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Ekiti Pelupelu Obas and Governor Fayemi Challenges: A Case Study of Status Question and Leadership Controversies, Nigeria

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Abstract:

The study of status question and leadership controversies embroiling ranks and file of Obas (Traditional Rulers or recognized Chiefs) in Ekiti State of Nigeria is aimed at authenticating traditions of their seniority and ranking. It traced administration of Chieftaincy matters on the status and ranking of Ekiti Pelupelu Oba and the official recognition/classification of Chiefs despite changes to native law and customs. It also examined steps taken by the British colonial government during indirect rule system to sustain the tradition by creating native authorities among principal and subordinate Ekiti kingdoms which helped in effective administration and political division of Ekitiland (Ekiti Divisions) in old Ondo Province of Western Nigeria under the British Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. The paper surveyed differences running high between Ekiti Pelupelu Obas (Principal Ekiti Traditional Rulers) and administration of Dr. John Kayode Fayemi (the incumbent Governor of Ekiti State of Nigeria) over the appointment of a non-Pelupelu member (Alawe of Ilawe-Ekiti) as Chairman of Council of Ekiti State Traditional Rulers. It observed an official directive of previous administration of Mr. Peter Ayodele Fayose as Governor of Ekiti State that altered age long tradition of Pelupelu rank by conferring similar status on non-Pelupelu members thereby informing the currency of government decision contrary to laws and tradition. It acknowledged the mediating roles of senior Yoruba Obas in the crisis to forestall the government from making such matter before the court of law to be subjudice, if not politically ill-motivated. The study justifies the need to reexamine tradition of Ekiti Pelupelu Oba in order to preserve the sanctity of Chiefs and sustain a harmonious and peaceful political governance in Ekiti State.

Keywords: Ekiti Obas, Yoruba culture, senior Yoruba obas, native law and customs, chieftaincy tussle, Government

1. Introduction

Human society and its variant socio-cultural organizations thrive to establish a well meaning and acceptable systemic process.¹ Equally, indigenous societies with emphasis on the African traditional society continues to exist and appreciate the depth of their commitment to an existing structure of relationships and engagement that ensures social stability and political relevance reasonable to sustain and predict their access to public life and privileges.²

The scope of power relationships in relation to the equation of power and the aggregate of influence within the indigenous society has been determined for long by tradition and culture of the people despite the changing phase of the modern society and the reforms that attends it as long as the institution of the traditional society are sustained and protected by the people, the society and the state.³

It is evident that despite the influence of western education and culture in many colonized and later independent countries of the world and in particular, Africa and the Third world countries, the aspirations of democratic institutions and societies to attain equity in social leverages and equality for all men, does not remove the existence of class and the impact of class struggle and social stratification at large. This is because the existing society and its culture are deeply rooted in indigenous practices despite changing world order and reforms.⁴

¹Sztompka, Piotr, *The Sociology of Social Change*, Blackwell Publishers, 1994, ISBN 0-631-18206-3; Trigger, Bruce, *Sociocultural Evolution: Calculation and Contingency (New Perspectives on the Past)*, Blackwell Publishers, 1998, ISBN 1-55786-977-4; Seymour-Smith, Charlotte, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 1986, Macmillan, New York.

²Evans-Pritchard, Sir Edward, *A History of Anthropological Thought*, 1981, Basic Books, Inc., New York.; Graber, Robert B., *A Scientific Model of Social and Cultural Evolution*, 1995, Thomas Jefferson University Press, Kirksville, MO.

³Harris, Marvin, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, 1968, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York.; Hatch, Elvin, *Theories of Man and Culture*, 1973, Columbia University Press, New York.

⁴Johnson, Allen W. and Earle, Timothy, *The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State*, 1987, Stanford University Press.; Kaplan, David and Manners, Robert, *Culture Theory*, 1972, Waveland Press, Inc., Prospect Heights, Illinois.; Kuklick, Henrika, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*, 1991, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Mesoudi, A. (2007). Using the methods of experimental social psychology to study cultural evolution. *Journal of Social, Evolutionary & Cultural Psychology*, 1(2), 35-58

In similar veins, traditional societies particularly in Africa and Asia Minor continues to exhibit high premium of cultural intelligence and harmony through the efforts of its indigenous institution and systems of human communication and controls.⁵ This is however not restricted to these societies since it is also obvious among Red Indians and other developed societies in the Middle East, Americas, Australia and New Zealand.

There is no way the traditional society can exist in its purest state without references to the existence of various classes and structures of the society often based on privileged positions, past attained glory and evidence of superior-subordinate relationships.⁶ The cultural evolution developed through these political systems often presents a feudalistic approach embedded in an aristocratic or oligarchy structure to sustain their tradition and social interactions in history from the past to the present. This is why an average indigenous society would continue to survive on the relevance of its tradition and culture despite the effect of western modernization in those African, Eastern and Asian countries.

It is imperative for the traditional society to therefore remain unassailable and retain its richness by giving measure of credence to the role assigned to the various structures that forms its system of organization and relationships. This is the only guarantee of preserving the laid down and existing foundation and beauty of the tradition of the people, the class of people and their leadership within the traditional social system and its hierarchy among others. Moreover, the human society cannot be well organized and coordinated without witnessing the desired elements of leadership and processes to drive its organization, activities and objectives.⁷

In modern society, governance and its bureaucratic character remains the major characteristic of an organized system and therefore supports the process and roles played by the leadership. It equally gives room for the adoption of hierarchy and chains of command to achieve the purest form of unity in promoting harmony and control of the people and the society, the governed, the stakeholders and the government.⁸ In this study, attempt is therefore concentrated on looking at the role of traditional political systems and the issues of equality and inequality that often results to crisis and controversy in their relationship and social values vis a vis the role of leadership and organization of traditional rulers and the modern government system.

The central theme of the study revolves round the politics of leadership and the hierarchy of Chiefs in Ekiti State of Nigeria as a case study and in relation to their social functions and relevance from times past towards understanding issues inherent in social relations and conflicts within the traditional African society. No doubt, the recent crisis between a class of Senior Ekiti traditional rulers (Pelupelu Oba) and the Government of Ekiti State over the appointment of a perceived interloper and ineligible traditional ruler as the Chairman of the Council of traditional rulers in Ekiti State of Nigeria ginger the need to undertake the study.

2. Traditions of Ekiti Society and Its Rulership: Past And Present

Ekiti State of Nigeria was carved out of old Ondo State of Nigeria on 1st October, 1996. Prior to that period, Ekiti State formed the bulk of Local Governments in old Ondo State when the State was carved out of the Western State of Nigeria in 1976. The population of Ekiti State was regarded at about 52% of the total population of the then old Ondo State. Before the creation of Ondo State out of the Western State of Nigeria, Ekiti was a group of Districts and much later a set of Administrative Divisions created within the old Ondo Province in the defund Western Region of Nigeria prior to the independence of the Federation of Nigeria from Great British on 1st October, 1960. In the period of colonial era, Ekiti was part of the colonized territories of Yorubaland under the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.⁹

⁵ Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Ogunremi Deji & Biodun Adediran (ed.): Culture and Society in Yorubaland, Rex Charles, 1998, p.17; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109; Falola, Toyin & Genova, Ann: The Yoruba in Transition (History, Values and Modernity)

⁶ Mesoudi, A. Cultural Evolution: How Darwinian Theory Can Explain Human Culture and Synthesize the Social Sciences, 2011, University Of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0-226-52044-5; Raoul Naroll and William T. Divale. 1976. Natural Selection in Cultural Evolution: Warfare versus Peaceful Diffusion. *American Ethnologist* 3: 97–128.; Stocking Jr., George W., Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology, 1968, The Free Press, New York.

⁷ Harris, Marvin, The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture, 1968, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York.; Hatch, Elvin, Theories of Man and Culture, 1973, Columbia University Press, New York.

⁸ Berber, David, The Citizen Politics, An Introduction to Political Behaviour. (Chicago: Workman Publisher, 1969); Hatch, Elvin, Theories of Man and Culture, 1973, Columbia University Press, New York.

⁹ Oguntuyi, A.O., History of Ekiti: From the beginning to 1939 (1979), Bisi Books, Ibadan; Oguntuyi, A.O., Traditional Ekiti Kingdoms, Hope Paper Mills, Ado-Ekiti, ISBN 9780284899, 1986; Oguntuyi, A.O.: A Short History of Ado-Ekiti (1979) Bisi Books, Ibadan; Olomola, Isola: A Thousand Years of Ado History and Culture, (Ado-Ekiti, Omolayo Press, 1984); Olomola, I.G.: Ekitiparapo Aspirations Since 1890s, Ile-Ife, Andkolad, 2005; Olomola, Isola: History of Ado-Ekiti From earliest times to the present. (Ado-Ekiti, SA Printers, Ile-Ife, 2017).

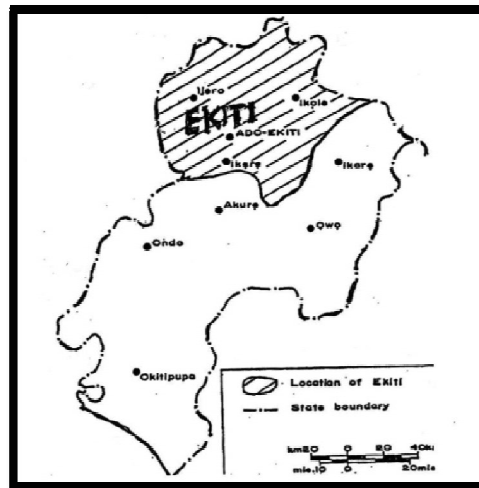


Figure 1: Map of Ekiti Division in the Old Ondo Province in the Colonial Era –
Source: Oguntuyi, 1979 P. 4

Prior to the British occupation of Yorubaland before the scramble for and partition of Africa, the people of Ekiti have been organized into kingdoms headed by principal Obas with subordinate towns headed by other minor Obas, Princes, Baales and Chiefs surrounding.¹⁰ The traditional political organization of the indigenous society enabled these people to be well coordinated to protect their various kingdoms and to instill presence of government built around palaces and the society.¹¹ This also helped them to ensure a flourishing commerce, trade and inter-communal relations to boost and sustain their local economy while enhancing the customs and traditional beliefs of the people.¹²

The traditional political system was an enviable and lasting system of chieftaincy aided by a unified family life and sources of livelihood for the defence of the society and its advancement with particular reliance of the age grade system, the guilds, the Council of Chiefs with the Iwarefa (Kingmakers) in the lead and the priesthood as well as the secret society called the Ogboni which aided the system of administration. There was a very strong connection between the Palace Chiefs, the family and quarter chiefs, the market chiefs, the warriors and Generals of the army and the aspirations of each community to achieve its goals in order to function effectively within the larger society.¹³

Land was a great value to the economy and expansion of the population as well as the territoriality of various kingdoms¹⁴ which are better known today as states, provinces or local areas if their geographical space falls within the political boundaries outlined during colonial era and thereafter. The degree of organization and relationship of the people in various communities was therefore influenced by the degree of their capacity and sphere of influence as well as the history of their origins and conquests in time and space.¹⁵ This was inherent in the political equation and social effect of their established lines of relationship and differences in terms of social inequality, hierarchy and controls. It actually formed the basis of the relationship among the kingdoms and subordinate towns in Ekiti at the advent of British occupation and during most of the years of the colonial rule between 1900 and 1960.

In looking at the role of Ekiti Obas prior to the Kiriji Wars, the expansionist agenda of some of the principal kingdoms influenced the way and manner they related with each other.¹⁶ The effect of inter-communal wars in finding ways to either improve their local economy or expand their scope of authority and influence made it clear that despite the similarities of these people, they were however often at loggerhead to survive. Nonetheless, many of the Ekiti Kingdoms were unable to dominate each other as they would have desired.

The wars between Ado-Ewi and Ikere was unabated for centuries since Ikere was formerly part of the Emure Kingdom headed by Elesun that Ewi as his guest assassinated to take over the rulership of the political capital of the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Ogunremi Deji & Biodun Adediran (ed.): Culture and Society in Yorubaland, Rex Charles, 1998, p.17; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109; Falola, Toyin & Genova, Ann: The Yoruba in Transition (History, Values and Modernity)

¹⁴ Lloyd, P.C. Yoruba Land Law, NISER, Ibadan, Oxford, 1962; Lloyd, P.C. The Political Development Of Yoruba Kingdoms In The 18th & 19th Centuries, Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1971, OP No. 31 Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003

¹⁵ Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Ogunremi Deji & Biodun Adediran (ed.): Culture and Society in Yorubaland, Rex Charles, 1998, p.17; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109; Falola, Toyin & Genova, Ann: The Yoruba in Transition (History, Values and Modernity)

¹⁶ Akintoye S.A. A History of the Yoruba People, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971; Oguntuyi, A.O., History of Ekiti: From the beginning to 1939 (1979), Bisi Books, Ibadan; Oguntuyi, A.O., Traditional Ekiti Kingdoms, Hope Paper Mills, Ado-Ekiti, ISBN 9780284899, 1986; Olomola, Isola: History of Ado-Ekiti From earliest times to the present. (Ado-Ekiti, SA Printers, Ile-Ife, 2017).

Elesun Kingdoms.¹⁷ Ikere became fiercely opposed to the attempt of Ewi to recolonise it after the demise of Elesun and this resulted to the role that the Benin War Commander, Ogoga played in saving Ikere and eventually displacing the Olukere over the affairs of Ikere.¹⁸

In similar veins, the wars between Ise and Emure was unabated and fierce to the extent that Ise often got military alliances with other kingdoms to suppress Emure which was also an ally of Ewi while Emure suffer much loss until the advent of the British colonial rule.¹⁹ A community known as Orun located between Ise and Emure relocated much of its people in the process to the Ewi territoriality between Ado-Ekiti and Igbemo where lies today, the second home of Orun people.²⁰

Within the scope of Northern Ekiti territories, the Otun people led by Oore dislocated the Aaye people to resettle in the current location while allowing those chiefs within the ranks and hierarchy of the Moba Confederacy to relocate and surround the Otun as the major kingdom of the clime. This is equally what occurred in most part of Ekiti kingdoms where the senior Obas locate their Kingdoms often in the centre of their sphere of influence while the surrounding communities and subordinate towns serves the buffer zones and gateway into the political capital of their kingdom otherwise regarded as the municipality.

The strategy of surrounding subordinate towns around the capital town helped in no small measure to safeguard the principal Oba against sudden attacks from invaders. It equally helped most Ekiti kingdoms to survive the onslaught that could have resulted to their destruction. They were easily alerted to prepare for evacuations or to move to battle field wars and resist the invading bands during the pre-colonial era. No doubt, many kingdoms were displaced due to wars of that era particularly those waged by the Benin hordes in its attempt to colonize Ekiti land after succeeding in displacing the headship of the indigenous people of Akure and placing them under a Benin War Brigadier – Daji (corrupted as Deji).

Similar influence of Benin was seen in the Owo axis and part of Akoko kingdoms just as some Ekiti communities were dislocated, intermingled and found new homes in Akokol and thereby leaving among Akoko people and becoming culturally bounded to them. Hence, some Ekiti communities are today as part of Akokol and in Ondo State by political and territorial division as well as cultural affiliation and emancipation. This was the scenario within which most Ekiti kingdoms exist and thrived in the pre-colonial era.

Efforts of each principal Ekiti kingdom to survive and establish a common ground for political stability and socio-cultural relevance within the sub ethnic group and Yoruba nation in the midst of continued invasion and destabilization of Ekiti territories called for vigilance and ultimate collaboration which eventually came to be known as the Ekiti Confederacy during the Kiriji (Ekitiparapo) wars.

3. Relationship and Emerging Role of Yoruba Obas: The Status Question

The popular Kiriji (Ekitiparapo) war could not be prevented or stopped until the British intervened through the help of the Alaafin of Oyo²¹ who was held in high esteem in Yorubaland and at that time owing to his position as an important ruler next only to the Ooni of Ife. Indeed, Alaafin had ruled the Oyo Empire and brought much fame and relevance to the Yoruba nation for centuries despite the fact that Yoruba tradition regards Ile-Ife as the motherland.

In the relationship between the Alaafin as an Emperor in the Oyo Empire and rulers of other Yoruba traditional kingdoms, it was obvious that Alaafin was second to none²² except the Ooni of Ife. This is because he did not only wield powers that was very extensive and incomparable militarily and politically in that era, his rule by extension made him the most influential and powerful Oba and indeed the ruler of the populous territories within the Yoruba Nation.²³

The effect of the Alaafin military and political conquest in Yoruba nation could not however remove the place and status of the Ooni as the head of the Yoruba nation, in his capacity as the main ruler of the motherland, Ile-Ife. This dovetails from tradition which regarded the Ooni of Ife as the Pope among principal Yoruba Obas (Alayeluwa) also regarded as Igba Keji Orisha (divine messengers). These set of traditional rulers can be referred to in modern day Catholicism in the ranks of Cardinals and Archbishops in the church system in addition to their roles as traditional rulers.²⁴

The role of the Ooni of Ile-Ife was enormous taking cognizance of Yoruba tradition that regards him as the Arole Odua (representative of the founder of Yoruba Nation- Oduduwa). The Ooni therefore enjoyed tremendous respect and undeniable privileges among the Yoruba traditional rulers just as Ile-Ife enjoys awesome recognition and quantum of respect among Yoruba people even when it was neither military equipped or politically organized to rule the entire Yoruba Nation.

The customs of Yoruba people as presented through the organization of their principal kingdoms and minor chiefdoms and the status of their monarchs were often determined by the source of crown of each Oba, their political relevance and spiritual significance within each region, though the character of each monarch and their prominence

¹⁷ Babatola, J.E.T.: This Fiery Man – Thoughts and Perspectives of High Chief Dr. J.E. Babatola, Samadek Publishers, Lagos, 2008

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Akintoye S.A. A History of the Yoruba People, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109

sometimes add value to their importance.²⁵ Other factors that aid their status and position in tradition was basically their military capacity and prowess and the alliances formed and exploits gained during their conquest.

The strategic nature of the location of each kingdom and its contribution to the regional trade, the economic and social life of each sub ethnic groups and its population, were the ultimate premium used to determine their seniority or status in the pre-colonial era.²⁶ In many instance, the relationship among the states, their location and potentials to create alliances further strengthened their goals and co-existence to sustain their Kingdom, play the required role within each sub ethnic groups and eventually contribute to the continuous expansion of the Yoruba nation.

It was therefore apparent clear and impossible for every Yoruba Obas to be equal to each other going by their history and tradition, territorial and military exploits and their relationship to one another. This is similar to what exist today among nations of the world where there are superpowers and other less powerful and practically vulnerable and powerless nations, who relies on big brothers and partners as well as allies and former colonial master to survive.

It is generally acceptable in Yoruba custom to assert that Yoruba traditional rulers of various kingdoms and chiefdoms within each sub ethnic group exercise different forms of independence and autonomy in their internal affairs, while the principal kings relate with each other at the level of their capacity and status. No doubt, any minor Oba or autonomous chief that came in contact with a superior (principal) Oba or who settles within its sphere of influence would either engage in a war of survival or pledge allegiance to the senior Oba in order to settle down with his people within the axis. Hence, such Oba invariably comes under the control of the senior Oba as a subordinate Oba.

The same happens where a minor Oba borders a senior Oba. It would result to a master-servant or superior-inferior relationship in the tradition and customs of the people in the era. This is why the quest and influence of the Alaafin of Oyo and the Oba of Benin was prominent among Yoruba states where they bore the brunt of their colonial rule as vassals to the Emperors. As well known in Yoruba tradition, no Oba can seek equal importance or fame with a superior Oba. This tradition subsists among Yoruba people and is very strong in Benin Kingdom where no Oba dare compete with the Oba of Benin (in Edo State). In the relationship of senior Ekiti Obas and the minor Ekiti Obas, Princes, Baales and Chief, the predominance and status of the senior Oba reflected in their relationship with the minor Obas surrounding them just as it was seen in most parts of Yorubaland.²⁷ This tradition separated the Pelupelu in Ekiti from other Ekiti Obas just as similar tradition separates other Obas from principal Obas in other sub ethnic group in Yorubaland before Kiriji wars.

The uniqueness in the relationship of the people in the various climes across Yorubaland and however was some of the changes that Kiriji war brought to Yorubaland. This change tends to have plagued the relationship of some minor Ekiti Obas, Baales and Chiefs with the senior Ekiti Obas. It had also resulted to agitations or aspirations for equal status or assertion of their independence and equality with those senior Ekiti Obas contrary to Yoruba tradition and customs. It was apparently clear that during the negotiations to end Ekitiparapo (Ijesha/Ekiti) wars against Ibadan armies, Ekiti soldiers and their supporters became very controversial. Most of the Ekiti warriors and Obas insisted that they have to be independent of the Alaafin of Oyo and his Ibadan imperial rulers since Ekiti people were Yoruba people like the Oyo and Ibadan people and they should not serve as vassals or slaves of anyone.²⁸

It was stated categorically in the Kiriji Treaty that the Alaafin and the Oba of Ilesha shall stand to each other in relationship of the elder brother to the younger brother as before when the Ekiti countries were independent.²⁹ The implication of the agreement was that Ekiti Kingdoms must become independent of Oyo despite the fact that they regard as Oyo Alaafin as senior (superior) in a relationship with the Kingdoms of Ijesha and Ekiti. The further implication of the changing attitude of the people and their Obas is that they began to gradually assert their independence from one another as the opportunity permits even if one Kingdom has a senior Oba while the other has a minor Oba, Baale or Chief.

The environment of traditional political relationship in Ekiti began to change as the people ushered in the British colonial rule and this is the cause of the current day conflict of interest among Pelupelu Oba (Senior Oba) and other Ekiti Obas. What however made the relationship of these traditional rulers to be more contentious does not remove the tradition that established their various status and relevance in Yorubaland either as minor Obas and Baales or senior Obas and how they should relate to each other in the hierarchy of traditional rulers. If the Obas would rather claim equal status and arrogate much attention to themselves contrary to the tradition, there would be nothing left to cherish in their cultural background and heritage.

This is the problem which the colonial masters failed to realize and which has become a land mine for modern day politicians to dabble into and use as basis for the classification of chiefs. What is left to be resolved through these processes are the underlying political factors and the evolving traditional political system arising from the review of the chieftaincy laws and the frequent executive orders by fiat to promote certain categories of Obas from a lower rung of the ladder to higher rung, which may eventually leave no one in any lower rank to the other. The question that such actions

²⁵ Akintoye S.A. A History of the Yoruba People, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

²⁶ Oguntuyi, A.O., History of Ekiti: From the beginning to 1939 (1979), Bisi Books, Ibadan; Oguntuyi, A.O., Traditional Ekiti Kingdoms, Hope Paper Mills, Ado-Ekiti, ISBN 9780284899, 1986; Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109

²⁷ Lloyd, P.C. Yoruba Land Law, NISER, Ibadan, Oxford, 1962; Lloyd, P.C. The Political Development Of Yoruba Kingdoms In The 18th & 19th Centuries, Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1971, OP No. 31 Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003

²⁸ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University for the award of Doctorate degree in History and International Studies, 2019 In the Clause 3 of the 1886 Kiriji Treaty,

²⁹ Op. Cit. Babatola, J.T. - See Clause 3 of the 1886 Kiriji Treaty

would again bring surrounds the reality of government to sustain the rich culture and tradition of the people from ancient times.

Today most Ekiti Obas are referred to as His Royal Majesty and even some preferred to be called Imperial Majesty, when most of Ekiti traditional rulers in colonial era were His Royal Highnesses and His Highness. If any of the Ekiti Obas qualifies today to be referred to as His Royal Majesty, it would be the 16 Pelupelu Obas or at best the totality of the Ekiti Obas in the category of First Class King. The implication is that if the hierarchy of Yoruba Obas were to be properly situated, it would have consisted of the following categories:

- His Eminence and Imperial Majesty (Oduduwa Progenitors i.e. Ooni, Alaafin)
- His Royal Majesties (Senior Obas i.e. Alake, Awujale, Ewi, Ajero, Elekole, Oore, Deji, Olowo, Orangun, etc)
- His Royal Highnesses (Minor Obas)
- His Highnesses (Baales and Town Heads)

4. Existence of Pelupelu and Its Changing Phases after 1900 Ekitiparapo Council

Pelupelu which is otherwise regarded as the Conference of Senior Ekiti Obas have been in existence for over two or more centuries.³⁰The active participation of the Pelupelu in the affairs of Ekiti country therefore helped to sustain the independence and political stability of the Ekiti sub ethnic group in Yorubaland for so long. The Pelupelu stood as a major collaborative strategy in the pre-colonial era for the senior Ekiti Obas to interact and resolve their differences as a sub ethnic group within the Yorubaland despite the expansionist agenda of some of them.

The Pelupelu equally helped Ekiti kingdoms to become well prepared and organized to withstand external invasions since its diplomacy was aimed at maintaining regional peace and political stability. The balance of power achieved by setting up the meeting among these sons and relatives of Oduduwa who became rulers of indigenous people and migrants that later found homes in Ekitiland helped to evolve the currency and future of the Ekiti country.³¹

The existence and role of the Pelupelu became a major factor that later helped the Ekiti people in the face of oppressive rule under Ibadan Imperialism to agitate for their independence from the middle of 19th century with the example of Ado-Ekiti and Aramoko Alliance against the invasion of Ibadan warriors which led to the enslavement of some traditional rulers and chiefs and the later popular Anglican priest from Iyin – Ifamuboni (Babamboni). Many of the returnee captives and their descendants from Ibadan and Oyo environment who were born outside or carted away in that period were part of the Ekiti people known for instance as the Ado Oyo in Ado Ekiti while the Oyo settlements at Okemesi for instance was populated by warriors demobilized after the Kiriji wars but found homes in Ekiti.³²

It is imperative to state that the revolt of Fabunmi at Okemesi created a desired conscious efforts of Ekiti people to break the yoke of Yoruba colonialism and demand once and for all for their independence, though it was not freely given. Ekiti people and their neighbours – the Ijesha had to form an alliance known as the EKITIPARAPO CONFEDERACY to vehemently oppose the Ibadan rulers and warriors and to lead military campaigns for sixteen years of the Ekitiparapo (Kiriji) wars. This was after the convening of the Pelupelu war conference of Ekiti Obas, warriors and towns representatives at Otun regarded as a strategic location to reduce interference and detect any infiltration of the Conference and proceedings of the meeting.³³

It is on record that the meeting of Obas and Military Commanders held at Otun did not have the full compliments of the Pelupelu in attendance, but it had their blessings. Indeed, it provided the conveners and the entire Ekiti people, the opportunity to develop an effective plan against the Ibadan Army while equally perfecting plans to overthrow the Provincial Consuls (Ajele) and to drive them out of Ekiti.³⁴ The resultant effect was the levy of wars against Ekiti kingdoms by the Ibadan imperial Army, which stood as an extension of the Oyo Empire despite asserting its independence from the Alaafin and disobeying its orders not to invade Ekiti.³⁵After the Kiriji wars and the British occupation of Yorubaland, the 16 Ekiti Pelupelu Obas met in 1887. Many of the meetings of the Pelupelu were held and still being held at Ado-Ekiti being the political capital of Ekiti people since the colonial era.³⁶

Membership of the Pelupelu has changed over time through replacement by substitution and the Presidency of the Pelupelu has been rotated among the 17 senior Ekiti Obas since 1947.³⁷ This was also gazette in the Ekiti State Traditional Rulers Council Law (2000) as earlier sustained by their roles in the Western House of Chiefs, Western Council of Chiefs, Ondo State Council of Chiefs and the much later Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers (Chiefs).

³⁰ A correspondence from the Alaafin of Oyo – Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III, to denounce the actions of the Ekiti State Government to issue query to the Pelupelu Oba in March 2020 asserted that the Pelupelu had existed for times immemorial.

³¹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.E.T.: *This Fiery Man – Thoughts and Perspectives of High Chief Dr. J.E. Babatola*, Samadek Publishers, Lagos, 2008; Babatola, J.T., *Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960)* – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University in History and International Studies, 2019

³² Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.E.T.: *This Fiery Man – Thoughts and Perspectives of High Chief Dr. J.E. Babatola*, Samadek Publishers, Lagos, 2008; Babatola, J.T., *Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960)* – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University for the award of Doctorate degree in History and International Studies, 2019

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Akintoye S.A. *A History of the Yoruba People*, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893)*, Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

³⁶ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., *Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960)* – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

³⁷ Ibid.

Admission into the Pelupelu among Ekiti Obas was built around the status of Ekiti Obas from times immemorial and their place in Ekiti history, geography and economy. This was similar in fashion to the status of traditional rulers in other parts of Yorubaland like Osun State, where the Ooni take precedent above the Owa Obokun and Orangun of Ila among others and in Ogun State where the Alake of Egba, Awujale of Ijebu Ode, Akarigbo of Remo and Olu of Yelwa (Ilaro) would stand ahead of others.³⁸

In tracing the process of placing statutory recognition on the Conference of the Pelupelu Oba, it was on record that Major Reeve Tucker inaugurated the North Eastern District of Yorubaland Council of Chiefs of the Ekitiparapo (**Pelupelu**) on 21st June, 1900 at Oke-Imo, Ilesha³⁹ and it showed a lot of impact on traditional politics and chieftaincy matters in Ekiti Division at that time. The Pelupelu Obas were given the role of prescribed authorities over the minor Chiefs and Baales at the time under the colonial government.⁴⁰ The meetings of Ekiti Pelupelu Obas made these senior Ekiti Obas to become celebrities in the writings of the renowned Ekiti historian, Banji Akintoye because it afforded them the opportunity to show their traditional grandeur – shimmering, beaded, high-domed, Oduduwa crowns beaded shoes and scepters, with all complete buglers or trumpeters to proclaim their arrival at meetings.⁴¹

Indeed, the senior Ekiti Obas were designated as Native Authorities and served in as chairmen of the Native Courts where they were not represented. They also served as the Prescribed Authorities in the appointment of minor chiefs, Baales and quarter chiefs in their kingdoms. They became the official agent of the state for the collection of tax among citizens, source of public mobilization to aid government policies and programmes, symbol of tradition and culture in the State, holders of rights in performance of traditional ceremonies required by law and attendance of public functions, hosting of meetings in the palaces to promote peace and harmony in the community and conflict resolution, arbitration and settlement of chieftaincy, family, land and matters of socio-cultural relevance.⁴²

Monsignor A.O. Oguntuyi writings gave ample insight into Ekiti geographical setting using anthropological approach to discuss issues surrounding its origins, social organization, habits, similarities and dissimilarities of dialects among the different clans and communal idiosyncrasies of the different Kingdoms of the Ekiti people. It was a sociologist's account of Ekiti tradition though it made fewer efforts in reconstructing Ekiti history because Oguntuyi did not exhaustively approach Ekiti history. He rather created some doubts in his narratives to avoid controversy, leaving readers to form their opinions. What however remained unmistakably bold and clear in Oguntuyi assertion surrounds the existence of the Pelupelu with the emphasis he made on the 16 Ekiti Principal Kingdoms as rendered thus:

'When Ekiti consisted of 16 independent kingdoms including Akure, Ado-Ekiti kingdom had boundaries with 13 of the other kingdoms leaving only 2 Obaships with which the Ados had no land connection. Ado-Ekiti is in fact the melting pot of the variegated culture, the changing habits, the national aspirations as well as the cherished philosophies and moral codes of the entire Ekiti people.'⁴³

The position of Oguntuyi like most of the other early writers was the same in discussing the existence of principal kingdoms in Ekiti prior to the advent of colonial rule. This was also a tradition that the British agents had recorded in the various colonial Intelligence Reports on Ekiti Towns and Kingdoms and regarded as part of the tradition of the Ekiti people. No doubt, the constitution of the Ekitiparapo Confederation at Oke Imo in 1900 by Major Reece Tucker was in furtherance of these traditions as shown by the list of its membership among the Ekiti Pelupelu Obas as reproduced below:

4.1. 1900 Tucker List

Oore of Otun, Elekole of Ikole, Ewi of Ado, Olobo of Obo (Now in Kwara State), Ajero of Ijero, Alara of Aramoko, Deji of Akure (Now in Ondo State), Alaaye of Efon, Arinjale of Ise-Ekiti, Olojudo of Ido, Oloye of Oye, Ologotun of Ogotun, Ogoga of Ikere, Oloja of Imesi, Onitaji of Itaji-Ekiti and Onisan of Isan.⁴⁴

A further inquiry into the study of the tradition and statutes with respect to the role and functions of the Pelupelu Obas and their membership within the Government recognized or constituted platforms leaves no doubt about the sanctity of the Conference. Indeed, various lists of senior Ekiti Obas who qualifies for the membership of the Pelupelu as drawn from historical works, archival documents and government publications were similar as reproduced below:

4.2. 1903 Government Service List

Ewi of Ado, Ajero of Ijero, Ogoga of Ikere, Olojudo of Ido, Obalufon Alaaye of Efon, Arinjale of Ise, Olojaoke (Owa) of Okemesi, Alara of Aramoko, Oloye of Oye, Ologotun of Ogotun, Ata (attah) of Aiyede, Onitaji of Itaji and Onisan of Isan⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁴⁰ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁴¹ Akintoye S.A. A History of the Yoruba People, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

⁴² Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁴³ Oguntuyi, A.O., History of Ekiti: From the beginning to 1939 (1979), Bisi Books, Ibadan

⁴⁴ Government of Ondo State, Report of the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission, Vol. I-IV, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

4.3. 1920 List of Ekiti Confederation Council

The Elekole of Ikole, The Ewi of Ado-Ekiti, The Ajero of Ijero, The Alara of Aramoko, The Deji of Akure, The Alaaye of Efon, The Arinjale of Ise, The Olojudo of Ido, The Oloye of Oye, The Ologotun of Ogotun, The Ogoga of Ikere, The Oloja of Okemesi, The Onitaji of Itaji, The Onisan of Isan, The Ata of Aiyede and The Elemure of Emure⁴⁶

4.4. 1921 Rev. Samuel Johnson List

Oore of Otun, Ajero of Ijero, Ewi of Ado, Elekole of Ikole Alara of Aramoko, Alaaye of Efon Alaaye Ajanpada (Deji) of Akure Ologotun of Ogotun Olojudo of Ido, Ata of Aiyede Oloja Oke of Igbo Odo, Oloye of Oye Olomuo of Omuo Onire of Ire, Arinjale of Ise and Onitaji of Itaji⁴⁷

4.5. 1971 S.A. Akintoye List

Oore of Otun, Elekole of Ikole, Ewi of Ado, Oloye of Oye, Ajero of Ijero, Olojudo of Ido, Ogoga of Ikere, Deji of Akure, Arinjale of Ise-Ekiti, Elemure of Emure, Alaaye of Efon, Oloja of Imesi, Alara of Aramoko, Onisan of Isan, Onitaji of Itaji-Ekiti, Olobo of Obo and Ologotun of Ogotun.⁴⁸

4.6. 1979 Monsgr. A. Oguntuyi List

Ewi of Ado, Ajero of Ijero, Elekole of Ikole, Oore of Otun, Deji of Akure, Alara of Aramoko, Olojudo of Ido, Ogoga of Ikere, Oloye of Oye, Arinjale of Ise, Elemure of Emure, Alaaye of Efon, Onitaji of Itaji, Olojaoke (Owa) of Okemesi, Onisan of Isan, Ologotun of Ogotun and Onire of Ire.⁴⁹

It is imperative to state that the British later realized that Ijesha and Ekiti Obas were independent and autonomous Kingdoms of different sub ethnic groups bonded only together by the desire for an alliance to break the yoke of Ibadan Imperialism and by implications, the Oyo hegemony. Hence, it was necessary to divide them into separate political enclaves so as to active the smooth running of the colonial administration which demands that the indirect rule should be economically employed and administered without frictions. The British colonial agents had no choice but to separate the Ijesha and Ekiti people to avoid a deepening crisis that lies ahead⁵⁰ and which can become a clog in the wheel of progress for its exploration of resources at the hinterland to the metropole.

The disbandment of the Ijesha Ekiti Union under the North Eastern Yorubaland therefore took place in December, 2012. With the inauguration of the Ekiti District Council in 1913, a newly adopted political system emerged for Ekiti people though it did not crystallize into operational machinery until the introduction of 1916 Native Administration Ordinance which took effect in January 1917. It was the ordinance that gave further recognition to the principal Ekiti Obas to act as sole administrators of their Native authorities under the Council. The British agents equally stationed their officials in the capital town of each district, provinces and the region in order to be able to influence public life and palace administration in line with colonial policies to achieve the aims of indirect rule system.⁵¹

The passage of the Native Administration Ordinance in 1916 created 15 Ekiti Senior Oba as native authorities indicated in the list below.

4.7. 1916 Native Administration Ordinance List of Ekiti Native Authorities

Elekole of Ikole, Ewi of Ado-Ekiti, Ajero of Ijero-Ekiti, Alara of Aramoko-Ekiti, Deji of Akure, Alaaye of Efon, Arinjale of Ise-Ekiti, Olojudo of Ido-Ekiti, Oloye of Oye-Ekiti, Ologotun of Ogotun-Ekiti, Ogoga of Ikere-Ekiti, Oloja Oke (Owa) of Okemesi, Onitaji of Itaji-Ekiti, Onisan of Isan-Ekiti and Ata (Attah) of Aiyede-Ekiti.⁵²

The list indicated above shows that two Ekiti senior Obas were left out as Native Authorities namely: Oore of Otun (Moba) and Elemure of Emure-Ekiti. The absence of the two senior Ekiti Obas was attributed to the fact that Oore of Otun was moved to Ilorin Province in Northern Nigeria (North Central) due to boundary delimitation at the time, while the Elemure of Emure was grouped under the Native Authority headed by the Arinjale of Ise until Ise and Emure were constituted into separate districts in 1924 and 1930 respectively. The secession of Akure from Ekiti in 1946 however reduced the number of recognized Ekiti Senior Obas.⁵³

5. The Sources of Crowns and Status of Ekiti Obas

It is very important to understand the status of Ekiti Obas in order to determine their role and give them appropriate recognition conferred on them by tradition. This is because the modern day government since the colonial era has made efforts to grade and classify all Ekiti Obas under the law and Yoruba customs so as to give specific recognition and attention to them and their traditional importance within the sub ethnic group. Moreover, the availability of relevant information on the sources of crowns and status of these Ekiti Obas could help in addressing knotty issues presented by

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷ Samuel Johnson - History of the Yorubas

⁴⁸ Akintoye S.A. A History of the Yoruba People, Amalion Publishing, 2010, Dakar; Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

⁴⁹ Oguntuyi, A.O., History of Ekiti: From the beginning to 1939 (1979), Bisi Books, Ibadan

⁵⁰ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁵¹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁵² Native Administration Ordinance of 1916 on Ekiti Native Authorities

⁵³ Ibid. - Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960)

the recurrence of conflicts and agitations among them in the attempt of some of them to seek undue recognition and attention

A good point of reference to therefore review with relevance of these traditional rulers in playing their customary roles lies in existing colonial materials that documented their sources and roles. Indeed, a very important historical record in this wise included the well documented publication of Alademomi Kenyo (1952) where he explored the sources of crowns of the Ekiti Obas to determine their origin, relevance and role within the scope of Yoruba tradition.

5.1. Oduduwa Sons Crowned as Ekiti Monarchs at Ile-Ife:

Ajero of Ile Ijero, Alara of Ile Ara-moko, Alaye of Efon, Deji of Akure, Elemure of Emure, Ewi of Ile Ado, Elekole of Ikole, Olojudo of Ido faboro, Olomuo of Omuo, Onirun of Irun, Onisan of Isan, Ore of Otun, Ologotun of Ogotun, Ologbagi of Ogbagi, Oloja-Oke (Owa) of Okemesi, Oloye of Ile Oye, Owalobo of Obo⁵⁴

5.2. Ekiti Monarch Given Crown by Benin Kingdom:

Ogoga of Ikere⁵⁵

5.3. Ekiti Monarchs Given Crown in Other Parts of Yorubaland

Arinjale of Use (Ise), Ata (Attah) of Aiyede, Owa of Odo Owa⁵⁶

5.4. Ekiti Monarchs from Ife Barred from Wearing Crown:

Olojudo of Ido Irapa (Ido-Ile), Olosi of Osi Ekiti, Onimesi of Imesi Lasigidi⁵⁷

5.5. Ekiti Monarchs from Ile-Ife with Unrecognised Crowns

Alara of Ilara Mokin, Alare of Are, Alawe of Ilawe, Alawo of Awo, Alaye of Aye Moba, Arajaka of Ugbara (Igbara) Odo, Aworoko of Iworoko, Ekiri of Ero, Elewu of Ewu Ileje, Eleda of Eda Ileje, Elejelu of Ijelu, Elepe of Epe Ijero, Elepe of Epe Moba, Elesun of Ilesun Ikole, Olode of Ode, Olosin of Osin Ikole, Olujare of Ujare (Ijare), Olukoro of Ukoro (Ikoro), Olupere of Ipere Ileje, Oluporo of Uporo, Oluro of Uro Ikole, Olusi of Usi, Olusin of Isin Pakunde, Oluyin of Uyin (Iyin), Onigede of Igede, Onikun of Ikun Moba, Onire of Ire, Oniye of Iye Ileje, Oba of Ilofa, Obaleo of Erimope, Oloja of Egosi, Oloja of Ora Ido, Olora of Orin Ido (Ora Ido), Olorin of Orin Ido, Owajumu of Omu Ijelu, Owalosun of Osun Moba, Owalogbo of Ilogbo, Owatapa of Itapa⁵⁸

5.6. Other Ekiti Kings Who Obtained Crown from Benin

Onijan of Ijan, Oro of Agbado⁵⁹

5.7. Ekiti Monarchs from Places outside Ile-Ife and Benin

Adapogun of Ipogun, Ajagun of Ilu Omoba, Akota of Ikota, Alawo of Awo, Alara of Ara Ikole, Alara of Ara Ijero, Alasa of Ilasa, Onimesi of Imesi Lasigidi, Alaye of Oke Igbira, Alaye Aye Ido, Apalufin of Aisegba, Baale (Elesure) of Esure, Elerio of Erio, Ejisun of Arigidi, Elewe of Ita Ogbolu, Eleyin of Odo Eyin, Eleyio of Eyio, Esaoye of Isaoye, Elemobo (Balemo) of (Araromi) Obo, Okiti of Uju (Iju), Olikun of Ikun Ikole, Olupoti of Ipoti, Oluroye of Iroko, Oluropora of Iropora, Onibule of Ibule, Onifisin of Ifisin, Oninu of Inu, Onio of Ilogo, Oniyapa of Iyapa, Oba of Igbemo, Obaisa of Igbole, Obajagun of Arigidi, Obala (Obanla) of Ijesa Isu, Odofin of Afao, Ojurin of Ijurin, Oloja of Ifaki, Oloja Eseta of Eseta, Oloja of Egbe, Olorin of Orin Ikole, Oloro of Oro Ijero, Olosan of Osan Moba, Olowa of Ugbara Oke, Owa of Odo Igbira⁶⁰

In reviewing the well-known tradition of Ekiti Obaship, a failure to divert, compromise or non-conformity of the role and status of the Ekiti Obas to tradition and customs of the people can only be accommodated where there is a sweeping reform of the entire traditional political system without reference to their meeting together or their traditional sources and relationship. Otherwise, any step taken may amount to an attempt to either bastardize the traditional political institutions and their revered age long relationships. It would further upturn the recognition of their order of hierarchy and relationship within the traditional arrangement and organization. Other archival materials on the origin of Ekiti Obas was discussed by the Ooni of Ife during the 1903 enquiry of the Colonial Government as follows:

5.8. Ooni's 1903 List of Ekiti Paramount Rulers

Ijero Kingdom (Ajero of Ijero), Aramoko Kingdom (Alara of Ara), Ado Ewi Kingdom (Ewi of Ado), Ikole (Egbe-Oba) Kingdom - Elekole of Ikole, Otun (Moba) Kingdom - Oore of Otun.⁶¹

It is obvious from the list presented by Oba Adelekan Olubuse, the Ooni of Ife on Yoruba Obas that qualify to wear beaded crowns that he made mention of Eight (8) Ekiti Obas out of which 5 were regarded as possessing the status of paramount rulers. This is an issue that is left to be determined by their tradition, the size of their Kingdom and wealth their recognition among other Ekiti and Yoruba Obas as highlighted below.

⁵⁴ E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Chapter 2, p. 15-17

⁵⁵ E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Chapter 4, p. 20

⁵⁶ E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Chapter 8, p. 25

⁵⁷ E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Chapter 9, p. 26

⁵⁸ Source: E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Ch. 10, p. 28-31

⁵⁹ Source: E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Chapter 11, p. 32-33

⁶⁰ Source: E.A. Kenyo, 1952, Ch. 13, p. 37-45

⁶¹ Op.Cit - J.E.T. Babatola - Extracts of Ooni Olubuse 1903 list of Yoruba paramount rulers

5.9. Ooni's List of Crowned Ekiti Obas

Osi Kingdom (Olosi of Osi), Otun (Moba) Kingdom (Oore of Otun), Ido (Faboro) Kingdom - Olojudo of Ido, Ijero Kingdom - Ajero of Ijero, Aramoko Kingdom - Alara of Ara, Ikole (Egbe-Oba) Kingdom - Elekole of Ikole, Efon (Alaaye) Kingdom - Alaaye of Efon and Ado (Ewi) Kingdom - Ewi of Ado.⁶²

In further looking at the list presented by the Ooni containing the prominent Ekiti Obas (paramount rulers) and Olojas (recognized chiefs) in well established traditions of Ile-Ife, it is obvious that seventeen (17) Ekiti towns and Kingdoms with their natural rulers would stand tall above others when giving consideration to the status of Ekiti Obas in terms of seniority and superiority with others as shown in the table drawn below.

5.10. Ooni's List of Ekiti Obas and Olojas

Otun (Moba) Kingdom - Oore of Otun, Ijero Kingdom - Ajero of Ijero, Ido (Faboro) Kingdom - Olojudo of Ido, Aramoko Kingdom - Alara of Ara, Ikole (Egbe-Oba) Kingdom - Elekole of Ikole, Ado (Ewi) Kingdom - Ewi of Ado, Oye Kingdom - Oloye of Oye, Efon (Alaaye) Kingdom - Alaaye of Efon, Ogotun Kingdom - Ologotun of Ogotun, Ikere Kingdom, Ogoga of Ikere, Emure Kingdom - Elemure of Emure, Igbara-Odo Kingdom - Owa of Igbara, Oke-Imesi Kingdom - Oloja Oke of Imesi (Owa of Oke Mesi), Imesi Kingdom II - Oloja Oke of Imesi, Obo Kingdom - Owalo of Obbo, Ilawe Kingdom - Onilawe (Alawe) of Ilawe, Erijiyan Kingdom - Olohan of Erijiyan⁶³

5.11. List of Recognized Ekiti Kingdoms as Native Authorities (1917)

Ado, Ikole, Ido, Oye, Ise, Emure, Ikere, Omuo, Ogotun, Ayede, Isan, Itaji, Ijero, Okemesi, Efon and Akure.⁶⁴

6. British Inability to Create Ekiti Paramountcy

It is obvious that the British failed in the bid to create a sole authority in Ekitiland unlike what they easily pacified and achieved in other Yoruba Provinces and Divisions like Egba (Alake of Egba), Ijebu (Awujale of Ijebu Ode), Owo (Olowo of Owo), Ijesha (Owa Obokun Adimula), Oyo (Alaafin of Oyo) among others, due to the controversy, contestation of hegemony and balance of power that had existed among Principal Ekiti Kingdoms and their senior Obas prior to Kiriji wars. The tradition of the Ekiti Pelupelu Oba made it impossible to impose a specific senior Ekiti Oba on others as the paramount ruler of Ekiti. The most obvious was to make the capital of the most prominent among the Ekiti Pelupelu Oba as the political capital of Ekiti people and no more.

Indeed, the British had no choice than to allow for peace to reign when it reverted to the traditional pattern of relationship among Ekiti Oba by devising the formation of Ekiti Confederation Council in 1900 to give statutory identity and recognition to the senior Ekiti Obas as prescribed authorities and native authorities to represent the interest of the entirety of Ekitiland when the Ekiti and Ijesa Obas were constituted into the Council at Oke-Imo, Ilesha on 21st June, 1900. With the dissolution of the North-Eastern District on 31st December, 1912, the British decided to establish Ekiti Native Authority and extracted the Ekiti Obas from Ijesa-Ekiti Council to form a separate Ekiti Confederation Council which was inaugurated on 1st March, 1920, amidst pomp and pageantry.⁶⁵

A study of Ekiti people and tradition during the colonial era shows that it would be impossible to administer Ekitiland without the existence of the Council (Pelupelu) and this was the view of the British colonial agent at the time.⁶⁶ Hence, the importance of the Pelupelu was that it stood as the fabric and legitimacy of authority within Ekiti traditional political system and society. Furthermore, the Ekiti Confederation Council⁶⁷ during colonial era performed many important functions such as:

- Serving as the authority and faces of paramount rulers designated as prescribed authorities over other minor Chiefs and Baales.
- Involved in the implementation of Government policies for the introduction and collection of Owo-Ile (Poll Tax) in their various domains to generate taxes for the running of the local administration.
- Collaborating with the District Officer to ensure that palm trees and other economic trees like Iroko, Agao and Apepe were not destroyed in their domains.
- Engaging in activities of the Native authorities (today's Local Government) and
- Empowered to engage their subjects in the execution of minor public works, grant of timber concession, signing of permits for timber felling and dealing with official correspondence.

In looking at the British-local relations, it was apparent that traditional rulers who complied with the British colonial policies often enjoyed greater privilege and opportunities unlike their counterparts who decided to oppose or show discontent against the State. This shows the degree of tolerance and cooperation that existed between the British, the traditional rulers and the local people in Ekitiland. Akintoye's reference to the British attempts to elevate Ewi of Ado-Ekiti above other senior Ekiti Obas was invariably a pointer to the fact that some Obas enjoyed British support in Ekitiland.⁶⁸

⁶² Op.Cit - J.E.T. Babatola - Extracts of Ooni Olubuse 1903 list of Yoruba paramount rulers

⁶³ Op.Cit - J.E.T. Babatola - Source: Extracts of Ooni Olubuse 1903 list of Yoruba paramount rulers and Monsgr. Oguntuyi 1979 List of Ekiti Obas and Olojas

⁶⁴ Op.Cit - J.E.T. Babatola - See L.C. Gwam p.5

⁶⁵ Ibid. - Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960)

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Akintoye, S.A., Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland (1840-1893), Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo, London, Longman, 1971

Indeed, the attempt to compensate Ewi as a ruler with position of paramountcy where a tradition of plurality of equality exists among traditional rulers could have distorted the tradition even though Ewi deserves it by his prominence and territoriality. Nonetheless, the 1930s protest in Ekitiland forced the British to abandon the attempt to impose an Oba over another. Though some Obas continued to enjoy the privileges of their status in exchange for their support for the British, nationalistic agitations eventually displaced the role of traditional rulers in emerging political process. This is why the majority of scholars who studied the history of Ekitiland of that era were consistent and cautious in presenting the 1900 and 1920 list of Ekiti Council of Chiefs to validate its relevance and the actual status of the members since no one was regarded in the tradition of the Pelupelu to be superior to the order beyond the tradition that each possess within its domain and source of arrival and conquest in Ekitiland. This is why the colonial government in 1924 listed the first and second class chiefs who were not subordinates to other Native Authorities in Ekiti as follows:

6.1. *1924 List of Native Authorities in Ekiti Division*

Deji of Akure, Ewi of Ado, Elekole of Ikole, Ajero of Ijero, Alara of Aramoko, Olojudo of Ido, Alaaye of Efon, Oloye of Oye, Ogoga of Ikere, Arinjale of Ise, Ologotun of Ogotun, Atta of Aiyede, Onishan of Isan, Onitaji of Itaji and Oloja of Okemesi.⁶⁹

The controversy generated by 1900 and the 1920 list of Ekiti Council membership were referenced in the Southern Nigeria Handbook (1912) which is a better and more acceptable list of the prominence, status and traditional relevance of members of Ekiti Confederation, as indicated below:

6.2. *1912 Southern Nigeria Handbook on Ekiti Confederation and Its Principal Obas*

Ado under the Ewi, Ikere under the Ogoga, Ogotun under the Ologotun, Ikole under the Elekole, Aiyede under the Atta, Ise under the Arinjale, Ara(moko) under the Alara, Ishan under the Onisan, Efon under the Alaaye, Itaji under the Onitaji, Iddo under the Olojudo, Okemesi under Oloja Owa, Ijero under the Ijero, Imesi Ipole under Oloja Owa and Oye under the Oloye.⁷⁰

7. Ekiti Obas and Their Frosty Relationship since the Colonial Era

The inauguration of Ekiti District Council and the grant of Ekiti Native Authorities aided the acceptance of the hierarchy and seniority existing among the Ekiti Obas since modern times, though it also generated unhealthy competition and confrontation. Arising from the vehement opposition among senior Ekiti Obas on the choice of its chairman going by the predominance of the policy of permanent chairmanship (headship) of traditional councils elsewhere, the focus shifted around the paramountcy of the Oore, the Elekole or the Ewi for a long time.

The Oore of Otun chaired Ekiti Pelupelu in August 1900 and the Elekole of Ikole took over from 1919 till 1939 when agitations to remove him found expression in the appointment of the Alara of Aramoko as his successor. The attendant crisis surrounding the formation of the Council nearly destroyed the sacredness of kingship institutions in Ekiti land. The colonial agents however used force and consensus to have their ways and they often patronized the choice of the Oore and the Elekole for the following reasons:

- The duo had close ties to British Officials from the period of Kiriji.
- The duo accepted the colonial rule much earlier.
- The duo were involved in the pacification and enforcement of colonial rule
- The duo was rather amenable to colonial policies than the Ewi and Ado people and
- The occupants of the Ewi throne before Oba Daniel Anirare Aladesanmi II were unassertive of their status among the senior Ekiti Obas.⁷¹

Prior to the colonial rule, Ekiti rulers were considered super-human, whose personality commanded respect and awe among their subjects. They maintained a measure of seclusion from the general public to maintain their sacredness and protect their invincibility as divinely empowered beings. However, reference to the senior Ekiti Obas as colonial agent errands during colonial era hindered them from performing the patrons' role except in advisory capacity at the Ekiti Council.

The enormous powers enjoyed by the District Officers over the Native Court whittle down the prestige of the average Ekiti Oba and they became less authoritative and sovereign. This was indeed one of the reasons for the non-participation of the Ewi in Native Court affairs where he was often represented by his Chiefs in order to retain his status and prestige.⁷² Furthermore, a great mistrust and suspicion crept into the relationship of Ekiti Obas due to the persistent demand of the British agents on Native Authorities requiring them to become overbearing and offensive in their direct involvement with local administration, taxation and chieftaincy matters in many instances.⁷³

To a large extent, membership of the Ekiti Parapo Council (Pelupelu) in 1900 was a vague perception of the British about Ekiti political structure as criticized by those who were not properly placed or excluded from the Council. The seniority between Ewi and Elekole for instance reared its head in the History of Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and Elekole of Ikole

⁶⁹ 1924 Nigeria Gazette Notice No. 58 on Native Authority Ordinance (Cap. 70)

⁷⁰ A. Adegbola, Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilization, 2009, p. 614

⁷¹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

forwarded to the Resident in March, 1935 by the District Officer of Ekiti Division.⁷⁴ However, the tours of Ekitiland by Commissioner R.L Bower from Ibadan in 1890s to 1900s and those of the Travelling/District Commissioner Reeve-Tucker leading to the 1900 Oke-Imo, Ilesha meeting revealed the segmented settlement pattern of Ekitiland. It showed the existence of numerous autonomous chiefdoms not suitable for a well planned British administrative structure, since the British officers were repulsive of the chiefdoms openly described as 'recalcitrant.' The only alternatives was to bring these autonomous and subordinate chiefdoms under principal traditional rulers, irrespective of their status since they are not prominent and were often subservient to the most prominent ones.⁷⁵

The persistence of agitations for independence among the few senior Ekiti Oba who were placed under other senior Ekiti Obas started yielded positive result starting with the Elemure of Emure who was granted autonomous status in 1929 and was listed as a member of Ekiti Council in 1936. Other traditional rulers who agitated for local autonomy with the most celebrated cases involved the kingdoms of

- Ire agitations against Oye;
- Ilogbo agitations against Ido;
- Iyapa (now Aiyetoro) agitations against Ijero;
- Ido Irapa (now Ido-Ile) agitations against Efon Alaaye;
- Aaye agitations against Otun;
- Ode agitations against Ado-Ekiti;
- Imesi-Lasigidi agitations against Ado-Ekiti;
- Ijan agitations against Ado-Ekiti;
- Osi agitations against Ado-Ekiti;
- Ilawe agitations against Ado-Ekiti.

In 1946, Igbara-Odo, Ilawe, Osi and Ido Ajinnare (now Ido-Ile) were granted autonomy thereby making the Alawe, Olosi, Olojudo (Ido -Ile) and Arajaka (Igbara-Odo) to assume the status of autonomous Village Heads which invariably increased the number of district heads and autonomous village heads in Ekiti from 16 to 20, it did not however changed the status of the additional famous four as Pelupelu Obas. Official records indicated the difference in status of the additional Obas going by the recognition given to each of them in terms of their status within the newly assigned Native Authorities as reproduced below:⁷⁶

Native Authority/Areas of Jurisdiction	Title Holder and Council
1. Ado District Native Authority	- The Ewi & Ado District Council
2. Aiyede District Native Authority	- The Ata & Aiyede District Council
3. Ara District Native Authority	- The Alara & Ara District Council
4. Efon District Native Authority	-The Alaye & Efon District Council
5. Emure District Native Authority	-The Elemure & Emure District Council
6. Iddo District Native Authority	- The Olojudo & Iddo District Council
7. Ijero District Native Authority	- The Ajero & Ijero District Council
8. Ikerre District Native Authority	- The Ogoga & Ikerre District Council
9. Ikole District Native Authority	- The Elekole & Ikole District Council
10. Ise District Native Authority	- The Arinjale & Ise District Council
11. Ishan District Native Authority	- The Onishan & Ishan District Council
12. Itaji District Native Authority	- The Onitaji & Itaji District Council
13. Ogotun District Native Authority	- The Ologotun & Ogotun District Council
14. Okemesi District Native Authority	- The Oloja & Okemesi District Council
15. Otun District Native Authority	- The Ore & Otun District Council
16. Oye District Native Authority	- The Oloye & Oye District Council
17. Iddo Irappa Village Native Authority	- The Iddo Irappa Village Council
18. Igbara Odo Village Native Authority	- The Igbara Odo Village Council
19. Ilawe Village Native Authority	- The Ilawe Village Council
20. Osi Village Native Authority	- The Osi Village Council

Table 1

The supremacy battle that occurred among the senior Ekiti Obas during colonial era was unexpected, since they had hitherto considered themselves as brothers and never out rightly competed for supremacy since the Pelupelu existed among them. Hence, the geographical dislocation, wars and external invasions that forced some principal towns and their kings to situations whereby they seek to form alliances and security pacts with each other through Pelupelu and Kiriji among others, also reduced their capacity to struggle for supremacy or to assert superiority over each other in matters of status or prestige in the pre-colonial era.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) –A Report written by J. Olawande and confirmed by Neil Weir, the Ag. District Officer for Ondo Division

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ N.A. I, The Public No. 95 of 1945 of Ondo Province – Ekiti Native Authorities. See O.V. Lee Report on Ekiti Reorganization

⁷⁷ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local

It seems that each senior Ekiti Oba was satisfied with the degree of independence and administration enjoyed within their territories rather than assert any form of supremacy over each other going by their military advantage and political influence.⁷⁸ This is why it was not difficult for the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti for instance to question his army General - Aduloju when he laid siege on Osi by sending a counterforce against him. At the time, Osi was not regarded as a belligerent within Ewi's territoriality and an attack on it was not acceptable to the Ewi. This tradition between a senior Ekiti Oba and those within his territory also subsist in the tradition between them and their peers in the 16 principal kingdoms across Ekitiland.⁷⁹

Another tradition which subsists among senior Ekiti Obas was giving due respect to age or years of enthronement in making deference to each other before the advent of colonial rule. For instance, the Onisan would refer to Elekole as 'Baba' (father), not necessarily because Ikole had suzerainty or superiority over Onisan or Isan, but rather due to the age of the incumbent or his status in the Yoruba ascendancy. Likewise, the Onitaji never forced himself over the Attah of Aiyede, whom he granted land as a show of love and brotherliness before colonial rule.⁸⁰

The Pelupelu meeting of 17 Native Authorities (17 Ekiti Oba) held at Ado-Ekiti on 24th August, 1942 with the District Officer (Special Duty) was a major pointer to the reforms and reorganization of Ekitiland during the colonial era going by the terms of reference and findings of O.V. Lee. Critiques of the Lee's meeting with Ekiti Council noted however that it was to a large extent an impromptu and teleguided exercise because it centered on pre-determined issues. Lee's visit to Ekitiland resulted to various sets of recommendations made to the Government and indeed his positions were contrary to the position of Pelupelu meeting held at Ado-Ekiti from all indications of the outcome of his recommendations to the Government.⁸¹

As observed from the review of the O.V. Lee's report, the approval granted by the colonial authorities for the admission of Ilawe, Osi, Igbara-Odo and Ido-Irapa into the Ekiti Superior Native Authority Council in 1948 as 'separate village councils' was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Though, it paved way for the recognition of these Ekiti Obas as independent of the senior Ekiti Obas, it could not have transformed them to the Pelupelu status. At best, these towns succeeded in breaking the spirit of their previous prescribed authorities particularly Ado-Ekiti who was opting for a separate Division from Ekitiland at the time. It was therefore compensation to those villages that opposed the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and agitated for their local independence from. Yet, the protracted struggle for local autonomy was not fueled by the specific demand of the people, but in many instances by the intervention and guidance of government officials.⁸²

The O.V. Lee's report showed some interesting developments on the conflict issues and agitations of various towns in Ekitiland from 1942 onward. For instance, the Resident at Akure wrote to the Commissioner at Ibadan on 21st June, 1943 and took a very strong position against O.V. Lee Report on the agitations of Olosi of Osi to wear Crown and be granted independence from the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti.⁸³ He submitted that:

- Only 17 Ekiti Obas were allowed to wear the full beaded Ife Crown
- The 17 Ekiti Obas jealously guard their rank and status against intrusion.
- Most of the conclusion in Lee's report in acceding to the claims of Olosi was not properly investigated in the first instance, despite his acceptance of the fact that Reeve-Tucker was too rough on them.
- The interferences and rising pressures of Town's improvement unions and societies in Ekitiland to present their claims made the agitations more confusing and difficult to verify.
- When the Olosi visited Reeve-Tucker to complain against his harassment by Ekiti Obas for assuming equal position with them, he was told to relinquish his pretensions and he readily accepted.⁸⁴

The Resident therefore concluded and recommended that the Olosi should be accorded the right to wear an Ife crown - a secondary crown derived from Oduduwa's son - Obalufon or a later Ooni, provided he continues to regard Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and his Council as the head of the Native Authority.⁸⁵

In the case of the Alawe of Ilawe, Lee took similar position when he found out that Alawe had agitated for his independence from Ado since the early days of colonial rule with a major protest recorded in 1924. He stated that the case of Alawe is similar to the case of Olosi and recommended that the Alawe should be allowed to wear a crown and granted independence from Ado-Ekiti. However, on the claims of the Alawe of Ilawe, the Resident again stood his ground and wrote thus:

- Senior Ekiti Obas have been jealously guarding their crowns from time immemorial
- They may not allow Alawe to share same prestige or wear similar crown with them.

Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; See Monsignor Oguntuyi

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

⁸² Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Olora of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; See Monsignor Oguntuyi

⁸³ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019

⁸⁴ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019 -

See NAI - Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480; (N.A.I) NA.AC Weir, Ekiti Div 1/613, O.V.

Lee, Intelligence Report on Ekiti Division of Ondo Province, 1942,

⁸⁵ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019 -

See NAI - Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480; (N.A.I) NA.AC Weir, Ekiti Div 1/613, O.V.

Lee, Intelligence Report on Ekiti Division of Ondo Province, 1942,

- The Alawe can only wear a crown after the matter is resolved with Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and his chiefs and
- The Alawe should be informed of the penalties for non-observance with the provisions to wear a secondary crown.⁸⁶

A scenario on the agitations among Egbe Oba rulers was recorded in O.V. Lee's observation during his visit to Elekole's Court. Indeed, the position taken by Lee at the meeting strengthened the agitations of the chiefs under Elekole for their own independence, rather than put them to check. The meeting was held on 2nd August, 1942 and presided by O.V. Lee with the attendance comprising the Elekole, and 14 Chiefs of his Chiefs including 3 Iwarefa, 3 Ojuwa, 2 Iyare Ikole, 1 Elegbe Merin Ilu, 4 Ojuwa Afin and 1 Elegbe Afin (from Ikole Township), 30 other Chiefs from Ikoyi, Ijelu (Olujelu), Owa Itapa, with 7 Chiefs, and other chiefs representing Oke-Igbirra (now Oke Ayedun), Odo-Igbirra (now Odo-Ayedun), Usin, Ilasha, Araromi, Orin-Odo, Esun, Ikun, Ikunrin, Olode, Eda and 50 other dignitaries and officials.⁸⁷

During O.V. Lee visit to the Ajero of Ijero on 28th July, 1942 to address specific complaints on the untoward and unbecoming attitude of Olupoti and others in Ijero District, he summoned Olupoti to a meeting at Ijero on 31st July, 1942. The meeting centered on the report by the Ajero of Ijero (as a prescribed authority of the District) against village Heads in the District except Ewu, Ipere, Iporo and Eda. Ajero reported that the Olupoti refused to supply the customary annual tribute of 200 tubers of yam and failed to appear at his annual festival to salute him. Moreover, the recalcitrant attitude of the Elewu towards Ajero, being a friend to Olupoti also heightened his suspicion that Olupoti is fueling discord and disorder in the District.⁸⁸ Lee gave an ample opportunity to Olupoti to defend himself on the matter. When Olupoti could not proffer any genuine reason on the matter, Lee decided that Olupoti should by all means supply the yam within a month to Ajero, while he would be placed on the watch list by the District Officer to keep him under check. Lee concluded that the Olupoti was influencing the Elewu to agitate against the Ajero.⁸⁹

On 12th August, 1942, O.V. Lee held a meeting at Ewi's Palace at Ado-Ekiti to look at issues of interest surrounding conflict and agitations in the community. It was obvious that Ado-Ekiti people were more than prepared for the British agent as they left him no opportunity to gain insight into their activities and operations by refusing to submit any official petition for Lee's intervention. Nonetheless, Ado District Council demanded for payment of salaries to its senior chiefs in addition to a 10% collected from the Treasury. This was a similar agitation brewing in other Ekiti District Councils when Ado attempted to follow Akure's path to seek for a separate Division from Ekiti. O.V. Lee therefore made known his observations on the rare participation of the Ewi in the sittings of the Native Court which Odofin often chaired and at other times by Odogun when a case is on appeal.⁹⁰ Incessant probing by Lee on Ewi's Presidency also showed that Ado Chiefs represented by Chief Sasere and the Baale Uyin (now the Oluyin of Iyin-Ekiti) would prefer Ewi to preside at Council meetings. However, Ewi's response to the issue was that he was half hearted about it rather than indicate that he was not interested in lowering his status and prestige through Court appearances and frequent access to the District Heads and Chiefs.⁹¹

The District Officer of Ekiti Division on his part submitted different a 4-page memo⁹² where which he considered crucial to the reorganization of Ekiti Division as summarized below:

- That none of the existing towns in Ekiti Division was coerced into Ekitiparapo Confederation. Rather, they were part and parcel of the Ekitiland either as original settlers or those who migrated there and lived with others as neighbours, depending on their emerging status before the advent of British rule.
- That the conflict and agitations for local autonomies in Ekitiland which a desire for separation of Native Authorities using the case of agitation for separation from Ekiti by the Deji and Akure people as an instance was suggestive that more of it would be witnessed since precedence was laid.
- That it is better to adopt a method that would allow the income realized from each District to be budgeted on the needs of the District such as Road construction and provision of public amenities so that all councils are 'satisfied that their own money was being spent in the District and the principle of contributing towards Central and Road Funds' would be acceptable to all.
- That the need to restructure the native courts was essential because of the poor quality of the court performances, the need to secure competent and incorruptible Court officials and to keep a well trained workable but smaller size Judiciary. Hence, except where the distance of the court is very far to the villages and its environs, the existing courts should be maintained.

Going from the above, it is imperative to state that the progressive efforts made by the colonial administration to create order and sanity within the traditional political system were achieved minimally. The enhancement of the status of

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019 -

See NAI - Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480; (N.A.I) NA.AC Weir, Ekiti Div 1/613, O.V.

Lee, Intelligence Report on Ekiti Division of Ondo Province, 1942,

⁹⁰Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019 -

See NAI - Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480; (N.A.I) NA.AC Weir, Ekiti Div 1/613, O.V.

Lee, Intelligence Report on Ekiti Division of Ondo Province, 1942

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹²See NAI - Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480

these Traditional rulers in playing prominent roles in political affairs of the colonial state despite the reduction of their status and intervention in governance resulted in their choice of delegations to negotiate Nigeria's independence from Great Britain. In Ekiti Division, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti –HRH Oba Daniel Anirare Aladesanmi II was chosen as part of the delegation and he was accompanied by Hon. Chief J.E. Babatola, a Minister in the AG Government of Western Nigeria at the time. This further strengthens the belief of the colonial administrators who actually signed treaties with the traditional rulers to incorporate their kingdoms into the Nigerian State, to also play prominent roles in deciding on the political independence of the country from the British.⁹³

8. Pelupelu under Chiefs Law and the Reforms since Colonial Era

The treaties signed with the various Obas by the British agents in Yorubaland in the 19th century were the basis of incorporating the Obas and their Kingdoms into the British Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914 in the first instance. When the Ekiti Confederation Council (Pelupelu) was inaugurated to replace the Ekitiparapo Council, the Council became the government policy making arena where the Ekiti Obas often discuss or rubber stamped colonial initiatives before they were made public.⁹⁴

The subsequent regulations made senior Ekiti Obas to act as the consenting authority over other minor Ekiti Obas and Baales according to their existing tradition and customs and in view of the role and status of Obas in Ekiti history and Yoruba land.⁹⁵ Further reforms and amendment to the Chiefs Law made the Council to serve as court for the adjudication of criminal cases though its ruling was subject to review by the District Officer or the approval of the Lieutenant Governor.⁹⁶ Any issue beyond the scope of a Native Council was referred to the Judicial Council such as charges against the Baale (Village heads), land disputes between villages etc. The meetings of Ekiti Judicial Council were largely marked with an atmosphere of goodwill and willingness to work as a corporate body. The Council, however, had no legal status until 1948.⁹⁷

Further reforms on the chiefs law came in 1954 when the Government of Chief Obafemi Awolowo by the Appointment and Recognition of Chiefs Law No. 1 of 1955 made a set of declarations for most Obas, Baales and Chiefs in Western Region and provided for the process of the appointment of Kingmakers, presentation of Ruling Houses and deposition procedure to make the process well written and documented, ascertainable and statutory. Each declaration showed the names and number of ruling houses, order of rotation, present ruling house and others next in line, eligibility criteria for candidates, Kingmakers and process of filling vacant stools which varies across towns and chieftaincies and incorporated into the Chief Law.⁹⁸

Towards the end of colonial era, reforms in the Native Authorities and the introduction of Local Government system reduced the participation and interference of traditional rulers in local politics and political governance with the replacement of traditional rulers by elected officials at the Local Government level. The role of traditional rulers as members of House of Chiefs in Western Nigeria was also truncated by the promulgation of new Constitution under the Military regimes that reduced the involvement of traditional rulers to membership of Traditional Councils instead of House of Chiefs which could have been near equal to the House of Lords or Privy Council in Great Britain under the British Parliament. The legitimacy and status of the traditional rulers reduced to the point that they became members of chieftaincy committees in Local Government Councils, whereas it was the traditional rulers that exercised powers over their people and kingdoms before the advent of British colonial rule in Nigeria.⁹⁹

In 1976, there was a major reform and shift in the application and implementation of the Chiefs Law. This was as a result of de-recognition and delisting of non-Obas and minor chiefs subject to Obas of their domain from the category of recognized chiefs particularly the kingmakers (Iwarefa). The Order listed recognized chieftaincies classified as RECOGNIZED CHIEFS while others lost their status before the State Government on in chieftaincy administration that was becoming contentious and controversial.¹⁰⁰

In 1978, all existing Chiefs Law applicable in the State were revised and a new law was enacted. The law reinstated the idea that no court has jurisdiction to entertain any civil suit to determine the selection, appointment, installation, deposition, suspension or abdication of a chief (Oba). It further stipulated that the State Executive Council shall determine the salaries and allowances payable to recognized chiefs in a Local Government Area while declarations on the customary law of the Chieftaincy within the State would be made by the Council Committees for the State Executive Council to approve or reject. The Section 18 of the 1978 Law provided that the consent of a consenting authority of a paramount ruler or superior Oba is required by Government to fill a vacant stool while lesser stools cannot be filled when vacant as long as the stool of a superior Oba is vacant within the domain.¹⁰¹

⁹³ Babatola, J.E.T. – A Will in the Wind (Biography of Chief J.E. Babatola – the Olora of Ado-Ekiti), Samadek Publishers p.1-398, Lagos, 2008

⁹⁴ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019 – See NAI – Ekiti Div. 1/1, Administrative Department, File No. 613 registered on 8th April, 1942 with the Subject: Re-Organization: Ekiti Division II - Mr. O.V. Lee's District Officer Report p. 1-480; (N.A.I) NA.AC Weir, Ekiti Div 1/613, O.V. Lee, Intelligence Report on Ekiti Division of Ondo Province, 1942

⁹⁵ See NAI – The 1930 Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance

⁹⁶ Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis, Ekiti State University, 2019

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Interview with Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014; See The Chiefs Law of Western Region of Nigeria, (Cap 19) W.R. 1959.

⁹⁹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, 2014

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014; See the Recognized Chieftaincies (Revocation and Miscellaneous Provision) Order 1976 of Ondo State of Nigeria

¹⁰¹ Interview with Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014; See The Ondo State Chiefs Law (Cap. 20) 1978

By 1979, a fresh order was enacted which revoked all the entitlements in written customs accorded to the minor chiefs earlier derecognized. The outcome of the White Paper on the report of Morgan Commission in July 1981 abolished the entire procedure surrounding consenting authority, though Morgan Commission gave powers of Prescribed Authority to the senior Ekiti Obas over minor chiefs in their traditional domain.¹⁰²

In 1982, the Ondo State Government published the membership of the Chieftaincy Committees of the 17 Local Government Areas of the State and the Efon Alaaye Administrative Chieftaincy Committee with powers to make declarations on recognized chieftaincies within their Local Government areas.¹⁰³ Equally in 1984 and 1991, the State Government gave the Governor the power to make, amend or revoke a chieftaincy declaration in the interest of peace, order and good government.¹⁰⁴ Part of the law insist that any Oba who is installed and later removed would be regarded to have reigned and as such the rotation shall go to the next ruling house and where there is only one house, he shall not be represented for the stool at the point of choosing an eligible candidate. By the new law, the government must approve and announce the appointment of any candidate to be pronounced an Oba by the kingmakers and any attempt to contravene the provision was regarded as a crime. The law also made Obas as prescribed authority to approve the appointment of minor chiefs.¹⁰⁵

In year 2000, about four years after Ekiti State was carved out of the old Ondo State, the Ekiti State House of Assembly passed a new law.¹⁰⁶ The law made provisions for a Council with permanent members and rotational members among recognized traditional rulers in the State. The Law further stipulated that there shall be a Chairman for the Council who shall be appointed by the Governor in bi-annual rotation among the Alademerindinlogun (Pelupelu) Obas in the State.¹⁰⁷ The Council was empowered to advise the Governor on Chieftaincy matters or any Oba and any matter that appears to raise a question of public policy concerning traditional rulers or any other class of chiefs, customary law or cultural affairs and inter-communal relations. Note worthy here is the fact that minor Obas have become elevated to positions where they could perform roles and responsibilities of senior Ekiti Pelupelu Oba within their Local Government areas wherever senior Ekiti Obas do not exist and such roles were required by the law, the tradition and custom of their people. This resulted to the upgrade of many of them as First Class Obas and it equally compounded the problem of who is superior to the other and who is part of the Pelupelu Oba or just a decorated First Class Monarch.

The difference was the scenario in the relationship of Ekiti Obas until the close of the colonial rule when it was the predecessors of the stool of Pelupelu Obas in Ekitiland that represented Ekiti affairs at various fora. These senior Ekiti Obas who sees themselves as the custodians of Ekiti tradition and customs had assisted to bring peace to Yoruba land during years of political turmoil and crisis in the First and Second Republic.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, some of the senior Ekiti Obas had represented defunct Western Nigeria, old Ondo State and the Ekiti State at the meetings of the National Council of State to advice the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on major issues affecting national interest. Most of them and their predecessors were holders of National Honours Awards of Great Britain and Nigeria in recognition of their status. This was unlike their colleagues who held other titles and status.

In all the years since the era of colonial rule, the meetings of the Ekiti Pelupelu Obas have been held in the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti Palace or in any of the palaces or towns of the presiding chairman. It has never been an offence for the Pelupelu to meet. The Pelupelu continues to meet even outside the general meetings of the Ekiti State Traditional Council to harmonize issues and settle their differences. None of their meetings were nocturnal or directed at pulling down the Government.¹⁰⁹ It was this same Pelupelu that hosted several meetings of Ekiti leaders at Ewi's Palace to fight to the creation of Ekiti State penultimate in October, 1996 during General Sanni Abacha's military administration.

Indeed, the Pelupelu met severally at the Palace of Ewi of Ado-Ekiti to jaw and discuss the way forward on the creation of the Ekiti State, citing of the State capital at Ado-Ekiti and many other issues required for their benevolence and sustenance. The role of traditional rulers, particularly the Pelupelu Obas was second to none during the struggle for the creation of Ekiti State in the 1990s which eventually succeeded with the strategies put in place by prominent Ekiti leaders like Chief Deji Fasuan, Aare Afe Babalola SAN, Dr. Bode Olowoporoku, Dr. Kayode Obembe, Chief Ojo Falegan, Chief Isola Filani, Chief J.E. Babatola and many others in their various capacities. Indeed, most of the senior Ekiti Obas in the current crisis with Ekiti State Government and in particular, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti were in the forefront damning all consequences during the administration of Evangelist Bamidele Olumilua in old Ondo State and during subsequent military regimes to agitate for the creation of Ekiti State.¹¹⁰

After the creation of Ekiti State in 1996 and the enactment of the Ekiti State Traditional Council Laws in year 2000, the Law stipulates that only Pelupelu members that consist of the 16 senior Ekiti Obas should chair meetings of the Council of Traditional Rulers in Ekiti. The Pelupelu Obas therefore by the Law comprises of the following senior Ekiti Obas till date namely:

- Ajero of Ijero,

¹⁰² Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, 2014 and Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014; See Government of Ondo State, Report of the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission, Vol. I-IV: Op. Cit - Babatola, J.T

¹⁰³ Interview with Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014; See Government of Ondo State, The Chiefs Edict (Edict No. 11) 1984 and the Chiefs (Amendment) Edict No. 4, 1991

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers Law (2000)

¹⁰⁷ The Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers Law (2000) - Article 2 Section 2

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, 2014 and Chief Bade Gboyega, 2014

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Prof. (Chief) S.T. Akindele, Elemo of Ado-Ekiti, March, 2020

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

- Alara of Aramoko,
- Ewi of Ado Ekiti,
- Ogoga of Ikere,
- Olomuo of Omuo,
- Attah of Ayede,
- Olomuo of Omuo,
- Onitaji of Itaji,
- Oloye of Oye,
- Arinjale of Ise,
- Ologotun of Ogotun,
- Onitaji of Itaji,
- Elemure of Emure,
- Alaaye of Efon,
- Owa Ooye of Okemesi,
- Olojudo of Ido Faboro,
- Elekole of Ikole and
- Onisan of Isan-Ekiti.

Available records indicated however that there was a Government directive on 20th July, 2004 to review the composition of Ekiti Pelupelu Obas in Ekiti State without the input of its members and a proper legislation to amend the extant law. This directive issued by the Ayo Fayose administration without decorum to the process of law and respect for the sanctity of the traditional institution in Ekiti has created more controversies and contentions that left the Council of Obas polarized as well as bringing the Pelupelu against the State Government and other Ekiti Obas today. No doubt, the Government directive to include some Obas in the category of Pelupelu was lacking in merit to uphold since the custom and the extant laws does not recognize or confer such rights and privileges on those government elevated Obas to become statutory members of the Pelupelu.

Looking at the existing historical works and available documentations on grading and status of Ekiti Obas, it would amount to the desecration of Yoruba tradition and culture as well as flagrant violation of the extant law to allow any non-member of the Pelupelu to chair or preside over the meetings of the Council. A citation of the tradition and customary laws guiding chieftaincy matters in Ekiti State since the colonial era that gave various authorities on Chieftaincy matters with respect to the status and role of Obas and the recognition of Pelupelu (senior Ekiti Obas) can be drawn from the following statutes:

- Weirs Intelligence Report (1930s)
- O.V. Lee Reports on the Reorganization of Ekiti (1940s)
- Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance (1930 as amended 1945)
- The Appointment and Recognition of Chiefs Law (1954)
- The Chief Law (Cap. 19) W.R. 1959
- The Recognized Chieftaincies (Revocation and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order, 1976
- The Chiefs Law (Cap. 20) 1978
- The Recognized Chieftaincies (Revocation and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order, 1979
- 1980 Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission Reports Vol. I-IV
- The Chiefs Law (The Establishment of Chieftaincy Committees) Orders, 1982
- The Chiefs Edict (Edict No. 11) 1984
- The Chiefs (Amendment) Edict No. 4, 1991 and
- The Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers Law 2000 and
- Various Government White Papers on Judicial Commission of Enquiry among others.

It has been observed that Government in the past made efforts to reform the traditional political institution so as to give room for the expansion of the prestige and status of traditional rulers in the State and by extension the Pelupelu. However the legitimacy and eligibility into Pelupelu membership by any other Oba has to conform to the norms and tradition for appointment of persons into positions of Oba and Chiefs in Yorubaland in the first instance.¹¹¹ It should equally conform to the customs and process observed in upgrading any Oba into the Pelupelu rank from time immemorial. This is because the admission into the membership of Pelupelu ought to be a decision of the body and not those of the Government. The power of the Governor should be limited to upgrading Obas either as First, Second or Third Class grade.

Going by the tradition noted in the legitimacy of the colonial government to transit governmental powers to the modern day's independent government in Nigeria, it required the participation of these traditional political institutions from whom the Government originally took their powers.¹¹² No doubt, since the British realized that it could not successfully rule without these traditional institutions, they accorded them the required recognition and role under the laws. It was these laws that later transited the role of the traditional rulers under the present day Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria to offering assistance in the areas of grassroots mobilization, chieftaincy matters, community

¹¹¹ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007

¹¹² Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007 and Prof. Isola Olomola, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, 2015; Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

development and cultural heritage of the people.¹¹³The role of democratic governments in the modern state system as representatives of the majority of the people (The Electorate) therefore calls for caution to ensure that these traditional institutions that equally represents their peoples at the level of the grassroots and who remain the institutions of their tradition and customs, are accorded proper recognition and privileges required of their status in an atmosphere devoid of politics, ridicule and public animosity.¹¹⁴

9. The Faceoff between Governor Fayemi and Ekiti Pelupelu Obas

It came to public knowledge in August, 2019 that the Ekiti State Government had decided to appoint the *Alawe* of Ilawe *Ekiti*, *Oba* Adebajani Alabi, as the Chairman of the Council of Obas without due consultations with the Pelupelu and similar Yoruba Obas in their rank. The decision of the Governor did not go down well with the Pelupelu Obas more so that it was without recourse to the requirements for the amendment of the Ekiti State Chieftaincy Law (2020) that specified those qualified to preside over the Council of Chiefs.¹¹⁵ Further to steps taken by the Pelupelu Obas to counsel Governor Kayode Fayemi against the decision was ignored as the Government went ahead to inaugurate the new Council with Alawe as Chairman.¹¹⁶ Hence, the Pelupelu instituted a suit on the suitability and traditional posit of the Alawe to warrant his appointment at the Ado *Ekiti* High Court.

In the suit filed by the Pelupelu on 7th August, 2019, the Obas raised the following issues for the Court to determine¹¹⁷ viz.

- Whether the 1st Defendant is empowered under Council of Traditional Rulers Law, Cap 15, Laws of Ekiti State 2012, to appoint the Chairman of Ekiti State Council of Traditional Rulers on a bi-annual rotational basis from amongst only class of Obas constituted Alademerindinlogun/Pelupelu Obas of Ekiti State.
- A declaration that (they) claimants are the only valid authentic Obas or traditional rulers under the classification of Alademerindinlogun qualified to be so appointed as Chairman.
- A declaration that the 3rd respondent is unfit, unqualified and ineligible to be appointed as Chairman of the council in consonance to the Ekiti State Traditional Council Law.
- A declaration that the appointment of the 3rd defendant by the 1st Defendant was a flagrant violation of the law, unlawful, null and void, unjustifiable, illegal and unsustainable.
- An order nullifying the appointment of the 3rd defendant as the Chairman of the council of traditional rulers.
- An order of perpetual injunction restraining the 1st defendant as chairman of the traditional council and other relevant orders as deem first by the court.

After the matter was brought to court, there were efforts by good spirited individuals to resolve the differences between the Governor and the Pelupelu Obas. Indeed, a group of Ekiti elders intervened in the faceoff between the Governor and the Pelupelu to no avail and it was on record that the former Governor, Otunba Niyi Adebayo also made personal efforts that failed to materialize. All the attempts were frustrated by continuous attempts to embarrass some of the Pelupelu Obas at public functions and in particular, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and his chiefs.¹¹⁸ It was not only saddening that the Government took steps that could divide the traditional political institution and bring them further to disrepute, it also made the crown holders of these institutions to lose the respect of their townsmen and women.¹¹⁹

On 11th March, 2020, the Government took a further step to query members of the Pelupelu who refused to attend meetings presided by the Alawe. The document issued to the 11 Pelupelu Obas and widely publicized in the newspaper and the social media by the signatory - a government agent acting for the office of the Permanent Secretary, Bureau of Chieftaincy Affairs¹²⁰ speaks volume on contempt and the drastic disregard for traditional rulers in the new millennia. Following the outcry and condemnation that greeted the query of the Government by Ekiti people by 12th March, 2020 with anxiety that the State Government intends to depose the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti and 10 others, the Ekiti State Government through its Chief Press Secretary - Yinka Oyeboode admitted that the query was an administrative routine though it denies the fact that the Government would depose any Oba and that it was a propaganda of the Opposition.¹²¹ The situation has left too many questions to be asked and unanswered.

¹¹³ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007 - See 1979 and 1999 Constitution of Nigeria

¹¹⁴ Interview with Chief Bade Gboyega, Ado-Ekiti, 2014; Babatola, J.T., Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) - Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

¹¹⁵ Aug 12, 2019 - www.vanguardngr.com > News - Ekiti Obas drag Fayemi to court over appointment of ... and threatened that they won't attend the inauguration of Alawe as Council Chairman; Aug 15, 2019 - Governor, Kayode Fayemi, on Thursday inaugurated the Alawe of Ilawe Ekiti, ... 'a violation of the Ekiti State Chieftaincy Law.' - Newtelegraph www.newtelegraphng.com >; Aug 16, 2019 - Alawe's rejection stemmed from the claim of the pelupelu Obas - www.vanguardngr.com > News - Fayemi ignores aggrieved Obas; Aug 18, 2019 - Ekiti Obas Squeal at Fayemi Over Traditional Council ... www.independent.ng >; Aug 18, 2019 - They said they were opposed to the appointment of the Alawe of Ilawe Ekiti, Oba Adebajani, a minor Oba ... Ekiti elders intervene in Fayemi, 16 monarchs' feud » Tribune ... tribuneonlineng.com >; Aug 25, 2019 - punchng.com > its-abnormal-for-alawe-to-lead-ekiti-pelupelu-kings-o... Oba Adeyemi, Alara; Aug 31, 2019 - The 16 aggrieved aboriginal Pelupelu Obas opposed the action and filed a suit at the Ado Ekiti High Court... www.premiumtimesng.com >

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ The 11th March, 2020 query was titled: Re-Absence from State Functions and Council of Traditional Rulers Monthly Meeting

¹²¹ Interview with Prof. (Chief) S.T. Akindele, Elemo of Ado-Ekiti, March, 2020 and Pastor Yemi Olayinka, Ado-Ekiti;

Interview of Senator Babafemi Ojodu (Special Adviser to the President on Political Matters) on Social Media, March, 2020

10. Rethinking the Reasonability of Pelupelu Obas in Ekiti Tradition

The law is sacrosanct on the membership and number of the Pelupelu which is fixed at 16-17 and these set of senior Ekiti Obas know themselves. The colonial authorities acknowledge the fact that they jealously guarded their positions and status even after the release of the O.V. Lee Report in the 40s on the reorganization of Ekitiland.¹²² It would therefore be an error of judgment or mischief carried too even with ongoing reforms in the traditional political institution to confer the status on Pelupelu on any Oba without the consent of other members. The reasonability of Pelupelu membership serves as the basis of these views in Ekiti tradition.

In Yoruba tradition, the appointment of Chiefs is the responsibility of the traditional rulers (Obas). The process set in place to achieve the appointment of Chiefs demands that the family nominates its candidate subject to the approval of the Oba. The acceptance of the candidate lies in the decision of the Oba or Oba in Council. The appointment of chiefs for instance may require the adoption of any of the following methods to restrict the selection to a category of eligible and qualified persons viz.

- Presentation of the preferred candidate by the family head
- Presentation of the preferred candidate through balloting and or presentation by representatives of the extended family
- Voting for preferred candidate among family members or
- Overruling and appointment of a specific candidate by the Oba which may be reviewed through court judgment.

In similar version, the choice of an Oba may be suggested or influenced by the Government or manipulated through the version of Ifa choice presented to suit the choice of chiefs and other stakeholders. However it must be seen to conform to the inherent facts in the choice and decisions of the kingmakers and the townspeople they represent, the presentation and eligibility of the aspirants as members of the ruling houses or line of Chiefs (in the case of Ibadan) and it must be in accordance with the chiefs declaration where sustained. This is essential for a king to be elected and presented to Government for ratification and presentation of Staff of Office in Yorubaland.¹²³

A good analogy suffices in the admission of persons to guilds and secret society like Ogboni in Yorubaland. Admission into the membership and ranks is a matter of choice except where it is by nomination through replacement or inheritance. Admission is expected to meet internal requirements after application by a prospective member. Admission also requires cooperation of members to admit persons and that why the process is secret. The choice of Oba is also a process that follows similar format until it finally announced just like the choice of a Pope in the Catholic order. The implication here is that the Yoruba society has their norm and culture on admission of persons into different categories of societies and offices.

The admission of any Oba to Pelupelu ought to follow the same tradition and not by executive fiat. To get any member recognized by custom or the law regardless of any government directive that is unknown to law and tradition, the prospective member must be acceptable to the existing members. It is not a do or dies affair. The history and culture of people matter in any organization. Where the government issues a directive and imposes a member of a traditional society on others where they have no role to play in their affairs, it portends abuse and dangerous manipulation of tradition. It also smacks ignorance and ultra vires where it is inconsistent with provisions of the law.

It has been advocated that the agitations of Alawe and others to be included in the Pelupelu have been long or recognized since the 40s, but the agitators failed to substantiate the claims with the inhibiting factors surrounding the inadmissibility of the Alawe and others. A good study of the O.V. Lee Report of the 1940s on Reorganization of Ekitiland would provide more hidden facts in this direction. No doubt, the inclusion of subordinate chiefs like Alawe in meetings of Ekiti Superior Native Authority during the colonial government did not translate into becoming one of the Pelupelu Oba even when it was a mere plot to whittle down the paramountcy of the Native Authorities and to particularly weaken Ewi of Ado-Ekiti among others.¹²⁴

It is a well-known fact that Ewi and people of Ado advocated to leave Ekiti Confederation like Akure did. However, colonial government and many Ekiti Obas were opposed to the idea. To make matters worse, they began to incite subordinate towns of Ado to seek for their autonomy so as to reduce the size of Ado Ewi kingdom. The outcome was part of what led to granting the recalcitrant Ilawe and others under Ewi the status of autonomy to reduce the sphere of influence and territoriality of Ewi and block the move by Ado to be self sufficient to break away from Ekiti Confederation owing to envy of those against the Ewi and Ado people for refereeing to them as people of the hinterland (Ara Oko).

A review of the tradition shows that the interference of the Government is limited to disputation in the Court of law in matters of rights of candidate to appointment to positions of chief. Going from the above, it is obvious that the choice of any chief to appoint among the community of persons and institutions of traditional rulers are purely responsibility of the Obas and the Governor would at best be involved in the ratification where the law so prescribes. Similarly, the Governor cannot appoint Obas for towns without input of kingmakers in Yorubaland. Though, the law gives the Governor the prerogative to appoint one of the Pelupelu members as Chairman of Council as he may so wish, the law

¹²² Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T: Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

¹²³ Munoz L.J.: A Living Tradition – Studies in Yoruba Civilization, (Ibadan, Bookcraft Ltd) 2003; Ogunremi Deji & Biodun Adediran (ed.): Culture and Society in Yorubaland, Rex Charles, 1998, p.17; Fadipe, N.A. The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan University Press, 1970, op.cit., p.58-109

¹²⁴ Interview with Chief J.E. Babatola, the Oloro of Ado-Ekiti, March 2007; Babatola, J.T: Conflicts and Agitations for Local Autonomy in Ekitiland (1900-1960) – Thesis submitted to Ekiti State University, 2019

did not require the Governor to determine who constitutes the Pelupelu since it is purely traditional and customary in nature.

11. Intervention and Hope for Peace

Prior to the current logjam between the Government and the Pelupelu Obas, the Ekiti Council of Elders attempted to wade into the crisis between the Government and the Pelupelu Oba and it drew the attention of the reputable Yoruba historian and Leader, Prof. Banji Akintoye into the fold. However, there was no desired result in intervention. In the scheme of the controversies and public outrage over the turn of events arising from the queries to the Pelupelu Oba, the Alaafin of Oyo, Iku Baba Yeye, His Imperial Majesty, Alayeluwa Oba Dr. Lamidi Adeyemi CFR in consultation with the Ooni and senior Yoruba Obas was compelled to write an open letter the Government of Ekiti State on 13th March, 2020.

The content of the said letter summarized below attempts to establish the following facts on hand:¹²⁵

- That the Pelupelu is a grade of 16 crowned Obas in Ekitiland and which serves as order of hierarchy and seniority for position placement in the Traditional Council.
- That Pelupelu had existed from time immemorial to the admiration of other Yoruba Obas
- That Obaship leadership has been within the 16 Obas (Pelupelu) without any dispute or quarrel among them and indeed to the admiration of other Yoruba Kingdoms.
- That senior Yoruba Obas registers their discontentment against the Government's neglect of the age long hierarchical order by appointing a subordinate Oba as the Chairman of Council of Obas over the recognized chiefs.
- That the Government should allow the Court process to decide the matter since it has failed to reverse itself of the grievous mistake or deliberate error.
- That the writer and the various traditional political institutions he represents condemns the issuance of query to the Crowned Pelupelu Obas as an attempt to frustrate and humiliate them, forgetting the role of the Pelupelu Obas since Kiriji wars
- That the Government should be cautious of their roles since the linkage between the people and the Government are the Obas, their ancestry and traditional stool in Yoruba tradition and culture as well as their spiritual significance as owners of the land whose institution should not be rubbished owing to the roles of our forefathers
- That Yoruba traditional political institutions are not similar to the Emirates in Northern Nigeria or other traditional institutions in Nigeria
- That the government should adopt the mechanism of conflict resolution to resolve its differences with and the Pelupelu Obas.

Further to the revered position taken by the Alaafin, the Alawe responded to the Alaafin letter by escalating the conflict and making undesired efforts to assault the legitimacy and legacy of the foremost Yoruba traditional ruler, who is next to the Ooni of Ife. This was a rare and unexpected situation. However, Governor Kayode Fayemi made a spirited effort to meet the Alaafin on the matter. Thereafter, the tide of the situation changed on Monday, 16th March, 2020 with the visit of the Ooni of Ife, Oba Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II to Ekiti State where he met the Pelupelu Obas, the Governor and the Alawe.

The outcome of the meeting was the proactive steps taken to commence the resolution of the crisis including the demand on the Pelupelu Obas to withdraw their suit against the Government so as to pave way for an arbitration to look into the matter.

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