

Colonialism and Communal/Border Disputes: The Akure–Isikan/Isolo Affair in Historical Perspective

Fagite Kayode Oluwole

Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba-Akoko

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800552>

Received: 27 August 2026; Accepted: 01 September 2026; Published: 11 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Insecurity is commonly understood as the actual outbreak of violence, yet this reading is too narrow. Disputes and disagreements capable of precipitating a serious breakdown of law and order constitute, in themselves, a latent form of insecurity, whether or not they culminate in bloodshed. Communal clashes over chieftaincy and boundary questions are a recurring feature of Nigerian public life, and they routinely prompt government commissions of inquiry charged with tracing root causes and recommending remedies. Far less attention, however, has been paid to the much larger number of disputes that have never reached that terminal stage — disagreements that persist for generations without resolving into open violence but that nonetheless corrode trust, entrench division, and periodically threaten to erupt. The Akure–Isikan/Isolo chieftaincy and border dispute in present-day Ondo State is one such case. This article traces the dispute to the colonial encounter, arguing — on the basis of the documentary and comparative-historiographical evidence available, and pending the fuller archival research identified below — that the British administration's technology of rule in Western Nigeria, most notably the compilation of "Intelligence Reports" during the reorganization of Native Administrations, was significantly implicated in converting a more fluid, layered, and historically contested relationship between Akure, Isikan, and Isolo into a rigid hierarchy of paramount and subordinate authorities. In doing so, the colonial state did not merely record local history; on the reading advanced here, it reshaped it, hardening an ambiguity that had once permitted coexistence into a fixed and contested hierarchy, and in the process likely helped plant seeds of mistrust that continue to structure litigation and unrest a century later. The article concludes that the "created" traditions of origin, and in particular the chieftaincy hierarchies inherited from the colonial period, require serious and sustained appraisal — by historians, by government, and by the communities themselves — if their afterlife in local government administration and in the machinery of dispute resolution is to be properly understood and responsibly managed.

Keywords: colonialism; communal disputes; chieftaincy institutions; Intelligence Reports; indirect rule; Akure; Isikan; Isolo; invented tradition; local government administration

INTRODUCTION

The study of insecurity in Nigeria has been dominated, understandably, by the analysis of its most visible and most costly manifestations: insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes, and outright communal warfare. This emphasis is not misplaced, but it has had the effect of narrowing scholarly and policy attention to the moment at which a dispute crosses into violence, and of treating everything prior to that threshold as a matter of local curiosity rather than a legitimate object of security analysis.¹

This article proceeds from a different premise: that a dispute capable of producing a serious breakdown of law and order is a form of insecurity in its own right, irrespective of whether it has yet produced casualties. Judged by this standard, Nigeria's landscape is considerably more unsettled than the incident-based record of communal violence suggests. Beside the disputes that have attracted commissions of inquiry — because they degenerated

¹On the tendency of security studies to privilege the moment of outbreak over the longer history of a dispute, see the general critique of 'negative peace' as an inadequate frame for understanding conflict, in Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

into bloodshed — sits a much larger population of chieftaincy and boundary disagreements that have simmered, sometimes for a century or more, without ever quite tipping over. The Akure–Isikan/Isolo affair, situated within Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State, is a case in point.

The dispute concerns the relative status of three interlocking traditional authorities — the Deji of Akure, the Iralepo of Isikan, and the Osolo of Isolo — and the boundaries of the communities over which they preside. Contemporary reporting describes Isikan, Isolo, and Akure as together constituting the Akure kingdom within Akure South Local Government Area, with the Deji recognised as paramount ruler and the Iralepo and Osolo recognised, in law, as quarter or minor chiefs beneath him.²

That hierarchy is not, however, uncontested. Isinkan partisans have long argued that the relationship between the three centres of power was originally closer to confederation than subordination, and that Isikan and Isolo possessed their own independent ruling houses, palaces, and territorial jurisdictions before the disputed hierarchy hardened into administrative fact. This article argues, on grounds set out more fully in the note on sources and method that follows, that the hardening was plausibly, and in significant part, the work of the colonial state, and specifically of the genre of colonial ethnographic-administrative writing known as the Intelligence Report. It further argues that the consequences of that hardening did not end with independence: they persist in the courts, in local government chieftaincy machinery, and in periodic public tension between the three communities into the present day.

Sources and Method: A Note on the Evidentiary Basis

This article draws on four categories of evidence, which are not of equal evidentiary weight and are not treated as such in what follows. The first is primary judicial documentation: the Court of Appeal rulings of 2012 and 2025 discussed in section 8 below, treated here as authoritative for the fact and outcome of the legal decisions they record, though — in the absence of direct access to the case files — their fuller reasoning is known here only through contemporaneous court reporting rather than through examination of the judgments themselves. The second is the secondary historiographical literature on indirect rule, invented tradition, and the Yoruba obaship, which supplies the comparative and theoretical framework within which the Akure–Isikan/Isolo material is read. The third is contemporary Nigerian press coverage of the dispute, several items of which are explicitly partisan interventions by parties to the ongoing contest rather than neutral reporting; these are used here as evidence of how the dispute is currently narrated and argued by the communities themselves, not as a neutral historical record, and are flagged as such at the point of citation. The fourth is community tradition, as recounted in that press coverage and in local memory — material that is itself a proper object of historical analysis, but that cannot substitute for the administrative record it purports to describe.

A particular limitation concerns the article's central historical claim. The account offered in section 6 below of what the Akure District Intelligence Reports actually said — which communities they enumerated, how they ranked them, and on what stated basis — is drawn not from direct examination of the original colonial files but from a summary of that material appearing in partisan newspaper commentary on the present-day dispute. This is a significant evidentiary gap, and it is acknowledged openly here rather than left implicit. The original Intelligence Reports and related Native Authority and Provincial Office files for Akure District would properly be sought in the National Archives, Ibadan, and, for surviving Colonial Office correspondence, in the relevant Nigeria series at The National Archives, Kew; neither has yet been consulted for this article.

Given this gap, the article's claims proceed at two distinct levels of confidence, and the language used to state them is chosen accordingly. That the colonial administrative apparatus, once it had settled on a hierarchy, entrenched and hardened that hierarchy through its subsequent legal and administrative practice is documented with reasonable confidence, on the strength of the litigation record traced in section 8. That the Intelligence Report process itself substantially produced, rather than merely recorded, the specific hierarchy among Akure, Isikan, and Isolo is a more far-reaching claim, argued here primarily by analogy to the well-documented behaviour of the Intelligence Report genre elsewhere in colonial Nigeria and Yorubaland, and it is offered as a historiographically grounded interpretation rather than as a conclusion demonstrated by direct examination of

²"Uneasy calm in Akure kingdom, Isikan community tackles Deji over chieftaincy stool," *Punch* (Lagos), November 1, 2021.

the Akure file. Where the distinction matters, the text below flags it explicitly; the archival work needed to resolve it is set out as a first priority in the recommendations that close the article.

Insecurity beyond Violence: A Conceptual Note

Security scholarship has long distinguished between the absence of war and the deeper absence of the structural conditions that produce conflict — a distinction most influentially framed as the difference between negative and positive peace. Applied to communal relations, this distinction suggests that the mere fact that Akure, Isikan, and Isolo have not fought a pitched battle in living memory should not be read as evidence of resolved insecurity. Rather, the persistence of an unresolved chieftaincy and boundary question, litigated and re-litigated across decades, is itself a chronic condition — a standing capacity for breakdown that periodically surfaces as court suits, gubernatorial interventions, palace suspensions, and public agitation.

This reframing matters for two reasons. First, it widens the empirical base available to historians and policymakers: instead of studying only the small number of Nigerian communal disputes that reached the stage of a formal commission of inquiry, it becomes possible — and necessary — to study the much larger corpus of disputes that never did, precisely because they offer a clearer view of how disputes are produced, sustained, and occasionally defused short of violence. Second, it shifts the analytical question away from proximate triggers (a contested coronation, a disputed boundary marker) and toward the deeper architecture that makes such triggers combustible in the first place. In the Akure–Isikan/Isolo case, that architecture was substantially assembled during the colonial period.

Akure, Isikan, and Isolo before Colonial Rule

Local tradition, as recorded and contested in twenty-first century public argument, holds that the palace of the Iralepo of Isikan once stood at Oke Isinkan, with its principal courtyard known as Ponna-Lila Oralopo, and that it later relocated to its present site at Ita-Owa, establishing a boundary with Akure at Imogun; the Osolo's palace is likewise said to have moved from a site along Irese to its present location, while the Akure palace itself moved from Oke Oge to its current site, with a boundary with Isolo fixed at Igiso.³

The very fact that these traditions can still be recited with this degree of topographic specificity — named palace sites, named boundary markers, named courtyards — indicates that pre-colonial Isikan and Isolo possessed independent institutional apparatus of the kind associated with autonomous polities rather than mere wards of a single town. Yoruba political tradition generally accommodated considerable complexity in the relationship between a metropolitan Oba and satellite or associated ruling houses: relationships of tribute, ritual precedence, military alliance, and territorial adjacency coexisted without collapsing automatically into a single fixed hierarchy of paramountcy and subordination. It is precisely this kind of ambiguity — productive, in the pre-colonial period, of a workable *modus vivendi* — that colonial administration found difficult to accommodate, and that it ultimately resolved by fiat.

Partisans of Isikan's independent status point, for example, to accounts of Isinkan military forces — the Eshos of Isharun, commanded by Ogundana Adanri — operating as an autonomous fighting force as late as the early nineteenth century, which they read as evidence against any claim that Akure had conquered or extended protection over Isinkan.⁴ Whatever the ultimate historical merits of that particular claim, its persistence into contemporary public debate is itself significant: it shows that the question of precedence among the three towns was never definitively settled by pre-colonial practice, but remained genuinely open — a contested field of historical memory rather than a fixed and universally accepted hierarchy.

³Wumi Akintide, "Isinkan Kingdom and Akintide's Crocodile Tributes to Osolo to Further Akure's Hegemony," *Vanguard* (Lagos), July 31, 2023. The article is itself a partisan intervention in the ongoing dispute and is cited here as evidence of the terms in which the pre-colonial narrative continues to be contested, not as a neutral historical record.

⁴Akintide, "Isinkan Kingdom and Akintide's Crocodile Tributes."

The Colonial State and the Machinery of "Intelligence Reports"

British administration in Nigeria after 1900 was organised, in principle, around the doctrine of indirect rule: government through existing, or purportedly existing, indigenous political institutions, supervised rather than replaced by British officers.⁵ In the south-west, where centralised Yoruba obaships coexisted with a denser and more variable range of subordinate and associated chieftaincies, the doctrine required colonial officers to first establish which local ruler counted as the legitimate apex of a given administrative unit, and which counted as subordinate to it.

That determination was rarely self-evident, and colonial officers were rarely equipped — by training, by time, or by inclination — to reconstruct the layered, often deliberately ambiguous political relationships that had prevailed before conquest.⁶ The instrument colonial administrations developed to make this determination — and to fix it in a form usable by subsequent officers, courts, and Native Authorities — was the Intelligence Report: a district-level compilation, typically produced by a Resident or District Officer in the course of a formal "reorganization" exercise, that recorded local oral tradition, ranked competing ruling houses, and recommended an administrative structure of Native Authorities, subordinate councils, and tribute or tax obligations.

The genre had a specific institutional purpose and a specific institutional bias. Its purpose was to produce a workable, auditable hierarchy that colonial administration could recognise, tax, and hold accountable through a single native authority; its bias, built into that purpose, was toward simplification. Overlapping, historically layered, or genuinely ambiguous relationships between neighbouring polities were routinely resolved into a single linear hierarchy, because a linear hierarchy — one paramount ruler, several subordinate chiefs — was what the colonial administrative apparatus could actually use. Reports were typically compiled quickly, relied heavily on the testimony of whichever local informants were most accessible or most cooperative with the visiting officer, and were rarely subjected to independent verification against the oral traditions of the towns being subordinated.

The Making of a Hierarchy: Akure Paramountcy and the Subordination of Isikan and Isolo

As indicated in section 2 above, the reconstruction that follows of the Intelligence Report tradition for the Akure district rests on a secondary summary rather than on direct examination of the original colonial file, and should be read with that limitation in mind. According to that summary, the Intelligence Report tradition identified a set of adjoining communities beyond Akure town itself — among them Isinkan, Isolo, Oba, Ibule, Ipogun, Ilaramokin, Ikota, Ijare, Obo, Irese, Iju, Ita-Ogbolu, Igoba, Ero, Isharun, and Igbaraoke — each with its own named traditional leader, but placed all of them within a single administrative structure headed by the Deji of Akure.⁷

The administrative logic of this arrangement is not difficult to reconstruct. A single Native Authority, headed by one recognised paramount ruler, was administratively convenient: it gave the colonial government one point of contact for tax collection, one court of first instance for customary disputes, and one signatory for local ordinances. Whether or not that convenience corresponded to the actual pre-colonial distribution of authority among Akure, Isikan, and Isolo was, from the standpoint of the reorganizing officer, a secondary consideration. What mattered was producing a report that a Resident could approve and a Native Authority could operate.

⁵Frederick Lugard's Political Memoranda of 1906, addressed initially to administrative officers in the Northern Provinces, articulated the doctrine that native chiefs and British officers formed a single government rather than two parallel authorities; see the discussion in "Indirect Rule, Africa," Encyclopedia.com, accessed August 2026.

⁶A rudimentary "warrant chief" system, improvised to identify interlocutors in societies without a single recognised paramount authority, was already in informal use in parts of southern Nigeria by 1891, well before Lugard's arrival; see "Indirect Rule, Africa," Encyclopedia.com.

⁷Akintide, "Isinkan Kingdom and Akintide's Crocodile Tributes." The enumeration of adjoining communities with distinct traditional leaders is drawn from the Intelligence Report tradition as summarised in this source. As with n. 3 above, this source is a partisan intervention in the ongoing dispute rather than a neutral historical record; its characterisation of the Intelligence Report's content is used here as the best currently available secondary indication of that content and has not been independently verified against the original colonial file. See the note on sources and method in section 2 above.

The consequence, over the following decades, was the entrenchment of the Deji of Akure as sole paramount ruler and Oba, and the corresponding demotion, in colonial and later in Nigerian administrative and judicial usage, of the Iralepo of Isikan and the Osolo of Isolo to the status of quarter chiefs or minor chiefs within Akure town — members, at most, of the Deji-in-Council rather than independent traditional rulers in their own right. Whatever the pre-colonial reality had been — and, as noted above, the pre-colonial record itself sustains rival readings — the Intelligence Report tradition converted a contested question into an administrative fact, and administrative facts, once inscribed in a colonial file, proved extraordinarily difficult to dislodge.

Invented Tradition, Distorted History, and the Production of Mistrust

The theoretical vocabulary for understanding this process is now well established in the historiography of colonial Africa. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's foundational argument that a great deal of what nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africans and Europeans alike took to be immemorial custom was, in fact, comparatively recent invention — produced to serve the practical needs of colonial administration — applies with particular force to chieftaincy hierarchies established or ratified through Intelligence Reports.⁸ Subsequent scholarship has refined rather than abandoned this thesis, showing that African rulers and communities were not merely passive objects of colonial invention but active — if unequally positioned — participants in the process, pursuing their own agendas within the constraints the colonial state imposed.⁹

This refinement is important for the Akure–Isikan/Isolo case, because it forecloses a reading in which the Deji of Akure is cast simply as a passive beneficiary of colonial favour. It is entirely plausible — and consistent with what is known of indirect rule elsewhere in Yorubaland — that Akure's ruling house actively pressed its own claim to paramountcy in its dealings with visiting colonial officers, understanding correctly that a favourable Intelligence Report would convert a contested claim into an enforceable administrative and, eventually, legal fact.¹⁰ What matters for present purposes is not to adjudicate the rival historical claims of Akure, Isikan, and Isolo — that is properly a matter for further archival research — but to insist that the instrument through which the matter was apparently settled, the Intelligence Report, was neither a neutral transcription of pre-existing fact nor an impartial arbitration between competing claims. It was a colonial administrative document, produced under colonial administrative pressures, whose findings then acquired an authority in later Nigerian law and administration wholly disproportionate to the rigour with which they had originally been established.

A comparable dynamic has been extensively documented for south-eastern Nigeria, where the British invention of "warrant chiefs" among the largely acephalous Igbo produced decades of resentment and, eventually, the Women's War of 1929.¹¹ The Akure–Isikan/Isolo case differs in one crucial respect: Akure, Isikan, and Isolo were not acephalous societies onto which an entirely alien chieftaincy was grafted, but three communities each already possessing its own ruling institutions, among which the British then imposed a single hierarchy where — on the contested evidence available — a more layered or federative relationship may well have existed. The distortion, in other words, was not the invention of chieftaincy where none had existed, but the flattening of a plural chieftaincy landscape into a singular, legible hierarchy — with the same practical effect of generating grievance that could be, and evidently was, mobilised by rival claimants across the following century.

From Colonial Categories to Postcolonial Litigation: The Long Afterlife of the Intelligence Report

The durability of the colonial-era hierarchy is nowhere clearer than in its migration from administrative practice into formal Nigerian law, where it has been repeatedly tested, and repeatedly upheld, in litigation stretching across more than two decades of the twenty-first century.

⁸Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁹See the discussion of reformulations of the invention-of-tradition thesis, and of the diverse agendas pursued by African chiefs within colonial administrative structures, in the introduction to a study of chiefs and rural health services in south-western Nigeria: "Chiefs and Rural Health Services in South-Western Nigeria, c. 1920–c. 1950s," *Social History of Medicine* 35, no. 2 (2022): 589.

¹⁰On the broader pattern of Yoruba obaships actively shaping the outcomes of indirect rule reorganization, compare J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934* (London: Longman, 1973).

¹¹A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (London: Longman, 1972).

In a judgment delivered on 6 March 2012 in suit CA/B/129/2005, the Court of Appeal sitting in Benin held that neither the Iralepo of Isikan nor the Osolo of Isolo could be granted the status of an Oba without the sanction of the Deji of Akure — a holding affirmed in the lead judgment of Justice Chinwe Eugenia Iyizoba and concurred in by Justices Kudirat Motonmori Olatokunbo Kekere-Ekun and Moore A. A. Adumein.¹² In effect, a judicial panel in 2012 ratified, as binding law, a hierarchy whose ultimate origin lay in an early twentieth-century colonial administrative exercise — without, so far as the public record indicates, the judgment engaging in any sustained interrogation of how that hierarchy had itself been produced.

The practical consequences of this legal settlement have continued to surface in the years since. In 2021, following the death of the Iralepo of Isikan, kingmakers in Isikan elected a successor, only for the Deji of Akure to assert his prerogative to select the new titleholder himself — provoking public tension, accusations of "imperial oppressiveness" from Isikan indigenes, and a palace statement insisting that the Iralepo remained, in law, a quarter chief rather than an independent traditional ruler.¹³ The Deji's camp explicitly invoked the 2012 Court of Appeal judgment, and a subsequent Supreme Court pronouncement, to insist that there was "no ambiguity" about the subordinate status of the Iralepo and Osolo stools, and dismissed the Isikan kingmakers' independent selection as an exercise without legal effect.¹⁴

The dispute resurfaced again in 2025, when a further Court of Appeal ruling in Akure declared the earlier upgrading of the Iralepo chieftaincy to recognised-chief status null and void, prompting the Deji to order the immediate suspension of the sitting Iralepo and a public appeal to Isikan indigenes to remain calm pending an appeal of the ruling.¹⁵ More than a century after the original colonial reorganization, in other words, the same underlying question — is Isikan (and, by extension, Isolo) an independent traditional authority or a subordinate quarter of Akure? — continues to generate litigation, palace suspensions, and public unrest, with each round of legal proceedings citing back to precedents that ultimately trace to the colonial Intelligence Report tradition rather than to any fresh historical inquiry.

Chieftaincy Institutions and Local Government Administration: Structural Implications

Nigeria's post-independence local government system has generally proceeded on the assumption that the chieftaincy hierarchies inherited from the colonial and early post-colonial periods represent a settled baseline requiring, at most, administrative recognition rather than historical re-examination. Chieftaincy Declarations, registered with state governments, formalise lines of succession and title precedence; local government councils convene chieftaincy matters committees to adjudicate disputes; and courts, as the Akure–Isikan/Isolo litigation shows, treat prior administrative and judicial recognition as close to dispositive.¹⁶

This is not a peculiarity of Ondo State. Comparable studies of indirect rule's institutional legacy across British Africa have noted that the councils, hierarchies, and precedence rules established during the colonial reorganization period were carried forward into post-colonial local government with remarkably little structural revision, even where the underlying colonial ethnography on which they rested was thin, contested, or produced under considerable time pressure.¹⁷ Elsewhere in Yorubaland, comparable dynamics of colonial-era deposition

¹²"Two Princes at War over Iralepo Chieftaincy Stool in Ondo," *The Street Journal*, October 24, 2021, reporting the terms of the Court of Appeal judgment in suit CA/B/129/2005. The judgment itself has not been independently examined for this article; its terms are known here through contemporaneous press reporting, and direct examination of the case file is recommended in the conclusion below.

¹³"Uneasy calm in Akure kingdom, Isikan community tackles Deji over chieftaincy stool," *Punch*, November 1, 2021.

¹⁴"You can only become king in Nollywood movies, Deji of Akure tells new Isikan king," *Tribune (Ibadan)*, October 26, 2021.

¹⁵"Deji of Akure Sacks Iralepo of Isikan," *Roving Reporters*, February 21, 2025.

¹⁶For the routine operation — and periodic breakdown — of this chieftaincy-declaration machinery in Ondo State, including disputes arising from the absence of a registered Chieftaincy Declaration, see "Bribery, Imposition Allegations Rock Ondo Community Over Oba's Selection," *New Telegraph*, September 13, 2024.

¹⁷See the discussion of the incomplete and geographically uneven scholarly treatment of indirect rule's institutional legacies in British Africa in "Councils and Indirect Rule in British Africa," *NBER Working Paper Series (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022)*.

and hierarchy-formation have been shown to have reshaped the practical limits of royal power well into the twentieth century, with lasting effects on how obaships are contested today.¹⁸

The structural implication is straightforward, if uncomfortable: a local government administration and a judicial system that treat colonial-era Intelligence Reports as historically authoritative are, in effect, administering present-day chieftaincy disputes according to categories that were never intended to serve as neutral historical findings, and were not produced by a process capable of generating them. Where those categories are genuinely uncontested by the communities concerned, the point may be moot. Where, as in the Akure–Isikan/Isolo case, they remain actively and repeatedly contested more than a century after their creation, continuing to treat them as self-evidently authoritative is itself a policy choice — one that has so far favoured administrative continuity over historical accuracy, and that has not, on the evidence of the recurring litigation and unrest traced above, actually succeeded in producing durable communal peace.

Toward a Decolonial Reading of the Akure–Isikan/Isolo Affair

A decolonial reading of this material begins from the recognition that the Intelligence Report tradition did not merely misdescribe a pre-existing hierarchy; it participated in what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has termed epistemicide — the destruction, through a colonial monopoly on legitimate knowledge-production, of alternative ways of knowing and narrating a community's own past.¹⁹ In the Akure–Isikan/Isolo case, the alternative ways of knowing were not exotic or esoteric; they were the ordinary, plural, sometimes mutually inconsistent oral traditions of three neighbouring Yoruba communities, each with its own palace, its own named ruling lineage, and its own account of precedence. What the Intelligence Report tradition did was to select, from among these plural accounts, the single version that best served colonial administrative convenience, and then to certify that version — through the imprimatur of an official colonial document — as the authoritative history, against which all subsequent competing claims would be measured and, generally, found wanting.

Recovering the plural historical record is therefore not merely an antiquarian exercise; it is a precondition for any durable resolution of the underlying dispute. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has argued in a related context, the recovery of a community's own naming and narration of itself is inseparable from its capacity to govern its own affairs on terms it recognises as legitimate.²⁰ Applied to the present case, this suggests that neither the Akure palace's confident assertion of settled paramountcy nor the Isikan and Isolo camps' equally confident assertion of original independence should be treated, by scholars, as simply correct. Both are, in part, products of a century-long contest conducted substantially on colonially inherited terrain, in which each side has learned to argue in the idiom — precedence, paramountcy, quarter-chief status — that the colonial and post-colonial legal apparatus recognises, whatever the underlying pre-colonial reality may actually have been.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has argued that the Akure–Isikan/Isolo chieftaincy and border affair is best understood not as a spontaneous or timeless communal rivalry, but as a dispute that was, at minimum, substantially hardened, and quite plausibly in part manufactured, by the colonial administrative technology of the Intelligence Report. On the historiographically grounded interpretation advanced here — provisional, for the reasons set out in section 2 above, pending direct archival verification — the genre's structural bias toward administrative simplicity converted a genuinely layered pre-colonial political landscape into a rigid hierarchy of paramount and subordinate authority. What is documented with greater confidence, on the strength of the litigation record traced in section 8 above, is that this hierarchy was subsequently absorbed, with little independent scrutiny, into post-colonial local government administration and, eventually, into binding judicial precedent. The result, on either reading, has been a century of recurring — if generally non-violent — contestation that qualifies, on the

¹⁸See the discussion of Tunde Oduwobi's research on the Akarigbo of Remo and the Awujale of Ijebu in "Indirect Rule in Nigeria and Its Impact on Traditional Rulers," *HistoricalNigeria.com*, October 23, 2025.

¹⁹Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

²⁰Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

broadened definition of insecurity advanced in section three above, as a chronic and unresolved security concern in its own right.

Four recommendations follow, the first two of which are a precondition for placing the others on firmer ground. First, historians and archivists should prioritise the systematic recovery, digitisation, and critical re-reading of the Akure District Intelligence Reports and related colonial-era administrative correspondence and Native Authority files — sought in the National Archives, Ibadan, and in the relevant Nigeria series at The National Archives, Kew — and should examine the full text of the 2012 and 2025 Court of Appeal judgments directly, rather than relying, as this article has had to, on press summaries of them; all of this material should be subjected to the same source-critical scrutiny routinely applied to other categories of colonial and judicial documentation, rather than treated, or treated at one remove, as settled fact. Second, that same programme of research should include the systematic, triangulated collection of oral history from Akure, Isikan, and Isolo alike, rather than continued reliance on the partisan press advocacy that has, to date, supplied much of the publicly available record of community tradition. Third, government — at local, state, and, where relevant, federal level — should undertake a structured review of the chieftaincy-recognition framework as it applies to communities with genuinely contested colonial-era hierarchies, distinguishing between disputes that reflect present-day political competition and disputes that reflect an unresolved historical question about how the relevant hierarchy was originally established. Fourth, and most importantly, the Akure, Isikan, and Isolo communities themselves should be supported — by traditional institutions, by the state government, and by independent historians — in convening a forum capable of engaging their respective traditions of origin on terms of parity, rather than continuing to litigate the question exclusively through a legal apparatus whose starting categories were never theirs to begin with.

None of this guarantees resolution. Pre-colonial political relationships were often genuinely ambiguous, and it is possible that no single, fully reconstructable "true" hierarchy exists to be recovered. But an honest acknowledgment of that ambiguity — and of the colonial state's role in resolving it, unilaterally and for its own administrative convenience, into a fixed and disputed hierarchy — would itself represent a significant advance over the present situation, in which each recurrence of the dispute is treated as a fresh administrative or legal problem, disconnected from the century-long history that actually produced it. The present article is offered as a first step in that direction: an interpretive argument, grounded in comparative historiography and in the documentary record so far available, that distinguishes where its stronger claims can currently be sustained from where they cannot yet be, and that sets out, in the recommendations above, the archival and oral-historical work required to close that gap.

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