

A History of Origin and Growth of Osi-Ekiti

By

Olalekan Johnson Fagbona,
Department of History & International Studies
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State
Email Address: fagbona.olalekan@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract

Osi is one of the ancient and prominent Yoruba speaking communities in the South-western region of Nigeria. With an origin traceable to Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba, the town has fascinating historical experience of migrations from its first settlement known as Osi-Sooko in Ile-Ife, to Isodu, a nearby village to Ogotun Ekiti, down to another settlement, Osi-Emimu and to its present location, Osi-Asise (Ekiti), in the present Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The people were not static but witnessed change and continuity and had remarkable growth which helped to sustain and consolidate the town. This paper takes a historical excursion to x-ray tradition of origin and growth of Osi-Ekiti, its pre-colonial economic activities, administrative tradition, kingship and palace organization in pre-colonial Osi, and changes and adaptation during the colonial period. Primary and secondary sources were consulted during the documentation of this work, and the paper found out that colonialism had its positive and negative effects on the town such as abolition of human sacrifices, introduction of literacy (Western education) and construction of major roads. It also hampered the growth and development of Osi people in no small measure, desecrated Osi Kingship stool, and made nonsense of their traditional beliefs. The paper concludes that colonialism was a phenomenon of mixed package.

Introduction

Prior to the various external invasions of the area, *Osi* happened to be a very vast and prosperous town with many tributary towns and villages. The town extended to the heart of the present Ido-Ekiti¹¹⁷ and shared a boundary with former Arigidi which was corruptively spelt as Ageridi now

¹¹⁷ Interview with Pa. Omolayo Adeuti at Emila Compound, Idofin Quarter, conducted by the author on August 5, 2019

(Ayegbaju) in the present Oye Local Government Area of Ekiti State.¹¹⁸ For instance, Osi lost fifteen tributary towns in war, six to the Ajero, six to the Olojudo and three to the Ewi of Ado.¹¹⁹ The various invasions on the area really diminished Osi and confined the town to its present geographical location.

Ido/Osi Local Government Area, formerly Ido/Osi District Council, later (Ero Local Government) is located geographically within the latitudes 7° 45' and 7° 50'N and longitudes 50° 05'E to 50° 10'E. It is situated in the northwestern part of Ekiti State within the topographical map of Ado Ekiti (N.W sheet 244) on the scale of 1:50,000. Most of the settlements in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area are not large in terms of population and can still be classified as towns and villages. Their major and most prominent pattern of settlement is linear along the major roads and nucleated in valleys or plain lands. The major towns in the area include, Ifaki Ekiti, Ido Ekiti, Osi Ekiti, Usi Ekiti, Ayetoro Ekiti, Ilogbo Ekiti, Igbole Ekiti, and Ora Ekiti. Other minor towns include, Aaye Ekiti, Ifisin Ekiti, Orin Ekiti, etc.¹²⁰

Osi is located geographically within the latitudes 7°47'15"N5°09'16"E. It is bounded in the North by Igbole Ekiti, in the West by Epe Ekiti, Ijero Local Government Area, in the East by Ilogbo Ekiti, in the South by Iropora Ekiti, Ifelodun/Irepodun Local Government Area. It is about 30 kilometers to the capital city, Ado Ekiti.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ NAI, Governor Macgregor visit to Ekiti Kingdoms on 15th September, 1903. File No. 27966/4. P. 7

¹¹⁹ NAI, Governor Macgregor visit to Ekiti Kingdoms.....P. 8

¹²⁰ O. S. Ayodele. (2012). "Geology and Groundwater Quality Assessment of Ido/Osi Area, Southwestern Nigeria", *Journal of Environmental and Earth Science*, Vol. 2, No.5.

¹²¹ Google earth.com retrieved on July 10, 2019, 10:30 am

The people are strictly Black as other Yoruba race. The predominant occupation is farming due to the gifted mixed savannah. There are a few traders. Women however engaged in weaving of thick cloth, woven on traditional looms. Other occupations secondary to farming were dyeing and pottery coupled with carving by a relatively insignificant percentage of the people. The people speak a dialect of Yoruba, (Okun Yoruba of Kwa sub-group)¹²² slightly different from other dialects of her neighbouring towns and villages but most akin to that of Ile-Ife.

Notable farmland, among many others, include, Odo Esi, Urere, Oke Ipekun, Oke Eniju, Utagba, Ayedu, Amudu, Mokoto, Adagbo, Ayinrin, Imila, Ogege, Oke Ofin. Osi has a fairly level terrain; there is a belt of forest round the town which acts as an absorber against the havoc of tornado and rainstorms. Recently, this layer had been deforested in the process of community expansion. Water for domestic uses had always been solved by the never-dry rivers and brooks of Omi Usun, Alale, Omi Oko Iludi, Sogun, Imila, Agbetayun, Uwole, Shumute, Ogburu-gburu, Omi Ababadu and a host of others. All rivers and brooks flow outside the town with none flowing inwards.¹²³

As a result of the agrarian nature of the people of Osi, bush fallowing is the predominant agricultural method because of the abundance of cultivated lands. This bush fallowing method which is erroneously described as shifting cultivation is a process where farmers rotate the cultivated land to

¹²² J. Otitoju, (2002). *The Okun People of Nigeria*, Lagos: Wepcom Publishers Limited

¹²³ Interview with Mr. *Aje Jimoh* at Ajana Compound of *Ijopa* Quarters, conducted by the author on December 13, 2019.

allow the fallowing of exhausted land plots.¹²⁴ Beside the agrarian nature of the people, they also domesticate live stocks such as, goat, sheep, dogs, Elila of (Cow family) but lager and robust than cow.

Tradition of Origin of Osi Ekiti

Osi people are a branch of the Yoruba who share culture and mythology with other Yoruba groups with considerable historical differences. According to information and various accounts of origin of Osi people, Olosi was one of the senior sons of Oduduwa, the acclaimed founder of the Yoruba race. The first Olosi, according to this tradition left Ile-Ife during the waves of migration of other sons of Oduduwa, to found Osi. The tradition adds that large retinue of migrants followed Olosi to this new establishment. In the intelligence reports on Ado District, the travelling Commissioner of the Northeastern Yoruba Province, Captain N.A.C. Weir, supported this view strongly when he noted that "Olosi was the second most senior son of *Oduduwa* and this was why his father gave him many valuable presents during his departure from Ile-Ife".¹²⁵ Although no reason was given for this dispersal, it is axiomatic that the first Olosi left *Ife* with a blessing and this authenticate the basis on which Osi people traced their origin to Ile-Ife

Another account of origin of *Osi* people has it that, the first *Olosi*, Olukoronfo, was a son of Obalufon who himself was a successor of Oduduwa to the throne of Ile-Ife. This tradition asserted Osi to be part of Ife before Obalufon died. The Olosi contested the Ife's throne after the

¹²⁴ M. A. Agunbiade & O. O. Agunbiade (2017). "The History & Administrative Structures of Osi Ekiti Kingdom," a Paper Presented to the Ooni of Ife, His Imperial Majesty, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II during a courtesy visit of Olosi of Osi, Ekiti Kingdom on October 16, 2017, p. 5

¹²⁵ NAI/File No.32/30/"Intelligence Report on Ado District",

death of his father but narrowly lost. It was this loss of such an enviable throne that prompted his leaving Ile-Ife with several sympathizers to found a new town called Osi–Sooko. He therefore became its first king, leaving Ife with his own traditional crown and edifices.¹²⁶

Forerunners were sent to search out a plain and fertile land for Osi. The present location of Osi-Ekiti was discovered and the Olosi with his loyalists finally moved there to settle. It is instructive to note that, though the Olosi and his loyalists left Ife when his aspiration to become the Olofin Ife after Oduduwa’s death failed, still there was no love lost between Olukoronfo and Oduduwa because Olukoronfo (the king of *Osi*) played a highly exalted role in the burial service of Oduduwa, hence the name (*Osi*), to bury.¹²⁷

When Olufe (the ruler of Ife) died, none but the designated regional heads were allowed to come near the corpse, but because of *Olosi’s* powers and achievements, he was chosen as the Chief performer of the most highly celebrated funeral rites (that is, Baba Isinku). It was thus his prerogative to supply the special coffin tree called *Asise*, with which *Olofin N’Ife* (The ruler of Ife) was eventually buried.¹²⁸

Sooko was a title reserved for a prince who is to be enthroned as the next *Ooni* of *Ife* which literally means (someone who should not be confronted) because he is to be crowned the next *Ooni*. It was stressed that, it is impossible to be crowned *Ooni* in those days without first being installed as (*Sooko*). Osi Sooko was a farmland located at the back of *Ooni’s* palace

¹²⁶ Interview with Prince Dipo Agunbiade at Akombo Ruling House, Iludi Quarters, conducted by the author on November 10, 2019.

¹²⁷ M. A. Agunbiade & O. O. Agunbiade, (2017). “The History & Administrative Structures of Osi Ekiti Kingdom”... p. 8

¹²⁸ Interview with His Royal Majesty, Oba Solomon Adeyeye Adenipekun Ademakinwa I, the Olosi of Osi-Sooko. Lafogido Ruling House, Ile-Ife, conducted by the author on August 20, 2019.

in those days. It was confirmed that the people of Osi-Ekiti left Osi-Sooko in Ile-Ife in the year 1240 AD¹²⁹ in search of a more fertile and comfortable zone for themselves under the auspices of their leaders Olukoronfo and Ogunmegbokanle. Having left Osi-Sooko, they dwelled shortly in a place called (Isodu), now (Ikeji Ile-Ijesa) in the present Oriade Local Government Area of Osun State, a boundary between Osun and Ekiti State.¹³⁰

The people later migrated from Isodu and dwelled at Ipekun. They called their new settlement Osi-Emimu, where they settled before various invasions forced them to move downward Ipekun. They were prosperous at Ipekun and they had one salient feature of a very large ear which earned them the praise name *Omo a mugba lo soja meti kola a le* (i.e. One who went to the market with a plate and ended up using his/her ear to pack okras home). This feature of large ears distinguished Osi people at Ipekun from any other people around them. And in the present time in Osi Ekiti, there are people that have such a large ear who are regarded as the relics of Osi Ipekun (Ancient Osi). At a time, the people of Osi were raided and carried away in captivity and only six people were left with one dog. The six main quarters in the town were formed according to those six people that survived the raid. The quarters are, Iludi, Idofin, Isao, Ijopa, Ehinlata, and Iwaro.¹³¹ Presently, there are many other quarters or streets that evolved from the above listed six quarters.

¹²⁹ Interview with High Chief John Oluwafemi Olayinka, the Ejemu of Osi-Ekiti at Ejemu Compound, Iludi Quarters, conducted by the author on August 10, 2019

¹³⁰ Interview with the High Chief, Oke Fasosin, the Elemikan of Osi-Ekiti at Obaiye Compound, Isao Quarter, conducted by the author on August 10, 2019.

¹³¹ Interview with High Chief Babateye B. O., the Eruran of Osi-Ekiti at Eruran Compound, Iwaro Quarters, conducted by the author on August 12, 2019. The informant died on September 9, 2019.

At Ipekun, there are diverse relics of the people which had turned to a rocky stone, such as traditional bell (*Agogo Osi*), which was being used to alert the people during invasions and threat of war and to convey important information to the people, a hut, mortar and pestle which are now in their rocky form. The present Osi which is also called (Osi-Asise) was established by Ogunmegbokanle, a younger brother of Olukoronfo with whom they both left Ife together. Ogunmegbokanle sojourned at *Eruran*'s house and he was instructed by his brother Olukoronfo to go and establish kingship in a place called (*Oke-Akombo*), where the Olosi's palace is situated till date, while he, Olukoronfo would be left with the responsibilities of taking care of the pregnant women, people with one ailment or the other and community health in general being a herbalist (*Babalawo aremo*).¹³²

Socio-Political Organization and Growth of Osi-Ekiti

One can aptly opine that kingship and palace organization in Osi-Ekiti started with Ogunmegbokanle, having become the first king of Osi- Ekiti people in their present settlement Osi Asise, at the dictate of his elder brother, Olukoronfo. The institution of kingship in *Osi- Ekiti* has survived from centuries till date regardless of the challenges associated with it. *Osi* had produced twenty-eight (28) *Obas* successively and the current one, His Royal Majesty, *Oba Oladiran Adewoye Agunbiade Justin III*, is the 29th *Olosi*, who ascended the throne of his forefathers on the 11th November, 1991.¹⁷

¹³² Interview with Mrs. Apeorola Abe, Odiyileka House of Onigemo at Ijopa Quarters, conducted by the author on August 15, 2019.

The Administrative Tradition in Osi Ekiti

Osi Administrative tradition resembles many other Yoruba speaking communities in Nigeria with little differences. Traditional administration in *Osi* possesses a considerable level of semblance to modern democracy, which sustains the smooth running administrative system of the town.

Ogunmegbokanle the first *Olosi*, (king of *Osi*), established palace system purely for administrative conveniences with a palace built in the heart of the town (*Oke-Akombo*). He brought the palace organization to cynosure of all eyes and prominence. The *Olosi* possesses enormous powers but never autocratic because of the institution of checks and balances to curtail any abuse of power and office. He is only absolute in theory but in practices he does not rule alone. The *Olosi*'s pattern of administration had a resemblance with the old *Oyo* administrative tradition where the *OyoMesi* under the leadership of Chief *Bashorun* served as a check on excessiveness of the *Alaafin*, the king of *Oyo* and could be asked to commit suicide.¹³³

In *Osi*, the wearing of inner part clothes (*Odi Aso*), by women of the town and the holding of *Apasa* and *Obiri* tools for traditional weaving symbolize an urgent removal of the *Olosi*. This is a considerable measure against the excessiveness of any *Olosi*.¹³⁴ *Olosi* is not left alone in the administration of the town; he is assisted and advised by the members of his executive council, viz. the *Enumo*, the *Ijoye*, the *Elegbe*, the *Ijogun* and the *Egbogi*, each possessing senior and junior segments.

¹³³ Interview with Chief Alaba Olasusi, the Oniba of *Osi* at *Isao* Quarters, conducted by the author on September 27, 2019.

¹³⁴ Interview with Prince Farotimi Adegbuyi at *Akombo* Ruling of *Iludi* Quarters, conducted by the author on August 5, 2019.

The most senior in the hierarchy of the chiefs is the *Enumo* (the council of elders). They meet in the palace with the *Olosi* every nine days. It is instructive to note that high chief *Eisa* attends the meeting not as a member of the *Enumo* but as the President of the *Ijoye* (chiefs) in Council such that in the next three days after the *Enumo*'s meeting he would be able to relate the outcome of the *Enumo*'s meeting with the *Ijoye*, because, the members of the *Ijoye* in council do not attend *Enumo*'s meetings while the members of the *Enumo* do not attend the *ijoye* meetings. Only Chief *Eisa* attends the two meetings and this has earned him a phrase, *Oteru, Oba Ode* (One who sees in and out). Chief *Eisa* can be aptly described as the liaison principal between the two councils, i.e. the *Enumo and Ijoye* councils. Issues affecting the town are deliberated upon by the councils and decisions are made with the king's approval.

The four most senior members of the *Enumo* council are in hierarchical order, *Odofin, Eisa, Aro*, and the *Ejemu*. They are referred to as the (*Iare Merin*). These senior chiefs together with the military chiefs, viz. *Elemikan, Ajalugbo* and the *Eruku* formed the (*Osi-Meje Ode*), and they are also the kingmakers of the town.¹³⁵ The quarter's chiefs also bear the responsibility of maintaining law and order in their various quarters and judging cases that are above the jurisdiction of the lineage head.¹³⁶

In a similar vein, the female Council of Chiefs known as the *Egbogis* namely: *Esemure (Oba Obinrin), Ojumu, O-gun*, and the *Oniyara* constitutes an important traditional institution. These are the most senior female chiefs and they are headed by *Esemure*. They convene their

¹³⁵ Interview with High Chief John Oluwafemi Olayinka, the *Ejemu* of *Osi-Ekiti* at *Iludi Compound*, conducted by the author on August 10, 2019.

¹³⁶ M. A. Agunbiade & O. O. Agunbiade (2017). "The History & Administrative Structures of *Osi Ekiti Kingdom*"... p. 13

meetings every nine days at *Esemure's* residence. Other notable female chiefs include *Olosare*, and *Olookoju*. The female *Iare Merin*, *Esemure*, *Ojumu*, *O-gun*, and *Oniyara* meet with *Olosi* in Council when an important matter is being discussed on such issues like setting rules for the subjects, tradition matters and setting out punitive measures for anyone who violates the law of the land. They also help to maintain law and order and promote the dignity of women in the community.¹³⁷

For effective traditional administrative system, *Ogunmegbokanle* established association system. One of them is the *Egbe Ibile* (the traditional age-grade). Each grade is captained by *Olori Egbe* (head of the association). Members of the same group also have one overall head known as *Olori-Ebi* (head of the group). They all operate within the age grade system. They also help in promoting the aspiration of the town, maintain law and order and champion community developmental programme.¹³⁸

The hunters and native doctors (*Ode/Babalawo*) guild evolved under the leadership of *Ogunmegbokanle*. The hunters, apart from watching over the town in the night, also fight wars and eliminate wild animals capable of eradicating human generation such as lion, leopard, tiger, buffalo and elephant. The native doctors are concerned with the spiritual matters and consultations. They are also summoned by the *Olosi* to consult their oracle on a serious matter affecting the growth of the town, such as outbreak of an epidemic disease. For instance, there was a time during the reign of the 26th *Olosi*, *Oba William Ajayi Agunbiade*, 1939-1973, that sudden death erupted in every house in *Osi*, the king summoned one old, most renowned

¹³⁷ Interview with High Chief, Mrs. Ranti Akinbode, the *Esemure* of *Osi* at Obalua Compound, Isao Quarters, conducted by the author on August 8, 2019.

¹³⁸ Interview with Pa. Farotimi Joseph at Akombo Ruling House, Iludi Quarters, conducted by the author on August 12, 2019.

Ifa priest named *Anifa-olojalapo*, who consulted the oracle and proffered solution to the ugly occurrences.¹³⁹ Institutions of religious cults in *Osi* were initiated by Ogunmegbokanle, though *Olua* deity is most rooted in mystery which no one knows how it began.¹⁴⁰ However, these various traditional cults help in the smooth administrative system of the town.

Kingship and Palace Organisation in Osi-Ekiti

Prior to the advent of the British rule, *Osi* people had a well-organized and structured Kingship system that totally brought order and harmony to the town. The King (*Olosi*) was held in the highest esteem just like any other *Oba* in *Yorubaland*. *Olosi* had the power of life and death (theoretically), which made people venerate his position and treat him with reverence. *Olosi* had total control in pre-colonial *Osi-Ekiti* over his people and was responsible for all socio-cultural, political, economic and military experiences of his people.

Kingship and Palace Organization in pre-colonial *Osi* was the key and essence of the administrative system of the people. This, in no small measure, enabled the *Osi* people to live peacefully and promote the spirit of brotherhood among them. *Olosi* was projected as the ultimate, the representative of the gods, and he was also regarded as the *Alase Ikeji Orisa*,¹⁴¹ the only one next to the gods.

The palace of the *Olosi* was seen as the unifying centre that united all the citizens; *Olosi* was regarded as the father of all in the community irrespective of their age and status. *Osi* kingship and palace organization

¹³⁹ Interview with Chief Lawrence at Adubina, Alaaye Compound of Ijopa Quarters, conducted by the author on August 15, 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Pa. Omolayo Adeuti at Emila Compound of Idofin Quarters, conducted by the author on August 5, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Pa. Kehinde Fagboyo at Onigemo Compound of Ijopa Quarters, conducted by the author on August 30, 2019

in the pre-colonial era was superb and enviable. It was established based on African democratic system), which gives no room for excessiveness.¹⁴² The British colonial masters were aware of this well-organized socio-political system or institution and they knew it would be a colossal failure for them if they refused to carry the *Obas* along in their new order. Hence, the necessity of the British system of Indirect Rule, in which the subjects were ruled through their existing traditional rulers. The British colonial rule came and totally disorganized the kingship system desecrating, to a large extent, the spiritual powers of the kings. They usurped their powers by making them subservient to the District Officers. Consequently, the kings became mere rubber stamps, with their status greatly reduced, though they were retaining their positions and given full powers that were, however, not challenging to the British rule.¹⁴³

Kingship in pre-colonial *Osi* was regarded as most sacred and, the *Olosi* palace, most hallowed by all and sundry. Any lesser treatment to this standard was regarded as profanity and sacrilegious which can attract the wrath of the ancestors and trigger ill-lucks. One noticeable feature of kingship and organization of the palace in *Osi* and many other places in pre-colonial Yoruba land was the independence of one *Oba* from another. This was a factor that widely promoted peaceful cohesion and brotherliness spirit among the *Obas* in Yoruba land as they saw themselves as one blood and partners in progress.

Unfortunately, the British came and made new changes to this hallowed institution by placing one *Oba* above his brother *Oba*, thus creating enmity

¹⁴² Interview with High Chief John Oluwafemi Olayinka, the Ejemu of Osi-Ekiti at Ejemu Compound of Iludi Quarters conducted by the author on August 10, 2019.

¹⁴³ F. J. Oloidi (2014). "The Changing Status of Ekiti Traditional Rulers in Colonial Nigeria", *Historical Research Letter*, Vol. 13

and bitterness which triggered stiff competition among the *Obas*, giving many *Obas* powers which never existed in their tradition. The arrangement at *Oke-Imo* on June 21, 1900 where *Ekiti* Council of *Obas*, formed under the Relative Authority birthed by W.R. Revee Tucker divided *Ekiti* into kingdoms, and each of these had a paramount king.¹⁴⁴ This arrangement was purely made for administrative conveniences and selfish interest of the British policy of Divide and Rule.

Prominent *Obas* with valid historical stamina were placed under another *Obas* which had no historical supremacy over them. For instance, *Ewi* of *Ado* was placed third in order of precedence, while *Osi*, *Ilawe*, and *Ijan*, were placed under *Ado* until 1946 when *Osi* and *Ilawe* as a result of many agitations assumed district headquarters and the earlier arrangement became useless and irrelevant. This has since set the tempo of relationship between the *Obas* in *Ekiti*, who are naturally brothers to become enemies as a result of struggle for political relevance, lobbying, and other selfish interest.

Recently, Governor Kayode Fayemi on the 28th July, 2019 appointed His Royal Majesty *Oba Adebajji Alabi; the Alawe of Ilawe* as the *Ekiti* State Chairman of Council of *Obas*, and his appointment was criticized by sixteen *Obas* claiming superiority and asserted that, *Alawe* did not belong to the sixteen traditional rulers, known as '*Pelupelu Obas*.' They sued Governor Kayode Fayemi over his appointment of *Alawe of Ilawe-Ekiti*, *Oba Adebajji Alabi*, as Chairman of the *Ekiti* State Council of *Obas*. The aggrieved monarchs described the action taken by the Governor in picking someone outside the sixteen *Obas* called '*Alademerindinlogun*', (i.e.

¹⁴⁴ F. J. Oloidi (2014). "The Changing Status of Ekiti Traditional Rulers in Colonial Nigeria".....

sixteen crowned kings) to occupy the exalted seat as a flagrant violation of the *Ekiti* State Chieftaincy Law.

Joined in the suit were Governor *Kayode Fayemi* (first defendant), Attorney-General of *Ekiti* State, *Wale Fapohunda* (second defendant) and *Oba Adebajji Alabi* (third defendant). An originating summons filed by Dr. B.A.M. Ajibade (SAN) on August 7, 2019, and deposed to by *Ajero of Ijero, Oba Joseph Adewole*, on behalf of other 15 *Obas*, sought an interlocutory injunction restraining *Fayemi* from swearing-in *Alawe* as the chairman of the council.

The monarchs insisted that by composition, the Council of *Ekiti* State Traditional Council has permanent and rotational members. The aggrieved *Obas*, with the exception of *Oore* of Otun, *Oba Adedapo Popoola*, who travelled abroad and later died on the 22nd October, 2019, had in a letter to the governor dated August 2, 2019, asked *Fayemi* to reverse the action, saying a court had earlier struck out a suit filed by five monarchs who were promoted to *Pelupelu* and seeking recognition of that status. They said that the promotion of *Alawe*, *Olosi*, *Olojudo (Ido- Ile)*, and *Arajaka* to the *Pelupelu* rank by the government was an erosion of the tradition, saying that all the appointments were done in violation of the tradition and existing laws. They said that they were opposed to the appointment and threatened that they would not attend the inauguration of *Alawe* as Council Chairman and any meeting of the council where he presided.¹⁴⁵ The above was a

¹⁴⁵ P. Yaqoub (2019). "Ekiti Flay Appointment of Alawe as Traditional Council Chairman", the Independent Newspaper, Monday, August 12, 2019.

testament of unhealthy competition and struggle for political relevance that exist among the traditional rulers in *Ekiti* State.

Changes and Adaptation in Osi-Ekiti Palace Organization during the Colonial period

It is axiomatic fact that changes did not begin with the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. In the case of Osi, it was obvious that changes had started to manifest prior to the coming of the British colonial administrators, but these changes were people oriented and, in accordance with the peoples' traditions and way of life.¹⁴⁶ One of the most significant and noticeable changes that shook *Osi* kingship is traceable to the arrangement that took place at Oke-Imo. Major W.R. Reeve Tucker formed the North Eastern District at Oke-Imo now in *Osun* state, where the *Ekiti* Council of *Obas*, formed under the Relative Authority, was to be meeting him regularly. In one of such meetings that took place on June 21, 1900, *Ekiti* was eventually divided into twenty kingdoms and each of these had a paramount king, while the kings were also ranked. The *Ewi* of Ado, for example, was placed third in order of precedence, while Osi was placed under Ado.¹⁴⁷ However, the ranking of kings was challenged by many *Obas*, particularly because of the reduction of the status of their territories by the colonial administration which was not ready to understand the historical and cultural background of the people

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Chief Adedayo Ogboja, the Baba Ijo of Methodist Church at Osi Asa Compound, Iwaro Quarters, conducted by the author on November 21, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ F. J. Oloidi (2014). "The Changing Status of Ekiti Traditional Rulers in Colonial Nigeria", in *Historical Research Letter*, Vol. 13

In a similar vein, Major W. R. Reeve–Tucker who served as the first Travelling Commissioner for the North–Eastern District of the Yorubaland, toured the entire district and assembled all the *Baale* (Community Heads) of satellite towns in the metropolitan towns to re-enact and enforce their submission to the paramount *Oba* of their area. In the course of this exercise, he took steps to deal with recalcitrant Ekiti *Baale* who opposed the idea of their official subordination to neighbouring paramount Ekiti *Obas* in the district. Instances of the British colonial agents application of suppressive rule was cited during Major Reeve Tucker’s tour of the Kingdom of Ado-Ewi (later Ado-Ekiti) on 18th January, 1900 where he assembled *Baaless* and *Obas* in the neighbouring towns to come and pay obeisance to the *Ewi*. It was cited that he fined the *Olosi* of Osi, a sum of £5 (five pounds) because the latter refused to prostrate to *Ewi* of Ado-Ekiti in his presence and in the presence of other *Baaless* and officials.¹⁴⁸

Oguntuyi specifically noted that the *Olosi* as a *Baale* of an *Ekiti* town was the first to agitate for local autonomy in the realm of *Ewi* as he reiterated thus:

The *Olosi* was one of the first among those under the *Ewi* to agitate for independence. On the account of this, Aduloju attempted to attack Osi but the *Ewi* Atewogboye objected strongly. Aduloju insisted. He besieged Osi but Atewogboye sent *Akogun Irona* to drive him from the place. He narrowly escaped with his life. He was attacked at Ojido

¹⁴⁸ J. T. Babatola, (2019). “Traditions and Controversies Surrounding the Ekiti Senior Obas (1860-1960)”, Pp. 1-19. Retrieved from [researchgate.net/publication/335137616_TRADITIONS_AND_CONTROVERSIES_SURROUNDING_THE_EKITI_SENIOR_OBAS_1860-1960](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335137616_TRADITIONS_AND_CONTROVERSIES_SURROUNDING_THE_EKITI_SENIOR_OBAS_1860-1960)

Forest. A street skirmish followed. The only one killed during the fight was *Atabata*, the head servant of the *Akogun*...Sometime later the *Olosi* again put up his case but this time he did not receive the sympathy of the British officials. He was seriously warned by Major Reeve Tucker. When Captain W. A. G. Ambrose...succeeded Major Reeve Tucker, he warned the *Olosi* against the wearing of crown and settled the land dispute between *Olosi* and *Olojido* in October 1901. It was this dispute that made *Ajero* and *Olojido* in November 1901 forbid their men to attend the *Osi* market, but further amicable settlement was made by the *Ewi Ajimudaoro*. In 1904, Ambrose seized *Olosi's* crown at *Oke Imo*.¹⁴⁹

The way the colonial masters tampered with the autonomy and sovereignty of the *Olosi* should have been better imagined than experienced. Also, the existing peaceful cohesion between *Olosi* and other traditional rulers was hampered during the colonial period. Prior to this period, *Olosi* regarded *Olojido* of *Ido (Faboro)*, *Ajero* of *Ijero*, *Ewi* of *Ado* and other traditional rulers in *Ekiti* as brothers who originated from a common origin (*Ile-Ife*) but the advent of the colonial rule marred the cordial and smooth relationship that existed between the traditional rulers in *Ekiti* as a result of the colonial manipulations and their system of divide and rule, which lorded one *Oba* over his fellow *Oba* regardless of their historical antecedent and validity.¹⁵⁰ For instance, *Osi* was placed under the suzerainty of *Ado* at *Oke-Imo*. This arrangement was in no small measure a setback in *Osi* kingship and palace organization as *Olosi* consequently became subservient to *Ewi*

¹⁴⁹ A. O. Oguntuyi (1979). *History of Ekiti: from the Beginning to 1939*. Ibadan: Bisi Book. p. 135

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Pa. Adeuti Omolayo at Emila Compound, Idofin Quarters conducted by the author on October 28, 2019.

of Ado as salient administrative decisions could not be taken in Osi without the approval of *Ewi* of Ado, until 1946 when Osi as a result of different agitations and unrest, became autonomous of Ado alongside with Ilawe, Ijan, and Ido Ajinare.¹⁵¹

Also, the economic power of *Olosi* was weakened and considerably reduced as a result of the new tax system introduced by the colonial administration. Traditional gifts, tributes, charges and fines which were earlier received by the *Olosi* were outlawed and replaced by payment of taxes; which was not forthcoming because most of the Osi people evaded taxes by running away and hiding in their farms and forests to avoid tax collectors.¹⁵²

In a similar vein, salaries and stipends were introduced by the colonial masters to accompany the collection of taxes and these salaries were paid based on derivations from each kingdom in Ekiti. For instance, the 27th Olosi, Oba William Ajayi Agunbiade, who reigned from 1939-1973, first received €48, and was later increased on the 1st of April, 1952 to €60.¹⁵³ This meant that apart from the reduction of *Olosi's* administrative power, his (*Olosi*) regular sources of income were also reduced.

One significant consequence of the salaries introduced by the colonial administration, apart from reduction in *Olosi's* source of income, was a change of the *Olosi's* orientation from being a pro-people to pro-colonial government king. Of course, who pays the piper, dictates the tune.

¹⁵¹ J. T. Babatola, (2019). "Traditions and Controversies Surrounding the Ekiti Senior Obas (1860-1960)", P. 28 Retrieved from [researchgate.net/publication/335137616_TRADITIONS_AND_CONTROVERSIES_SURROUNDING_THE_EKITI_SENIOR_OBAS_1860-1960](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335137616_TRADITIONS_AND_CONTROVERSIES_SURROUNDING_THE_EKITI_SENIOR_OBAS_1860-1960)

¹⁵² Interview with Chief Ateniola Ajayi, the Olotin of Osi-Ekiti at Olotin Compound, Ijopa Quarters conducted by the author on October 14, 2019.

¹⁵³ N.A.I./File No.27968/1/ "Osi District Questionnaire on Chiefs' Salaries,"

However, the above asserted points were not to suggest that colonialism was a total fiasco in Osi. In fact, its benefits cannot be swept under the carpet. For instance, abolition of human sacrifice was another change witnessed in *Osi* kingship during the colonial period. Prior to this time, after the completion of the compulsory seclusion of the *Olosi*-elect in Chief *Odofin's* house (*Akodi-Odofin*), and he was being led to his palace by the *Omo-Owas* (princes and princesses), *Ikan, Ode* (hunters), and *Awos'* (witch doctors), *Olosi*-elect must step on blood of human being which was used for ritual before he ascended to his father's throne. This practice was outlawed by the colonial administration with a stern punishment for anyone caught in the act of sacrificing human being to any deity. Consequently, this practice was replaced by the killing of white ram which *Olosi*-elect will have to step on its blood instead of human blood.¹⁵⁴

Western education was another credit of colonial rule witnessed in the town. Schools were established by the missionaries to facilitate literacy. For instance, Saint Paul's Anglican Primary School was built in 1917, followed by the Methodist Primary School in 1925, and Saint Michael's Catholic Primary School in 1943.¹⁵⁵ These schools helped to address high level of illiteracy in Osi and also helped in children enrolment to school. The Ekiti state government has taken the administrative control of these schools in the present time.

Construction of major road was another legacy of colonialism in the town. The main road that links *Osi to Ido and Ado* was constructed in the heart

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Chief Oke Fasosin, the Elemikan of Osi-Ekiti at Obaiye Compound, Isao Compound, conducted by the author on November 19, 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Chief Adedayo Ogboja at Asa Compound, Iwaro Quarters, conducted by the author on December 21, 2019.

of the town in 1939.¹⁵⁶ The road helped to facilitate a robust commercial intercourse between the people of Osi and her neighbours and also helped to reposition the town to modern standard.

Economic Activities and Growth of Osi Ekiti

The strategic location of *Osi* greatly facilitates commercial intercourse with her neighbours. There are links, major and minor routes in Osi that facilitate trade and commerce. For instance, there is a route that links Ilogbo, Epe, Esure, Igbole, Ijero, and Iropora to Osi. Osi was known for the vastness of its markets, especially in Pre-colonial era. There are two major markets (Oja), in Osi-Ekiti: Oja Imodan and Alejo-Osi (Oja Oba). Each market holds on cyclic basis with four days' interval. Recently, another market (Oja Owode) was introduced by His Royal Majesty, Oba Oladiran Agunbiade, and the Olosi of Osi-Ekiti kingdom. This market is on daily basis to meet the various needs of the indigenes and to facilitate a better commercial transaction. The Iyaloja (head of market women) of Osi oversees these markets in collaboration with other chiefs and report whatever they discovered to be inimical to the progress of these markets to the Olosi in order to proffer a solution to the matter.¹⁵⁷

Commercial and trading activities reached its peak during the reign of the 25th *Olosi*, His Royal Majesty, Oba Farotimi Amerinjoye who reigned from 1910 to 1935. He possessed administrative expertise and an enterprising *Oba* who domiciled in *Ipoti* and was invited to ascend the throne of his forefathers. His astuteness earned him the praise name, *Oni a t'poti a kaye*

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Pa. Omolayo Adeuti at Emila Compound, Idofin Quarters, conducted by the author on December 10, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Chief Mrs. Alice Ademilua, the Iya Ijoja of Osi-Ekiti at Obaaji Compound, Iwaro Quarters, conducted by the author on August 5, 2019.

Osi jo, (he that came from *Ipoti* to add value to *Osi*). Traditional rituals (*Esi Oja*) were buried in *Osi* market site, which is believed to be the reason for the booming and vastness of *Osi* markets. All the neighbouring towns and villages trooped to *Osi* for economic advantages including from *Oyo*, *Ilogbo*, *Ipoti*, *Ijero*, *Ido*, *Otun*, *Ifaki*, and *Usi*.¹⁵⁸

Traditionally, *Osi* people are Agrarian in nature. They possessed vast and fertile lands and deep forest. There are vast farmlands and forests which are reported for not being cultivated for more than a century. Recently, the fertility and vastness of *Osi* lands has led to the influx of strangers to the town to farm, such people like, the *Igedes* from Kogi and the *Tivs* from Benue states respectively.¹⁵⁹

The people of *Osi* grow food crops and cash crops in a large commercial quantity. Yams of difference spices, cassava, maize, beans, rice, banana, tomatoes, pepper, are grown in a large quantity for domestic consumptions and commercial purposes. Cash crops such as Cocoa, Coffee, Cotton, Oil Palm, Bitter Kola, Kolanut, *Obi Abata* (Kola Acuminata), *Obi Goro* (Kola Nitida), are all grown in larger commercial quantity. Edible fruit crops were also grown in a large quantity such as, cashew, mango, pearl, walnut, oranges of different species, cherry, pineapple and vegetables. The people also have a good knowledge of forestry; they tend hard woods such as *Iroko* tree, Mahogany, Rubber.

The people of *Osi* also domesticate live-stocks such as sheep, goat, dog and fowl of different kinds. *Elila* (of cow family but larger and robust than cow), were common and peculiar to *Osi* people, especially during the reign

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Pa. Omolayo Adeuti, Emila Compound at Idofin Quarters, conducted by the author on August 23, 2019.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Prince Adetokunbo Agunbiade at Akombo Ruling House, Iludi Quarters, conducted by the author on August 23, 2019.

of *Oba Farotimi Amerinjoye*.¹⁶⁰ In the Intelligence Report of Governor Macgregor on his visitation to *Osi* on the 15th September, 1903, he asserted that:

“The people of *Osi* had a certain amount of cotton planted among the yams and maize; There, i.e. (*Osi*) they plant and eat small quantities of groundnut. The season had been too dry for Cotton. They had planted only the native varieties”.

Apart from the above economic activities in *Osi*, there is a record of pockets of pottery making, cloth dyeing, blacksmithing, carving, weaving, music entertainment and hunting. Cornelian ornaments are largely available in *Osi* than in any other places in Yoruba land. Governor Macgregor testified to this during his visitation in 1903 when he asserted; “His (*Olosi*) wives have the best cornelian ornaments. I have seen in the country.”¹⁶¹ Another factor that stabilized economic activities in *Osi* was tax and tributes. *Osi*, being a vast town with many vassal towns and villages under her hegemony who relied on her military strength for protection, those that wanted to retain their local autonomy, and the defeated towns in war were paying regular taxes and tributes to the *Olosi* both in cash and kind. Agricultural and other products such as, palm oil, yams, goat, ram, hunted wild animals, slaves and cowries were sold (especially slaves), to generate income.¹⁶²

More importantly, the *Olua* festival provoked a robust commercial and economic boom in *Osi* during this period. Influx of migrants is witnessed

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Omolayo Adeuti at Emila Compound, Idofin Quarters, conducted by the author on August 23, 2019.

¹⁶¹ NAI, “Governor Macgregor visit to Osi-Ekiti kingdoms on the 15th September, 1903” File No. 27966/4.

¹⁶² Interview with Pa. Omolayo Adeuti at Emila Compound, Idofin Quarters, conducted by the author on August 24, 2019.

in the town from various parts of the world. People come for all sort of spiritual consultations and solutions are proffered for them by the *Olua* (god). Hoteliers, canteens, pubs, joints, commercial vehicles, markets, and other economic segments of the town always attest to the huge economic contributions of the *Olua* festival apart from the spiritual aspect of it. *Olua* festival annually does assemble more than three thousand foreigners in the town and it is celebrated in early March and early August of every year. People from the neighbouring towns and villages always come to *Osi* during this period with their products to sell. It is axiomatic that during this period, money is widely circulated in the town and the people are always looking forward to boost their trade during *Olua* festival,¹⁶³ because buying and selling are always at its peak. The economic contributions of this festival cannot be over-emphasized.

Conclusion

Changes that occurred in *Osi* in the 19th century were motivated by internal factors while those at the beginning of the 20th century were brought about by the colonial administration. Consequently, *Osi* indigenous system of government gave way to the imposition of foreign model with its foreign *dramatis personae*. Colonialism also affected the duties of the traditional government in *Osi-Ekiti*. Be it as it may, colonialism was a mixed package and denying its positive contributions in *Osi* will amount to distortion of fact. The history of *Osi-Ekiti* in the period under review is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people. From its ancient origins in *Ile-Ife* to its present location, *Osi-Ekiti* has undergone significant

¹⁶³ Interview with Chief Alaba Olasusi, the *Oniba* of *Osi* at *Isao* Quarters, conducted by the author on September 27, 2019.

transformations, shaped by both internal dynamics and external forces, particularly colonialism. While colonialism brought about some positive changes, such as the abolition of human sacrifices and the introduction of Western education, it also had devastating effects on the town's traditional institutions like kingship and cultural practices. Ultimately, the experience of Osi-Ekiti underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of colonialism, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of its impact on indigenous communities.