

## **AGILA POLITICO-RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AS A MODEL OF PARLIAMENTARISM: A CALL FOR INCLUSION IN GOVERNMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The nature and character of the socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria is indeed a leviathan task for scholars to look outside the box of the current structure of governance and thereby theorize better options. Thus, the problematic of this paper is on the Agila political and religious institutions as a model of parliamentarism with a call for the inclusion of traditional institutions in governance. The paper aptly revealed that the Agila in Ado Local Government in Benue state has well developed political and religious institutions that its existence predicated colonialism in Nigeria. This institution in antiquity regulates the political, religious, cultural, legal and economic life of the Agila. The attainment of independence in 1960 did not only exclude the traditional institution in the arrangement of governmental powers, but the virtues of transparency and accountability that were inherent in the traditional political systems in antiquity have gradually disappeared in the attitudinately structures of Nigerians. It is upon this missing link, that Agila traditional model is been used as a case study for onward generalization. Thus, it is recommended that traditional institutions should be included in the governance of local government with the House of Chiefs created as an organ of government in every local government. This will aid the preservation of some of the eroding indigenous norms and values.*

**Key Words:** Agila, Political, Religious Institutions and Government.

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## **Introduction**

The Agila in Ado local government area of Benue State, north central Nigeria has a unique traditional political institutions. It is this inimitable traditional political institution that has to a large extent distinguished their culture, customs and tradition from most districts in Idoma land. The analysis of the socio-cultural stratification existing among the twelve Agila clans, its purpose and significance forms the major thrust of this paper. Also, the qualifications, the procedures of selection/election and functions of Otse-Agila and other traditional offices in the community were also substantiated. In antiquity, the chiefs in Agila enjoyed unconcealed authority over the people. Traditional political systems may have differed from one district to the next, chiefs may have been challenged by contenders for their titles at times and quarrels arisen over jurisdiction, but the system itself stood intact and inviolate. That has changed since the introduction of a modern political system during the years of foreign rule. The change has been especially noticeable during the period that saw the rise of the modern democratic apparatus of government in Nigeria. We now have legislators, presidents, governors, judges and other officials serving in the modern government. Like the Agila traditional political system, the council of chiefs is ascribed with political, legal and religious functions as analyzed in tables below.

The two political systems, the modern and the traditional, appear to be on parallel tracks. Traditional chiefs still enjoy considerable respect in their own sphere, but it is modern political leaders who control today's Western government. Agila is such a kingdom that has well premeditated traditional institution political and religious wise. While writers have over the years paid more attention to the origins, history and settlement of Agila<sup>1</sup>, little attention is been given to parliamentary utilities of the political institutions and its usefulness in contemporary time. It is against this gap, that this paper sought to

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<sup>1</sup> See E.O. Erim, Idoma Nationality 1600-1900: Problems of Studying the Origins and Development of Ethnicity, Emgum Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 1981; For more details, see G.S.O.Ikese, 'Re: On the letter Mr.Ikese Wrote' in The Voice, Friday Novemeber25<sup>th</sup> ,2009,P6.

advocate for bringing back chiefs into the modern system. Too, now that the issue of the role of traditional chiefs in the modern government is gradually gaining ascendency in public discourse in Nigeria and as such there is need to shine searchlight in the importance of the Agila traditional political system as model of parliamentary theory too precious to be relegated only to the status of receiving homage.

### **Theorizing the Problematic**

Every political system has verities of functions and such functions are essentially performed by sub-systems, which could be political, social, cultural, religious, or judicial. In every political system be it traditional or modern these functions are inherently performed by the sub-systems. Theoretically, schemes for classifying political systems into types are as old as the political system itself. This is because the study of politics did not start with the emergence of modern political systems. Aristotle, for example, produced a classification based on two criteria: the number of citizens entitled to rule, whether one, few or many; and whether the rulers governed in ‘interest’ or their own self-interest<sup>2</sup>. Aristotle classified political systems into three types namely:-

| <b>Mode of Authority</b> | <b>Number of Citizens Entitled to Rule</b> | <b>Tool</b>            |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Kingship (monarchy)      | One  | Tyranny                |
| Aristocracy              | Few  | Oligarchy              |
| Polity                   | Many                                       | Democracy <sup>3</sup> |

Aristotle’s early and noteworthy classification scheme has been followed by many other efforts, particularly in recent decades. Thus, the question of which one is the best typology obviously depends on the criteria for classifying the political system. What one finds useful depend of the system that is most interested. According to Ochoga, while political scientists may be interested in the form of power exercised in the political system, philosophers or theologians

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Barker,ed, *The Politics of Aristotle*. Oxford University Press,1952,p.110

<sup>3</sup> Adopted and reworked from Dahl R. *Modern Political Analysis*, sixth edition , Parson Education, 2003,p.66

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might be interested in distinguishing the best political system by using ethic and religious criteria and so on<sup>4</sup>. This implies that even the Agila traditional political system is fundamentally pertinent hence there are some of its features that may be worthily inculcating in modern democratic states. Such conceptual benefits could be indentify that (1) Agila political traditional system like any other are: path to the present,(2) their socio-economic levels or degree of modernity serve as basis for present stage of development, (3) the of distribution of authoritative resources and skills of them could be used to correct present abnormalize,(4), it serve as the gate way to understand emerging cleavages and cohesion, (5) for the understanding of politically motivated conflicts, and (6) for resolving present quagmires of sharing political power among component units of the modern political system.

Although, traditional political system may be monarchical in power acquisition and ascribed in authority distribution, whereas there are some silent features (particularly norms) of the ancient political system that can be adopted, refined and be useful in the practicing of democracy in contemporary time. It is on this premise that Ochoga aptly argued the that study of indigenous societies and their political system is rooted in the historical materialism theoretical framework of Karl Marx and which he propound as a lens in understanding the present in all its ramifications<sup>5</sup> Just like the British cabinet system, the Queen is the titular head of the state, the real executive powers are lodged not in a single person but in a cabinet which is composed of a prime minister and about twenty other ministers. The members of collegial executive are selected from the parliament and are response to it ...<sup>6</sup> The British parliament thus perform dual functions like the Agila traditional political system, whereas the Otse-Agila and other members of the cabinet perform political and religious functions. Also, Like the British parliamentary model, from the Otsonu-Agila to the least of the cabinet member has ascribed roles inherent in their offices. While Otsonu-Agila oversees

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<sup>4</sup> Ochoga E. Ochoga. Politics of Ingenious Societies: The Paradox of Development. In *Journal of Social Studies*, COE Maru,2010,p.54

<sup>5</sup> See Ochoga E. Ochoga. Politics of Ingenious Societies: The Paradox of Development...p57

<sup>6</sup> See Rime Anifowose, in Rime Anifowose and E. Francis. Element of Politics...1999,p177

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the obligations of the other cabinet members, the Otse-Agila has the veto-power in every matter.

Be that as it may, traditional leaders seem to have a secure place in the ancient societies of every African state. Although, they have lost much of the economic clout they had in former times, they are still greatly honored. The younger generation today may not be as respectful of traditions as older people, but they will probably fall into line like everyone else. There will be little or no place in the modern government for traditional leaders as such. They will be an influential voice on elected officials, but in an informal way. Some of these individual leaders will run for elected office, but this will probably continue to be the exception rather than the rule. The two political systems can coexist as long as chiefs have the good sense to keep conflict with the modern leaders to a minimum. If it ever comes to a showdown between the two political systems, the chiefs will lose and the traditional system erodes. Modern political leaders will be expected to defer to traditional chiefs in the latter's realm. Chiefs will be expected to submit to modern political authorities in the arena of modern day life and law. One of the expectations of people today is that all should be equal under the law. To the extent that chiefs try to comply with this principle, they will be more likely to preserve their own traditional prerogatives.

### **Trajectory on the Office of the District Head of Agila (Otse-Agila) in Agila Political and Religious System**

The Otse Agila performs both cultural and religious functions. In other words, he is the political and religious head of the Agila kingdom. The traditional institution of Otse Agila predicated colonialism in Nigeria as the Agila kingdom was in existence for centuries before the British colonial authorities made the territory hitherto controlled by the Otse Agila kingship as among the districts in Idoma land. In other words, the institution of the Otse Agila and Otsapa Igumale now called District Head of Agila and Igumale respectively have been in existence before the emergent of the Colonial Administration in Nigeria in 1900. By implication therefore, the office of the Otse Agila is as old as Agila people themselves. The kingship traditional arrangement in Agila, Igumale, Ulaji,

Ijigbam and Ekile has to a large extent made the customs and traditions of these communities in the Southern part of the Idoma speaking areas of Benue State differs from of the other Idoma sub-cultures. In as much as general Idoma culture values kingship, but as far as chieftaincy matter is concerned, the Districts in Ado Local Area have peculiar chieftaincy institution. Culturally assimilated into this system is the Utonkon. The District Head of Utonkon and his title holders were allowed to wear to Akpalewo, dog ear-like royal cap sealed through cultural agreement reached between them and the people of Agila and Igumale. All these communities are now grouped into what is today known as Ado Local Area, Benue State with Headquarters at Igumale.

The Otse Agila (King of Agila kingdom) is traditionally regarded as the spiritual father of Agila land and an embodiment of peace and unity of the whole land. Otse Agila's authority is unchallengeable because his status is equated as the representative of their ancestors in Agila. So many tale are told of Otse Agila notably that he can stay in his palace and monitor any information from anywhere in the universe. That he knows when he is going to die and so on. Otse Agila's comes out of his palace only as demanded by customs and traditions. One should consider himself as extremely lucky to see Otse Agila in the public in those Days. It is a custom that when-ever Otse Agila appears in the public he is either going to a journey or to his Court and his 'Okanga' and 'Okpatsina' (Royal Band and flutes) normally accompany him. The Otse Agila (like the Otsapa Igumale) is selected strictly from among the Ruling Clans of Agila purely on merit. The selection and appointment of Otse Agila is not on rotational bases between the two ruling clans rather the contest is normally thrown open to every qualify male adult of the ruling clans to test their popularity, and whoever appeals to the majority of the king-makers (Itsogwa) merges the winner. The lobbying of the Itsowa by contestants is usually conducted secretly.<sup>7</sup>

All candidates are screened at a crucial meeting of the Itsogwa presided by the Otsonu Agila (Traditional Prime Minister and Head of the Itsogwa). This meeting is usually held in the palace of the Otsonu-Agila in the dead night, and

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<sup>7</sup> Author's field survey, 2017.

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must be attended by the accredited Itsowa. The decision of the Itsogwa is final and it is biding on every Agila indigenes both at home and abroad. The identity of the Otse Agila elect remains a top secret until the date of the official announcement and the coronation<sup>8</sup>. Now comes to day of the presentation of the Otse Agila elect to his subjects. This is infact, the most tense and apprehensive moment in the life of Agilas. As relatives and supporters of the contestants assembles at the town playing ground (Ofuo Akpoge) with every contestants and their supporters felling very optimistic of winning. At times the relatively poor turn of Agilas at the Ofuo Akpoge is an expression of fear of possible violence which may erupt from the losers.

The contestants are lined facing the anxious crowd with each them holding yards of Ikporigwo (pure white locally woven cloth), two white and two feathers with which he would be turbaned, and about two yards of same white cloth for wrapper. As soon as the Itsogwa take their seat, the Otsonu Agila steps into the arena and open the ceremony with a short address in which appeals to the looser to endeavour to maintain absolute peace by adopting the spirit of sportsmanship. The end of the speech, the Otsonu-Agila announces the name of the Otse-Agila elect publicly and immediately his Adotse (traditionally appointed father of the Otsonu) to feather the Otse-Agila elect. The Adotse responds by tying parts of the white cloth around the Otse's head and then insert one white and one red feather each on both sides of the Otse's forehead. And about two extra yards tied to his waist as wrapper. This is immediately heralded by booming of dame gun shot after which the Otse Agila elect raises exclamations of Om'a ntso !.<sup>9</sup>

Then the Otsonu-Agila and his Itsogwa leaves the scene immediately to avoid physical aggression and attack on their persons by aggrieved persons. From the Ofuo Akpoge Square, the Otse Agila is led away amidst of booming of gun shots and jubilations to the various shrines where he performs the mandatory traditional rites at each of the places.

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<sup>8</sup> Oral interview with Mr. M. Ochoga, Apa-Agila, age 59 years on the methods of Otse-Agila selection, 2th January,2017

<sup>9</sup> Ibid...

The first point of call is the Ikpaje-Agila (Agila ancestral shrine). This the place where Agila people first settled before they started to multiply. Here, the Oraja-ekwu of Agila (chief priest of the shrine) opens the gate to allow the Otse-Agila in and he subsequently administers the necessary ritual ceremony on him. The much any one could say about the cultural implication for this ritual is that, the Oroja-ekwu introduces the Otse-Agila to the ancestors for blessings; because the details of the ritual perform at the Ikpaje Shrine is largely unseen and unrevealed to any other Agila apart from the Otse-Agila elect and the Oraja-ekwu. From there the Otse Agila moves to Etse-Oko, an ancient tree reputed for its healing and miracles located at the front of Ikpaje kindred in Akpoge clan. This tree known as Etse-Oko is another symbolic tree in the history of Agila that is planted directly beside the Ikpaje Agila shrine.<sup>10</sup> It is only the Otse-Agila and the Oraja-ekwu that know the actual spiritual implications and significances of the Etse-Oko to the office of the Otse Agila.

The next place of call is the Ikpudu- another ancient trees famed for its mystery located right inside in an area that is traditionally restricted for only Adult Agila males (inekwu). This tree is found in Okpatobo clan. At this place, the chief priest of the Ikpudu performs the necessary ritual ceremony for the Otse Agila accordingly. Another place of ritual performance is the Etsi-Idibia at the Ogblobo clan where the Otsonu-Agila originates from. At this historical spiritual place, the Otse-Agila is administered the last ritual ceremony and proceeds to straight to the Atsi- Idoko (royal confinement) and remains there for a period of fourteen days. On the following day, the Itsowa normally dress in their traditional regalia and walk in procession to the Atsi-Idoko to pay the Otse-Agila first homage. This procession the each Itsogwa will hold his Ogotsi (staff of office).The Ogotsi is normally held by Itsowa only on important ceremonial occasion. While in the Atsi-Idoko, the Otse Agila is taught the various Rules and Regulations pertaining to his office and general Agila cultural norms and values. He is decorated with Ikirinyi and Okopi (substance made out special trees) to his both feet. He holds Otsi-Igwu (about three long stick) with his left hand. He must only eat food

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<sup>10</sup> Oral interview with . A. Ochoga, Otukpo, age 95 years on the methods of Otse-Agila selection, 4th January,2017

cooked by his trusted wife and must not have sex within this period of fourteen days. Also, during this period no person of dubious character is allowed to visit him.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the fourteenth day of the royal confinement, he returns to his palace amidst pomp and pageantry to assume normal responsibility as the Otse-Agila. This the day he will wear Oka, wrist beads which is his symbol of authority. After three months in office, the Otse- Agila performs the Iba (coronation) ceremony.<sup>12</sup> The new Otse-Agila reserves the right to retain in office the Otsonu-Agila and all the Itsogwa or drop them and appoint new people who will serve in his interest. Since Oka is a symbol of authority it is only the Otse Agila that is culturally permitted to wear it. In other words, even the Otsonu-Agila and the Itsogwa are not allowed to wear Oka. In the olden days, the new Otse-Agila had to travel to Idah to receive his Okwute (staff of office) form the Attah- Idah, where the Agila people descended from. This is aptly why J.S. Boston and supported by O. O.Okpe Jr and Y.A.Ochefu vehemently argued that:

The Igala strongly influenced the evolution of the Oche institutions in the pre-colonial Idoma societies <sup>13</sup>. Up till date, the extent of this influence has not been fully determined. Available evidence however indicates that at a point, the Oches of the central Idoma polities travelled to Idah for their investiture ceremonies<sup>14</sup>. Again, there is little evidence to show that these Oches were tributary to the Attah of Igalaland, rather royal visits has been associated with the overwhelming influence of the Attah at that time<sup>15</sup>.

While some scholars have their reservation for the routine investiture visit of certain Idoma royal fathers to Idah, scholars such as N.Agbo and A.P Agnyebe

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<sup>11</sup> Oral interview with . A. Ochoga, Otukpo, age 95 years on the methods of Otse-Agila selection, 4th January,2017

<sup>12</sup> Ibid ...

<sup>13</sup> J.S. Boston...ibid

<sup>14</sup> Okpe, O. O.. 'Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Idoma.' In Y.A.Ochefu, J.I and T.A. Varvar (Ed). *A History of the people of Benue State*, Makurdi, Nigeria: Aboke Publishers,2007.

<sup>15</sup> Okpe, O. O.. 'Origin, Migration and Settlement of the Idoma.' In Y.A.Ochefu, J.I and T.A. Varvar (Ed)...

seen it different as means of reawaken ancestral ties between the Igala and Idoma. Agbo contends that:

Idah was the ancestral home of some Idoma groups, so that the people still believed that Idah was the abode of their ancestors, hence their installation was sanctified at Idah<sup>16</sup>. While Anyebe basically sees these royal trips to Idah as merely spiritual and not political<sup>17</sup> as being insinuated in some quarters. However, the political, cultural and social influence of the Igala (Attah of Idah), over pre-colonial Agila society would not be completely ignored.

To be eligible for selection and appointment as Otse-Agila, first and foremost, such person must be a family member from the two ruling clans of Osiroko and Effuofo. The candidate must be a male child of the culturally recognized two ruling clans. Secondly, he must be able to give at least four names of his ancestral fathers as proof of being full blooded Agila indigene. Thirdly, he must possess pleasant personality and proven integrity. Finally, he must be married. The Otse-Agila is the chief custodian of Agila customs, culture and traditions.<sup>18</sup> By implication, he is under oath to at all times to uphold, defend, preserve and protect the Agila customs, culture and traditions. The Otse Agila plays executive, legislative and judicial roles within his domain and over his subjects. Be the chairman of Agila Traditional Council, the Otse -Agila is an automatic member of Ado Traditional Council at the Local Government level, as well as a member Idoma Traditional Council. The Otse -Agila decides who gets what, when and how within the purview of his traditional, customary and cultural jurisdiction.

### **The Place of the Agila Prime Minister (Otsonu Agila) in Agila Political and Religious System**

The Otsonu Agila is the Traditional Prime/Head of the Kingmakers (The Itsogwa Council). By order of ranking, he is the next rank to the Otse -Agila. The Otsonu Agila being the Head of the Itsowa Council, he coordinates the activities

<sup>16</sup> See N.O. Agbo, Idoma Politics and History,Lagos: Parade Communications Ltd,1991,p.5

<sup>17</sup> See A.P Agnyebe, The Idoma Chieftaincy, unpublished paper,1975.p.111.

<sup>18</sup> Author's field work, 2017.

of the Itsogwa and report to the Otse- Agila for necessary action. The Otsonu Agila has the prerogative to present and install Otse Agila elect as decided by the Council Itsowa headed by him. Meanwhile, the appointment and removal of Otsonu Agila is the exclusive of the right of the Otse- Agila. By tradition, Otsonu Agila does not wear Oka. While the Royal greeting of Otse Agila by his subjects (Agilas) is 'Ogaba Iduh', that of Otsonu Agila is simple 'Otsonu Agila'. The office of the Otsonu Agila is exclusively reserved for the Ai- Otsonu Otse- Okpaga, Ai- Otsonu Ebenyi, and Ayiya sub-clans of Ogbblolo clan.<sup>19</sup> Even though is it the birth right of these kingderds to occupy the office of the Otsonu Agila, it is not by rotation, rather the appointment is strictly made by the description of the Otse Agila.

In other words, only the Otse -Agila has the authority to appoint or remove the Otsonu Agila, just as only the Otsonu Agila has the authority to crown the Otse Agila and traditionally confer on him the attendant power. The delicate system of checks and balance is designed to prevent autocracy by any individual, be he the otse -Agila, the Otsonu Agila, or the Otsogwa. Basically, the functions of the Otsonu -Agila include the Headship of the Itsogwa or the traditional council of kingmakers; being the second-in-command to the Otse -Agila and thereby acting capacity for the Otse in his absence or death (when the chief is known to be dead.); and formal crowning of Otse -Agila after deliberations in camera by the Itsogwa. For example, one of the longest serving Otsonu-Agila, Adai Otsonu was appointed in 1955 by Chief Attah Ochoga and him had the privilege and honour of crowning three Chiefs-namely Chief Agbaji Omerigwe, Chief Onmonya Ogorri, Chief Omerigwe Attah and excluding the controversial crowning of Chief Philip Agbese Onagzi in 16<sup>th</sup> of December,1985.<sup>20</sup>

### Synthesis of Recent History

When Otse -Agila 'goes tiger' his owo is cut down after year, confirming his transition to the home of his ancestors. Thereafter, the politicking commences

<sup>19</sup> Oral interview with . A. Ochoga, Otukpo, age 95 years on the methods of Otse-Agila selection, 4th January,2017

<sup>20</sup> Ibid Oral interview with . A. Ochoga, ...

lasting for at two years. This tradition enables the populace in general, and the traditional council of kingmakers in particular to;

- (i) get to know Otse-Agila contestants,
- (ii) determine the suitability of each contestant by knowing his strength and weakness, and;
- (iii) allow for a consensus opinion amongst the Itsogwa for a candidate of their choice, since the Itsogwa must not be seen to have divided interest.

Investigation revealed that the three years period of interregnum is not only peculiar to the Agila people, it is practiced by all the tribes that their kingship is institutionalized after the Wukari kingship model. Some of these includes the Jukun, Igala, Ibirra, Doma, Yala, Ogaja and among other tribes. Any attempt to subvert this custom would be regarded as an aberration. Five recent examples are showed below to illustrate this contention:

- (i) When Chief Ebonyi died in 1952, it took over three years before he was succeeded by
- (ii) Chief Attah Ochoga in 1955. And he in turn voluntary resigned from the position in 1957, three years elapsed before
- (iii) Chief Agbaji Omerigwe succeeded him in 1960. When this Chief was deposed by the government in 1964, the normal three years elapsed before he was succeeded by
- (iv) Onmonya Ogori in 1966, who died in 1969. The mandatory three years passed before
- (v) Chief Omerigwe Attah ascended the throne in 1972 and so on.<sup>21</sup> The history of the Agila chieftaincy custom and tradition is shrouded in mystery. Thus, the unpredicted and unpreventable avengers of the Arekwu, ancestral spirits and Aje, the earth cult, h Agila have its ways of unleashing revenge on violators. Only those who are conversant with Agila history and tradition can attest to this unflinching fact.

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<sup>21</sup> Author's field work 2017

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Until 1949 when the post of Och' Idoma was created, there was no central authority in Idomaland. The colonial administration created the Och'Idomaship to unite the various kingdoms and communities in Idomaland which culturally have many things in common. It was felt that a central authority would bring the people as for colonial developmental purposes; as well as the people together as distinct entity by promoting aspects of their culture that emphasize their uniqueness and unity. The Och'Idoma is under oath not to stage any action or inaction that would contravene the traditions and customs of any district in Idomaland.

Therefore, the choice of Otse-Agila is strictly an internal matter that is only later communicated to the Idoma Traditional Council (I.T.C) of which the Och'Idoma is the Chairman. The I.T.C is only represented at the official and public selection of Otse -Agila as an observer, not a participant, and certainly not as enforcer. Any attempt of the I.T.C to foist their preferred candidate on the kingmakers and Agilas would amount to outright violation of customary order as well as triggering the anger of the Arekwu and Aje whose fury is unprecedented.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the Och'Idoma or his representatives must not be present at the various secret meetings normally held by the Itsogwa under the chairmanship of the Otsonu-Agila to discuss and make their choice of Otse-Agila.

### **The Religious and Cultural Functions of the Agila Kingmakers (Itsogwa)**

Itsogwa literally means a traditionally accredited and confound kingmakers in Agila traditional political system. There are twenty four traditionally and customary recognized Itsogwa in Agila tradition system (see the table below). The Itsogwa is a group of title holders representing various sub-clans and clans in Agila Traditional Council. The Itsogwa title is strictly restricted to the ten clans that do not produce Otse -Agila. They are normally greeted or addressed by their title such as Echembi, Ogene-Agila, Agada, Otsanya Agila etc. They wear specially made cap- 'Akparewo', which distinguishes them from ordinary persons in Agila and this Akparewo is designed in order of superiority of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid Oral interview with . A. Ochoga, ...

title. The core Agila kingmakers are drawn from among the Itsogwa (Itsogwa Council). According to the Agila customs and traditions, an Itsogwa has no claim to the stool of Otse -Agila neither any of their family members and vice versa.

By tradition, Itsogwa do not wear Oka. It is a serious offence for any Itsogwa to appear in the public without his traditional walking stick, ogazi. The appointment and removal of an Itsogwa is the exclusive right of the Otse-Agila. Each of the Itsogwa has traditionally specified functions to play in Agila's religious, socio-cultural and economic life. Table 2.1, Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 shows the twenty four titles of the Itsogwa and their classification based on the ascribed functions in the Agila traditional society.

Table 1.1: The Itsogwa that performs Religious Functions

| S/No | Title/Office | Descendant of: | Clan(s) Reserved for | Sub-Clans Restricted to |
|------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1    | Oraja-ekwu   | Idogaogbo      | Akpoge               | Ikpaje                  |
| 2    | Ots'Oba      | Idogaogbo      | Onogwu               | Onogwu                  |
| 3    | Ogene        | Idogaogbo      |                      |                         |

Source: Authors' fieldwork(2015).

Table 1.2: The Itsogwa that performs Civil Functions

| S/No | Title/Office    | Descendant of:        | Clan(s) Reserved for          | Sub-Clans Restricted to  |
|------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4    | Agada           | Idogaogbo             |                               |                          |
| 5    | Echno embi      | Otsogbo               |                               |                          |
| 6    | Oga aloe        | Idogaogbo and Otsogbo | Osudu and Akpoge              | Ai-Odudoaguna and Ikpaje |
| 7    | Otsanya Agila   | Otsogbo               | Ogbilolo and Osudu            | Ogbilolo and Osudu       |
| 8    | Onoja Okpatoobo | Idogaogbo             | Okpatoobo, Akpoge and Opaakor | Ai-Onogwu, Ikpaje and    |

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|    |          |           |          |           |
|----|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|    |          |           |          | Ai-Ebakwu |
| 9  | Otsome   | Otsogbo   | Osudu    | Ai-Ome    |
| 10 | Odenebi  | Otsogbo   | Ogbilolo | Efiga     |
| 11 | Atu      | Otsogbo   | Osudu    |           |
| 12 | Oworitso | Idogaogbo | Okpaakor | Ai-Abakpa |

Source: Authors' Fieldwork(2015).

Table 2.3: The Itsogwa that performs Military Functions

| S/No | Title/Office               | Descendant of: | Clan(s) Reserved for | Sub-Clans Restricted to |
|------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 13   | Unogwu<br>Ogbilolo         | Otsogbo        |                      |                         |
| 14   | Unogwu<br>Akpose           | Idogaogbo      |                      |                         |
| 15   | Atsonwu<br>Ogbilolo        | Otsogbo        |                      |                         |
| 16   | Atsonwu<br>Akpose          | Idogaogbo      |                      |                         |
| 17   | Otse<br>Alekpa<br>Ogbilolo | Otsogbo        |                      |                         |
| 18   | Otse<br>Alekpa<br>Akpose   | Idogaogbo      |                      |                         |
| 19   | Otsima<br>Ogbilolo         | Otsogbo        |                      |                         |
| 20   | Otsima<br>Akpose           | Idogaogbo      |                      |                         |
| 21   | Otse'uje                   | Otsogbo        |                      |                         |

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|    | Ogbilolo           |           |  |  |
|----|--------------------|-----------|--|--|
| 22 | Otse'uje<br>Akpose | Idogaogbo |  |  |
| 23 | Okpozu<br>Ogbilolo | Otsogbo   |  |  |
| 24 | Okpozu<br>Akpose   | Idogaogbo |  |  |

Source: Author's fieldwork(2015).

### **The Role of Kinsmen of the District Head (Ogori and Ai-Attah) in Political and Religious System**

There are usually one Ogori from each of the two ruling clans of Osiroko and Efuofu. The Ogori simply means elders of the ruling clans, who are selected among the Ai- Attah (i.e the Osiroko and Efuofu clans). The selection is presented to the Otse- Agila for installation. The Otse-Agila reserve the right to refuse granting the approval and the installation of the Ogori elect. The Ogori-Attah is the Head of the Ogori. In other words, both Osiroko and Efuofu have an Ogori-Attah heading the Ogori group of classified elders in the clan; that is why there is Ogori-Attah, Osiroko and Ogori-Attah, Efuofu respectively. The Ogori under the leadership of the Ogori-Attah discusses matters affecting their clans and at the same time advises the Otse-Agila on such matter accordingly. For instance, protection of the ancestry spirit cult of Ekwu Aja, Arekwu Eka, Unaloko and other ancestral shrines practice by the ruling family are matter priority of the Ogori title holders<sup>23</sup>

The Itsogwa have no hand in the selection of an Ogori. Similarly the Ogori do not participate neither interface in any process leading to selection of the Otse-Agila or the Itsogwa. Once an Ogori-Attah is appointed he cannot aspire to the stool of Otse-Agila. Infact no Agila can use one traditional office as a stepping stone to

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<sup>23</sup> Chief Attah Michael Ochoga asserts that Ogori under the leadership of the Ogori-Attah and discusses matters affecting their clans and at the...

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another position. The selection, suspension and removal of an Ogori and the two Ogori-Attah is the collective of the Otse-Agila and the general elders of the Ai-Attah who he represents. The two Ogri-Attah and their Ogori are entitled to wear their kind of Akpalewo that is different from that of the Itsogwa. As imply to the Otsonu-Agila and Itsogwa, both the Ogori and their Ogori-Attah do not wear royal beads, oka on their hands.

### **The Unsung Virtues of Agila Political and Religious System: the Imperative of it Inclusion in Modern Democratic System**

The authors have been inspired to analyze the Agila traditional institutions and structures in view of the streams of uniqueness of the system in antiquity. Even as the misconception campaign continues, the aim of this paper is to preserve the truth against any history orchestrated on falsehood to sewn seeds of discourse among Agilas. This is the system in which all Agilas were born into it and no Agila should have any difficult to identify the sustenance of Agila culture with what is obtainable elsewhere in Idomaland and all other tribes that their histories is been traced to the Idah and Wukari kinship model. This collaborated position suggest that, long before the Europeans came to Nigeria for colonialism, the doctrine of Separation of Power and Checks and Balances were already institutionalized in Agila traditional political institutions. While the two clans of Osiroko and Efuofo produces only the Otse-Agila, the other ten clans produces the Otsonu-Agila and the twenty four Itsogwa who reserved the right to appoint the Otse-Agila and perform several other religion, cultural and civil functions as enshrined in Agila customs and traditions.

This implies that the concept of Separation of Power as epitomized by Montesquieu was not new to the Agila people. This invariably could be what prompted two eminent Idoma scholars Okpe O.Okpe Jr. and Yakubu A.Ochefu in their book titled 'The Idoma Ethnic Group: A Historical and Cultural Setting' to observe that:

The Idoma have had social and political institutions that were the product of the historical experience of the people. Although not

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structured strictly in terms of the Montesquiean model of Separation of Power between the organs of government, the Idoma social and political system possessed the law-making tradition that provided the broad framework within various units of the society performed different functions in the context of the development process of the people.<sup>24</sup>

It is because of this doctrine of Separation of Power enshrined in Agila social and political from antiquity that restricted Agila people from Osiroko or Efuofu clans from participating in the prestigious Arekwu ancestral spirit cult that is the sole right of the ten clans. Even among the ten clans as showed in the tables above, the Otsonu-Agila and Itsogwa titles are distributed according to lineages and clans. In other words, all the traditional offices and customary rites are distributed and restricted for certain lineages, sub-clans, and clan(s) as the case may be among the ten clans. Even among the ten clans, it is not every lineage, sub-clan, and clan within the ten clans that have the same Arekwu ancestral spirit cult. Thus, the custom has equally distributed and restricted them to reincarnate different Arekwu ancestral spirit cults. This customary role differentiation is the reason why different lineages, sub-clans and clans possessing the right of reincarnating Arekwu-Ekpela, Arekwu-Ekpe, etc. Come to think of it, the ododo and lkata accorded to the Ekpela and Ekpe varies among the lineages, sub-clans and clans that have the rights.

These few examples of socio-cultural stratification are enough reasons for every Agila and even those yet unborn to continue giving glory and praises to the founding fathers of Agila. The Agila customs and traditions are by no means an accident of history, but they are orchestrated as a way of life and solace of belief whose metaphysical genealogy is saddled in mystery, while its physical genealogy has been traced to the Idah and Wukari kinship model. The only loyalty and allegiance demanded from Agilas by the founding fathers is the continuous status maintenance, rather than bastardizing what the forefathers have painstakingly put together; without knowing the nature of sacrifices they have

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<sup>24</sup> See Okpe O.Okpe Jr. and Yakubu A.Ochefu in their book titled 'The Idoma Ethnic Group: A Historical and Cultural Setting...'

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made to establish the Agila chieftaincy institutions and other customs and cultural structures.<sup>25</sup> Every typical clan in Agila has a peculiar socio-cultural role to play in Agila traditional and cultural system. It is the configuration of these roles that have over the years made Agila a distinct community in Idomaland. Therefore, any attempt to bastardize the Agila traditional order would amount to an aberrational movement. Agila has never been an egalitarian society as appears it to be in few Idoma clans, and as such the agitations for the democratization of the Otse-Agilaship would amount to a coup d'état orchestrated to erase the socio-political status quo that has been entrenched in antiquity. Thus, the distribution of the authority in the hands of the Otse-Agila, Otsonu-Agila, and the Itsogwa representing different clans is to effectively manage the dynamic complexities of the Agila community. This position has being succinctly puts by Erim as:

... the various socio-political structures and institutions that were created are in actual terms, a manifestation of efforts aimed at controlling, mobilizing, appropriating and distributing surpluses, and the co-ordination and resolution of conflicts that may arise there from. The origin of an Ocheship in the political organization of the Idoma represent the concentration of authority in the hands of groups of titled elders in their efforts at the managing the complexities of their societies<sup>24</sup>

Concerning the age-long tradition of the entire Ado districts, there is every need to preserve, promote and to encourage the custodians. Therefore, the following recommendations are been suggested: While that of Otse-Agila and Otsepaligumale had already been taken care, the Otsonu-Agila and his equivalent in Igumale, the Ozoko should be enhanced and placed on permanent salary in the Ado LGC payroll on Grade Level 12. Secondly, instead of appointing another person, the position of the accredited Itsogwa representing the various clans of Agila, Igumale, Ulaji, Ijigbam, Ekile and Utonkon should be automatically confirmed by the Ado L.G.C as their clan Head and placed on salary. Since some

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, Chief Attah Michael Ochoga, 90yrs, an voluntarily resigned Otse-Agila, interview in Otukpo, May,2013

of the Itsogwa are the traditional Head of their respective clans therefore, they should be recognized by the L.G as such. Also, the two Ogori-Attah representing the two ruling clans of Osiroko and Efuofu in Agila ( and their equivalents in Igumale, Ulaji, Ijigbam and Ekile) should be invariably designated and appointed by the L.G.C as the clan Heads Osiroko and Efuofu respectively with permanent salary.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper is aimed at finding out the role and prospects of traditional institutions in community development with specific emphasis on Agila political traditional system in Ado Local Government Area in Benue state. This study revealed precisely that traditional rulers are the major agents in transforming the attitude of the rural people provided they are answerable to a titled ruler vested with the authority of governing the affairs of the people. Based on the findings, the paper has come to conclusion that traditional rulers have made a positive impact in community development to a large extent. It is thus advocate for the inclusion of traditional institutions in modern democratic structures in Nigeria. Allocating statutory role and functions to traditional institutions in our constitution is essentially necessary now, considering the series of socio-economic challenges confronting the nation. By empowering the traditional institutions, it aims to adopt the spirit of frequent dialogue amongst the subjects. The outcome of the dialogue will create necessary relationship towards community development programmes. While, wealthy individuals from in the community can support the traditional institution to enable traditional rulers embark on huge projects, traditional institutions should be included in the governance of local government with the House of Chiefs created as an organ of government in every local government. This will aid the preservation of some of the cherished norms and value such as the spirit of honesty, transparency and accountability that were inherent in the traditional political system in antiquity.