

The Travails of Kingship Institution in Yorubaland: a Case Study of Isinkan in Akureland.

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Abstract

In this paper, an attempt is made to discuss the travails of kingship institution in Yorubaland, with reference to Isinkan in Akure South Local Government, Ondo State Nigeria. This is germane because of the prevalent of kingship crises in Yorubaland in contemporary times. The discourse relies on oral testimonies, written and archival documents. In the main, the paper discovers that regardless of the fact that Isinkan people lives within Akure settlement, they retain their political autonomy from time immemorial. It also revealed that the quest for recognition of the *Iralepo* (*Oba* of Isinkan) by the Government took a new dimension about two decades ago. This paper argues that regardless of the recognition, hardly can you notice any difference between the two communities. Therefore, the agitation for recognition may be for socio-political reasons rather than for cultural autonomy.

Introduction

Over the years, kingship institution in Yorubaland, South Western Nigeria has experienced unpleasant changes in leadership and socio-cultural hurdles. Among these are revolutions, wars and the incursion of the British rule.¹ With the loss of political authority in recent times, Yoruba kings have been struggling for relevance in the scheme of things. The struggle for relevance earned them symbolic or nominal authority, because it is believed by some people that the glorious pre-colonial status of the traditional rulers should be scrapped, since they are old-fashioned, reactionary and anachronistic.² In essence, the nominal authority has made them ceremonial rulers not leaders of their communities; worse still, the attainment of this nominal recognition is a herculean task in the light of post independence political developments.³ However, Isinkan in Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, is chosen as a case study, because even within Akure, Isinkan still retains its political autonomy as a settlement, similar to Egbaland where the Alake is the paramount ruler to the sectional *Obas* in Abeokuta.⁴

This paper is approached from a socio-historical perspective. The method employed is analytical. This study was derived from oral testimonies received from

traditional rulers, chiefs, elders and some other custodians of history from both Akure and Isinkan. Also, relevant information from available literatures and archival documents provided the background to the paper.

Conceptual Considerations

Kingship is a word derived from the term “King”, which is attached to the statehood of the King.⁵ In this paper, a king is identified as the most supreme or paramount sovereign in any village, town or city. Generally, he is recognised by his subjects as their spiritual leader and Chief Custodian of traditions.⁶

The institution of kingship is a common phenomenon with states, empires, countries and other similar entities, which makes the institution a universal concept, with a long history. The Biblical account lends credence to this. The Bible gives a detailed account of kingships, for instance, the prosperous kingship of Solomon in the Old Testament.⁷ In the same manner, European history clearly reveals that states like France, Austria, Poland, Spain and England had for centuries operated kingships, such that by the turn of the 18th century, kings became the principal targets of political regimes in their respective countries.⁸

Over the years, the continents of Asia and Africa had operated kingship institution before colonial rule. Japan and Spain, in fact, had Emperors whose positions or offices had all the elements of kingship.⁹ Similarly, in Africa, kingship was numerous. Among them were those of Benin and Oyo in West Africa and Bunyoro in Kitara, East Africa. In West Africa, before the 20th century, kings were regarded as supreme rulers, who had both power of life and death over the people. In Benin, the institution was such that every *Oba* was seen as the owner of the kingdom who had the final say over every aspect of the lives of Benin people.¹⁰

Ovie-Whiskey observed this much on kingship institution in Nigeria when he asserted that:

*Nigerians, too, love kings, even if the kings,
be one to one square kilometer as it sometimes
is the case and even if their courts be less dignifying
than the homes of many of their subjects...
Though the Kings of today, in most cases, wields*

*no political power, he is not just a museum piece,
opening vistas into the past, he honors the wealthy,
the strong and the great. So long as men worship social
titles, so long will the man who confers them wax strong,
be relevant and command loyalty and respect.*¹¹

In Yoruba kingship, the king assumed total dignity befitting royal office on the day of coronation. The *Oba* would be imbued with the ritual power along with paraphernalia of royal office. Among these were crown, robes, scepter and horsetail as umbrella. The crown is the most significant of the royal insignia. It stipulates the sacred royal power of the king. The king of Isinkan confirmed its sacredness on the day of his coronation:

*It was the happiest day of my life,
that I wore a crown of an Oba
before a huge crowd....*¹²

This depicts that the crown is a sign of divination as it depicts the institution of royal ancestral force and the revelation of great moral insight in the person of the king. Besides, the crown is one of the treasured antiquities of the palace. The implication of a crown is that any place in which the bearer settled would automatically become a Kingdom.

The royal prerogatives of wearing the crown are restricted to the king. This is simply because only the king's crown has a horn called *Iere Okin* in Yorubaland. Moreover, it can only be found in the palace and that distinguishes them from commoners. Significantly, at installation, the king prostrated for the last time before the kingmakers in the public gaze of the people. He is thereafter restrained from doing obeisance to men.¹³

Conventionally, a king could declare war and make peace, conclude alliances, send and receive ambassadors, levy taxes, administer justice and appoint subordinate officials.¹⁴

Generally, kingship clearly shows the office of a king in the kingdom. In essence, the kingship revolves around the statehood of a king, which is the contending issue that this work deals with.¹⁵

Generally, in Yorubaland, kings and their offices were to be accorded utmost reverence by the people whose perception was that doing otherwise was acting contrary to demands of traditions, which could incur punishment from the gods.¹⁶ While kingship refers to the ruler in his Kingdom,¹⁷ the king in Yoruba context is addressed as *Oba, alase ekeji Orisa* (King, the ruler and deputy of the gods).¹⁸ He is also addressed as *Kabiyesi*, an expression which is a contracted form of the sentence *ki a bi nyin ko si* (there is no question of anybody querying your authority or action).¹⁹

According to Samuel Johnson, the *Alaafin* was the supreme head of Yoruba kingdom:

*The Alaafin is the supreme head of
all the kings and princes of the Yoruba
nation. He is the direct lineal
descendant and successor of the reputed
founder of the nation.*²⁰

However, this assertion is too encompassing as the *Alaafin*'s authority did not extend to the entire Yorubaland even at the apex of Oyo's wealth and political fame between 1500-1800. In pre-colonial times, clairvoyance was credited to a typical Yoruba king. He was regarded as the most powerful, the most knowing, the wisest of all men and the paramount ruler with larger than life image.²¹

Meanwhile, a king was expected to reciprocate this reverence and power accorded him by ensuring the prosperity of his kingdom. Likewise, misfortunes like scarcity of food, epidemics were usually blamed on the ill-luck of the king, since he was expected to establish a direct communication link with the gods either by magical means or by rites or both. The usual remedial measure was to propitiate the gods to avert negative tendencies usually through an ordained priest. On occasions when where this could not reverse the situation, the king was removed through popular insurrections. In the old Oyo empire, a calabash bearing the head of a parrot was presented to the king, which signified suicide or total banishment from the kingdom. In Akure kingdom, the nakedness of the town's women signified the urgent removal of the *Deji*.²²

Practically, there were efficient checks and balances on a king's functions and power. In most cases, the kingmakers participated in decision making. In old Oyo, the

Bashorun was the head of the *Oyomesi* that served as constraints to the *Alaafin*'s power. In other parts of Yorubaland, the fame, power and integrity of the traditional ruler were fundamentally different from that of the *Alaafin*. In Akure, for example, the *Deji* was held in highest esteem and regarded as a divine king. In theory, he possessed absolute power, but in practical terms, he did not rule alone. He was assisted by some groups of Chiefs that included the *Iare*, *Ikomo*, *Ejua*, *Ogbe* and *Owose*. In Isinkan, the *Iralepo* was assisted by the *Ihare*, the *Elegbe*, the *Ejua* and *Ikomo*.²³

A Short Historical Note on Isinkan.

Although the tradition of origin of Isinkan is not the aim of this paper, it, however gives us an insight into the conditions for official nominal recognition involved the kingship feuds, which is the contending issue this paper focuses on. Traditions of origin from Isinkan and the present mother town: Akure, attest to the fact that the ancestor of Isinkan, Oluroko, must have been one of the Ile-Ife migrants, since the name Oluroko is not discernible among Oduduwa's (founder of Yoruba lineage) children, but the political and socio-cultural traits of the town possess close affinity with that of Ile-Ife.

Oluroko first settled at Ora in Epe settlement, in fact, the disjointed segment of Epe settlement is still discernible in the present Ondo town. While at Ora, Oluroko gave birth to a son named after the settlement, Ora. Oluroko later died at Ora. On the death of his father at Epe, Ora proceeded on his relocation. When he and his entourage were tired, they halted for a rest. Meanwhile, when he was approached the next morning, he was found sitting majestically on a beautiful scarlet: "*Won te ite fun*", meaning clothes were spread on the throne for him. The people exclaimed "ORA LOPO" meaning Ora was on the throne.²⁴ This was later corrupted to *Iralepo* (still referring to Ira, the swampy area), the title of the chieftaincy, which was imported to Isinkan. The unsuitable or inhabitable nature of Ora, being a swampy area underpinned their relocation to Oke-Isimikan, where the name of the town is design as Isinkan.

Essentially, the kingship institution of Isinkan existed in this period as a complete autonomous community with its own derived political administration. In fact, Atandare attests to this that it was a large city evident in the king's kitchen cabinet. For example, Lisa was the second – in – command to the king [*Iralepo*].

However, the 19th century wars, especially Benin-Akure Wars forced *Iralepo* of Isinkan and *Osolo* of Isolo to join forces with the bigger community, Akure, to construct trenches round their settlements, in order to ward off future external aggression.²⁵ This brought about territorial adjustment. Isinkan, which was situated about 5 kilometres away from Akure moved near Akure in order to efficiently join forces together against any external invasion. This relocation had grave implications on the autonomous existence of Isinkan, which meant that *Iralepo* would now accord supremacy to the *Deji*, king of Akure.

Modern Political Development in Isinkan

In Yorubaland, prior to colonisation and independence, kingdoms had existed without government recognition. However, following the incursion of the British administration right from the late 19th century, a curtailment was pronounced on the traditional monarchical government, which resulted in to the use of warrant chiefs.

After independence, the Western Region government recommended that each traditional political institution in Yorubaland should seek government approval and upgrade their institutions in accordance with the Morgan Commission of 1977. In other words, any Yoruba kingdom that could trace its link with Oduduwa in Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba Civilisation, would be given the staff of office (*Opa Ase*). This is the genesis of the kingship tussle in Isinkan as kingdoms that failed to send representations were accorded little or no recognition and perceived as non-independent kingdoms.

Either by omission or commission, Isinkan failed to send any representative to the commission, hence, the community was not officially recognised. By omission, Isinkan slept on their right, they did not appear at the Morgan commission, and probably they did not foresee any grave consequence. However, communities that were not as great as Isinkan were upgraded, simply because they agitated for their rights. It was not the case of them being *Baales* [village heads] and then being upgraded, just like the *Olojada* of Oda. The incumbent *Olojada* was enthroned as *Baale* (community or quarter head),²⁶ but was later upgraded in the 1977 Commission because he thoroughly championed his course, and so was upgraded to grade C *Oba*. In the same vein, *Aiyede* of Ogbese, *Alara* of Ilara, *Okiti* of Iju and *Olujare* of Ijare among others were also upgraded as *Obas*. In fact, Weir's Report of 1934 placed these mentioned communities under Isinkan, which

was regarded as an independent village adjoining Akure, while these aforementioned were regarded as permanent Akure settlements and sub-villages under Akure.²⁷ All these formed the motive behind the Community's bitterness for not being accorded recognition. However, had *Iralepo* advocated for his constitutional right at the Morgan Commission, the tussle would have been really unnecessary.

By commission, even though it was upheld that, in 1977, regency was in place, not a king, the ruling house should have sent representatives to the Commission, since they did not emerge from nowhere.

Meanwhile, the crux of the matter is that, since Isinkan kingship was not recognised by the Commission, it would have to be engulfed in a long protracted tussle that lasted for 27 years (1978-2005). The incumbent *Iralepo*, stated that he wrote his first memorandum concerning this kingship tussle on July 9, 1978 during the reign of *Oba Adelegan Adesida, Deji* of Akure, who was very pleased with it and commented that government should make sure something was done to restore Isinkan's constitutional rights.²⁸ Thus, all along, the *Iralepo* has been employing one means or the other to get the attention of the government in order to approve the kingship.²⁹ After 1978, The *Iralepo* wrote an application to the Ondo State Council of Chiefs in 1983 for recognition under Part II of the Chiefs Law. After thorough cross-examination of the claims, the Council recommended that *Iralepo* chieftaincy should be recognised under part II of the Chiefs Law, as this would conform with the existing practice of recognising traditional heads of autonomous communities and to prevent threat to peace and stability.

However, the recommendation was not put forward without a clause, which was the disapproval of public wearing of crowns.³⁰ In all, this Council's recommendation cannot be discarded on account of the restraint because it recognised the autonomous identity of Isinkan.

In 1982, the Akure Local Government Secretary, Ayo Oderinde forwarded a letter to the Ondo State government on the directive of the *Deji* of Akure, *Oba Adelegan Adesida* that the *Iralepo* should be upgraded from a minor to a recognised *Oba*, since the *Deji* of Akure has confirmed that both the *Osolo* of Isolo and the *Iralepo* of Isinkan are traditional rulers of their communities, just like the sectional *Obas* in Abeokuta earlier noted. Also that the *Iralepo* of Isinkan and *Osolo* of Isolo were permitted to wear beaded

crowns on ceremonial occasions in their domain.³¹ He later posited that Isinkan is a distinct quarter in Akure, not a separate community,³² consequently, there are evidences that Isinkan have now been overshadowed by Akure as the mother town.³³

Meanwhile, the *Deji, Oba Adelegan Adesida III* wrote a letter in 1978 that greatly enhanced the *Iralepo* status. He forwarded a letter to the Akure Local Government secretary, that *Iralepo* title should be upgraded to Part III according to the way it was carried out in Morgan Commission of 1977.³⁴ The above depicts the contiguity in the claim of *Iralepo* and the *Deji*.

The Augustus Adebayo Chieftaincy Review Commission, which was set up in 1987 also furthered the issue of recognition. On behalf of the State Government, the Commission recommended that the plaintiff be granted the status of traditional ruler and be admitted to Part I of the Chiefs Edict 1984.³⁵ However, action did not follow, as the State government neglected the implementation of the Committee's recommendation. All these have made the effort of *Iralepo* in seeking for recognition to prove abortive during the 1980s.³⁶

The 1990s witnessed a more vigorous and intense phase of this struggle. The vigour and intensity probably resulted from the change in *Deji's* Chieftaincy, that is, the demise of *Oba Adelegan Adesida III* and the installation of *Oba Adesida Adebobajo*. Since the personalities of these kings seemed to be a cogent defining factor in the race for recognition, this will also be properly analysed in the course of this paper.

In February 1994, the *Iralepo* forwarded another letter to the then Military Governor, Lt.Col. Mike Torey to accord the recognition based on the evidences and letters that have been earlier discussed. A source holds that Col. Torey was prepared to grant the recognition, but due to high pressure from above (Abuja-the Military base) he was curtailed from granting the recognition. Since that was the usual practice of the military government, order-from-above prevailed.

In the same year, another letter was forwarded in October to Ondo State Council of *Obas*, portraying the history of Isinkan as of descent from Oduduwa and the mode of appointment of *Iralepo* independent of external party, that is solely by Isinkan kingmakers. In sum, that princes do not beget kings, but kingmakers, more importantly, revealing the constitutional roles of *Iralepo* as a traditional ruler of his own people and

urging the Council to implement the recognition. As usual, this effort was abortive; nothing was done to elevate the status of the *Iralepo*.³⁷

Since the above did not suffice, another letter was forwarded in 1994 to Col. Ahmed Usman, the Military Administrator of Ondo State. But this time, it was a joint effort by the *Iralepo* of Isinkan and the *Osolo* of Isolo who was also not recognised as an *Oba*. They pleaded the distinction of their communities from Akure especially in the area of traditional festivals like *Ilefunta* and *Aeregbe* which are restricted to Akure. Also at the demise of the *Deji* when trees were felled in Akure, it was not carried out in the two communities. The 1934 Weir's report was also used to argue their position. In fairness to Usman, Engineer James Olusoga, an eminent Akure personality noted:

*when I was the Ondo State commissioner for Works, Usman, the then military governor asked me to go and meet the Deji to grant the recognition. I went with the Commissioner for Justice and Attorney General Chief Esan, this was because the Deji Adebobajo, before he was installed advocated for Iralepo, but when we got to him the song changed.*³⁸

From the above, the personality of the *Deji, Oba Adebobajo* prevailed. Prior to this period, his predecessor, Adelegan advocated for this recognition and even pleaded on their behalf with the government; paradoxically, when the government was ready to approve the recognition based on the *Deji's* consent, the table was turned around and the unprecedented occurred.

At this juncture, it was becoming apparent that it would involve the intervention of higher authorities, since all the relevant authorities were either reluctant or unwilling to accord the recognition. The decision to summon the case to court was finalised when unconstitutional act was pronounced. The *Deji, Adebobajo*, and his *Lisa*, High Chief Folorunso David, second in command to the *Deji* held that he (*Iralepo*) should be put in the *Iare* Council of Chiefs, meaning that *Iralepo* would be in the 7th position to the *Deji*³⁹ which was considered to be wrong, thus further stipulating that *Iralepo* would be in a meeting rotational in the *Iare*. In the first place it is not traditionally correct to have a 7th-position-Chief-to-the king, because the *Iwarefa Mefa* group of High Chiefs consisted of six chiefs that met in the *Asamo* of Akure's house, for traditional rotational meeting.

Therefore it would be a cultural aberration to have such an arrangement. *Iralepo* perceived this as a relegation that can only be restrained by court injunction.

Consequently, the time was ripe to seek the recognition in the law court. The *Iralepo* sued the Government, since it was the responsibility of the government to issue the staff of office. The *Deji* and Akure Chiefs joined in the suit on the side of government. The writ of summons was issued and the case began in earnest in December 1996 at the Federal High Court, Akure.

In due time, the hearing of the case commenced. In fact, this case caused a deep seated rivalry between Isinkan and Akure, for the ten years (December 1996 to December 2004) that the case was tried in the court. During the hearing of the case, all the earlier mentioned evidences were arrayed in the court, and witnesses were brought from both sides (plaintiffs and defendants) to testify for and against their views.

In the course of the hearing, there were some salient facts observed that would further enhance thorough understanding of this essay. Although we are not competent to review any law record, because we are not skilled in that field, nonetheless, there are seasoned historical facts that add flavour to this research. Besides, history is a multidisciplinary subject. Hence, historically relevant issues are raised.⁴⁰ Chief Joseph Abegunde, one time *Omolare* of Akure (a Palace Chief) shed more light on the crisis based on his experience in the palace since 1953. He noted that since he had been working with *Oba Afunbiowo Adesida I*, the *Iralepo* did not attend the palace ceremonies, *Ogun Olokun*, *Ogun jesa* and *Ogun Akure*, which were ceremonies performed in the palace that weaved the palace Chiefs together.⁴¹ The reason for this, according to him, was that *Iralepo* was a traditional ruler of his own people and has his own palace ceremonies meant for his Chiefs and himself. In essence, tradition forbids *Iralepo's* attendance in these ceremonies in Akure. Traditional record of the four groups of Chiefs, the *Eghare*, the *Ikomo*, the *Ejua* and *Ogbe* headed by Chief Lisa, Chief Sao, Chief Asamo and Chief Ajana respectively, shows that they do not belong to any of the group. The four met in Chief Asamo's palace every nine days. He further posited:

*I was attending the meeting once in every nine days at the Asamo's place. The plaintiffs do not attend the meetings...because they have their own meetings in their domain.*⁴²

It must be clearly stated that the testimony of this palace Chief is germane because of his experience at the palace since 1953 where he served for 46 years. He further affirmed that as a palace Chief, the installation was usually carried out at *Ojukoto* in the *Deji's* palace but the installation of *Iralepo* was performed at the *Igboye* shrine.⁴³ Similarly, Chiefs do not climb the *Okitiomoolore* (the noble hill of the royals), but the *Iralepo* did, since it was meant exclusively and traditionally for *Obas*.

In another vein, the claim that *Iralepo* is hailed *Kabiyesi* does not hold water because he (*Omolare*) held that *Lisa*, is also saluted as *Kabiyesi* and also known as *Oteru Oba Ode*. Also, due to the intertwined nature of Akure people and Isinkan people greatly owing to geographical proximity of the two communities, there is no clear cut distinction in their dialect:

*The plaintiff speak Akure dialect
We are all Akures.*⁴⁴

As a matter of fact, outside Akure, someone cannot claim to be an indigene of Isinkan, but Akure before reference can be made to Isinkan. Meanwhile, this is not to say that Isinkan is not an independent settlement. At least the political autonomy cannot be underestimated. After cross examination by the prosecuting and defending counsel, it was agreed that the facts given are true.

Another personality that gave a relevant testimony was High Chief Aminu Balogun, the *Aro* of Oke-Aro quarters. He provided another perspective that Gabriel Adelegan Adesida, the *Deji* of Akure appointed the *Iralepo*, hence, Isinkan is a quarter. Also, the Isinkan people did not come to Akure with any crown, because they came as war refugees during the reign of *Oba Gbogi*. He also affirmed that his position as a quarter Chief (*Aro*) is equivalent to that of the *Iralepo*.

However, he later admitted and confirmed a photograph presented to him bearing the portrait of *Iralepo* with *Iere Okin* crown which is meant exclusively for *Obas* in Yorubaland. Earlier, he observed that he(*Iralepo*) was installed by *Oba Adelegan*; however, a letter forwarded to him (*Adelegan*) by a renowned Akure prince, *Adegoroye*, restraining him from interfering in the appointment of *Iralepo*, as tradition severely forbids it was presented in the court:

--- By tradition your Highness will remember the Deji of Akure never has anything to do with the selection, appointment or installation of an Iralepo, who is himself an Oba of Isinkan people which people have, due to the growth of Akure township, been submerged into Akure township but who, to this day still have their own tradition to follow and implement in the matter of appointing their Oba- the Iralepo. If your highness has any doubt, then the issue arises as to how your highness can claim a right that was never exercised by your ancestors... The Iralepo's position is singularly inviolate and must be so treated...⁴⁵

The above extract clears any doubt as to the involvement of the *Deji* in the appointment of the *Iralepo*, because the coming of such from one of the leading princes in Akure absolutely leaves no room for skepticism, as to the traditional existence of Isinkan as an independent community, at least politically.

Another claim that needs to be examined is the claim that the *Iralepo* wears a crown. The *Aro* posited that the *Iralepo* only wears a coronet, not a crown which is also worn by Akure Chiefs. Thus, there is no special traditional implication attached to wearing of coronets. Similarly, there has been no time in history that the *Iralepo* wore his crown to the *Deji's* palace. The latter fact is not disputed by the *Iralepo* that they do not wear crown to the *Deji's* palace as a sign of respect and recognising the paramountcy of the *Deji* as supreme and major ruler in the area.

All told, the High Court of Justice presided over by Justice A.O. Akinwalere declared that:

Joseph Olu Ojo, the Iralepo of Isinkan is the traditional Oba and paramount ruler of Isinkan community in Akure and he is entitled to be admitted into part I of the Chiefs Edict 1984 of Ondo State of Nigeria as a recognized chief--- the 1st plaintiff (Iralepo) be accorded the right to wear the paraphernalia of office as the traditional Oba and paramount ruler of Isinkan community.⁴⁶

In contrast to earlier observed recommendations, the verdict was followed by appropriate action in the following year, 2005. Following the court verdict, the then

Governor, Olusegun Agagu, issued and presented the long awaited staff of authority of the *Iralepo*.

Not pleased with the court verdict, the Adesida Royal Family and some Akure High Chiefs, *Lisa* and *Aro*, among others filed an appeal to the court of Appeal, Benin. At the moment of writing, the case is still in the process of hearing, that is, judgment is not proclaimed yet. This informs why the discourse of this paper stops at 2005, because a complete history cannot be written, particularly as the case is still in court. This explains the reason why some people regard the kingship as a pending kingship that can only stand the test of time as long as the Appeal Court verdict favours them.

Nonetheless, Engineer Olusoga postulated that from all indications, that is, following the available evidence, most of which have been earlier discussed, the *Iralepo* is likely to get his kingship re-affirmed as a king of his people.⁴⁷

A Discourse on Isinkan Kingship Travails

The fact that Isinkan's ancestor was one of the Ile-Ife migrants, shows that the town qualifies for the recognition, in accordance with the 1977 Morgan Commission.

Meanwhile, two factors significantly affected the autonomy of Isinkan. First, the 19th century wars, specifically the Benin-Akure War brought Isinkan geographically closer to Akure, especially the circumscription of the community within the trench[Yara]. This could have been misinterpreted to affect its separate identity. The second factor is the failure of the community to secure official recognition in the Morgan Commission. This is being exploited by the *Deji* to claim that Isinkan is but a quarter in Akure.

Even with or without the recognition, the *Deji's* (Adebobajo) predecessors recognised *Iralepo* as an *Oba* of his own people. *Oba* Afunbiowo had no dissension with the reigns of *Iralepo* Onaowuro (1919-1932) and *Iralepo* Alade Otutubiosun (1932-1976). Similarly, the *Dejis* that succeeded Afunbiowo, Agunsoye Ademuagun Adesida II (1957-1973) manifested no opposition to the position of *Iralepos*. Likewise, *Oba* Adelegan III (1975-1991) that reigned during and after the Morgan Commission was not aggrieved concerning the reign of *Iralepo* in Isinkan. This is evident in the letters and memoirs reviewed above that the *Deji* forwarded to appropriate authorities to make sure tradition was followed.

Following the necessary conditions to be met before kingship in Yorubaland is recognised, the mode of appointment of an *Iralepo* leaves little or no room for doubt as to the position of *Iralepo* as an *Oba*. During the installation ceremony of an *Iralepo* elect, he performs nine days *Arapon* (seclusion) ceremony like the *Deji* and not seven days meant for the Chiefs. The *Iralepo* climbs the *Okitiomoloore* at installation, while Chiefs do not. The *Iralepo* is installed at *Igboye* shrine in Isinkan, while Akure Chiefs are installed at *Ojukoto* in the *Deji*'s palace.

On the other hand, another tradition from the Akure perspective noted that during the coronation of an *Iralepo*, a delegate from the *Deji* was always present to represent the *Deji*. The relevance claim has been contested on the ground that even if there was representation it stipulates the extent of cordiality between the two communities, following the existence of Isinkan inside the moat. In comparison, the traditional sitting of the *Deji* on *Owa* (king) of Ilesa's lap does not make the *Deji* inferior or subservient to the *Owa* but a mark of traditional affinity that exists between the two communities in terms of the emergence of *Deji* lineage.

Another point of obscurity is the fact that the *Iralepo* wears fetish crown meant for ceremonial purposes, whereas Chiefs do not wear fetish crowns. A Chief in Akure, the *Odopetu* who tried it on an occasion was sternly warned and fined:

*Sometime in ----- 1990, Odopetu
during his new Yam festival adorned
himself with a crown, The case was
reported to the Deji of Akure in council
and Odopetu was fined 2 cows.⁴⁸*

Whereas, the *Iralepo* has never been sanctioned by any *Oba* in Akure for wearing the crown even at his domain.

Another bone of contention arises as to why the kingship tussle lasted so long. During the reign of *Oba Adelegan Adesida* in Akure, he advocated for the approval of the constitutional right of Isinkan, starting from memos and letters to the Chieftaincy Commission Council till his demise in 1991. Similarly, prior to the coronation of *Adebobajo* as a king, he advocated for the *Iralepo*, that he should become an *Oba*, but on getting to the throne, the story changed. Meanwhile, the tussle was about over, when the then Military Administrator, Colonel Torey sent delegation in 1995 to seek the consent

of the *Deji* concerning the approval, but the consent was not given as earlier observed. The above makes a critical mind to ponder why the same personality that had approved the kingship before his installation changed his mind.

A source has it that the *Deji*, Adebobajo was unwilling due to some reasons advanced by his chiefs. Specifically, some of his High Chiefs: *Asamo*, *Lisa*, *Aro*, and *Elemikan* instigated him that Isinkan should not be allowed any measure of political autonomy as it would amount to division in Akure kingdom which the Adesida Ruling House seemed to be presiding over, this was because the Royal Family has ruled Akure for a century. It was believed that the rotational ruling system would go to obscurity and the only ruling house would be Adesida.⁴⁹

The above partly explains the reason why Adebobajo disallowed *Iralepo* from becoming a Chieftain and invited him to his *Iare* group of Chiefs and the consequent court suit that followed, which made the struggle to become protracted.

However, the bolt was untied when the *Osupa* Ruling House succeeded Adesida Royal Family in the *Deji* kingship. Besides, speculations are rife in Akure that *Asamo* instigated Adebobajo against *Iralepo* due to petty jealousy against *Iralepo*, whereas *Iralepo* happened to be a friend of his. But due to his position as a High Chief, he did not want his friend to be hailed as *Kabiyesi*.⁵⁰ Although this appears to be mere speculation, which can hardly be accepted as a historical fact, the disposition of the Akure Chiefs after the 2005 government recognition partly attest to the above. The *Odopetu*, another High Chief also wants to be recognised as an *Oba* like *Iralepo*, evident in the suit he filed against the *Deji* of Akure.⁵¹

On the other hand, the rationale behind the action of Adebobajo cannot be discarded in totality, because provided the recognition is re-affirmed in the Court of Appeal, Benin, Akure metropolis may likely be in shambles, because the (other) quarters like Ado-Akure may perceive it as an impetus to seek for independence of their domain, in the same way the *Odopetu* has just started to do. Meanwhile, the *Elemo* of Akureland regarded the case of the *Odopetu* as a horse of another colour whose position is different from that of *Iralepo*.⁵² In fact, another source avers that since the mode of appointment of *Odopetu* cannot be likened to a king, and in so far as *Odopetu* is appointed by the *Deji*, he does not have any group of kingmakers. All these actually make his case different from

that of the *Iralepo*. Julius Sani Adebo, from the quarter of Odo-Ikoyi in Akureland remarks about the situation:

*somebody can stay in his house
and say he is a king of his house,
but it is now left for the government
to approve the acclaimed status.*⁵³

Consequently, the verdict of the court remains final as to whether any quarter can successfully secede either in present time or in the age to come.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has presented the travails of kingship institution in Yorubaland in general and Isinkan in particular from the pre-colonial times up 2005. Isinkan has being a community in Akure, that can be partly substantiated in the traditional *Pelupelu* meeting attended by Kings in pre-colonial years.⁵⁴ Moreover, kingship institution is not a recent phenomenon in Isinkan, it is prior to Ora, the son of Oluroko on arrival at Isinkan, as earlier observed. Similarly, the ancestor of Isinkan, Oluroko, was one of the Ile – Ife migrants. Although no government record attests to the fact that they had kings, the primacy is reserved that the *Iralepo* is the head of his community, not Chief of his quarter in Akure. Even the *Deji* of Akure is referred to by Weir as the Head or Chairman of Akure Community heads.

In sum, it becomes legitimate for Isinkan Chieftaincy, headed by the *Iralepo* to be recognised by the Government as a traditional ruler of his people. On the other hand, at every stage of the nation's political engineering, the institution of monarchy has suffered one form of onslaught or the other, which has gravely dragged the once-revered institution down the hill. As a matter of fact, the 20th century political development in Yorubaland greatly affected Isinkan monarchical institution as the government stood in the position of a superior body that ratified the traditional system of leadership.

Meanwhile, a complete history of the kingship travails cannot be written for now, since the litigation is still on-going in the Appeal Court, Benin.

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