers in Igbirraland whom he would not want to lose. Under these circumstances, he, in conjunction with other delegates from Kabba district, were prepared to vote for Abdulmaliki, the Attah's son. Thus, the provincial election at Lokoja became a contest between the Igbirra and Igala Native Authorities' delegates, the two most populated divisions or ethnic groups in Kabba Province. At the end of the day, both Abdulmaliki and G. U. Ohikere, the ITU sponsored candidates from Igbirra, were among those selected. Also selected was Peter Achimogu from Igala. Kabba Divisional delegates lost, not being able to secure a representative or a seat at the Regional House of Assembly. Kabba's failure this time arose from her small population. In as much as electoral system in Northern Nigeria was based on provincial as well as divisional population, it was absolutely impossible for Kabba Division to get her delegates elected because she constituted a small Yoruba minority within the province. Even if all the delegates were united, with a total vote of 9, they wouldn't have been up to those from Igbirra or Igala. But to make matters worse, they did not always speak with one voice; they therefore could not lobby delegates from other divisions to ensure Kabba's success in the elections.

Low population was not the only factor that militated against Kabba's success to have its delegates elected. Information reliably gathered disclosed that Kabba and Yagba delegates were not in agreement. Yagba would not like Kabba to lead, nor would Kabba succumb to Yagba. Apart from the fact that Kabba still nursed the grievances of the excision of Yagba from it, in the late 1940s, a quarrel ensued between the two Native Authorities over the payment of royalty from the tantalite being mined at Okere in West Yagba. In 1947 the royalty was paid into the coffers of the Kabba Native Authority

Treasury (KNAT) instead of Yagba Treasury at Isanlu. This was challenged by D. S. Moody on the pages of a Yoruba Newspaper - *Akede Eko* on January 18, 1947. In a rejoinder published by the same paper on 22/2/1947, D.O. Aka, the officer in charge of Kabba Native Authority Treasury (KNAT), claimed that though Kabba and Yagba were separated since 1935, the two had resumed joint operation in 1943.¹⁹ It is not clear what D.O. Aka meant by “joint operations”, though revenue sharing was implied but not proved. The press war between the two Native Authorities further strained the relations between them. The air was not yet cleared over the issue when the delegates assembled at Lokoja for the provincial election. Similarly, in the 1940s, the Ijumu were engaged in a struggle for self determination from the Kabba ‘yoke’. Little wonder then that the Divisional delegates at Lokoja needed only little pressure to give their votes to the Igbirra and Igala delegates.

As a result of this development, the people were aggrieved that no Kabba representative, despite of its educational advancement, was elected to either the House of Chiefs or the House of Assembly. By comparison, Igala Division provided a member for each House and Igbira had a member (in person of the Attah) for both houses. The western educated elite through the YFL protested against this development. It seized the opportunity to revisit other grievances. For instance, it complained that in spite of the privileged educational position of the Division in the Region, she was so rarely, and if at all, briefly visited by persons of importance. The only ministerial visits were by the Minister of Education (just for four hours for the opening of the Women’s Training Centre), at Mopa in 1942 and the Minister of Natural Resources, twice during the provincial constitutional review conference in August 1949.

This issue of Kabba-West merger, which began as early as mid 1930s was re-opened. The issue had received considerable attention from East Yagba Council. The people had expressed their grievances over the issue of their merger with the Hausa Fulani. On September 1939, on the floor of Yagba District Central Council, David Adeniyi had recalled the enduring historical associations which Yagba had with the Southern Yoruba people.²⁰ The merger was perceived as the solution to the problems of being a minority group in a vast region. For instance, reacting to the lack of representative, the Yagba Federal League in a strongly worded petition in February 1952 protested and argued that the Northern Nigeria electoral system was entirely opposed to Kabba being represented in the Northern Houses of Assembly, thus preventing the people from participating in a democratic government. It used the occasion to reiterate its demand for a merger with the Yoruba in the West.²¹ Even the Regional Government considered these grievances justified in view of “Kabba’s progressive records and

educational advancement.”²² A palliative measure was taken, when the Obaro of Kabba was gazetted as a member of the House of Chiefs in December 1951.

Perhaps one of the most significant results that followed the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 was the evolution of political parties in the Regions. In respect of Kabba Division, there was no organized or active Action Group (AG) party in the area except perhaps those who were individually privately inclined towards the party. As for the NPC, all the Native Authority workers were automatically members. This was because their positions and salaries depended on the good wishes of the Regional Government. The penetration of the AG party into Kabba Division began about 1953 with its search for a suitable Kabba indigene to be the party’s Organizing Secretary in the area. In a discussion held with Pa S.A. Adeniji, the party had an opportunity when he, as the Secretary for extra-mural classes in the Division, attended a two-week course organized for local teachers by Mr. Ayo Ogunseye (then the Deputy Director of extra-mural studies) at the University of Ibadan. He (S.A. Adeniji) was approached by members of the party to take up the post but he rejected the offer for lack of interest. He was however enjoined to look for somebody else and he contacted Mr. R. T. Alege, also from Mopa, who was then a teacher at Agbowa in Ijebu. Alege accepted the offer, left Agbowa and became the Party Organizing Secretary in Kabba Division.²³ However, the Party’s activities in Kabba Division in the early 1950s were strictly limited. For fear of intimidation, molestation and even possible imprisonment by the pro-NPC Yagba Native Authority, Alege could not openly or publicly declare or fight the party’s cause until after 1954. So the AG effectively became the opposition party to the NPC in the mid 1950s, and thereafter became a popular party in the area.

The easy penetration and the acceptability of the AG in the Division or the determination of party political alignments can be explained by some factors, ranging from geographical to ethno-cultural. The geographical contiguity of the area to the West easily exposed it to Southern influences. Kabba emigrants had always moved to the big cities in the southwest in particular for education, employment, and trade. The impact of these widely-travelled Kabba indigenes on later political development at home was enormous. Such returnees included H.O. Dada and Mr. Bello Apata Igbala (a renowned political activist from Amuro). Others are R.T. Alege and Bello Ijumu, who was based in the North. Secondly, the socio-cultural or ethnic affinity was important. Ile-Ife is traditionally believed by Kabba people to be their place of origin. In addition, their acceptance of the Christian religion made them naturally inclined towards a southern rather than northern political party. Added to the above was the fact that the earlier established *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* had provided a new identity and a joint

umbrella for the Yoruba-speaking group. It had helped to collate local grievances, issues and agitations in Kabba Division into the larger Nigerian issues. With time, the *Egbe* became more and more politicized to the extent that some of its leaders decided to form a political party – the Action Group. The *Egbe* later became an instrument for propagation of the ideas and programmes of the party.²⁴ With the earlier role of the *Egbe* in the affairs of Kabba and its link with the party, the AG party found easy access into Kabba Division. Moreover, from the perspective of the people, as expressed by one of the frontline activist, Mr. S. B. Ronke, an NPC with a central based leadership in Kaduna was far too remote from the Division to have any meaningful impact on the people. More importantly, the NPC (the political party of the North), aimed at inculcating in the minds of the people in the region, a genuine love for the Islamic Religion.²⁵ The party thus stood for all that Kabba people resented in their association with the North. There could therefore naturally be no love lost between the people of the Division and the NPC, and this was soon demonstrated in the 1954 and 1956 elections to be examined shortly. Under these circumstances therefore, Kabba Division had always looked towards the West for her social, economic, and political development, rather than to the North with which she was politically grouped by colonial arrangements. Though grouped with the North, they were not willing to continuously bow to Northern manipulations, hence the wide acceptability of the AG party.

In the wake of the challenges of the 1954 elections which followed the MacPherson Constitution, Kabba Division again had to struggle to establish for herself a place in both regional and national politics. As the parties were just unfolding, the 1954 election into the Federal House of Assembly was based more on personalities than on parties. It is in this respect that the career of two key political figures in the area – Mr. R.T. Alege and Chief Bello Ijumu – who featured prominently in the Division during the elections became crucial.

Alege's political career in Yagba and Kabba Division dated back to his activities in the Mopa Youth Patriotic Union (MYPU), and later, in the Yagba Federal League (YFL) of which he was the secretary. Born in April 1928, he completed his primary education at the Baptist Day School, Mopa. He enrolled in the Provincial Middle School Okene in 1940, but his involvement in a riot led to his expulsion in 1942. Thereafter and as the Second World War was reaching its peak, Alege was forcibly recruited into the colonial army at Lokoja, where he served. He retired as a private in 1947. He joined the Amalgamated Tin Mining Company of Nigeria based in Jos as a clerk. There he rose to become one of the leaders of the Union of the Company – the Mining and Allied Workers' Union of Nigeria. A

fearless radical leader, Alege championed the cause of his Union without minding the repercussions. Through an organised strike, which he led, the Company's Secretary (then an European) was removed.²⁶ Alege resigned his employment in December 1948 to become a frontline member of the MYPU and the YFL. In October 1952, he left Mopa for Ibadan where he worked briefly as a correspondent for the *Southern Nigeria Defendant*. Other newspapers for which he worked were the *West African Pilot* in Lagos, *The Daily Comet (later Daily Star)* in Kano, and the *Western Echo* based in Ibadan. His working experience as a soldier, trade unionist, and journalist, as well as the office he held in both the MYPU and YFL, all played an important role in his later career, particularly his success in the 1954 elections. The Unions in particular were a training ground for leaders both in terms of running an organization and in the general appreciation of political ideas. They are a proving ground for potential political leaders, especially charismatic individuals who could win support among a significant segment of the population. For R.T. Alege, success in elections at the divisional and national level was an expression of appreciation for his distinguished roles as a holder of offices in the Unions, which the young western educated elite championed.

Chief Bello Ijumu hailed from Aiyetoro Gbedde in Ijumu, but lived most of his life in Kano in the North. Though he had been one of the foundation members and General Secretary of the Gbedde Patriotic Union and one of the leaders of Ijumu Progressive Union, Bello Ijumu operated from his base in the North. He worked with the United African Company (UAC) Kano, from 1943 to 1948. Together with some Northern elements like Alhaji Magaji Dambata, Mallam Abdulkadri Danjaji and late Sani Darma they formed the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in Kano on August 8, 1950 and Bello Ijumu became its first secretary.²⁷ Bello Ijumu had a reputable political career in the North. He was instrumental to the moves and processes leading to the formation of the Middle Belt Peoples Party (MBPP) on July 12, 1953. He emerged the General Secretary of the party while Mr. E.G. Gundu (a member of the Northern House of Representatives from Gboko) was its President. After the Middle Zone League and MBPP were merged to become the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) in June 1955, Ijumu was still an active member of UMBC.²⁸ With this impressive northern political involvement, however, Bello Ijumu's first serious political contact with Kabba Division was in 1951 when he traveled home to educate his people on the need to form a strong political party and to establish branches of NEPU in Kabba Division. His effort was futile, NEPU was not embraced. This lukewarm reception from Kabba people was typical of the general attitude to NEPU in the Middle Belt Provinces where Bello Ijumu and his president went on the same mission. NEPU was viewed as nothing more than

a Hausa organization and with Kabba people's opposed attitude to Northern influences, culture and Islamic religion, their reaction to the idea of NEPU therefore was not surprising. Bello Ijumu admitted that the generally cold attitude of Middle Belt people to NEPU was instrumental to the idea of having a separate and more embracing political party for the Middle Belt to act alongside with NEPU. This brought about the birth of the MBPP.²⁹ With this rather vague initial political contact with Kabba Division in 1951, Bello Ijumu returned to Kano to continue his career in the NEPU and MBPP. He planned to contest the elections, still on the platform of NEPU in Kano where he had great support among the residents of Sabongari quarters.³⁰ However, he suddenly reappeared in Kabba politics on the eve of the 1954 elections, but this factor of his remote political base became a strong weapon against his political success in Kabba Division.

The Macpherson Constitution, among other things, provided for the establishment of a Central Legislature comprising a single chamber, styled the House of Representatives. Elections into this Central Legislature were now direct, being entirely independent of the Regional Legislatures in drawing its membership. In consultation with the Executive Council of that Region, each Governor was however empowered to draft and enact the electoral regulations of his Region. What finally emerged therefore was a mixture of indirect elections in the Northern Region and of direct tax suffrage elections in the Western and Eastern Regions.³¹ Elections into the Federal Legislature in Northern Nigeria lasted from October to December 1954 and they were by the indirect Electoral College system in which only adult males who paid taxes were considered eligible. The primaries came up on October 5, intermediaries on November 30, and the final elections were held between December 16 and 31, 1954. In this election one seat was allocated to Kabba Division and two each to Igbira and Igala, based on population. The election became another test of the strength of the cohesion of the various sub-groups, the western educated elite, and the entire Division in their participation in the larger political issues. From the month of October, excitement started to run high when Yagba (East and West) and Ijumu tried to obtain public consent and cooperation over the choice of a member for Lagos.

As indicated earlier, Bello Ijumu's sudden reappearance on the political scene of Kabba Division was on the eve of this election. This was at the invitation of the Ijumu Central Council. In an official letter bearing the official seal and stamp of the Council and signed by the then Olujumu, Oba Owonibi the second, Bello Ijumu was instructed not to contest the election in Kano but to return home to do so. Bello was promised the full support of the Ijumu throughout the elections.³² Based on this, Bello returned to Kabba Division in November 1954 to campaign, just a month to the election scheduled for

December 16, 1954. Running against time, he extensively toured Yagba, Bunu, Kabba, and Ijumu trying to organize branches of the MBPP and to canvass for votes.

The ‘unanimous’ support of the Ijumu symbolized by the official letter of invitation from the Ijumu Central Council gave Bello confidence of victory at the polls. That the NPC had no official branch nor base in the Division save the chiefs and the Native Authority workers, was also for him another sign suggesting success. Also the NCNC had no solid foundation in Kabba except a few members. Open declaration for the AG was dreaded by the people for fear of repression and oppression from the Northern powers. All these factors, Bello believed, would work for his victory at the polls. Bello Ijumu’s basis for assumed victory were however a clear indication of his ignorance of the realities of Kabba politics, especially his own district – Ijumu, at the time. Though the NPC appeared weak in the Division, it could not be underrated because it was the controlling political party in the Region. Though open participation in the AG was dreaded and the party was in its embryonic stage in Kabba Division, it was no doubt a growing and widely accepted party. In addition, Bello underestimated the strength of Yagba factor (population wise) in the politics of Kabba Division. Most importantly, he had been too far away from home to appreciate the gravity of local issues, political wrangling and bickering in Ijumu, the degree of their political harmony and level of ‘unanimity’. Thus Bello unduly overestimated Ijumu’s support for him in the impending elections.

The 1954 elections also coincided with the internal wrangling over the proposal to site an administrative headquarters for Ijumu at Ikoyi. The Ijumu Progressive Union (IPU), the official organ of Ijumu, had started building a palace at the proposed site when a splinter group, mostly from Iyara, rejected Ikoyi as site, proposing Iyara (just three kilometers from Ikoyi) on the ground of its ‘centrality’. At the peak of the conflict, the IPU, which had insisted on Ikoyi lost interest in the project and was forced to withdraw as a result of the conflict. Later in the year a compromise was reached; Iyara became the accepted headquarters and work proceeded on the new palace. A few months later, however, the Gbedde Group led by Aiyetoro emergent elite in the IPU rejected the new headquarters. This faction contended that Aiyetoro was the largest group, the most senior among Ijumu settlements, and had always been the headquarters of Ijumu since (1922), the time of Eleta Ayeni. This sectional interest shook the very principle on which the IPU was founded and weakened the body politics of Ijumu. The intensity of the crisis was on the increase about December 1954, when Bello Ijumu’s candidacy totally depended on Ijumu’s ‘support’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘unanimity’, which of course never existed. The strength

of this Ijumu support upon which Bello relied for success in the election was reflected in the nomination of candidates by the District.

From the Yagba sub-group, there appeared to be for the first time, unprecedented unanimity in the nomination of candidates for the election. East and West Yagba joint Native Authorities (NA), like others in the Division, successfully got their people together. From the village – group level people were selected to constitute the electoral team. West Yagba provided four people, two of them – Messrs S. A. Agbo, and J.P. Koledade – being from *Egbe*, and the other two, Messrs. A. Eniola and E.A. Abu, from Ere Group. From East Yagba NA there were six people. Two came from Isanlu, and one each from Ponyan, Ife-Olukotun, Amuro and Mopa. Altogether, ten people selected from the village – group constituted the electoral team from Yagba. The election became an occasion for attempted unity between East and West Yagba. Mr. R. T. Alege was initially unanimously selected by young elite in YFL as their unanimous candidate to contest the primaries. He had the full support of the emergent elite who were determined to elect their likes into the Federal House of Representatives. The appointment was to compensate Alege for his relentless services in the YFL. As the election approached, however, centrifugal tendencies caused by sectional interests almost thwarted this arrangement. Two other contestants – Messrs S. A. Agbo a young teacher and J. P. Koledade – from West Yagba emerged at the instance of the West Yagba NA. Both were members of the West Yagba NA Council representing the emergent elite. Mr. J. P. Koledade was among the first generation of SIM trained Yagba educated elite. He was one of the five African members of staff when the mission opened its first primary school at Egbe in 1930/1931. He rose to the position of the headmaster of the school in 1934. It was at the Council's meeting that both indicated their interest when the issue was raised, and they were not opposed. Mr. J. P. Koledade had become very prominent, influential and well known, not only in Kabba Division but in the entire Region. He was appointed to represent Kabba Province on the defunct Northern Regional Scholarship Board in 1953. Mr. S. A. Agbo was finally persuaded by the Oba and the conservative elements of the NA Council from West Yagba to step down for Koledade whom they preferred. The Oba and Council's preference for Koledade was based on the fact that he was already an influential and an elderly man. This brings to the limelight the use to which both the traditional and the western educated elite put one another in politics. The Oba and the NA Council did not want young, vocal, and radicals of the type of S. A. Agbo to represent them. On the other hand, the western educated elite who constituted the electoral team were opposed to the candidature of J. P. Koledade for many reasons. They were of the opinion that Koledade would not only dance to the tune of the Oba, but he

would serve the interests of the NAs and Council of Obas. Secondly, the emergent elite wanted their likes, a young and vocal man who would reflect their views, represent their group interests, and be able to defend the cause of the people. Hence they threw their weight behind R. T. Alege. Relying on the solid support of the traditional elite from West Yagba, J. P. Koledade was bent on contesting the primaries with R. T. Alege, contrary to the wish of the emergent elite who constituted the electoral team.

The ten-member electoral team from both East and West Yagba Assembled at Mopa to decide by vote between R. T. Alege from East Yagba and J. P. Koledade from West Yagba. In protest against Koledade's candidacy, some of the electoral team members refused to vote. The first voting was in favor of Mr. Koledade, since those who boycotted the vote were his opponents. This, the boycotting team members rejected, calling for a second and final voting. The protesting emergent elite were however persuaded to participate in the second voting, which R. T. Alege won by one vote, thus becoming Yagba's candidate. The incidental co-operation among the Yagba during this election culminated in the established principle of rotation between East and West Yagba. The effectiveness of the principle would depend on the extent to which the forces of unity, change, and developments were allowed to prevail. From Ijumu sub-group event took a new turn as election day drew close. Certain promises made by the district fell through before the final elections. To the disappointment of Bello Ijumu (but not to any one familiar with the socio-political trend in Ijumu), two other contestants, Mr. (later Chief) S. A. Ajayi from Ogidi and Mr. Fagbemi Adeleye from Ekinrin Adde, declared their candidacy for the election. Neither the IPU nor the Ijumu Central Council could resolve the deadlock. Kabba group was also bent on fielding its own candidate in person of Mr. Jethro Adebola. In the end, Bunu, Ijumu, and Kabba (BIK), fielded four candidates as opposed to one from Yagba. This multiple candidature which Yagba people considered as an affront strengthened their unanimity in the presentation of Mr. R. T. Alege.

At the final Electoral College in Kabba on December 16, 1954, BIK split its votes among four candidates while Yagba on the other hand voted enmass for Alege, who eventually emerged as the Divisional representative to the Federal House of Representatives. Alege's success was a function of many factors. One was the inability of BIK to agree on a candidate. Had they united, BIK would have had one or two votes more than Yagba. Secondly, the internal crisis within Ijumu foiled her attempt at the nomination of a candidate. Most detrimental to their cause was the fact that even the supposed "district candidate", Bello Ijumu, had no home support. He started his political activities outside the Division. He was considered as a "newcomer" to the political scene, a stranger to the politics of Kabba and an opportunist.³³ This is an indication that grassroots acceptability of candidates cannot be

overemphasized. It is a factor that still features prominently in post independent Nigerian politics. Bello's past political connection with the Division was weak. This political connection he suddenly attempted to gain and establish by his one-month intensive campaign prior to the election. This could hardly be expected to work in view of the endemic socio-political crisis in Ijumu. R. T. Alege on the other hand, had political connection not only in Yagba but also throughout the Division. This popularity had been established through the unions, the MYPU and the YFL. The later was particularly instrumental to his nomination. Moreover, by the 1954 elections, the battle was not that of political parties but of personalities. Issues were purely local and the results were not so much dependent on the programmes and achievements of any political party but on the popularity or otherwise of the local candidate in his constituency.

By the time of the 1956 elections into the Regional House of Assembly, party politics had gained increasing foothold in the Division. Apart from the AG and the NPC, Bello Ijumu attempted to strengthen the position of the MBPP following his failure in the 1954 elections. By now he was the Secretary General of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). At the approach of the election, however, the UMBC was hit by internal crisis. A split occurred, and Bello Ijumu was with the Moses Rwang's wing of the UMBC.³⁴ Despite his position in the UMBC and his attempt to strengthen the party's position in Kabba Division, the party did not have much support. This was because it was to a large extent still associated with the North and its 'vices' which the people resented. Secondly, according to Chief Bello Ijumu, the MBPP, whose formation was just six months before the London Constitutional Conference of 1953 had not received wide publicity and acceptability before its name was changed to UMBC in 1954. Unlike the AG for instance, whose campaign team was constantly on tour of the Division with high-sounding electoral promises, the only personality on the scene for UMBC in the Division was Bello Ijumu. Therefore, attendance at its meeting was never high. In fact, its attendance dwindled steadily throughout 1955 to the extent that not a single person attended its meeting scheduled to hold in Kabba town in December 1955.³⁵ As for the NPC, there was relatively very little of its activities in the Division, being still wholly dependent on the strength of the chiefs, the Native Authority workers and a few interested individuals. The AG became by far the most active party in the Division, especially after R. T. Alege declared for the party after his election in 1954. Alege used his position and the party's sound organization to great advantage. Several weeks prior to the primaries, Alege was backed by a team of AG agents who also supplied vehicles for campaign purposes. This was followed later by the great motorcade tour of the Division by the leader of the party, Chief Obafemi Awolowo,

accompanied by two Western Regional Ministers. The tour was with all the paraphernalia of party campaigning.

In Kabba Division, the whole process of the 1956 Regional Election was carried out with anxieties, bickering, and partisan maneuverings. As noted earlier, the Yagba agreed on a rotational principle in the choice of candidates after the election of Alege in 1954. The 1956 elections therefore became the acid test for the workability of the agreed principle. The battle line was not drawn strictly between East and West Yagba, but among West Yagba villages whose turn it was to produce a candidate for this election. The 24 – member electoral team from Yagba again assembled at Mopa to decide on a candidate. Contrary to expectation, three contestants as opposed to one emerged from West Yagba for the primaries. One of them was Mr. David Adeniyi from Ogga, a retired pastor, and one of the first western educated elite in the area. The second was M. A. Abiodun, a visiting teacher from Egbe. There was also S. A. Agbo, also a teacher from Egbe. As a staunch member of the AG party, S. A. Agbo in collaboration with R. T. Alege had his name submitted to the headquarters as a suitable candidate. Fully supported by AG stalwarts both within and outside the Division, as well as most of the electoral team who formed his strong campaign team, S. A. Agbo was not prepared to step down for his Egbe co-contestants. Thus the two Egbe aspirants presented themselves at Mopa. However, Mr. Adeniyi from Ogga had transportation problems and arrived late to participate in the first voting, which M. A. Abiodun won by one vote. This result was rejected by Mr. Agbo's supporters who alleged rigging. Issues were complicated at this point by the arrival of David Adeniyi who accused the people of a calculated attempt to edge him out of the election. There was a stalemate. After much dispute, a witness recalled, Adeniyi was pacified and prevailed upon to step down. The two Egbe candidates were thus left in the race to undergo a second and final voting.³⁶ We can see the seed of electoral conflicts which befell Nigeria years after independence being laid at a very local level. The tradition of monetary inducement and corruption during elections is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian politics.

The issue was still not satisfactorily resolved for some members of the electoral team who were in support of Mr. S. A. Agbo. In protest against M. A. Abiodun's candidature, four voters from East Yagba boycotted the second voting and indicated that if M. A. Abiodun was presented at Kabba they would not vote for him. They were Messrs Salami Olukotun, the court clerk for East Yagba from Ife Olukotun; S. A. Adeniji, a headmaster in charge of SIM School at Mopa; Amodu from Ejuku, an NA staff; and Mr. Ikuponiyi from Ponyan. S. A. Adeniji, being an elderly man, was placated and eventually took part in the second voting. These NA staff opposed M.A. Abiodun's candidature on the ground that, being his

colleagues in the NA, they knew him to be an arrogant man, who would not take advice from anybody and so would not be a good representative of Yagba. Further protest from S. A. Agbo's supporters was only averted on the fear and understanding that Egbe stood to forfeit the opportunity under continued controversy, because Yagba was no longer prepared to be held to ransom by Egbe with impunity.³⁷ Thus M. A. Abiodun eventually became Yagba's candidate to contest the final election at Kabba, despite the stiff opposition from the NA staff. However, Yagba's problems were not yet over. If the three voters who had boycotted the primaries at Mopa remained unpacified and maintained their stand not to vote for Abiodun at the final college in Kabba, then Yagba stood the risk of losing. This was so because in the first instance, Yagba would be left with only 21 of her 24 electoral team, as against 26 from BIK. Secondly, if BIK could agree on, and vote for a single candidate they will definitely be at an advantage. But because of the three different ethnic components, it was as usual very difficult for them to agree.

Meanwhile, events were taking a new turn in Ijumu. With a supposedly better political stand calculated on the factors of time and increased campaign tours, Bello Ijumu came to the scene. He was beaten to it, however, by the emergence of another rival, an Ijumu man, Mr. (later Chief) S. A. Ajayi. Mr. Ajayi was a renowned contractor who was pro-NPC. He entered the race fully prepared and was supported by the NPC controlled government. In his bid to succeed, Ajayi overtly manipulated, sought and got the support of five voters from Yagba, among whom were the three who had earlier on boycotted Yagba primaries at Mopa in protest against M.A. Abiodun's candidature. Of these newly found Yagba political associates of S. A. Ajayi, S. A. Salami from Ife–Olukotun was the closest. In a discussion with S. A. Salami, the Olukotun of Ife, he disclosed that Ajayi's arrangement with them was not known by Yagba people until they got to Kabba.³⁸ As much as possible, BIK was determined to win the 1956 election into the Regional House, though they had three candidates (Messrs S. A. Ajayi, Bello Ijumu, and Adeyanju, a retired police officer from Aiyere) in the race. Yagba was equally prepared. As the election approached rumours circulated that BIK had resolved not to split its votes, but to vote for one candidate. This sent fear and panic into the Yagba camp because, with a combined vote, BIK was at an advantage and would easily defeat Yagba. Realising that their chance at this election was threatened, the AG stalwarts in Yagba under R. T. Alege strategically ensured that BIK members split their votes at Kabba. Through a calculated programme of deceit Mr. S. A. Agbo, the defeated Yagba candidate at the primaries in Mopa, with five of his supporters, were made to lodge with Bello Ijumu the night before the elections. There they assured Bello of Yagba "support" and convinced him not to step down for S. A. Ajayi. This excited Bello Ijumu who was now hopeful. Meanwhile, pressure was mounted on the AG

stalwarts in Kabba Division, especially Mr. S. A. Adeniji, by NPC supporters to convince his people to vote for S. A. Ajayi. On several occasions he was invited to Mr. Fadile's house. At other times he was invited to Mr. S. A. Ajayi's house where people like Messrs. Lesile Ode from Isanlu and S. A. Salami, both pro-NPC, were present. A discussion held with Mr. Lesile Ode and confirmed by Mr. Adeniji himself revealed that he (Adeniji) did not succumb to their pressure. At the nomination, Bello Ijumu was nominated by a Yagba man (Mr. M. D. Olorunmonu from Isanlu) based on previous "understanding" and "agreement". This was in reality a move to ensure that BIK's votes were split. Other Yagba people (represented by Mr. Owoyele) nominated Mr. M. A. Abiodun, who along with Messrs Bello Ijumu, Adeyanju and S. A. Ajayi from Ijumu, stood for the 1956 election at Kabba.

Up to the last day of the elections governmental manipulations and the tradition of monetary inducement went on. The AG's intensive campaign and support in Bunu were foiled overnight. Till the final electoral college, the results of the elections were thus in doubt, more so when the District Officer, John Samchi, was reportedly instructed not to allow any anti-NPC candidate to win the election. The instruction was sequel to the fact that by then the NPC – controlled Regional Government had become apprehensive of its stand in the Division. At the end of the day, S. A. Ajayi won the election by a narrow margin over his AG opponent. He had 22 votes (thanks to the three votes from his Yagba collaborators). M. A. Abiodun had 21; Bello Ijumu had 2 votes and Adeyanju had 5 votes.³⁹ S. A. Ajayi therefore fully declared for the NPC.

In spite of this, there was no improvement in the socio-political status of the Division in terms of government patronage. In fact, not until towards the end of his tenure was S. A. Ajayi made a Minister of State in the minister's office, without portfolio. For plump appointments, the preference was still for scions of the Hausa-Fulani ruling oligarchy. The 1956 elections awakened the NPC's political interest in Kabba Division. The very keen competition the party had from the AG in the said elections was considered a serious threat to the NPC position in the Division. The loyalty of Kabba people to the Regional Government was also doubted. The fear of increasing southern influence in Kabba Division made the NPC - controlled Regional Government to go in search of people who could "capture" Kabba Division for the NPC. One of such people contacted early in 1958 was Mr. M.I. Ojua, then resident in Port Harcourt. M. I. Ojua was an Electrical Engineer with the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN), later NEPA PLC, and now, Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). He had just left Lagos in 1958 for Port Harcourt to be a contractor to Shell British Petroleum. While at ECN, Ojua had several contacts

and connections with Honorable Ribadu, the Minister for Mines and Power. The Minister realized that not only was Ojua good at his job, but he also had the attributes of a good politician. Therefore when the NPC sought for people who could capture Kabba, Ribadu remembered Ojua. Together with other NPC stalwarts like Alhaji Inuawada, the Minister for transport; Dipcharima, the Minister for Commerce and Industry; and Alhaji Ali Sheltima Monguno, the Secretary to NPC, he met Ojua in Port Harcourt. They not only talked Ojua into politics, but also effectively brought him into the NPC fold, and he was invited to Kaduna to meet the Sardauna.⁴⁰ At the meeting with the Premier, he (the premier) reiterated the strategic position of Kabba in the north, constituting 65% of the total labour force in the civil service. Accordingly, he said, Kabba could not do without supporting the NPC. The message from the Premier was thus very clear; the NPC wanted to capture Kabba Division. As an incentive, the party was prepared to review the status of Kabba sons in the Northern Regional Service. Later events demonstrated that the NPC was not truly committed to the fulfillment of the agreement nor sympathetic to Kabba cause. However, at that time, a beginning was made with the transfer of Mr. S. Ade John (holder of a Master Degree in Economics, teaching in a secondary school) to the Ministry of Economics Planning as Senior Assistant Secretary. This will prove to be just a tantalizing crumb thrown at a prominent Kabba elite with little benefit to the group as a whole.

With this background work, attempts were made and various strategies adopted to get NPC invigorated in Kabba Division and to capture Kabba votes for NPC come 1959 elections. A conference of Oba was summoned intimating them of the need to ensure NPC success. Pressure was brought to bear on AG members in the Division to decamp. For instance, M. I. Ojua and his co-Yagba pro-NPC colleagues led a calculated move to woo R. T. Alege, then a member of the Federal House of Representatives. Refusing to be a saboteur and to subjugate AG's interest, Alege did not yield to these initial overtures. Several invitations sent to Alege by NPC stalwarts to attend meetings of Oba organised by NPC caucus were turned down.⁴¹ Alege could not however sustain his resistant for long as pressure persistently increased from the NPC government as well as his pro-NPC Yagba colleagues. He was also under serious opposition from pro- AG indigenes who had accused Yagba in general, and R.T. Alege in particular, of selfishness in terms of party patronage. For instance, out of the 30 scholarships awarded to the Division by the Western Government in 1955, 23 went to Yagba leaving BIK with just seven.⁴²

The increasing support and loyalty of BIK to the AG on the one hand, and their (BIK) opposition to Alege on the other, was sequel to certain local as well as national political developments. At the national level, by late 1956, the Moses Rwang – Bello Ijumu faction of UMBC had struck an alliance

with the AG. On the basis of this alliance, after his defeat in the 1956 election, Bello Ijumu led a delegation of his few UMBC supporters and representatives of BIK to Ibadan in October 1956. After a one-hour discussion with the leader of the AG, Chief Awolowo, and other party officials like Akintola and Oredein, the Principal Organizing Secretary, Bello, and the people formally registered their support for the AG. Bello admitted receiving a brand new car and some motorcycles for party activities in the area.⁴³ Also, the success of the NPC at the 1956 election in Kabba Division further made Alege's political situation more precarious. It did not give credibility to his stand in the AG being a party member of the Federal House from the Division. By January 1957, he faced serious opposition and a petition against him was sent from the party's secretariat at Kabba to the AG's headquarters at Ibadan. The petition accused him of flirting with the NPC, thereby undermining the effort of the AG in the area. For this, he was issued a query. However, on the timely intervention of Messrs. J.S. Olawoyin, Bola Ige, and Jonathan Orebiyi, the query was withdrawn. In spite of this, Alege's position in the AG did not improve. Matters reached a peak for him in December 1958, three months to the expiration of his term in the House. He was expelled from the AG on the ground of leaking party secrets to an opposing party, disobeying party directives and causing division among the rank and file of party members in his constituency. In the face of pressures and opposition, just eighteen days to the 1959 election, R. T. Alege publicly declared for the NPC at a campaign in Mopa organized by NPC stalwarts in the Division.⁴⁴

At the approach of the 1959 elections, party politics had become fully entrenched in Kabba Division with the AG and the NPC at the forefront. It is important to state at this point that in the late colonial and early independent period, Kabba became a battle ground for the two political powers (NPC and AG) that dominated the politics of Northern and Western Nigeria respectively. Kabba found herself in the midst of this struggle and control because the 1959 elections were crucial for the political parties as they determined who controlled the Federal Government. If the NPC won all the 174 seats allocated to the North, it could control the 312 – member House of Representatives.⁴⁵ For this reason it became part of the strategy of the NCNC and the AG to stop the NPC from winning all the Northern seats. They did this by entering into alliances with smaller Northern parties. NCNC allied with Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the AG with UMBC. The same reason would also explain why the AG threw its weight behind the KDU in the 1964 elections.⁴⁶

The 1959 elections again put to test the accidental Yagba co-operation and unity established during the 1954 election to Federal House of Representatives. This unity by and large collapsed in the face of

intense political activities and governmental manipulations. This latter factor gradually and increasingly became the bane of the elections. The situation in Kabba Division was worsened by bickering among the various sub-groups, which further polarized the Division and determined to some extent political affiliations. By Yagba's arrangements, West Yagba accordingly put forward the pro-AG D.S. Moody to contest the 1959 election into the Federal House, Alege the outgoing member being from East Yagba. By now elections were based on tax and adult suffrage and contested on party platform and no longer through Electoral College. Contrary to the earlier agreement, an NPC rival from East Yagba, Mr. S.A. Salami, emerged. The entrance of Salami into the race was an indication of the full determination of the NPC - controlled Regional Government to have Kabba votes. Secondly, it was sequel to the support he (S.A Salami) and four other Yagba gave to S.A. Ajayi in the 1956 elections. The latter had then promised similar support in future elections. Therefore, S.A. Ajayi in collaboration with M.I. Ojua, another NPC stalwart in Yagba, handpicked S.A. Salami from East Yagba to contest on the platform of the NPC while D.S. Moody contested on the platform of the AG. As usual, the NPC Regional Government left no stone unturned to ensure the success of the NPC candidate. According to an NPC informant who wished to remain anonymous, the party pumped as much as £600.00 into Salami's campaign for the 1959 elections. £600.0.0 was a lot of money then. In the end S.A. Salami was declared the winner and became the second Divisional Representative at the Federal House of Representatives.

The result of the election was by no means a test of the popularity of the AG party in the area. The fact was that governmental manipulations accounted for its recurrent loss in elections in Kabba Division. Moreover, at the turn of the 1959 elections, a number of factors had determined political affiliations and alliances in Kabba Division. One was the avowed determination of the NPC Regional Government to establish her stronghold in the area. Secondly, the inability of the Willink Commission in 1958 to create the Middle Belt State out of the Northern Region tilted opinion in some quarters in the Division towards settling down in the North where competition was less than in the West, in the interest of their children. The attractive higher education scholarships offered to aspiring and promising students from Kabba Division, by the Regional Scholarship Board was another factor. These factors to some extent marked a turning point in the political leaning of the people of Kabba Division and were partly responsible for NPC victory in the 1959 election. This victory did not however seriously enhance the socio-political and perhaps economic status of the Division in the Region. The NPC was overbearing. The people had to contend with the status quo. Realizing that they might have to settle down in the Northern Region,

Kabba Division was now faced with the challenge of establishing for itself a political ascendancy and recognition in the Region. This challenge was ‘tackled’ by the Kabba Divisional Union.

THE CHALLENGE FOR SURVIVAL WITHIN THE NORTHERN FRAMEWORK: THE ROLE OF THE YOUNG ELITE

The foregoing developments, especially the manipulation of elections, the overbearing and autocratic tendencies of the NPC- controlled government, caused great disaffection among the young and well-meaning western educated elite in Kabba Division. The time was therefore ripe, the western educated elite felt, to change the course of the political history of Kabba Division. By 1962 embers of agitation and protest had began to gather momentum mostly among young teachers. For the first time in the history of the Division, the young emergent corp of western educated elite came together. They formed an organisation which embraced and cut across all the sub-groups in the Division. It was called the Kabba Divisional Union (KDU) under the leadership of Messrs. Clement Rowland and S. B. Ronke. The KDU by all ramifications was a political party formed to champion the political cause of Kabba Division in the early 1960s.⁴⁷ The motivating factor for the KDU was the desire of the young emergent elite and the entire people of Kabba to seek and establish for themselves a political identity within the framework of the North. As one of the pioneer members declared, the situation was such that fears of domination, discrimination, undue preference for Northerners and Islamization which culminated in the demand for West-merger in pre-independence Nigeria, were beginning to manifest themselves in greater dimensions in post-independent Nigeria. The NPC treatment of Kabba Division and the Middle Belt in general tended towards autocracy; it never wanted their political survival. To fit into the political system and culture of the North, many people in Kabba Division began to change their Christian names to Islamic ones. Many, such as Jimoh Fadile of Kabba and Salami Olukotun, professed and became practising Moslems. In the people’s perception, it was not uncommon to find a standard six certificate holder from the North made boss over a better qualified person (perhaps with grade II or even Cambridge Certificate) from Kabba Division. It was believed rightly or wrongly that as long as such a Northerner could sign his name he could hold any post. In this situation, the people were aggrieved for being discriminated against. The formation of KDU was a response to these grievances.⁴⁸

The formation of KDU was also facilitated by a rift which occurred within the hierarchy of the NPC in the Division after the 1959 election. The rivalry within the Kabba NPC was first that of a

personality clash between S.A. Ajayi, the NPC Divisional representative at the Regional House, and M. I. Ojua, a prominent NPC member in Kabba Division. The former, by virtue of his office and position, felt qualified to lead the party in the area, while Ojua on the other hand, considered himself the rightful candidate, being instrumental to the NPC ascendancy in the Division. Thus the NPC in Kabba Division became factionalized. One group was led by S. A. Ajayi and S. A. Salami, the NPC-Divisional members of the Regional and Federal House respectively. The other faction was led by M. I. Ojua and Clement Rowland. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there was a rift over the management of party funds. Some money sent from Kaduna for the 1959 election campaign was allegedly misappropriated by the S.A. Ajayi, S.A. Salami and Adesina faction of the NPC, to the displeasure of the M.I. Ojua- Clement Rowland faction. This led to a protest by the Ojua faction to the NPC government. Ojua led Messrs M. I. Olupeka from Ogidi, Tunde Alao from Mopa, Oshagbemi from Eri, and Clement Rowland, to Kaduna to report the financial malfeasance. A delegate was sent from Kaduna to Kabba to investigate the matter. The District Officer was informed through a telegram of the coming of the delegates, and he notified S. A. Ajayi.⁴⁹ The uninformed Clement Rowland faction could not return from Kaduna to appear and present its case before the delegate. The delegate returned to Kaduna with a biased report, having heard from only one side (the accused officials) in the dispute. Not surprisingly, it tagged Clement Rowland and his group as irresponsible. Further protest by the aggrieved faction over the way and manner in which the arrival of the delegates was handled was, for reasons best known to the NPC, only treated shabbily.

By 1960, there was a lot of discontentment within the NPC, Kabba Division. It dawned on M. I. Ojua and his group that the NPC was never a democratic party, and that the group's aspiration for democracy could hardly be met within the autocratic tendencies of the NPC. They were therefore determined to prove to the NPC that S. A. Ajayi was no political match for them at home. In summary, so many lapses that characterized the NPC both at the divisional and national levels partly conditioned the emergence of KDU. These were: (i) the inability to agree on the leadership by the rank and file of Kabba NPC, (ii) certain financial anomalies within the party in Kabba, (iii) the undemocratic rule of the NPC, and (iv) the undue influence given to S. A. Ajayi (the parliamentary member from the Division) by the NPC government. Under these circumstances the aggrieved Clement Rowland faction and other young elite were faced with the problem of how the Division would survive in the North. The general disappointment of Kabba young elite with the political behavior of its senior partner (NPC) forced them

to seek for a way out. They decided to fight future elections on another platform. The formation of KDU was partly in response to these developments.

The opportunity for the emergent young elite in Kabba to seek and establish a new political identity and ascendancy for the Division within the Northern framework came with the 1964 elections. This issue was to be strategically tackled using two approaches as the 1964 elections drew near. One strategy was to inject an enlightened candidate from the Division into the NPC at the centre. The idea was that the presence of a vocal elite in the government will help to attract development to Kabba. Though in the NPC, the new representative would be expected to play the role of an internal critic who would always defend the interest of Kabba in the House. Seeing Kabba Division in opposition would perhaps influence the NPC government to give Kabba recognition and re-orientate its approach to issues and developments affecting the Division.⁵⁰ The struggle of Kabba during this period was not unique. Similar developments were taking place among other minority groups in Nigeria which had little or no opportunity for projecting, let alone achieving their socio economic and political interests. This was the case with the MBPP and other minority nationalities in the Northern Region. The Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo etc of the Western Region, the Efik, Ibibo, the Ijaw of today Rivers and Bayelsa state in the Eastern Region as well as Kabba's close neighbours – the Igbomina, Ekiti and Ibolo of Ilorin province were engaged in similar struggle for autonomy. In fact the struggle for autonomy in Kabba had a wider collaboration with other pressure groups such as the MBPP and the UMBC. Similar motives moved the Middle Zone League (MZL) from the Middle Belt into alliance with the NPC in 1953, hoping thereby to minimize the growing victimisation which the NPC brought to bear on non-NPC members.⁵¹

The plan to field an enlightened candidate and critic into the NPC failed. The NPC rejected Mr. Tunji Arosanyin who was supported by the KDU. On the basis of his NPC inclination, Arosanyin had obtained a job as a court clerk with the Native Authority at Kabba. The nature of his job gave him wide contact and enhanced his popularity with the people. Moreover, as the organizer of Kabba Divisional Sports Association made up mostly of young teachers, Arosanyin endeared himself to the masses. This growing popularity, coupled with the fact that he was a likely NPC candidate for the 1964 election, threatened some personalities within the NPC, Kabba chapter. Particularly concerned was S.A. Ajayi, who wanted S.A. Salami to run for a second term. Arosanyin not only lost his job, his candidature on the platform of the party was also rejected by the party stalwarts in Kabba Division as the election approached. Rather than contest the election, the NPC government in a message through Ahman G. Pategi, offered T. Arosanyin a scholarship to the university. Not willing to disappoint his ardent

sponsors and supporters (the KDU), Arosanyin rejected the scholarship, preferring to contest as an independent candidate since the electoral regulations allowed such.⁵² This approach of having a dynamic Kabba representative at Kaduna was preferred and strengthened by the fact that the people would not like the adverse consequences of their open declaration for the AG. By direct affiliation with the West or the AG party, Kabba people stood the risk of further victimization and discrimination by the giant NPC, thus their preference for this approach. But the situation where they were really opposed to Northern domination and were not at the same time convinced of going to the West with its more numerous educated elite, where they would be economically swallowed up, demanded a new approach.

The second approach was to completely sever or dissociate the area from the NPC. The consequences of this approach were appreciated by the young elite. It would, in addition to other serious repercussions, engender further neglect by the Regional Government. This was why they preferred to rally round Tunji Arosanyin in the NPC and give him their votes as somebody to champion the cause of Kabba Division in the party. But since this approach was nipped in the bud and was stifled by the NPC, the emergent young elite, who were determined to find a new political identity for the area, had to approach the issue from the perspective of a new political organisation which was neither NPC nor AG oriented.⁵³ It was to be a new political organisation which would be mid-way between the all-powerful NPC and the popular AG. The new organisation was the KDU and the course it took in 1964. The KDU came up as a distinct political organisation neither affiliated with the NPC nor the AG.

Investigation, however, revealed that the idea behind the formation of the KDU came from the West and the AG. Inside sources disclosed that the idea was in fact suggested by the AG and that the KDU was financed by the AG but sustained by the goodwill of the western educated elite in Kabba Division. Highlighting part of the activities of the KDU, it was further stated that consultations were secretly held with the AG. For fear of NPC oppression and maltreatment, KDU members traveled in the night to Ibadan to hold meetings with Obafemi Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola, and for obvious reasons, returned to the Division before daybreak. The AG took financial responsibility for KDU expenses during the campaign and the elections.⁵⁴ It was a renewed opportunity when the West again emphasized its cultural links with Kabba. It continuously impressed on Kabba people their affinities with the other Yoruba groups, their geographical contiguity and the need for a change. The popularity of the party, (KDU), was never in doubt. Support for it both from the western educated elite and the illiterate masses was overwhelming as was demonstrated during the elections, when the people voted in favour of KDU. All over the Division, the people felt the pinch of NPC autocratic rule and so were prepared to have a

break with the NPC. For instance, the period coincided with the passage of the obnoxious dane-gun license bye-laws by the NPC-controlled Native Authorities. The bye-law required every hunter to pay a 10 shilling tax annually. The Hunter's Association rejected the bye-law and refused to support the NPC. Both Mr. S.B. Ronke and M.I. Ojua, confirmed that in the South-East Yagba the mobilisation of grassroots support for the KDU was carried out by M.I. Ojua on the platform of the Hunters' Association. The KDU championed the cause of the common people. At the 1964 elections therefore, the people voted enmasse for the KDU-supported, sponsored, albeit independent candidate, Tunji Arosanyin. The 1964 election was taken with all seriousness. It became the deciding factor for the KDU and the people's final break or otherwise with the NPC. KDU campaign reached every nook and corner of the Division. Since it had a lantern as its symbol, the party was popularly referred to as *Egbe Alatupa* or *Egbe Imole*. Mr. S.B. Ronke personally printed the posters, cards and handbills used by KDU for the campaign.⁵⁵ The massive support for the KDU was demonstrated at the polls as people came out enmasse to cast their votes for the party. In Kabba town, for instance, only one or two people reportedly voted for the NPC⁵⁶

Victory for the KDU was however averted by governmental manipulations. Counting started on the night of the election, December 30, 1964 at about 8.00pm at the Kabba Town Hall, initially in the presence of both the KDU members and NPC officials. As two witnesses related, unlike the KDU boxes, most of the NPC boxes opened for counting were found empty. By 10.00pm, the KDU had gained a wide margin over the NPC. It was at this point that the District Officer - Mr. J. M. Samchi, the electoral officer - Mohammed Yola, and the counting officer forcefully dispersed everybody from the hall. The KDU raised objections regarding the security of their boxes. The District Officer in response promised to keep them in the custody of the Native Authority Police whose unflinching support and loyalty, of course, was to the NPC. Not satisfied with the arrangements for obvious reasons, aggrieved KDU members (such as Messrs S. B. Ronke, James Falodun - the KDU Secretary and Clement Rowland) defiantly kept vigil at the premises. In their presence the hall was opened around midnight under tight NA police security and KDU boxes were destroyed.⁵⁷ Thus, the election was shamefully and nakedly rigged. S. A. Salami, the NPC candidate, was declared winner to run for a second term in the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos.

The declared result was followed by a mass protest. On the strength of the protest the NPC – controlled Regional Government immediately moved the electoral officer back to Kaduna and descended on the KDU, unleashing tyranny on it. Many known members, including ordinary teachers

and leaders such as Messrs S. B. Ronke, Sephram Olorunmaiye, and Otei Tuba, were arrested and detained. The Native Authority police was employed to torture officers and members of the KDU. Those who secretly assisted the KDU were similarly victimized. Tunji Arosanyin escaped assassination narrowly by quickly leaving the Division. Ahman G. Pategi led an NPC delegation that took S. B. Ronke to Kaduna for discipline. His Grade II Certificate was confiscated. The Oba of Mopa, [M. Orimolade] Ronke's home town, shared in the victimization. His position became threatened as he was tagged unpopular, unfit and irresponsible, having allowed the KDU to gain the upper hand in his domain.⁵⁸ The NPC did not spare the KDU in any way. This was a time when the political structure of the country was on the verge of collapse, as a period of alliance and re-alliances of the many political parties in the country dawned. Given such a tense atmosphere, the NPC was not prepared to tolerate any opposition particularly from within the Northern region which was its base. The KDU was therefore suppressed to such an extent that it could not operate beyond the 1964 elections. With the majority of its leaders in jail and many others arrested, the KDU became moribund. The early termination of the life of the KDU was a deliberate move by the NPC to hinder and prevent it from surviving within the Northern Nigerian political framework. In its struggle to give Kabba Division political recognition and ascendancy, the KDU operated in a politically inhospitable climate. In the end it succumbed to political pressure and coercion from the Regional Government. The KDU died out, thus bringing an end to its political role in the post independent military and civilian rule. Internally, the emergence of the KDU marked the first move at unity in the Division. The Union represented the first serious and most positive attempt to foster the idea of Kabba unity thus bringing a measure of unity which had never before been achieved in the history of the area. KDU helped to link the electorate to the new democratic processes making them comprehensive in traditional terms to the Kabba population, which was still largely politically illiterate. Moreover, the lessons of organisation and united efforts of the KDU prepared the way for the birth (in the 1970s) of culture-bond framework of unions and associations which took up the challenges of modernisation in the area. The O-kun Development Association of later years was one of its legacies.

CONCLUSION

The increase in political activities throughout the country from the mid-1940s threw up a fundamental challenge to the people of Kabba Division. The challenge was that of preventing the

Division from being submerged under the political climate of Northern Nigeria, and Nigeria as a whole. The people that best responded to these issues were the emergent corps of western educated elite. These young elite at various times formed unions through which they attempted to advance the Kabba cause. Their response to the challenges of party politics of the 1950s drew the young elite in Kabba and the entire people into the mainstream of Nigerian politics. As occasion demanded, they allied themselves with parties which they believed would improve the socio-political conditions of their people. The emergent elite struggled to give Kabba Division political recognition and ascendancy in a politically inhospitable environment, but the forces of coercion and suppression frustrated their efforts. Thus, its battle to give the area a new and better socio-political standing came to nought. Nevertheless, the young elite politically helped Kabba Division to overcome its traditional isolation by becoming the organizational vehicle through which the people in the Division meaningfully participated in the wider political system. Even though the issues of political grouping and re-grouping as well as the elections further divided the people, the KDU, formed by the western educated elite became, for the first time, a unifying force to reckon with among a people whose history had been characterized by problems of competing loyalties, interests, and demands.

Kabba experience showed that the power politics of the time was such that in each region the economic and political interests of the dominant ethnic group became equated to the economic and political interests of the region. The principle of fair and equitable development did not inform the programmes of the regional government. The minority groups counted for little in the politics of their regions. And herein lay the genesis of the struggle for autonomy and group identity in the late colonial and early independent Nigerian politics. The behavior and the performance of political parties, especially their approach to electoral politics in the late colonial and independent Nigeria have become very crucial to the survival of democracy in Nigeria. The parties became the vehicles for the articulation and implementation of ethnic and regional interests. In this way, they generated ethnic conflicts and perpetrated divisions in the society. As vehicles for the struggle for power, they put the newly independent country on the part of electoral crisis, a process that continued for decades post-in independent Nigeria.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. For a detailed explanation of the impact of the western education on general awakening in Northern Nigeria see, J.S.Coleman: *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (London, University of California press, 1971), chapters 4, 5, 6 and 17. See also B.J.Dudley: *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*. (London: Frankcass and co.1968). p.73.
4. Reasons for the closure of the school include: lack of suitably qualified teachers; lack of continuity of supervision; the political exigency of the time (i.e. the First World War) which made the officers and teachers of the school to be withdrawn for military services; the schools had no political significances as the schools for the sons of the Emirs and Chiefs; and Native Authority education policy of the school, which disallowed English from being taught until the pupils' last three years in the school.
5. The following Missionary bodies also operated in Kabba Division: The Church Missionary Society (CMS); The Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and The Baptist.
6. E. A. Ijagbemi: *Christian Missionary Activity in Colonial Nigeria: The work of the Sudan Interior Mission Among the Yoruba 1908-1967* (Lagos Ad-colour Prints and Services, 1986) p.76.
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17. Interview with Chief H.O. Dada at Egbe, .9/7/1993.
18. Discussion with Rev. D.S. Moody at Egbe,3/6/1993.
19. For details see *Akede Eko* of 18/1/1947 and 22/2/1947.pp.2and 5.
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23. Interview with Pa .S.A. Adeniji at Mopa.25/1/1990.

24. For details of the relationship between the *Egbe* and the AG see S. O Arifolo: "The Egbe Omo Oduduwa: A study in Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism." Ph.D Thesis, History Department, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Ile –Ife, January, 1983 pp 270 ff.
25. J. O. Ojiako. Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and ... (Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers. 1989), p17.
26. F.I. Adeyemo: "The Life and Times of Mr. Reuben T. Alege (late) of Mopa. 1928- 1967", B.A. Long Essay, History Department University of Ilorin, June 1983. pp.14-16.
27. Interview with Chief Bello Ijumu at Kabba, on 19/2/1990.
28. B.J. Dudley: Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria. p 94.
29. Interview with Bello Ijumu.
30. The residents of Sabongari in Kano were mostly Southerners and a few Northerners who embraced NEPU or were members of the AG and or NCNC. They decided to vote for Bello Ijumu.
31. Kalu Ezera: *Constitutional Development in Nigeria*. (Cambridge University Press,1960), p.207.
32. Information collected from the Olu Adde of Ekinrin Adde, Oba Gabriel Babalola at Ekinrin Adde on 22/2/1990. He was then a member of the Ijumu Central Council.
33. Discussion with Chief M.I. Ojua, at Ogbom, 7/2/1990, 17/3/1990 and 28/4/1990.
34. B. J .Dudley: *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*. p.94. He examines in detail the internal crisis within the UMBC.
35. NAK Kabb. Dist. 803.vol. 11: Annual Report Kabba Province, 1949 onwards (1949-1958).
36. Interview with S.A. Agbo at Egbe on 25/3/1990.
37. Interview with Pa. S.A. Adeniji at Mopa 25/3/1990.
38. Discussion with the Olukotun of Ife, Oba Salami Ajibola, at Ife Olukotun,on 31/3/ 1990.
39. Information from Mr. S. A. Agbo, confirmed by Chief S. A. Ajayi.
40. Discussion with Mr. Benjamin. He confirmed this. He was resident with Mr. Ojua at Port Harcourt then in 1958.

41. Interview with Chief M. I. Ojua.
42. This was confirmed in a discussion held with Pa. S. A. Adeniji at Mopa. He was instrumental in bringing R. T. Alege into the AG.
43. Interview with Chief Bello Ijumu at Kabba 19/2/1990.
44. Interview with Chief M. I. Ojua.
45. For details of the result at the National level and the alliances that followed, see Obaro Ikime, *History, The Historian and the Nation*. Ibadan, Heinemann, 2006, pp294-295.
46. Other reasons include: (i) Kabba occupied a strategic position in the North. Because of her relatively advanced educational status, she constituted 65% of the total labour force in the regional civil service. So the Regional Government could not afford to part with her having spent huge sum of money on scholarship and crash programme to regionalize the civil service. (ii) Kabba people had emphasized their cultural affinity with the larger Yoruba group and the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* through the AG not only provided a forum for concerted effort for the separatist agitations, but also advocated and pressurised the colonial government to group Nigerians into various autonomous states or regions purely on ethnic basis. Hence the party i.e. NPC and AG were each determined to dominate the politics in Kabba.
47. Discussion held with Chief Tunji Arosanyin at Ilorin on 13/2/1990; and Mr. S. B. Ronke at Mopa on 23/3/1990.
48. S. B. Ronke in an interview.
49. This was confirmed by Chief S. A. Ajayi in an interview at Kabba on 22/2/1990.
50. Interview with Mr. S. B. Ronke.
51. B. J. Dudley: *Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria*. p. 94.
52. Interview with Chief Tunji Arosanyin.
53. Ibid. S. B. Ronke also confirmed this.
54. Interviews with S. B. Ronke.
55. Ibid.
56. Chief S. A. Ajayi, an NPC stalwart in Kabba also confirmed this in an interview.

57. Interview with Chief M. I. Ojua; also confirmed by S. B. Ronke in a separate discussion.
58. Interview with Chief Tunji Arosanyin and Mr. S. B. Ronke.

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