

THE AGADAGBA OF AROGBO-IJO CHIEFTAINCY DECLARATION, AND ITS CHALLENGES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA, 1957-2018

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Abstract

As one of the recognised and approved Chieftaincies in the defunct Ese-Odo District Council of Okitipupa Division, Ondo Province of Western Region, Nigeria, the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration was first codified with the identity of Perebiri Ruling House under Pere Shadrach Mesarawon Poro in 1957. However, with the creation of Ondo State in 1976, it was changed to Perebiyenmo Ruling House by the then Agadagba, Pere D. M. E. Eperetun at the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977. The above, thus, created disquiet within the adherents of the former and the latter. Yet, existing works failed to pay adequate attention to the impasse necessitated by the above singular act. This work, therefore, interrogates the conflicts caused by the alteration between 1977, when it was effected, and 2018, when another ruler was installed with the latter identity. The historical method was adopted; data collected from primary and secondary sources, which included oral interviews, archival materials, books, journal and doctoral theses were, scrutinised. The work revealed that the change of Perebiri Ruling House to Perebiyenmo Ruling House laid the



historical background to the conflict. The demise of Eperetun in 2007, and the attempt to fill the vacuum in the name of Perebiyenmo Ruling House ignited further succession crises. Though not yet abated, the incumbent Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo, Pere Z. D. Egbunu was installed with the identity of Perebiyenmo in 2018. The work, therefore, concluded that the rift was generated by the change, the then incumbent Pere Eperetun carried out in 1977.

Keywords: Arogbo-Ijo, Agadagba, Ese-Odo, Ondo State, White Paper

Introduction

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), does not assign any recognition to traditional institutions, yet experiences show vividly that they carry out enormous roles in the economic life of their respective communities, as well as the maintenance of peace, and security. Put differently, the institution of traditional rulers is in the exclusive purview of the various state governments through local government authorities, which actually constitute a critical and crucial component of the governance structure. On a significant note therefore, the traditional institutions formed the governance structures before the advent of the colonialists.ⁱ As a fact, in line with the modern day reality, a duly recognised chieftaincy title is associated with a traditional title holder in every given community, which encompasses a prescribed authority or ruler of a kingdom, with council of chiefs. As a recall, in the colonial Nigeria, the nomination, approval and appointment of a recognised chief was



regulated and codified by native laws and customs generally referred to as Chieftaincy Declaration.ⁱⁱ In conformity with the submission of Also, the British administration introduced Chieftaincy Declaration in order to arrest the magnitude of chieftaincy conflicts during succession period. He further stated that the enactment of the Western Region Local Government Law of 1952 which provided specific functions for the chiefs as subordinated agents of colonial administration notwithstanding, the use of Chieftaincy Declaration was formalised with the promulgation of the Chief's Law of 1955.ⁱⁱⁱ

As differently put by Oyemakinde, in the defunct Western Nigeria, Chieftaincy Declarations were mostly enacted on 20th June, 1957, named Chiefs' Laws, which cemented the bedrock of government regulation of the complex and sensitive Chieftaincy institution. The above was carried out because, in the British colonial indirect rule system which Lord Frederick Dealtry Lugard introduced, chiefs were a necessary ingredient(s) of grassroots governance. Hence, the appointment, approval, review and reprimand of chiefs occupied the center stage of the British socio-political, and other related activities in the colonial enterprise.^{iv} In accordance with today's practice, most of the 1957 codified Chieftaincy Declarations in the defunct Western Region, have systematically undergone changes in the time past occasioned by conflicts and other related societal exigencies. Some of these Chieftaincy Declarations are: the Olubadan of Ibadan, the Ooni of Ife, the Osomawe of Ondo, the Deji of Akure, the Olowo of Owo, etc.^v Furthermore, in the defunct Okitipupa Division of Ondo Province of Western Nigeria, the Amapetu of Mahin, the Ahaba of Ajagba, the Olu of Igbobini, the Kalasuwei of Apoi, the Tarabiri-Torhu of

Arogbo, the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo^{vi}, among many others, are few examples of Chieftaincy Declarations enacted in 1957, that have experienced fundamental alterations.^{vii}

Before directing historical search light on the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration, it is deemed fit to examine the origins of the Arogbo-Ijo as a group. Briefly put, they migrated during the pre-colonial period (under the leadership of a crown Prince Perebiyenmo) from the central Niger Delta of Gbaraun in the present-day Bayelsa State, and eventually settled in the present-day Ese-Odo Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria.^{viii} They are located between longitudes 40 and 50 N and between latitudes 60 and 70 N in the southern part of the State. To the east, they are bound by Safarogbo^{ix} in Edo State, and Egbema-Ijo of Edo and Delta States; in the west and southern part, by the Ilaje; and by the Ikale in the north-western part.^x Some of their notable communities are Arogbo, Amapere, Agadagba-Obon, New Jerusalem, Opubabilebu, Awodikuro, Dibigbini, Ewerebubogho, Ogidigba I, II and III, Igangbo, Biagbini, Ukpe, Bolowou, Ajapa, Opuba, Akpata, etc.^{xi}

On the historic name Arogbo, it was *ab initio* a canoe-carving forest. From this ancient traditional craft, the settlement in Ijo language, was christened *Aru Kara Ogbo*. That is, *Aru* means canoe, *Kara* means carving, and *Ugbo* means forest, meaning a canoe-carving forest or land, which was later corrupted to Arogbo.^{xii} Thus, all the inhabitants of the area are now identified and addressed as the Arogbo-Ijo. Firmly rooted on the above, their traditional ruler is known and addressed as the Agadagba of the Arogbo-Ijo Kingdom, with his administrative seat located at the

settlement, Arogbo. On a remarkable note, the settlement, Arogbo, itself, is traditionally headed by the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo Chieftaincy title holder. Significantly, in 1957, the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo, and the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo, were two of the recognised and approved Chieftaincy Declarations of the then Ese-Odo District Council, Igbekebo.^{xiii}

The Agadagba of the Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration was approved and registered with the identity, Perebiri Ruling House by His Royal Majesty, *Pere* Shadrach Mesarawon Poro, Opukutu II, the then Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo in 1957 (hereinafter referred to as *Pere* Mesarawon) under Ese-Odo District Council of Okitipupa Division of Ondo Province, Western Region, Nigeria.^{xiv} However, the above was eventually changed to Perebienenmo Ruling House in 1977 by his successor, His Royal Majesty, *Pere* Defaye Mejuya Ebenezer Eperetun, Aaga II, the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo (hereinafter referred to *Pere* Eperetun) at the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission consequent upon the creation of Ondo State in 1976. That singular action, thus, generated conflicts of various dimensions between the adherents of the former and the latter. Yet, scholars are yet to adequately examine the grounds for the change and its' far reaching implications on the adherents. This paper, therefore, interrogates the grounds for the change, the resistance mounted by the adherent of the Perebiri identity, and the necessary counter actions of the adherents of the Perebienenmo identity as well, and other related conflicts ensured therein on the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Stool. The starting period of the work is 1957, the year the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration was first enacted. The terminal period is 2018, when the incumbent traditional ruler, His Imperial Majesty, *Pere*

Zacchaeus Doubra Egbunu, Opukutu III, the Agadagba, and the Prescribed Authority of the Arogbo-Ijo (hereinafter referred to as *Pere Egbunu*), was installed with the identity, Perebienenmo Ruling House. The paper is, thus, divided into five sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two examines the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration of 1957 with the Perebiri identity. Section three discusses the change from Perebiri to Perebienenmo at the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977 and its concomitant rifts. Section four examines the demise of *Pere Eperetun* in 2007, and the intra and inter succession crises emanated therein. And the fifth section is the conclusion.

The Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration of 1957

As earlier pointed out, the highest traditional head of the entire Arogbo-Ijo is known and addressed as the Agadagba of the Arogbo-Ijo. Next to him is the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo, the traditional Prime Minister. Therefore, in line with the tradition and custom of the people, whenever vacuum occurs in respect of the highly revered Agadagba's Stool, the incumbent Tarabiri-Torhu Chieftaincy acts as the Regent pending when a new Agadagba is enthroned.^{xv} Yayu, therefore, reveals that it was in accordance with the above traditional, customary and basic norm that, when *Pere Mesarawon* joined his ancestors on Wednesday, 3 August, 1960, Chief Joachim Ogongolo Ajuwa from Egbesubiri (quarters), the then Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo, acted as the Regent until his demise on Wednesday, 18 September, 1968.^{xvi} As a core historical fact, his reign glamorously catapulted Egbesubiri into the apogee of traditional administration at that point in time. As

further unveiled by Opirijitei, the recent celebrated instance, was that of His Highness Amos Ogbaghaminibofa Sofiyea from Agwobiri (the immediate past Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo), who acted as the Regent consequent upon the death of *Pere* Eperetun in 2007, who reigned from 1976 to 2007. The said Regency ended when *Pere* Egbunu ascended the sacred throne on Tuesday, 18 September, 2018.^{xvii}

According to Oyemakinde, the Chiefs Law ordains a specific rotational order for chieftaincies with ruling houses. Accordingly, a chieftaincy declaration with an identity should state explicitly the order of rotation in which the respective ruling houses are entitled to provide candidates to fill successive vacancies in the chieftaincy. This is to ensure that there would be no conflict among eligible families whenever there is time to fill existing vacancies.^{xviii} Therefore, on the nitty-gritty of the historiographical exploration of the formal approval and registration of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration in 1957, it was carried out at the time *Pere* Mesarawon was the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo. At that time, the area was administratively under Ese-Odo District Council, Igbekebo, Okitipupa Division of Ondo Province of Western Region. Prior to that, the Chieftaincy was operated within the traditional norms of the people for over many years, from pre-colonial to the colonial periods. First and foremost, the desirous need to formally register the title was first deliberated, and approved at the level of the three quarters at Arogbo, namely Agwobiri, Egbesubiri, and Erubiri. This was followed at the level of Ese-Odo District Council, Igbekebo, and same was approved and recommended to the Okitipupa Division, the Divisional Headquarters, for necessary consideration, etc. And, same was

equally approved at the levels of Ondo Provincial headquarters, Akure, and the Western Regional headquarters, Ibadan in 1957.^{xix}

Therefore, according to the approved and registered Declaration made under Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs' Law 1957 of the Customary Law Regulating the Selection to the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy, there is only one Ruling House and the identity of the Ruling House is: Perebiri House. The persons who may be proposed as candidates by a Ruling House entitled to fill a vacancy in the chieftaincy shall be: (a) Members of the Ruling House; and (b) Of the male line; in no case shall the succession of the Ruling House devolve on the female line. In respect of the kingmakers, the declaration further states that there are two Kingmakers as under: (1) Chief Ibagbunghunnu of Egbesubiri, Arogbo, and (2) Chief Beki of Egbesubiri, Arogbo.^{xx} On the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of the method of nomination, selection and appointment, the Declaration expressly states that whenever a vacancy occurs in the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy, the only Ruling House shall attend a meeting to be summoned by the Head of the family. The candidate enjoying the majority support of the family shall then be presented to the kingmakers.^{xxi} The three traditional officers or chiefs in the above processes are the Head of Perebiri Ruling House from Erubiri, and the two Kingmakers from Agwobiri and Egbesubiri.

The above phenomenal chieftaincy feat was achieved during the time of the late *extraordinaire* traditional ruler *par excellence*, Pere Mesarawon, who reigned from 1933 to 1960. Similarly, the Arogbo-Ijo five elected councillors at the defunct Ese-Odo District Council, Igbekebo, who significantly contributed to the fruition of

the 1957 Declaration were: Mr M. S. Okoro of Erubiri ward; Mr J. T. Akerele of Agwobiri ward; Mr J. K. Oyobolo of Egbesubiri ward; Mr E. G. Toikumomo of Ukpe ward; and Mr T. Mode of Akpata ward.^{xxii} However, it must be pointed out that, the original dream of *Pere* Mesarawon, was to secure the approval of four Chieftaincy Declarations in his Kingdom, for a start. Accordingly, he formally requested for the approval of the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo; the Egbeghene of Akpata; the Tabaimotimi of Opuba (now the Neinabiri-Torhu of Opuba); and the Iginabou of Ajapa.^{xxiii} As a dismay, that noble dream was almost truncated, as the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo Chieftaincy, was the only one, that scaled through. As a strategic appeasement measure peradventure, the Tabaimotimi of Opuba, the Egbeghene of Akpata, and the Iginabou of Ajapa, received emoluments as maintenance of traditional officers throughout the existence of Ese-Odo District Council. Accordingly, the yearly emolument of Tabaimotimi of Opuba was £14; Egbeghene of Akpata was £7; and that of the Iginabou of Ajapa was £5, based on revenues remitted to the council from their areas of jurisdictions, mainly from taxes.^{xxiv}

The Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977

Consequent upon the demise of *Pere* Mesarawon on Wednesday, 3 August, 1960, there was a political interregnum until September, 1976, when *Pere* Eperetun (a direct descendant of Mapata, a daughter of Perebiyenmo) was installed as the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo. As a noticeable fact, his installation was done with the 1957 Declaration' with the identity of Perebiri Ruling House as codified in 1957 by his predecessor, *Pere* Mesarawon. At the time of the historic installation of *Pere* Eperetun in 1976, the Head of



the Perebiri Ruling House was Chief Thompson Titiboh Ekpuruke. While the two Kingmakers were Chief Odondighi Shase, the Ibagbunghunnu of Egbesubiri, Arogbo, and Chief Joseph Tongui Akerele, the Beki of Agwobiri, Arogbo.^{xxv} In line with their customary functions, the Head of Perebiri Ruling House, Chief Thompson Titiboh Ekpuruke presided over the selection process of *Pere Eperetun*. Chief Odondighi Shase (the Ibagbunghunnu of Egbesubiri) formally presented the Agadagba-elect to the Kingdom, while Chief J. T. Akerele (the Beki of Agwobiri) marked the Agadagba-elect with the traditional white chalk, locally called *tori*. On the crowning of the Agadagba, it was performed amidst controversies by Ebaragha Nathaniel Ajama with a paternal and maternal ties to Egbesubiri and Erubiri, respectively.^{xxvi}

On the historical background to the unabated royal dispute from 1977 to date, according to Yayu,^{xxvii} after the creation of Ondo State from the Western State on 3 February, 1976, the first military Governor of the State, Wing Commander Ita David Ikpeme, set up Justice Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission in 1977, the first of its kind. The primary purpose was to review all the then existing chieftaincies in Ondo State, and make necessary recommendations to the government. As a matter of fact, 176 chieftaincies were presented by the various traditional rulers in the state for necessary considerations.^{xxviii} The crux of the issue under historical interrogation, the then Agadagba, *Pere Eperetun*, through his counsel, Richard A. Jolowo, Esq, presented the 1957 Chieftaincy Declaration of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo to the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission. On a cardinal note, he, in his own wisdom, requested that the identity, Perebiri Ruling

House be changed to Perebienenmo Ruling House, and that a third kingmaker, Chief Ogoh be added to the two in the 1957 Declaration. But he tactically amended his memo thereafter, and thus, expunged the name Chief Ogoh, thereby sticking to the 1957 two kingmakers only. A critical investigation reveals that *Pere Eperetun* dropped the name Chief Ogoh because of his consanguineous ties to Ejih, whose descendants are the major adherents of the Perebiri Ruling House.^{xxix}

Specifically on the identity of the Ruling House, *Pere Eperetun's* logical argument was that, it was traditionally erroneous for his predecessor (*Pere Mesarawon*), and other necessary stakeholders to have named it Perebiri Ruling House in 1957, because it is a name of a quarters in Arogbo. He, therefore, submitted that the appropriate identity should be Perebienenmo Ruling House, after the progenitor of the Arogbo-Ijo people.^{xxx} In a frantic move against the above step of *Pere Eperetun*, the descendants of Ejih and Fiyepaghatei, namely Chief Julius Mese Ashidi (who was the then Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo, the second-in-command to the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo), Ebaragha Nathaniel Ajama (who crowned *Pere Eperetun* in 1976), Lawrence Ife Egbekun, Chief Soye Michael Abednego, among other critical stakeholders, vehemently urged the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission in their presentation to retain the name, Perebiri as the rightful name for the Ruling House, as duly done by *Pere Mesarawon* in 1957.^{xxxi} However, the Morgan White Paper which was eventually released in 1981, changed the hitherto Perebiri Ruling House to Perebienenmo Ruling House.^{xxxii}

According to the Morgan Reports as applicable to the issue under interrogation: ‘the Approved Chieftaincy Declaration for the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy shall be as set out below: (A) Number of Ruling House: One; (B) Name of Ruling House: Perebiyenmo; (C) The persons qualified to be proposed as candidates by the Ruling House entitled to fill a vacancy in the Chieftaincy shall be: (1) Members of the Ruling House; (2) Of the male line only; (D) Present Ruling House: Nil; and (E) There are two (2) Kingmakers: (1) Chief Ibagbunu of Egbesubiri and (2) Chief Beki of Agwobiri.’^{xxxiii} A careful perusal of the above shows that the only fundamental change effected from the 1957 Declaration, was the alteration of the name of the identity, Perebiri Ruling House to Perebiyenmo Ruling House. And a minor alteration of the spelling of Chief Ibagbunghunnu was changed to Chief Ibagbunu. Of course, the primary target of *Pere Eperetun*, was the identity of the Ruling House only, which he effectively changed, though with its far reaching consequences on the members of both groups.

Therefore, as an implication from the above development, the approval of the Perebiyenmo Ruling House ultimately disqualified the descendants of Ejih and Fiyepagbatei from laying claim to the Agadagbaship, which they had equal historical claim to when it was codified under the identity of Perebiri Ruling House. According to Filatei and Peretei, it was grounded on the above earlier claim that Ugbutuwa of the Ejih lineage, headed the Perebiri Ruling House in time past. In fact, he presided over the installation and coronation of three Agadagbas, namely Egejigha, Opukutu, and Mesarawon consecutively; the only person in

history with such an unprecedented record.^{xxxiv} To give a further vivid picture of the impasse under discourse, both Ejih (m), Perebiyenmo (m) and Fiyepaghatei (f) were biological children of Ogbonu. Hence, when it was called Perebiri Ruling House, both were eligible to the throne. But with the dramatic change of the identity from Perebiri to Perebiyenmo, the other two descendants were automatically disqualified. In fact, this singular action of *Pere Eperetun* is still a matter of litigation between the descendants of Ejih and Fiyepaghatei on one hand, and that of Perebiyenmo on the other hand.^{xxxv}

As a dismay, when the Ajakaiye Chieftaincy Review Commission was inaugurated in 1989^{xxxvi} to examine certain chieftaincies which generated disputes in the reports of the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission, the descendants of the Ejih and Fiyepaghatei who were dissatisfied with the White Paper of Morgan Reports of 1982 did not obviously reopen the case of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration for necessary review. As a sign of self-defeatism perhaps, both the then incumbent Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo, High Chief Julius Mese Ashidi (of Ejih lineage), and other concerned critical functionaries who earlier confronted the move, kept mute over the burning issue when another window of opportunity offered its self. Consequently, the cardinal point being parroted and trumpeted is that the adherents of the Perebiri Ruling House, are still with melancholic memories strategically scheming to reverse the trend in vain. The above is to visibly demonstrate that human experience is a historical continuum; and that one must know where one is coming in order to know where one is going is still a valid wise saying. Understandably as argued



by Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), an American-English poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic, and editor, 'Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future and time future is embodied in time past'.^{xxxvii}As an end of a historic epoch, *Pere Eperetun*, who effected the change of the identity from *Perebiri* to *Perebiyenmo* reigned with it until February, 2007 when he eventually joined his ancestors. Regrettably, his tragic demise, thus, opened the floor-gates for intra succession crisis within the members of the *Perebiyenmo* Ruling House on one hand, and inter succession dispute between *Perebiri* and *Perebiyenmo* adherents on the other hand.

The Demise of *Pere Eperetun*, and the Subsequent Succession Crises

The departure from life of *Pere Eperetun* on Friday, 16 February, 2007, created a series of succession crises. The first, was an intra-succession crisis which reared its ugly head on the very lineage to fill the vacuum stool of the *Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration*. This was within the eight lineages of the *Perebiyenmo* Ruling House; because the declaration approved by the *Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission* did not provide any rotational order among them. Above all, the identities of the eight lineages were not even mentioned *ab initio* at the *Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission* because rotational rift in any form was never envisaged at that material time. The eight (8) lineages under discourse are: (1) *Asun* (m), (2) *Tabaimotimi* (m), (3) *Barakunmo* (m), (4) *Odiya* (m), (5) *Egberi* (f), (6) *Mapala* (f), (7) *Ereh* (m), and (8) *Okorobiti* (m). However, it must be pointed out that the *Okorobiti* lineage was visibly unknown in the affairs of the *Perebiyenmo* Ruling House initially. No wonder, it was formally



admitted as the 8th lineage while the intra-succession dispute was at its peak. In fact, throughout the intra-succession crisis, the Okorobiti lineage collaborated with the Egberi and Mapala lineages in the struggle.^{xxxviii}

On the bone of contention, the lineages of Asun, Tabaimotimi, Ereh, and Odiya in one accord, vehemently challenged the dominance of the lineages of Egberi and Mapala in the affairs of the Perebiyenmo Ruling House from time immemorial. Hence, their categorical argument and struggle was that Egberi and Mapala should not present candidates to fill the vacant stool at that point in time having done so on several instances in time past.^{xxxix} Grounded on their contributions in time past to the preservation of the Perebiyenmo Ruling House with particular reference to the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977, the duo bitterly considered the intention of their royal brothers to exclude them as offensive. Thus, their counter argument was that in all the instances they ascended the throne in time past, it was not based on rotational order. Rather the non-charlatan attitude of the former towards the affairs of the Royal House caused their perceived marginalisation, if any.^{xl}

As a *fait accompli* in historical discourse, according to Carr, the historian and his facts are inseparable. In other words, the facts create the historian and the historian creates the facts.^{xli} Therefore, at this critical juncture, it is deemed desideratum to unveil the historical identities of those who have occupied the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Stool so far in a chronological order: These were (1) Perebiyenmo Ogbonu, (2) Tabaimotimi Perebiyenmo, (3) Barakunmo Perebiyenmo, (4) Dibokoru Igbani Oyohoto, (5) Aaga

Thinba Bibija, Aaga I, (6) Egejigha Odiya, (7) Opukutu Ogbon, Opukutu I (1926-1929). (8) Mesarawon Shadrach Poro, Opukutu II (1933-3 August, 1960), (9) Defaye Mejuya Ebenezer Eperetun, Aaga II (1976-2007); and (10) Zacchaeus Doubra Egbunu, Oputuku III, the incumbent, installed on Monday, 18 September, 2018.^{xlii}

On a critical analysis with direct reference to the biological children of Ogbonu, namely Ejih, Perebiyenmo, and Fiyepaghatei, and their descendants, who have mounted the throne, are Perebiyenmo himself as the first Agadagba, two of his children (Tabaimotimi and Barakunmo) and their descendants, except Dibokoru, a descendant of Fiyepaghatei (sister to Ejih and Perebiyenmo). By implication, non from the lineage of Ejih so far. Now, looking at it from the perspective of the children of Perebiyenmo earlier mentioned, and their descendants, Tabaimotimi, (once, a biological son of Perebiyenmo); Barakunmo, (once, a biological son of Perebiyenmo); Aaga Thinba Bibija and Defaye Mejuya Ebenezer Eperetun, twice (descendants of Mapala); Egejigha, once, (a descendant of Odiya); Opukutu Ogbon, Mesarawon Shadrach Poro, and Zacchaeus Doubra Egbunu (thrice, descendants of Egberi). The above clearly reveals that non from Asun, and Ereh has ascended the throne so far.^{xliii} The above, therefore, necessitated the agitation against the dominance lineages of the Perebiyenmo Ruling House, namely Egberi and Mapala.

On the other hand, the inter-succession discord was between Perebiri and Perebiyenmo adherents, which was pursued from legal perspective. As argued by the descendants of Ejih, the

recommendation of the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission, and the subsequent approval of the Perebierenmo Ruling House by the Ondo State Executive Council in 1981 notwithstanding, the said Perebierenmo Ruling House Declaration was not directed to be registered or directed but not registered by the officers of the Government of Ondo State as required by Law.^{xliv} This was considered inimical to relevant sections of the Chiefs Law of Ondo State. Specifically for instance, Section 4 (1) of the Chiefs Edict 1984 provides as follows: ‘Every Declaration of the Committee approved by the Executive Council shall be registered and kept in safe custody by such officer as the military Governor may direct.’ Similarly, Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs (Amendment) Edict 1991 provides thus: ‘Any Declaration made in pursuant of this section shall be registered and kept in safe custody by such officer as the military Governor may direct’^{xlv}. Anchored on the above relevant provisions, the Ejih descendants’ argument was that in the eyes of the law, a non-registered declaration cannot be used to install the Agadagba. Consequently, the kernel of their argument was that the only legitimate Declaration in the eyes of the law should be the 1957 codified Perebiri Ruling House.

Having clearly seen the weighty nature of the argument postulated by the descendants of Ejih, the members of the Perebierenmo Ruling House, pontificated a counter argument within a legal hole created by the same Section 4 (1) of the Chiefs Edict 1984 and Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs Edict 1991. They, therefore, argued logically that the Perebierenmo Ruling House Declaration having been approved by the Ondo State Executive Council ought to have been duly registered and kept in safe

custody by such officer of the State Government under the direction of the Military Governor or the Executive Governor of the State as the case may be. Hence, the Government of Ondo State was liable for the obvious lacuna. As a way, they simply requested the then Executive Governor of Ondo State, Arakunrin Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu to use his good offices as an officer of Justice to ensure that the Perebiyenmo Ruling House Declaration be registered to enable them fill the vacant stool of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Kingdom.^{xlvi}

In compliance with the above request, 'the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy Declaration' was duly registered on 8 April, 2010. The statutory four signatories were, Oba M. O. Olomu, the Takunbe of Ipoke, and the Chairman, Chieftaincy Committee of Ese-Odo Local Government Area, Igbekebo; Oba Olatunbosun Luyi, the Ebini of Ojuala Kingdom, the Secretary, Ese-Odo Chieftaincy Committee; Mr I. O. Olajide, for the Secretary, Ese-Odo Local Government Area, Igbekebo; and the Permanent Secretary, Deputy Governor's Office (Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs) Alagbaka, Akure.^{xlvii} The descendants of Ejih furiously kicked against the above registration, which they described as surreptitious, and clandestine, thus challenged it in the High Court of Ondo State. The above objection notwithstanding, the Ondo State Government on the strength of the above registration, approved the appointment of His Imperial Majesty, *Pere Zacchaeus Doubra Egbunu*, as the new Agadagba, and the Prescribed Authority of Arogbo-Ijo. The Instrument of Appointment and the Staff of Office were presented to him by the then Deputy Governor of Ondo State, His Excellency, Alfred

Agboola Ajayi on Monday, 18 September, 2018 at the Arogbo City Play Ground.^{xlviii}

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo Chieftaincy Declaration was a duly approved and registered traditional stool in 1957 with the identity of Perebiri Ruling House. However, following the creation of Ondo State in 1976, the Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission was set up in 1977 by Wing Commander Ita David Ikpeme, the first military Governor of Ondo State, to review the then desired existing chieftaincies. Consequently, the then *Pere* Eperetun presented the 1957 Declaration for a review, and the Perebiri Ruling House identity was changed to Perebienenmo Ruling House in 1977; and the White Paper released in 1981. The above feat was achieved amidst stiff opposition, with particular respect to the Ejih descendants who saw no meaningful merit on the change. Meanwhile, the subsequent demise of *Pere* Eperetun in 2007 opened a series of intra and inter succession crises. Though the adherents of the Perebienenmo Ruling House succeeded in enthroning *Pere* Egbunu as the 10th Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo in 2018, the crisis between the two adherents is still a subject of legal contestation, and thus, haunting their unity. As an irony, *Pere* Eperetun who effected the change himself was installed with the Perebiri identity in 1976. The paper, therefore, concluded that the change of the identity of the Ruling House from Perebiri to Perebienenmo concomitantly laid the fertile grounds for the intra-succession rift within the descendants of Perebienenmo on one hand, and inter-succession dispute between the adherents of Perebiri and Perebienenmo.

End notes

- i Atiku urges governors to respect traditional institutions. Vanguard News <https://www.vanguardngr.com>>... accessed online, 28/06/2024.
- ii J. F. Olorunfemi, and B. A. Oloworaran 2021. Determining the effect of chieftaincy declaration on native law and custom: towards a consistent judicial approach in Nigeria. *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, Vol. 47, 2021-Issue 2. Accessed online [https:// doi.org/10. 1080/03050.1784770](https://doi.org/10.1080/03050.1784770).
- iii L. K. Alo 2014. Legal Regulation of Chieftaincy Disputes in Yoruba land, 1939-1960. A Thesis in the Department of History, Submitted to the Faculty of Arts, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, p. 1-18.
- iv W. Oyemakinde 1977. The Chiefs Law and the Regulation of Traditional Chieftaincy in Yoruba land. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. December, 1977, Vol. 1, pp.63-74.
- v Western State Chieftaincy Declarations. <https://wordcat.org>>ocle. Accessed online 16/05/2024.
- vi The word, Ijo is often spelt as *Ijaw* and *Izon* in some literature. The spelling adopted for this work is Ijo. Therefore, whenever the spellings *Ijaw* are *Izon* are used in this work, they are direct quotations from earlier works. Above all, Arogbo is one of the clans of Ijo Nation. However, in this context, Ijo is added to Arogbo (Arogbo-Ijo) in Ondo State to demonstrate their distinctiveness as a minority and non-Yoruba group.



- vii Western State of Nigeria, Western Chieftaincy Declarations, Okitipupa Division, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.
- viii E. J. Alagoa 2005. *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, pp.32-34; and E. J. Alagoa *et al.* Eds. 2009. *The Izon of the Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications, pp. 401-403.
- ix Note: The people of Safarogbo are historically of Arogbo-Ijo origin, and thus, directly under the Arogbo-Ijo traditional institution during the pre-colonial period. But, the British colonial rule brought them under Benin Division of Benin Province, while the greater part of the Arogbo-Ijo territories were brought under Okitipupa Division of Ondo Province of Southern Nigeria. That was the root of Arogbo-Ijo Balkanisation into different administrative units within the Southern part of Nigeria. Consequently, today, the people of Safarogbo, Oforojoh-gbini, Mamagbini, Kolombo and Bilebuwei-ama are found in Ovia South West Local Government Area of Edo State, but their traditional institutions are under the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijo (the traditional head of the Arogbo-Ijo).
- x E. J. Alagoa 2005. *A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Oral Tradition...* p.25.
- xi F. George 2022. Changing Identities and Inter-Group Relations Among the Arogbo-Ijo and Apoi of Ondo State, Nigeria, 1915-2007. A PhD Thesis Submitted to Faculty of Arts, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, p. 31.
- xii F. George 2022. A PhD Thesis Submitted to Faculty of Arts, Department of History...

- xiii Western State of Nigeria, Western State Chieftaincy Declarations, Okitipupa Division, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Declaration Made under Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs Law 1957 of the Customary Law Regulating the Selection of the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy, and Declaration Made under Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs Law 1957 of the Customary Law Regulating the Selection to the Tarabiri-Torhu of Arogbo Chieftaincy.
- xiv *Pere* is an Ijo word meaning a King in English and an Oba in Yoruba.
- xv K. I. Peretei 2014. *Arogbo Ijo People and Events*. Abuja: Mentors Communication Limited, Revised Edition, p.
- xvi High Chief Sunday Erepaghamini Yayu, 78 years, the Head of Ereh Lineage of Perebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 14 March, 202; see also, G. A. Eshofonie 2009. *The Arogbo Ijaws of Nigeria*. Lagos: Gabson and Sons (Nig) Enterprise Publishers and Educational Materials and Suppliers.
- xvii Oral interview held with High Chief Samson Opirijitei, 76 years, the Head of Tarabiri-Torhu Kingmakers Forum, Erubiri, Arogbo, 24 March, 2024.
- xviii W. Oyemakinde 1977. The Chiefs Law and the Regulation of Traditional Chieftaincy in Yoruba land. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, December 1977, Vol. 1 pp. 63-74.
- xix Oral interview held with High Chief Ebenezer Titiboh, 76 years, Head of Egberi Lineage of Perebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024; and see also, NAI. Ondoprof-2906/5, W. R. L. N. 265 of 1955. The Western Region Local Government Law, 1952 (No. 1 of 1953), B 775.

- xx Western State of Nigeria, Western State Chieftaincy Declarations, Okitipupa Division, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Declaration Made under Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs Laws 1957 of the Customary Law Regulating the Selection to the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy, Made by the Chieftaincy Committee of Ese-Odo District Council which has been designated as the competent Council by WRLN No. 22 of 1959 and signed by the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee this 20th day of April, 1959; approved by the Minister of Local Government this 11th day of April, 1960; and registered by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government this 1st day of June, 1960, p. 6..
- xxi Western State of Nigeria, Western State Chieftaincy Declarations, Okitipupa Division, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Declaration Made under Section 4 (2) of the Chiefs Laws 1957 of the Customary Law Regulating the Selection to the Agadagba of Ijaw Arogbo Chieftaincy.., p.6.
- xxii NAI: Ondoprsof-2960/5 WRLN 265 of Ese-Odo District Council Membership List of 1955.
- xxiii Oral interview held with High Chief Happy Kawei Atili, 83 years, one of the twelve Tarabiri-Torhu Kingmakers, Egbesubiri, 24 May, 2015.
- xxiv NAI: Minutes of Ese-Odo District Council Finance Committee held in the Council Committee Room on Wednesday, 24 September, 1958. See also, the letter written by the Local Government Adviser, Ondo, No. OK. 1091/472 of 16TH July, 1959.

- xxv Oral interview held with High Chief Ebenezer Titiboh, 76 years, the Head of Egberi Lineage of Perebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.
- xxvi Oral interview held with High Chief Ebenezer Titiboh, 76 years, the Head of Egberi Lineage of Prebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo. 23 March, 2024.
- xxvii Oral interview held with High Chief Sunday Erepaghamini Yayu, 78 years, the Head of Ereh Lineage of Perebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.
- xxviii Ondo State of Nigeria White Paper Two on Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977, July, 1981, p. v.
- xxix Oral interview held with High Chief Sunday Erepaghamini Yayu, 78 years, the Head of Ereh Lineage of Perebiyenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.
- xxx High Chief Israel Emokenighan, 64 years, Chief Bilebu of Arogbo, Erubiri, 26 March, 2024.
- xxxi The above details were revealed to the researcher by High Chief Soye Michael Abednego shortly before his demise on 12 July, 2012 at his residence in Abednego Kiri, Opu-Erubiri. Arogbo.
- xxxii Ondo State of Nigeria White Paper Two on Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977, 1 July, 1981, p. 92.
- xxxiii Ondo State of Nigeria White Paper Two on Morgan Chieftaincy Review Commission of 1977, I July, 1981, p. 92.
- xxxiv A. Filatei and K. I. Peretei 2023. *Edebo: The Portrait of an Uncommon Matriarch*. Lagos: Makere Books and Logistics Limited, p. xxviii.
- xxxv Oral interview held with High Chief Samuel Ojulawo Leloh, 66 years, Chairman, Arogbo-Ijo Ibe Council of Chiefs, Opu-Erubiri, Arogbo, 26 March, 2024.

- xxxvi Ondo State of Nigeria White Paper on Ajakaiye Chieftaincy Review Commission, June 1989.
- xxxvii A. I. Osuntokun. 1999. Nigerian Foreign Policy in Global Historical Perspective. *An Inaugural Lecture of the University of Lagos*. Lagos University Press, p.
- xxxviii Oral interview held with High Chief Samuel Leloh, 67 years, from Ereh Lineage of the Perebienenmo Ruling House, Erubiri, Arogbo, 24 March, 2024.
- xxxix Oral interview held with Chief Pius Okoro, 60 years, Chief Okoro of Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, Arogbo.
- xl Oral interview held with High Chief Benezer Titiboh, 76 years, the Head of Egberi Lineage of Perebienenmo Ruling House, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.
- xli E. H. Carr 1987. *What is History?* Second Edition. London: Penguin, p. 30.
- xliv E. J. Alagoa 2005. *A History of the Niger Delta: An Interpretation of Ijo Oral Traditions....*p. ; and Oral interview held with Chief Bolosiwei Epemu, 70 years, Chief Miyeibai of Erubiri, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.
- xlvi K. I. Peretei 2014. *Arogbo Ijo People and Events*. Abuja: Mentors Communication Limited, Revised Edition, p. and Oral interview held with
- xlvii A Petition entitled Vacant Stool of Agadagba of Arogbo Kingdom and the Non-Registration of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijaw Chieftaincy Declaration as Approved by the Executive Council of Ondo State, written by Otunba Henry Orumen and Associates, Barristers and Solicitors of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, Gold Standard Chambers, 1, El-Shaddai Road, Old Owo Garage, Akure, dated 30th July, 2009.

- xlv A Petition entitled Vacant Stool of Agadagba of Arogbo Kingdom and the Non-Registration of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijaw Chieftaincy Declaration...
- xlvi A Petition entitled Vacant Stool of Agadagba of Arogbo Kingdom and the Non-Registration of the Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijaw Chieftaincy Declaration...
- xlvii Open Registry, the Agadagba's File, the Local Government Secretariat, Ese-Odo Local Government Area, Igbekebo.
- xlviii Oral interview held with High Chief Ebenezer Titiboh, 76 years, the Head of Egberi Lineage of Perebiri Ruling House, Arogbo, 23 March, 2024.