

# **‘DEATH IS PREFERABLE TO IGNOMINY’: POLITICALLY MOTIVATED SUICIDE, SOCIAL HONOR AND CHIEFTAINCY POLITICS IN EARLY COLONIAL IBADAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Suicide is generally regarded as an anti-social behavior and of which society disapproves. That is why sociologists and psychologists, among other experts, have taken it upon themselves to account for the incidence of suicide in many societies. However, most of the modern theories of suicide do not emphasize the idea of ‘heroic suicide’. Epitomizing this ‘genre’ of suicide are the high profile, politically motivated suicides in early colonial Ibadan examined here. This paper suggests that the key to understanding these suicide cases is to be found not only in the people’s multilayered pasts – the general Yoruba past and Ibadan’s nineteenth-century military heritage - but also in their conception of honor and social norms. The ideals of honor thus carried over into the twentieth century were so strong that they survived the first three decades of colonial rule despite the intrigue-infested nature of Ibadan chieftaincy politics and the official interference of the colonial authorities. This paper concludes that politically motivated suicide, though self destructive was actually meant to serve an honorable purpose such that those involved became heroes even in death. There is therefore the need for many suicide theorists to highlight exceptions like these.

Keywords: Suicide, politics, honor, ignominy, chiefs, colonial rule.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Politically motivated suicide was a common occurrence in early colonial Ibadan. Within a space of ten years, three principal chiefs had committed suicide: *Baale* Dada Opadere (1907), *Baale* Irefin (1915) and *Balogun* Ola (1917). They did this as they perceived themselves on the brink of ignominy. This practice of political suicide was, however not a twentieth century development. It had its antecedents in nineteenth-century Ibadan politics which was powered by a military machine laden with intrigues, machinations and intense competition for public office and social advancement. Again, politically motivated suicide did not originate in Ibadan. It had always been reflected in Yoruba social thought and political culture, hence the saying: ‘*iku ya j’ẹsin*’ (death is preferable to ignominy). However, because of reasons peculiar to Ibadan that shall be discussed in the course of this study, this notion gained more ground in Ibadan than elsewhere.

This paper argues that the desire (which sometimes bordered on duty) to preserve personal and family honor in the face of impending ignominy was a major factor that moved public figures to commit suicide. The agency of these individuals in choosing death over exile is here acknowledged. Far from being ‘victims’, they made the most of disadvantageous situations and turned such around to earn for themselves respect and esteem in death instead of the original ridicule that would have been their lot. Suicide

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thus served an 'honorable' purpose for them. This paper also observes that despite the fact that colonial rule made militarism redundant in Ibadan, it could not immediately sweep aside the ideals of heroic honor associated with it. What the local ruling elite did was to demonstrate this heroic honor on the 'battleground' of chieftaincy politics. All these raise a number of issues. What forces 'institutionalized' politically motivated suicide in Yorubaland? What circumstances were considered ignominious at different periods of Ibadan history? What did it mean to have honor in death? Did such suicides have any cleansing effect on the society? In tackling these and other related issues I first examine relevant theories of honor and of suicide to see what light these could shed on the Yoruba/Ibadan cases discussed in this paper. The next two sections examine the idea and practice of politically motivated suicide in Old Oyo (representing pre-nineteenth century Yorubaland) and in nineteenth-century Ibadan respectively. This is to accentuate the changes and continuities that presaged the colonial period. This is followed by a presentation of the three Ibadan high profile suicide cases that took place between 1907 and 1917. The paper is then brought to a close with an analysis of the honor in suicide.

### **ON HONOUR AND SUICIDE**

Honor is a composite concept that has to do with esteem, respectability and reputation. The twin elements of self-regard and social esteem run through several definitions of honor. According to Julian Pitt-Rivers,

honor is the value of a person in his own eyes but also in the eyes of the society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride.<sup>1</sup>

This means that a personal evaluation of oneself is not enough to confer honor, the society must 'acknowledge that claim' which is usually manifested through a person's reputation. The role of society as judge is thus very significant in the acquisition of honor by its members. These two dimensions of honor: the personal and the social are thus closely related.

Another variant of the honor theory is provided by Elvin Hatch, which he calls a 'self-identity approach' to the study of honor.<sup>2</sup> According to this approach, individual actions and life are seen as being important as judged by 'criteria that transcends one's personal self-interest'.<sup>3</sup> These criteria are laid down by the society. Even though Hatch's emphasis is on personal self-identity, it is clear that such an identity cannot be pursued independently of the 'opinions of others', which provide the acceptable model for individual actions. What Hatch seems to be saying here is that because the criteria that an individual uses to assess or guide his conduct are those prescribed by the society, there is an intimate link between honor as the worth of a person in his own eyes and honor as the way society sees him. This again reinforces the role of society as judge. 'The observing other is ubiquitous', writes Hatch while Pitt-Rivers observes that "public opinion forms ... a tribunal before which the claims to honor are brought, 'the court of reputation' as it has been called, and against its judgments there is no redress. For this reason it is said that public ridicule kills".<sup>4</sup>

Pitt-Rivers might have meant this figuratively, but this principle holds true in real, literal terms as the cases of Ibadan chiefs later discussed in this paper show, in which case it was the fear of public ridicule, here called 'ignominy' that partially drove them to kill themselves. Another crucial point in this theory is the collectivity of honor. This applies to social groups such as families, lineages and kin groups. Within such groups, an act of dishonor by a single member will affect all others just as a single member could bask in the honor of the group. Thus, where status is ascribed by birth, 'honor derives not only from individual reputation but from antecedence'.<sup>5</sup>

Frank H. Stewart defines honor as an individual's right to respect.<sup>6</sup> This right exists both subjectively and objectively. These two levels again correspond to personal claims to honor and societal acknowledgement of same. But more significantly, Stewart identifies two types of honor, namely, horizontal honor, which is the kind of respect that is due to an equal; and vertical honor, which is the right to special respect enjoyed by those of superior social rank.<sup>7</sup> These two types of honor are not mutually exclusive. One may enjoy the respect of his peers as well as that of his social inferiors.

Perhaps, a definition of honor is not complete without juxtaposing it with shame, which concept comes up in many discussions of honor and is particularly relevant to the issue of ignominy raised in this paper. According to J.G. Peristiany, honor and shame 'are the two poles of an evaluation' i.e. they stand on opposite sides of a spectrum.<sup>8</sup> He identifies two fundamental categories of people: 'those endowed with honor and those deprived of it'.<sup>9</sup> Unni Wikan has reacted to this by insisting that honor and shame are not necessarily binary opposites and that shame contrasts more significantly with other concepts (although she does not tell what those other concepts are!).<sup>10</sup> Again, she reports that in certain societies in the Middle East, it is shame, rather than honor that is their predominant concern.<sup>11</sup> And instead of Peristiany's two categories, she insists there is just one category: that of shameful people.<sup>12</sup> I tend to agree with Inger-Lise Lien who offers what appears to be a mediatory approach to this debate on honor and shame.<sup>13</sup> According to him, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. One could be honorable in one context and be shameful in another context. Whatever is the case, it makes sense to assume that in societies where honor is highly prized, people would be afraid of conducts that are dishonorable. As to the specific value placed on honor in particular societies, only empirical studies will bear this out. And in heterogeneous societies where many groups prescribe criteria for attaining honor, honor thus becomes a contested category.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as honor is emphasized in particular societies, the idea of equality in dignity for all men becomes more remote because some would certainly enjoy more honor than others.

Ignominy, as used in this paper refers to a public kind of shame. It corresponds to the breakdown or cessation of the social esteem that an individual enjoys. This is to be distinguished from private shame or self-condemnation, which arises when an individual falls below his own self-expectation and which might not yet be known to a 'wide' public. The 'public' here is thus a shifting, elastic body whose composition could range from the immediate family group to wider audiences, which in turn are made up of several 'publics'. But when the public, as constituting the significant Other and the arena within which an individual had been previously invested with honor rises to condemn, or withdraws its approbation from him on account of his misconduct or violation of social mores, such situation becomes ignominious, transcending the normal boundaries of

personal shame. It results in public disgrace and ridicule; where scorn and contempt now replace honor and esteem.

The literature on suicide is very vast and varied, produced by experts in sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology and the bio-medical sciences.<sup>15</sup> The most popular are however the sociological and psychological approaches. Particularly interesting is the vociferous debate between some sociologists and psychologists on the issue of the approach best suited to the study of suicide. One side advocates the adoption of what it calls 'psychological autopsies' while the other insists on purely sociological methods.<sup>16</sup> The problem with these theories is that while some of them have been tested with success in western societies, they only have limited applicability to the African context. For example, the sociological theory of Emile Durkheim identifies three types of suicide, namely, the egoistic, altruistic and the anomic through which he tries to show that the incidence of suicide depends on the degree to which a person feels connected to, or integrated within society. Suicide was therefore more likely where an individual lacked close relationship or social bonds.<sup>17</sup> This theory is of little help in explicating political suicides in a place like Ibadan where an ambivalent situation arose when leaders killed themselves due to political defeat and at the same time sought to preserve their personal and family honor in the face of impending alienation and ignominy. An adoption of the altruistic explanation, in a case like this, obscures the social tensions surrounding such a suicide.

Meanwhile, the study of suicide has changed significantly since Durkheim. Jean Baeschler, writing 82 years later, sees suicide as the response of people to certain problems. This response is reflected in the typologies of suicide that he identifies, namely, escapist, aggressive, oblativ and ludic.<sup>18</sup> While the oblativ suicide appears to have some semblance to political suicides, its sacrificial ethos evokes a sense of passivity and resignation that are unrepresentative of the Ibadan context.

Most psychologists take Sigmund Freud as their point of departure due to his introspective approach to the study of suicide. Karl Menninger's theory identifies three distinct psychic elements in suicide: the wish to kill, the wish to be killed and the wish to die.<sup>19</sup> All these resonate with Freud's analysis of the death impulse and his emphasis on the sadistic and masochistic tendencies of the suicide.<sup>20</sup> Edwin Shneidman's 'mentalist' view of suicide also emphasizes unbearable psychological pain as being at the root of all suicides.<sup>21</sup> These psychopathological frameworks are therefore difficult to apply to cases of culturally-sanctioned suicides. It thus appears that the value of these theories and classifications to the study of suicide in Africa is not so much in their direct applicability to particular cases but in the general idea that studies of suicide should take note not only of the individual psyche, but also of the social institutions and environment within which such suicides took place.<sup>22</sup> Diachronic studies of specific socio-cultural contexts would serve a better purpose of exposing recurring patterns and highlighting notable exceptions as well as identifying changes and continuities in a society's practice of suicide. Paul Bohannan's collection of empirical studies on homicide and suicide in Africa, though a synchronic analysis is equally important because of its comparative dimension although most of the communities studied are from the same East African region.<sup>23</sup>

Certain questions are left unanswered by these theories. How much honor is attached to heroic suicide? How does society justify such suicides? To unravel these issues, we need to examine the Yoruba past (before the foundation of Ibadan) to identify

the origin and ‘institutionalization’ of political suicides; the nature of social cum political pressures that made such an option; and the various circumstances considered ignominious in the Yoruba context. This next discussion will also touch on the Yoruba worldview and attitude to death and how these intersected with cases of suicide.

### **POLITICAL SUICIDES IN YORUBALAND BEFORE THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

In order to have a good grasp of Yoruba attitude to political suicide, it is imperative to briefly discuss the Yoruba cosmology and their beliefs about death. The Yoruba conceived the cosmos as consisting of two distinct but yet inseparable realms – *aye* (the visible world of the living) and *orun* (the spiritual and invisible domain of the ancestors, gods and spirits).<sup>24</sup> The two realms were closely connected in the sense that the inhabitants of *orun* regularly involved themselves in human affairs. Thus a typical Yoruba community was not just perceived as a geographical entity with clearly defined boundaries and with a web of horizontal networks of kinship/familial relationships. Instead, it was also seen as a transcendental continuum, which stretched back into the past to include the dead, represented by the ancestors, and at the same time anticipated the future world of the yet unborn. These three elements: the dead, the living and the unborn always featured prominently in Yoruba traditional discourses on life.

Therefore, death was not seen as the end of life. It was a means of crossing to the other side. It was a “dematerialization of the vital breath or soul, a transformation from earthly to spiritual existence ... where the dematerialized soul may choose to stay forever ... [or] make periodic returns to earth through reincarnation”.<sup>25</sup> This belief in an afterlife and in reincarnation assured the Yoruba of immortality. It is therefore within this belief system that the idea of burying valuables, slaves and asking other notable personalities to die with a departed king and accompany him to *orun* becomes understandable. Perhaps, the cultural practice which best demonstrates the Yoruba belief in immortality is that of the *egungun* (masquerade). An *egungun* “is believed to be the spirit of a deceased person who has returned from ... (the abode of the ancestors) to visit his people. Hence he is called *ara orun* (visitor from *orun*)”.<sup>26</sup> The *egungun* cult was controlled by men who made visible the ancestral spirits and commanded their power. Spirits of the departed were thus celebrated in the annual *egungun* festival and were consulted from time to time by members of their family. It is also interesting to note that while the Yoruba frowned against suicide among ordinary people and stigmatized the relations of the affected person, they valorized the practice among the elite whenever it occurred within the context of a political contest or as a ritual obligation.

Much of the discussion that follows in this section is based on Samuel Johnson’s *The History of the Yorubas*, being the most authoritative narrative of pre-colonial Yoruba history.<sup>27</sup> The examples cited here are from the Old Oyo Kingdom, not necessarily because Oyo practice approximated what obtained in other Yoruba-speaking areas, but because Johnson’s *History* was essentially “Oyo-centric” and also because Ibadan, by the mid-nineteenth century appeared closer to Oyo in terms of language and ‘culture’ than to other Yoruba towns.

There were two types of high profile suicides in Oyo, and both were considered ‘honorable’ if promptly effected.<sup>28</sup> The first was actually ritual suicide and it involved important state officials and titleholders (some of whom were part of royalty). These individuals had to die either on the accession of a new king or on his demise. The

biological mother of the king-elect, for instance, was officially asked to 'go to sleep' immediately her son was called to be king.<sup>29</sup> This was necessary so that "there will be no occasion to violate any filial duty imperative on a son who is at the same time the king ... [and whose] majesty must be supreme".<sup>30</sup> Upon her death, an official mother was appointed for the king. Again, the Crown Prince and a host of other title-holders had to commit suicide on the death of the king in order to accompany him to the hereafter. These individuals were called *abobaku* (one who dies with the king).<sup>31</sup>

This tradition, apart from its ritual symbolism also had very strong political undertones. All the important titleholders that were customarily required to die with the king were those closest to him and who had the freest access to his person. To make their lives dependent on the king's was thus designed to ensure his safety. And since they all knew their lives would end whenever the king died, they took great care to protect him from premature death. And, as a sort of 'compensation' all these titleholders enjoyed a lot of privileges during the king's lifetime and could get away with very serious misdeeds. The most important of these functionaries was the *Aremo* (Crown Prince) who was required to die with the King as from the eighteenth century because it was suspected that some *Aremo* before 1730 had been committing patricide to hasten their own succession.<sup>32</sup> Between 1730 and 1758, the primogeniture rule was abolished in Oyo and successive *Aremos* ruled with their fathers, enjoyed tremendous powers and privileges, and were required to die with them. The *Alaafin* was then succeeded by any of his remaining male descendants approved by the *Oyomesi* (Council of chiefs).<sup>33</sup>

The second type of suicide was politically motivated and was 'imposed', either directly or indirectly on public figures. The direct demand came in the form of political rejection issued to the king. A ruling *Alaafin* could be rejected by his chiefs (the *Oyomesi*) for tyranny, wickedness or as a result of political intrigues or power struggles. This rejection was communicated to him by the *Bashorun* (Prime Minister) who presented the king with an empty calabash, or one containing parrots eggs, with the pronouncement 'the gods reject you, the earth rejects you, the people reject you'.<sup>34</sup> The only option for the king after receiving this message was to commit suicide. In the seventeenth century, nine *Alaafin* were thus removed. This practice continued into the eighteenth century, culminating in the internal struggle between the *Alaafin* and the *Bashorun*, which destabilized the empire in the second half of the century. As a form of political control, the *Alaafin* also had the right to request any titleholder to commit suicide.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, one of the *Oyomesi*, the *Samu* was also designated an *abobaku*, but despite all these measures, it appeared the *Oyomesi* (Council of Chiefs) used this prerogative more often than the *Alaafin* did.<sup>36</sup>

'Indirect' pressures for death could be presented by harrowing circumstances of life where the individual concerned did not wish to compromise his honor or where he felt he was approaching a situation of public ridicule. Johnson narrates the story of the head chief of Apomu (*Baale Apomu*) who committed suicide when Oyo decided to attack his town during the reign of *Alaafin Aole* (1789-1796).<sup>37</sup> There was also the case of *Alaafin Agboluaje* who committed suicide when asked by the 'overmighty' *Bashorun Gaha* (his Prime Minister) to attack one Chief Elewi-Odo, who was his personal friend.<sup>38</sup>

Where does honor come into all these? In the first type of political suicide identified as ritual suicide, the titleholders required to die saw it as an official duty to their land and so concealed their personal distress at having to die. Clothed in their best,

they gave lavish feasts and gifts to people amidst funeral dirges and even supervised the digging of their own graves and the making of coffins. After putting their houses in order, they retired to their inner chambers and went 'to sleep'. They were subsequently given befitting burials according to their ranks. Although their relatives mourned their exit, they were at the same time proud of their conduct. However, if it happened that the poison taken by the person expected to die did not quickly take effect (probably due to previous medicinal fortifications – *ajesara*), close relatives had a duty of 'finishing off' the chief either by strangling or some other means before sunset to preserve the honor of the family.<sup>39</sup> Such homicide was not considered as manslaughter or murder. In fact, it was presented, in the interest of the family, as suicide properly and promptly committed.

The idea of refusing to die as expected in a ritual suicide was simply unfathomable to the people. Many issues – of personal dignity, of family or group honor, and of communal equilibrium and spiritual wholesomeness – were hinged upon that death. To refuse to accompany a king to *orun* after a life of enjoyment, privileges and immunities with him was seen as a great betrayal, and a social disservice, which might portend grave consequences for the community. It also bordered on dishonor and ignominy, not only for the individual concerned, but also for his entire family, compound or lineage since many of the *abobaku* titles were hereditary. However, if any of the *abobaku* refused to commit suicide as expected and thus had to be executed, Johnson reports that "his carcass will be treated like that of a common felon and his house pulled down".<sup>40</sup> That was why close relatives did not hesitate to 'dispatch' such faint-hearted' individuals, in order to save their family from indelible disgrace. What is at stake here is thus beyond the individual. To die with the king as a titleholder was therefore considered honorable for the individual concerned and for his family. The individual concerned also anticipated a life of continued privileges and enjoyment as a royal consort in the afterlife.

Rejected kings who valiantly committed suicide were treated honorably and accorded decent and public funerals because they exited bravely without resistance. On the other hand, for a king to insist on living after having been rejected was also considered disgraceful and ignominious. Nobody anticipated such an existence. The only record of this in Oyo traditions is that of *Alaafin* Karan, who challenged the right of the *Oyomesi* to reject him. He was subsequently killed in an insurrection.<sup>41</sup> Thus according to Ali Mazrui, "suicide becomes respectable when the life which it ends [had] at once aspired to great heights and [is now] descended to such depths".<sup>42</sup> Where a leader (or anybody for that matter) was not requested to die by tradition and had not been officially rejected but found himself in dire straits and deep dilemma, suicide could offer a means of escape, as in 'saving' him the dishonorable task of attacking a loyal friend. And where a dishonorable act had already been committed, suicide also helped in face saving – of relieving one from the consequences of such conduct, or could even be restitutive. Thus considerations of honor and ignominy, either directly or indirectly were always lurking at the heart of many suicides, especially in high profile cases in pre-nineteenth century Oyo.

## **SUICIDE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY IBADAN**

John Iliffe, in his discussion of honor among the Yoruba in the nineteenth century rightly observes the prevalence of military notions of honor.<sup>43</sup> While this development was a function of the incessant wars and military conflicts that characterized the Yoruba region within that century; it also had an antecedent in the philosophy of the *Eso* in

eighteenth-century Old Oyo. The *Eso* were the seventy officers that commanded the Oyo military force. Robin Law calls them ‘seventy junior war chiefs, who acted as subordinate commanders of the army under the *Oyomesi*’.<sup>44</sup> Their concept of honor in war is reflected in the following saying:

*Ohun meji lo ye Eso*  
*Eso ja, o le ogun*  
*Eso ja, o ku si ogun*  
(One of two things befits an *Eso*  
The *Eso* must fight and conquer (or)  
The *Eso* must fight and perish (in war)

*Eso ki i gba ofa lehin*  
*Afi bi ba gb’ogbe niwaju gangan*  
(An *Eso* must never be shot in the back  
His wounds must always be right in front)<sup>45</sup>

These *Eso* principles of honor became crystallized in the nineteenth-century period of intense warfare in Yorubaland. The idea was that an honorable military commander must not survive defeat.<sup>46</sup> Nowhere was this ethos of military honor demonstrated as in Ibadan, founded in 1829 as a war camp and from there metamorphosed into a powerful military state. Nineteenth-century Ibadan politics has been studied by Bolanle Awe, Toyin Falola and Ruth Watson and the details need not concern us here.<sup>47</sup> However a brief summary of internal politics in the city might be given as follows. Political authority in Ibadan was wielded by a military oligarchy because the powerful warriors would not tolerate any form of autocracy. War veterans were put in charge of civil administration in the metropolis, while those still in active service led the Ibadan army to the various theatres of war in Yorubaland. Sometimes, powerful military commanders chose to head the civil administration at the same time, thus combining two duties. A distinguishing feature of Ibadan politics at this time was the opportunity it offered for upward mobility and social advancement. The idea of an ascribed status of royalty and its associated paraphernalia and practices were jettisoned in Ibadan. Merit was rewarded and a lot of young people with no royal pedigree were attracted from other Yoruba communities to come and seek fame in Ibadan. The result of this was that Ibadan politics was highly competitive since there was, in principle, no restriction on entry at the lower rungs of the socio-political hierarchy.

Seniority in age was respected but from time to time young men who distinguished themselves on the battlefield were rewarded with junior titles from where they made their way up the military ladder. The death or downfall of those holding the more senior titles was thus a matter of great interest to those under them as it would accelerate their own promotion. This competition for titles among the warriors was so intense that many of them actually became casualties. It is also instructive to note that political office did not necessarily make a warrior wealthier. In fact, it increased his responsibilities and the material demands that would be made on him. What these men sought to achieve through political office or a chieftaincy title was therefore not wealth

but honor, called *ola*. They wanted to win public recognition and social esteem. This *ola*, in the words of Karin Barber

was not wealth as such or power as such, but a total state of sufficiency and command over their social environment ...

What underlies *ola* is the notion of recognition, of being acknowledged as superior and of attracting admirers and supporters as a result.<sup>48</sup>

This idea of *ola* was not peculiar to Ibadan. In fact, it was (and still is) a general Yoruba desire to have *ola*. The luster and influence that is in *ola* made it so desirable that people called their children names such as Olawunmi (I desire *Ola*), Olaniyi (*Ola* is esteem able) Olaleye (*Ola* is lustrous), etc. What was peculiar to Ibadan (and in fact to other military states in the nineteenth century), was the idea that military valor and success in war could be an avenue to *ola* as reflected in a name like Akintola, whereas in the previous centuries, vertical honor derived from rank and high status was epitomized by royalty just as horizontal honor was gained by civil distinction expressed in good character and management of a household.

Once a military chief had attained the peak of his career, he jealously guarded his *ola*, which actually was not just for him, but for all the members of his family and posterity. His compound (*ile*) thus became an *ile ola*. Thus by the second half of the nineteenth century, the offspring of the early military chiefs saw it as their responsibility to preserve the honor of their compound. And if any of these second generation warriors distinguished himself in war in addition to his heritage of *ola*, he automatically became the target of envy and political intrigues as his success would begin to threaten others, especially his political seniors.

The first case of politically motivated suicide in Ibadan involved Chief Lakanle, who was the *Otun* (Second-in-command) to *Aare-ona-kakanfo* (Field Marshal) Oluyedun of Ibadan in the early 1830s.<sup>49</sup> It was the death of Oluyedun that created a succession dispute between Lakanle and Oluyole, his immediate subordinate. This degenerated into a civil conflict between the followers of the two chiefs. Oluyole's group gained the upper hand and he immediately demanded the death or exile of Lakanle. The latter, in typical *Eso* fashion chose death by ripping his bowels open with a jack knife. This closely resembles the ancient Japanese custom of suicide by disembowelment called *seppuku* or *hara-kiri*.<sup>50</sup> Upon Lakanle's death, Oluyole promptly became Ibadan's head chief. The second case of political suicide took place in 1877 and it involved Chief Aiyejenku, a war veteran who was much respected by the masses.<sup>51</sup> His main offense was that he was bold and fearless, the only person who pointed out the excesses of the head chief (*Aare* Latoosa 1871-1885). Because he was much older than the *Aare*, he deemed himself competent to give unsolicited advice and to criticize the latter. This, no doubt earned him the hatred of the *Aare*, who together with his supporters initiated a web of intrigue in which the older chief was caught. The occasion for this was provided by a succession dispute in Igbajo, one of the tributary towns of Ibadan supervised by Aiyejenku. He took a stand which the *Aare* and other chiefs immediately faulted. The result of this was that Chief Aiyejenku was systematically ostracized, his fighting men were taken, thus 'stripping him naked' and on 12 February 1877 he was asked to die. He went home to put his domestic affairs in order, carried his gun and then blew out his brains.

The third example here involved *Seriki* Iyapo, a relatively junior chief.<sup>52</sup> Iyapo was a young warrior made popular by his military successes. He was also heir to the vast household and resources of the late *Balogun* Ibikunle, a powerful military chief and head of Ibadan's army (1851-1864). Iyapo's possession of fame, military might, material resources and a heritage of *ile ola* made him a potential threat to all the senior chiefs especially the *Aare* Latoosa. Describing the fame of Iyapo as demonstrated during his return from a military campaign, Johnson writes:

The joy, the excitement, and the enthusiasm attending the pageantry of this young man so moved the whole town that the like of it had scarcely ever been seen. While it stirred the envy of some to its very depth, it excited the admiration of others. Thus a young man was heard to say; "If I enjoy such a glory for only one day and I die the next, I shall be content".<sup>53</sup>

The *Seriki* subsequently became the target of an intrigue masterminded by his political enemies. He was stripped of his title and deprived of his fighting men. He was then asked by the *Aare* to die. He was said to have replied the *Aare* thus: "my father was an *Eso*, and like an *Eso* I will die".<sup>54</sup> He promptly ordered his grave and coffin to be prepared, put his house in order, retired to his inner chambers and killed himself on 17 November 1877.

That the military chiefs in these three cases committed suicide rather than fleeing shows their commitment to their own honor and to their family honor. Considerations of one's family honor were particularly instrumental in the choice to die as a martyr in order to preserve the family name. However, not all military chiefs in similar situations took the same path. *Balogun* Ajobo was a case in point.<sup>55</sup> When he saw that he had been rejected by the council of Ibadan chiefs on 5 June 1870, he returned the war staff in his custody to the *Baale*, ordered his coffin and grave to be prepared and, in the night, he fled the town and took refuge among the Ijebu, one of Ibadan's enemies.<sup>56</sup> Ibadan chiefs reacted by driving his remaining family members out of the town and his compound was set ablaze.<sup>57</sup> Ajobo's choice to live also affected his posterity. Most of his slaves escaped and the freeborn soldiers under him sought out new patrons. Ajobo's compound thus became desolate (*ahoro*).<sup>58</sup> Some of his descendants that later returned to Ibadan lived as nonentities. Even in the twentieth century, none of them could aspire to the most junior chieftaincy title. Their *ile* was no longer reckoned with in the scheme of things. It was the fear of this type of *ibaje* (negative reversal of fortunes) that made other embattled chiefs to choose suicide over exile.<sup>59</sup> To maintain the honor and integrity of their *ile*; they were prepared to pay the supreme price. It is curious and ironic that John Iliffe, in his book on *Honour in African History*, saw nothing 'honorable' in these high profile suicides but dismissed them as 'victimization' even when he also quoted *Seriki* Iyapo's declaration that he chose to die like an *Eso*.<sup>60</sup> While the demand for somebody else's death by a majority or by a superior authority might have appeared as 'victimization', the agency of the subject in acquiescing should also be acknowledged especially where the option of exile was a possibility either directly or indirectly. It was only when a chief refused to flee or commit suicide that he was murdered as was the case of *Iyalode* Efunsetan Aniwura.<sup>61</sup>

Efunsetan was a very wealthy chief. She owned 'some 2000 slaves in her farms alone exclusive of those at home. She also had her own captains of war and warboys'.<sup>62</sup>

Most of the chiefs, including the head chief *Aare* Latoosa, had bought firearms and other war supplies from her on credit and so were heavily indebted to her. Uncomfortable about the financial hold she had on him, the *Aare* masterminded a plot which eventually led to her deposition on 1 May 1874. She was accused, among other things, of not being in support of Latoosa's war efforts. Efunsetan neither fled nor committed suicide. She sent various gifts to all the principal chiefs but this was to no avail. On 30 June 1874, she was murdered by two of her male slaves on the orders of the *Aare* who immediately appropriated her property and household. The fact that there is no record of any female chief that committed suicide in Ibadan history presupposes that masculine prestige might have also been a crucial factor in the choice of suicide by the male chiefs.

It thus appears that in the intrigues of Ibadan military chiefs and in their struggle for survival, their horizontal honor was often at stake. Once a chief lost the respect of his fellow chiefs, it was only a matter of time before he was 'stripped naked' – deprived of the respect and support of those under him. Therefore, it could be said that while his ascent to a high office was made possible by a proper harnessing and deployment of vertical honor, which Barber has characterized elsewhere as having 'people'; his continued stay in office and enjoyment of the pleasures that came with high status depended greatly on his retention of horizontal honor.<sup>63</sup> While these two expressions of honor were not mutually exclusive, an astute leader needed to understand which was relevant and had to be accentuated at crucial moments in his career. The bid to balance between these sociopolitical altitudes created much of the strife and heat discussed above.

#### **POLITICAL SUICIDE IN THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD (1893-1917)**

While retaining some of its pre-colonial features, high profile, politically motivated suicide persisted into the opening decades of the twentieth century despite the colonial presence. Certain features of the early colonial period made this possible. First, the absence of wars meant a decline in the importance of the military class. There were no more battles through which men aspiring to high status could acquire fame and a vast following. In fact, many of the military titles went into abeyance while the remaining ones became honorific.<sup>64</sup> New means of socio-political advancement now had to be sought. An immediate implication of this was that the title of the *Baale* (head chief) was now invested with more prestige than it previously had. This is not to say that the powers of the *Baale* increased vis-à-vis those of the colonial officials. As a matter of fact, the *Baale* suffered many indignities in the hands of the colonial administrators. The British presence as a superior power superintending the affairs of the chiefs greatly reduced traditional authority despite the rhetoric of 'indirect rule'. Nevertheless, with the absence of wars, political authority became concentrated in the *Baale* title.<sup>65</sup> This also meant that the *Balogun* title, which was the most prestigious Ibadan military title in the nineteenth century, now fell behind the *Baale* in terms of importance. Even at this point, the *Baale* could not pretend to any of the sacred authority traditionally associated with Yoruba royalty. Among his chiefs, he was just a *primus inter pares* (first among equals), which again was a nineteenth-century legacy of Ibadan politics.

Deriving from this increase in the prestige of the *Baale* title was a 'constitutional' problem created by the colonial situation. This had to do with the question of whether succession to the *Baaleship* should be from the *Baale* or *Balogun* line of chiefs. Between 1851 and 1893, successive *Baale* came from the *Balogun* line.<sup>66</sup> But when *Balogun*

Akintola refused the title twice (in 1893 and 1895, thinking he would still have the opportunity to ‘carry his new title to war’) the succession passed to the chiefs in the *Baale* line.<sup>67</sup> The chiefs in the *Baale* line interpreted this as a constitutional amendment that they were the only ones eligible to succeed to the *Baaleship*. Meanwhile, their counterparts in the *Balogun* line (including the *Balogun*) were equally interested in the *Baaleship*. This situation fuelled a lot of succession disputes in Ibadan. It was not until 1946 that a formal constitutional amendment which allowed the two lines to succeed in turn was made.<sup>68</sup>

It was therefore not surprising that the colonial administrators exploited the differences between the chiefs, setting one group against the other. They meddled in chieftaincy politics and easily knocked off (deposed) undesirable incumbents while hiding behind the intrigues of the chiefs. In terms of the complexity and ruthlessness of chieftaincy politics, the first three decades of colonial rule were particularly murky in Ibadan. And because all eyes were on the *Baaleship*, the pinnacle in anyone’s chieftaincy career, most of the ensuing crises surrounded the office and its incumbent. The latter now had to walk a tight rope, dancing to the tune of the colonial administration and at the same time depending on his fellow chiefs for loyalty and support. And in return for their political allegiance, the chiefs expected the *Baale* to be munificent and to respond positively to their own demands too.<sup>69</sup> Failure to satisfy both parties spelt trouble for the head chief. It is against this background that the politically motivated suicides of *Baale* Dada Opadere, *Baale* Irefin and *Balogun* Ola become understandable.

### ***Baale Dada Opadere’s Death***

Dada Opadere emerged as *Baale* in 1904 after a bitter succession struggle with *Balogun* Apampa. It appears the colonial officers eventually chose Dada on the advice of the *Alaafin* of Oyo.<sup>70</sup> During his third year as *Baale*, a civil agitation erupted against Dada which lasted about eight months.<sup>71</sup> It was believed that Apampa (who had now taken the title of *Otun Baale*) was the one behind Dada’s troubles. The latter’s inability to control the rising tide of armed robbery during his reign was misrepresented as an indication that he approved of their activities.<sup>72</sup> So during the civil disturbance of 1907, *Baale* Dada was openly accused of patronizing robbers and of being rude to his chiefs. People went about town singing abusive songs against the *Baale* and those loyal to him.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, he was deposed by the colonial authorities in December 1907. Contemporary observers however maintained that the accusation of theft was groundless. According to A.B. Akinyele, Dada’s real crime was that he was ‘stingy and avaricious’.<sup>74</sup> The chiefs could not bring this up against him ‘because they were not better than him in that respect’.<sup>75</sup> Coupled with his deposition was an exile at Abeokuta and a pension of £200 per annum.<sup>76</sup> A few days after his deposition, *Baale* Dada Opadere committed suicide in his house at Ibadan.

The travails of Dada Opadere have been interpreted in diverse ways. According to Toyin Falola, the unresolved constitutional issue of succession made it possible for *Balogun* Apampa to continue to antagonize him.<sup>77</sup> Falola cites two failed peace missions that came from Lagos at different times to reconcile Dada and Apampa.<sup>78</sup> G.D. Jenkins also points to the disarray in the chieftaincy structure caused by colonial rule as being the root of the crisis, and this even invited further administrative intervention.<sup>79</sup> Ruth

Watson, while acknowledging the colonial factor however emphasizes the agency of the Ibadan chiefs in ‘fomenting an unrest’, and this, she relates to their nineteenth century heritage of civil strife.<sup>80</sup> All these interpretations are valid. The colonial factor played out in two senses: the ‘constitutional’ problem mentioned above created a volatile situation which in turn paved way for the meddlesomeness of the administrative officers. Again, the penchant of the chiefs for intrigues actually fed fat on the uncertainties of the period and on individuals’ lapses. But to these should be added the significance of the socio-cultural context in which rejection and other forms of political defeat were seen as constituting an affront to the socio-political integrity of ones family, and to ones personal dignity. These perspectives also apply to the remaining suicide stories.

### ***Baale Irefin’s Death***

Irefin’s tenure as *Baale* (1912-1914) coincided with administrative reforms being carried out in the colonial establishment, especially the application of indirect rule to the Southern Provinces. A new Oyo Province was created in 1914 with its headquarters at Oyo and Capt Ross appointed as Resident. Under this new arrangement, the *Alaafin* of Oyo was created as the most paramount chief in the province and Ibadan, among other towns, was placed under him. This was a reversal of the nineteenth century situation when Ibadan was the most powerful Yoruba state and it answered to no other power. The details of this new arrangement need not concern us here for this is the focus of a magisterial work produced by J.A. Atanda titled *The New Oyo Empire*.<sup>81</sup> However, the implications of this for Ibadan were numerous. First, with the active support of Capt Ross, the *Alaafin* began to meddle in the internal affairs of Ibadan especially in the appointment and deposition of chiefs. This meant also that the *Alaafin* became an important factor in Ibadan’s political equations. In fact, at the installation of Irefin as *Baale* in 1912, the ‘presence’ of the *Alaafin* was ominously felt even though he was not there physically. Irefin was made to sign a document by the colonial authorities in which he publicly pledged his allegiance to the *Alaafin* of Oyo.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the ritual leaves (*ewe akoko*) that were used in the installation were reportedly sent from Oyo, meaning that Irefin owed his position to the *Alaafin*. Implicit in this was also the silent message that the *Alaafin* reserved the right to depose him. Secondly, the Treasury of the Ibadan native Administration was made to pay part of the *Alaafin*’s salary.<sup>83</sup>

By 1914, Ibadan chiefs felt they had had enough of the *Alaafin*’s meddlesomeness in their affairs. They complained to *Baale* Irefin and together secured the services of one Obadiah Williams of Lagos to help them prepare a petition which they sent to the Governor-general.<sup>84</sup> The petition contained three main issues. First was the interference of the *Alaafin* especially the manner in which Oyo had taken over Ibadan’s dependent towns.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, they complained about the high-handedness of Capt Ross, who among other things, was in the habit of asking chiefs to prostrate in public to acknowledge him. Thirdly, there was the issue of *Abese Balogun* Amida who had been deposed by the Ibadan council but who refused to leave the town or commit suicide.<sup>86</sup> Ross’s reaction to this petition was to blackmail the chiefs and get them to betray *Baale* Irefin.<sup>87</sup> The chiefs then sent a counter petition (without Irefin’s knowledge) in which they dissociated themselves from the first one, claiming they had been coerced by Irefin to affix their thumbprints to it; that the *Alaafin* was their father; and that Irefin was the ‘bad egg’ in their midst. The colonial officials promptly seized this opportunity as presenting a good

alibi with which to do away with Irefin. He was deposed on 14 March 1914 and sent on exile to his farm. Irefin lobbied to get permission to come back to Ibadan in February 1915. Immediately this was granted, he came back to his compound at Oke-Ofa and there committed suicide on 12 February 1915.<sup>88</sup>

### ***Balogun Ola's Death***

Of the three suicides examined here, *Balogun Ola's* was the most impressive by local standards. Ola was the last of the military chiefs that had actually fought in the nineteenth century Yoruba wars. By the time he became *Balogun* in 1914, he was already the oldest chief in Ibadan. But he was not infirm. He was very vocal and fearless.<sup>89</sup> He led the local opposition against the British and criticized most of their anti-Ibadan policies. Although the colonial administrative officials had a long list of his 'sins', his last act was his opposition to the plan to make the Ibadan Native Treasury contribute half of the £4,500 salary of the *Alaafin* of Oyo.<sup>90</sup> Ola had never subscribed to the idea of increasing the status of the *Alaafin* at the expense of Ibadan.

*Balogun Ola* had gone too far in antagonizing the colonial authorities before he realized that the other council chiefs were not in his support. On 18 August 1917, he was deposed, purportedly at the instance of the *Alaafin* of Oyo, and was asked to prepare for exile. Ola's response to this was captured very eloquently in I.B. Akinyele's narrative:

The *Balogun* left the meeting at which he was deposed without any outward sign of distress. He got home and began to put his house in order. He called his family together and encouraged them. They made a great feast and began dancing as if having a 'funeral wake'. He was also going up and down in their midst, joking and playing with them. Just before dawn, he entered his inner chambers and 'slept'. When he was expected to come out and he did not, the people in his reception hall checked on him and discovered he had passed on.<sup>91</sup> (My translation)

This act of *Balogun Ola* so much impressed Ibadan people that he was called *Balogun Kob'omoje* (He did not spoil his name) and that has remained his family and compound name till date. In fact, an extra verse was added to his *oriki* (praise poem) in which he was commended for this act:

*Balogun-o-b'omo-je, o kare*  
*Omo Akin! O kare! Omo Eso!*  
*Omo a m'erin-gun, omo a m'erin-so*  
*Omo Oyinyin, a ke bi i wura*  
*Omo Ogbagba la'gun ja*  
*Orun rere o!*<sup>92</sup>

*Balogun*, you did not spoil your name, you have done well  
Son of the brave! You have done well! Son of *Eso*!  
The one able to ride on an elephant; the one able to tether an elephant  
Son of *Oyinyin*,<sup>93</sup> he who shines like gold  
Son of *Ogbagba*,<sup>94</sup> victorious in war  
Enjoy your rest in the afterlife.

Moreover, the cause for which he fought was one with which most Ibadan masses identified though they lacked a voice with which to articulate those grievances given the helplessness of their chiefs. In this sense, Ola died as a patriot. In as much as his death was a protest against the British authorities, it was also heroic, thus adding to his honor.<sup>95</sup>

### **HONOR IN SUICIDE.**

There is no doubt from the above accounts that considerations of honor played a significant role in the choice of suicide by the individuals concerned. This is particularly understandable when one recalls the nineteenth century pattern of intrigue-infested Ibadan politics and how those who lost out in political contests ended their lives. Paradoxically, the distinction in the colonial period was that there was no demand for them to commit suicide nor was there a threat of destruction to their lives or properties. In pre-colonial Ibadan, a rejected chief either had to commit suicide or flee the town (those who fled felt safer pitching their tents with Ibadan's enemies, particularly the Ijebu). If he neither committed suicide nor fled, he would be attacked, his family destroyed, his compound leveled to ruins, and his dead body treated like that of a common criminal. There was no likelihood of this happening again during the colonial period because of the British presence. While colonial officers did not expect deposed chiefs to commit suicide, they were ready to arrange a safe exile for them. Therefore, that all the three chiefs chose death meant that they considered it to be a better option than exile. Even Irefin whose exile was to his own farm still killed himself. It is therefore clear that what was at stake was more than individual honor. These chiefs were interested in maintaining their own personal dignity as well as the name of their family/lineage. To them, it was better to die than face ignominy.

Perhaps, we should ask what situations were considered ignominious in the colonial period. First, political defeat was considered disgraceful. Second, life in exile was regarded as humiliating. Worst of all, was death in exile. In pre-nineteenth-century Yoruba history, there was no customary provision for 'life after public office' for a rejected or deposed king.<sup>96</sup> Political offices were held for life and if for any reason (misconduct, political intrigues, etc) a public officer was removed, the general expectation was that he should die as the cases of the rejected *Alaafins* show. In the nineteenth century when exile was available as an alternative in Ibadan, it was even more uncertain than death. It signified alienation, uprootedness and a loss of identity whereas in death was the anticipation of reuniting with past ancestors, and leaving a good name for their posterity, which the choice of exile precluded. Exile also meant that an *ile ola* could become desolate and there was also the possibility that the posterity of the affected chief could be reduced to nonentities within the city. Society understood all these and that was why those involved in such high profile suicides were given elaborate public burials and their heroic departure even eulogized for the way they preserved the integrity and honor of their compounds. The less the resistance offered by the individual concerned, the more 'heroic' he became after death. Closely related to this was the desire to die at home, among ones own people. This is illustrated best in the case of Irefin, who, after having been exiled, took permission to return home only to commit suicide, much to the chagrin of the colonial officers.

There is also a way in which old age reduces the fear of death. The elderly in Yoruba thought were generally considered to be closer to the world of the dead than younger people. It was not therefore strange to find elderly people anticipate death by giving their children instructions on how they wished to be buried and generally putting their affairs in order when they felt that their end was imminent. Balogun Ola had the advantage of old age which helped him face death with a type of equanimity that was lacking in the other two cases. This calmness in the face of death also contributed to his popularity and to the honor of his household.

Honor was thus reflected in personal dignity (which could be enhanced by age) as well as in a good name. A good name in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not necessarily mean moral rectitude. The chiefs that committed suicide were neither morally better nor worse than their colleagues. They only bowed out when they discovered that their 'music' had ended. Exiting when you were rejected without much fuss was thus considered honorable. But what the chiefs did not realize was that the times were changing. Ola's case was actually the last high profile suicide in Ibadan. Some of the other chiefs were beginning to see things in a new light. *Abese Balogun* Amida mentioned in Irefin's petition was a case in point. Although Amida had been rejected in 1914, he neither committed suicide nor went on exile. Instead, he secured the support of the colonial administrators and was eventually reinstated. By 1919, he had risen to the position of *Osi Baale*, and by the time he died in 1929, he was *Otun Baale* (next in rank to the *Baale*).<sup>97</sup> However, Amida did not have a particularly good reputation locally. When he died, a contemporary local observer described him as 'a sinister figure, who sold the political liberty of Ibadan to the *Alaafin*'.<sup>98</sup> While this may not be a direct indictment on him for not committing suicide, it does connote a disapproval of his actions. In Amida's bid to circumvent the Ibadan suicide equation and reinvent a new honor code for himself, he sought the friendship of the colonial officers and rendered to them duties, the results of which were considered detrimental to the welfare of the city. Amida ended up becoming 'alienated' even though he still attained great political heights at the expense of his reputation. He thus jeopardized the honor accorded him within the Ibadan public but gained the recognition of the colonial authorities who considered him 'wise and loyal'.<sup>99</sup>

'*Iku ya j'esin*', though a Yoruba adage also had its equivalent in other African cultures. John Iliffe writes about the Falasha or Beta Israel group in fifteenth and sixteenth century Ethiopia, who in their fight for independence sometimes killed themselves or one another to escape capture, while declaring "It is more meritorious to die honorably than to live in shame".<sup>100</sup> There were also other examples of political/ritual suicides outside Ibadan though with a different tenor, and colonial officers were always at a loss during such cases. In 1905, when the *Alaafin* of Oyo died, the *Eleshinoba* (one of the titleholders traditionally expected to die with the king) committed suicide despite the intervention of British officials. He chose not to 'dishonor' himself by forsaking his king even though the British tried to convince him otherwise. Again, in 1946 after the death of *Alaafin* Siyanbola Onikepe Ladugbolu, the colonial officers actually prevented another *Eleshinoba* from dying, but his son redeemed the 'honor' of the family by committing suicide in his father's stead. This event has been dramatized in Wole Soyinka's play titled *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975).<sup>101</sup>

## CONCLUSION

One major fact that comes out of the above is that Western theories of suicide are inadequate in explaining these African high profile suicides. A look into the people's history and mores has revealed that heroic suicide was considered honorable and the individual concerned was not seen as a 'victim' because he was part of the society that made his suicide comprehensible, and also because of his agency in killing himself thus earning additional honor in death. To him death represented an effective way of boycotting ignominy and also of demonstrating his elite masculinity. "*Iku ya j'esin*" thus meant for the highly-placed another shortcut to honor both in this world and in the afterlife. The weapons of self destruction used also reflected the mood of their times: in the eighteenth century, poison was used; in the nineteenth century, firearms and knives/daggers were used; while they reverted to the poison in the twentieth century.

This study has also shown, in practical terms, the linkages between vertical and horizontal honor. During the early colonial period, Ibadan chiefs needed to maintain these two manifestations of honor simultaneously. Their worth in the eyes of the masses was being challenged by the indignities they were made to swallow from the colonial officers, while the respect due to them from their peers was compromised by the demands of a political system characterized by high level intrigues, exploited by the British administrative officers. The 'casualties' of these crises were the principal chiefs who still held on to their traditional notions of honor and ultimately paid the supreme price. Again, while the worldview that valorized political suicide remained unchallenged, there was little that could be done, even by the colonial authorities to stop the practice. But as new religious systems and new ideas interacted with local beliefs, some of these views were gradually modified. In 1925, when *Baale Situ*, a Muslim, was deposed in circumstances similar to that of Irefin, he did not commit suicide but proceeded on exile to Saki where he died seven years later of natural causes. His family also did not suffer beyond the initial stigma, which they later overcame. Again, in 1949, when another political agitation erupted against Chief Salami Agbaje the *Otun Balogun*, the issue of suicide did not arise at all. Agbaje used his wealth, his contacts, and his children (two of whom were lawyers) to fight his cause as he appeared before the colonial Commission of Inquiry where he was justified. By this time too, exile and deposition were not as ignominious as they had appeared in the early colonial period. "*Iku ya j'esin*" was thus a cultural product of a worldview that celebrated deaths that boycotted ignominy especially among the political elite.

## ENDNOTES

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29. Ibid. 63.
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31. The list of the *abobaku* provided by Johnson includes: the *Aremo*; three princes with hereditary titles (namely, *Magaji Iyajin*, *Agunpopo* and *Olusami*); two titled men but not of royal blood (namely, *Olokunesin* and *Osi’wefa*) and eight prominent female officials (namely, *Iya Oba*, *Iya Naso*, *Iya l’Agbon*, *Iya le ‘Mole*, *Olorun-ku-mefun*, *Iyamonari*, and the *Are –ori-ite*). Johnson, *History*, 56.
32. R.C.C. Law, “The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal of African History*, 12 (1), 1971, 28.
33. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire 1600-1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 78.
34. Johnson, *History*, 173; Funsho Afolayan, “Kingdoms of the Yoruba: Socio-political Development Before 1800” in Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran (eds.), *Culture and Society in Yorubaland* (Ibadan: Rex Charles Publications, 1998), 22.
35. Law, “Constitutional Troubles”, 29.
36. Law, *Oyo Empire*, 74.
37. Johnson, *History*, 189.
38. Ibid. 179-180.
39. Ibid. 398.
40. Ibid. 173.
41. Law, *Oyo Empire*, 77.
42. Ali Mazrui, “Sacred Suicide”, *Transition*, 21, 1965, 11.
43. Iliffe, *Honour in African History*, 76.
44. Law, *Oyo Empire*, 74.
45. Johnson, *History*, 73.

46. In Ibadan, this was also interpreted to mean that even if the conflict was a civil one, an Eso must always seek to preserve his honor. Iliffe is however, quick to point out that some commanders did actually survive military defeat in the nineteenth century (Iliffe, *Honour in African History*, 76). That was probably in their early days during which time they found solace in the Yoruba saying that:  
*Mo'ja mo'sa, la fii mo akinkanju l'ogun*  
 (The hallmark of a brave warrior is in knowing when to advance and when to retreat).  
 But by the time they became general commanders, it was more difficult for them to handle defeat (euphemistically called retreat). A few of those who survived defeat then could not return home but had to stay outside the town until another opportunity presented itself in war in which they hoped to redeem their dented honor. At such points, honor easily meshed with pride.
47. Bolanle Awe, "The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power in the Nineteenth Century", Oxford University D.Phil. thesis, 1964; Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan 1830-1900* (Ile-Ife: Ife University Press) and Ruth Watson, *'Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan': Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
48. Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (London: International African Institute, 1991), 203.
49. For more details on this incident see: Johnson, *History*, 257; I.B. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan Ibadan ati Die Ninu awon Ilu Agbegbe re bi Iwo, Osogbo ati Ikirun - A History of Ibadan and some of its Neighbours such as Iwo, Osogbo and Ikirun* (Ibadan: Board Publications, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 1981), 32-34; Kemi Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, Vol.1, (Ibadan: Caxton Press, n.d.), 78-80.
50. Toyomasa Fuse, *Suicide, Individual and Society* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1997), 213-250.
51. Johnson, *History*, 407-410; Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 101-103; Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, Vol. 3. (Ibadan: Caxton Press, n.d.), 114-117.
52. Johnson, *History*, 410-412, 417-420; Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 103-108; Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History*, Vol. 3, 30-33.
53. Johnson, *History*, 395.
54. *Ibid.* 419.
55. Johnson, *History*, 384-385; Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 80-86; Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, Vol. 2 ( Ibadan: Caxton Press, n.d.), 110-117.
56. Johnson, *History*, 385.
57. None of his family members was killed though. And after he fled, many of those who had benefited from his kindness in the past composed an 'elegy' for him:  
*E pe ko lo*  
*E pe ko lo*  
*Ajobo Omirin*  
*Olonje ko ya lu pa*  
*Ko lo lo to.*

- (You asked him to go  
 You asked him to go  
 For Ajobo Omirin who fed us  
 Was not easy to kill  
 So it was good he left (alive).  
 Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 84.
58. The Yoruba especially prayed (and still do) that an *ile ola* (compound of those who occupy high rank) should not become desolate (*ahoro*), which was considered an ill luck or even a curse.
  59. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 84.
  60. Iliffe, *Honour in African History*, 76.
  61. The *iyalode* was a female chief in charge of women affairs. She was usually a wealthy market trader and she identified with Ibadan military life by contributing ammunitions and armed slaves to the war effort, appointing an experienced soldier to lead them though she personally did not go to war.
  62. Johnson, *History*, 391-394.
  63. Barber, *I Could Speak*, 203.
  64. Toyin Falola, *Politics and Economy in Ibadan 1893-1945* (Lagos: Modelor Press, 1989), 51.
  65. Watson, 'Civil Disorder', 89.
  66. Those who succeeded to the *Baaleship* in the nineteenth century were chiefs subordinate to the *Balogun*. No *Balogun* ever became *Baale*. Military commanders interested in the headship of the town took senior military titles such as 'Bashorun' or 'Aare-ona-kakanfo'.
  67. Falola, *Politics and Economy*, 51.
  68. Olufunke Adeboye, "The Ibadan Elite, 1893-1966", University of Ibadan PhD thesis, 1996, 303.
  69. See also Watson, 'Civil Disorder', 89.
  70. C.H. Elgee, *The Evolution of Ibadan* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1914), 24.
  71. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 154.
  72. Ibid. 155.
  73. Ibid. 156.
  74. Kenneth Dike Library (hereafter KDL), University of Ibadan, A.B. Akinyele Papers. A.B. Akinyele to Rt. Rev. Tugwell, 4 February 1908.
  75. Ibid.
  76. Falola, *Politics and Economy*, 55.
  77. Ibid.
  78. This is corroborated in Akinyele's *Iwe Itan*, 156-157.
  79. G.D. Jenkins, "Politics in Ibadan", PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1965, 82.
  80. Watson, 'Civil Disorder', 58.
  81. J.A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman, 1973.)
  82. National Archives Ibadan (hereafter NAI), Iba. Prof. 3/10: E.H. Oke, Secretary, Ibadan Native Government, 'Report upon the terms of the appointment of the Bale of Ibadan', n.d.
  83. Atanda, *New Oyo Empire*,

84. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 177. Watson however suggests that the petition might have been written by Herbert Macaulay. Watson, '*Civil Disorder*', 101.
85. The towns were formerly Ibadan's vassals in the nineteenth century, which carried over a form of dependent relationship with Ibadan up to the colonial period until Oyo began to lay claim to them.
86. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 178.
87. Details of Ross' involvement in this 'coup' against *Baale* Irefin are contained in Watson, '*Civil Disorder*', 102.
88. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 179,
89. *Ibid.* 186.
90. *Balogun* Ola's sins, according to the colonial authorities included: frustrating the attempts of the colonial government to get recruits from Ibadan during the World War I period, opposing land leases to aliens, making remarks that could bring down the morale of the people and disparage the colonial government during the war years, and seeking for a letter writer to assist him write a petition against the *Alaafin*, the Resident (Capt Ross) and Grier, the District officer. Adeboye, "The Ibadan Elite", 143.
91. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan*, 187-188.
92. *Ibid.* 188.
93. This was probably one of the praise names of Orowusi, Ola's father.
94. This was the native town of Orowusi, from which migrated to Ibadan in the nineteenth century.
95. KDL, Akinpelu Obisesan Papers. Diary entry for 29 August 1917.
96. Johnson, *History*, 173.
97. KDL, Akinpelu Obisesan Papers. Diary entry for 18 July 1929.
98. *Ibid.*
99. NAI, CSO26/14935: Resident Ross to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 2 May 1925.
100. Iliffe, *Honour in African History*, 64.
101. Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975).