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Practice of Selecting, Installing and Secluding Kings in the Yoruba Traditional Political Institutions of Ipoti-Ekiti, Nigeria: An Exploration of Cultural Changes in Modern Times

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ABSTRACT.

The kingship institution is a longstanding traditional practice among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. Despite centuries of external influences, the traditional monarchical system has maintained its relevance, with the king of a community usually referred to as 'Oba' serving as both spiritual and political leader. This study explores the selection, installation, seclusion, and coronation processes in Ipoti-Ekiti, which define the king's authority and shed light on the intricate dynamics of traditional governance. Using a historical descriptive research method, primary sources (oral interviews, archival materials, newspapers) and secondary sources (books, journal articles, seminar papers, government gazettes) were analyzed. Informants included kingmakers, chiefs, priests, diviners, indigenes, politicians from Ipoti-Ekiti and Ekiti State and local government officials. Findings revealed the origin of kingship institutions in Ipoti-Ekiti and the crucial role of the Ifa oracle in the traditional process, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural traditions in the face of modernization. This study contributes significantly to the understanding of African traditional systems, their enduring importance in the modern era, and their potential to inform contemporary governance and community development initiatives.

Keywords: kingship institutions, kingmaking practices, historical exploration, cultural significance, modernity.

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INTRODUCTION

Kingship system was an age long institution among the Yoruba people of the South Western part of Nigeria and part of the Republic of Benin. O.B Olaoba posited that the tradition was as old as Yoruba history which was firmly entrenched in the political culture of the people.[1] At the top of the political institution was an *Oba* (king) who was a symbol of both spiritual and political administration of the land. According to Thomas Hobbes, the fear-ridden condition came to an end when individuals agreed to relinquish their natural rights to everything and to transform their self-sovereignty to a higher civil authority, or *Leviathan*.[2] The significance of political administration in any society has been made clearer by scholars like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in their social contract and state of nature theories.[3] The idea of a "state of nature" is the idea of life without government and without state laws. Therefore, imagine a state of nature is to imagine an archaic society without government, law and security. These social contract theories could answer the question; why do humans live under the rule of law?

The need for order and peaceful coexistence of the day-to-day activities of the Yoruba people could not be isolated from the evolution of the traditional political system, passed down from one generation to the other and which remained valid despite modernity. Traditional politics in Yoruba communities were woven around the monarchical system headed by a king with different traditional title such as; *Olupoti, Ajero, Orangun, Alara, Ooni Ewi, Olukere, Ogoga, Oore, Alaketu, Soun,Olubadan* and others depending on the area. Kingship positions were sacred among the Yoruba people and that was why them referred to them as; *alase Igba keji orisa,* (Second-in-command to the Supreme Being) *Odio* (Ruler of the Universe), *oba l ori ohun gbogbo* (the owner of the universe) to describe how important they were in the traditional political setting. Tradition vested in the Oba both the spiritual and the political head of the community. He is regarded as the divine representatives of the gods on earth, and as such regarded as the most powerful and the wisest of men.[4] The king held executive, judicial, legislative power, and he commanded absolute obedience and respect from his people.

However, Yoruba has a unique system of selecting a successor after the demise of an incumbent amongst the royal families. In effect, a king was chosen from among those presented or designated as the royal breed within the same family or descendants (By birth right or seniority by hierarchy) within the class of chiefs, warriors or entitled classes. Therefore, a deep insight into the tradition process and customs involved in the selection and installation of Kings in Ipoti-Ekiti, will make a better understanding on the culture, heritage, rituals and the spiritual beliefs of the Yoruba people which was the subject matter of this paper.

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Overview Of Kingship Institutions In Yorubaland

Historically, the institution of monarchy among the Yorubas was traced to Oduduwa dispersal meeting held at the *Ita Ajoro* (the place of consultation) in Ile-Ife, when Oduduwa who was at that time getting old, charged his children to go and establish communities. Ade Ajayi posited that the Yoruba people's history began at Ile-Ife, in the heart of the evergreen forest where man was created.[5]Oduduwa migration history to Ile-Ife, the source of Yoruba civilization which had a model of kingship with its rituals, ceremonies and governance structures were in two versions. The first version traced the origin of the Yoruba race to the crown Prince Oduduwa.[6] I.A. Akinjogbin and E.A Alayande agreed with this version of history in Hugh Clapperton's extracts from Sultan Bello's history as popularized by Samuel Johnson. The version stated that the Yoruba people led by Oduduwa came from the north-eastern areas of Africa and settled at Ile-Ife, where he established a kingdom.[7]

The second version stated that the whole world began at Ile-Ife. It narrated that the creation of the world was carried out by the messengers of *Olodumare*, led by Oduduwa (ho had seized power from Obatala), landed at *Oke Oramfe* with five pieces of iron, a lump of earth placed on it and the chicken. The chicken spread the earth over the water that had covered the earth hence the name Ile-Ife. (land of spreading) Ade Ajayi interpreted Ile-Ife to mean *Ile Owuro, Ile-Ife Odaiye, nibiti Ojumo tinmo wa, Ile- Ife ori aiye gbogbo* (Ile-Ife the land of the most ancient days the dawn. Ile Ife where the work of creation took place)[8]. Going by this version, it could be ascertained that the origin of the Yoruba race predated the coming of the Oduduwa from the north east. It suggested the existence of an established group to which *Obatala* and *Oruelere* belonged, over which Oduduwa came to impose itself as the head.[9] Despite the contradictions, the two accounts can be reconciled as they both revered Oduduwa as a leader thereby sustaining the position of Ile-Ife in cosmology.

Oduduwa who was the first king in Ile-Ife established a monarchical system, the authority and symbols which he bestowed on all his children and grandchildren that dispersed at *Ita Ajoro* and established monarchical government fashioned according to the one operating in Ile-Ife .The movement of people from Ile-Ife occurred at different times as some decide to stay back and move later or broke away from the existing groups due to sheer ambition on the part of the more adventurous members of the ruling families, ambition to carve areas of power for themselves, population pressures as the land available in Ile-Ife and the neighboring towns became inadequate, a natural catastrophe like an epidemic or even drought which some of the population packing and a political crisis as a result of which many if not all the members of Oduduwa dynasty had to flee from Ile-Ife to other areas in Yorubaland.[10]

All Yoruba communities laid claim to have originated from Ile-Ife and sharing blood

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relations Oduduwa either as direct sons, grandsons or great grandsons. This explained the Yoruba political administration system, which was based on the ebi system. The meeting at *Ita Ajoro* brought about the *ebi* system because while dispersing an agreement was reached to maintain future contacts.[11] A consensus must be reached on who should lead as a king and first among equals. In Yorubaland, the male child from the royal family became the king who ruled over the society. It was obligatory that an *oba* should be able to show how he is directly related to Oduduwa and it was only when that was done, he could validly assume the beaded crown and other symbols of royalty. According to P. Llyod, the Oba was the personification of his town, without the Oba, the town would cease to exist the implication of this is that without kingship peace could not be maintained between the decent groups comprising the town.[12]

Origin Of Kingship Institutions in Ipoti-Ekiti

Oral traditions reveal that kingship institutions in Ipoti -Ekiti dates back to the arrival of Adeyemi Adeoba, a prince from Ajase Ipo Igbomina in the present Kwara State.[13] Historically, Ipoti-Ekiti which was a deep forest was later inhabited by people who migrated from different places of abode as result of thirst or struggle for power, in search of peace and security, need for arable lands for farming, search for better economic opportunities and displacement of a group by another superior group.[14] There were emigrants from *Ijero-Ekiti Iloro-Ekiti, Ile-Ife, Igbomina, Oke-Ila and Ila Orangun, Aramoko, Ado Ekit*i and *Ikere-Ekiti*[15] to settle at different quarters in the town and later categorized into three quarters namely: *Ipo, Owa* and *Ejiyan* for administrative convenience. The *Ipo* group (*Omoladan* and *Aganmusan)* resided at *Ugbo Aje* located very close to Oke-Ila Orangun in the present Osun state.[15] The Owa group led who were part of the Ajero group that left Ile-Ife relocated to *Ugbo Olua* due to successional disputes with the Ajero of Ijero and later to move to Ipoti.[16] The third group which came later was the *Ejiyan* group that joined the former groups from moved *Ugbo Ujumu* to *Idogun* before finally settling at Ipoti-Ekiti.[17] However, a major group in *Ejiyan* that later played a prominent role in the political development of Ipoti-Ekiti were the *Sajiyan* group claimed to have distinct migration story different from the other Ejiyan group. They traced their origin *Ora Igbomina* in Osun State, migrating first to *Odi Awodo* before they finally joined the other groups that to form a community later known as Ipoti-Ekiti.[18]

Meanwhile, kingship system began after the groups agreed to live together as a unit. Prior to this period, each group was been controlled by their leaders who led them to form the alliance. The concept changed when Prince Adeyemi Adeoba was installed as the first king in Ipoti-Ekiti. He was a son of *Igboribido* who left Ile-Ife under the guardian of a pigeon and perforated calabash handed over to him by his grandfather Oduduwa with the instruction that he should establish his town where the pigeon dies. The pigeon died at the present sight of *Ajase-Ipo* and there he established his kingdom and became

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the first king.[20] He was succeeded by his son Adeoba Dalla who gave birth to three male children of which the eldest was prince Adeyemi Adeoba.

The demise of Adeoba Dalla brought a prolonged successional dispute to Ajase Ipo.[17] Prince Adeyemi Adeoba thought as the first child of the late king he should automatically be installed as the new king. The king makers decided otherwise by making the third and the last born of the family the king. Adeyemi Adeoba was infuriated and he left *Ajase Ipo* in annoyance in company of his immediate junior brother, who history recorded did not stop at *Ipoti* but moved to establish another town, *Ipokia* in the present Ogun state.[21] In the course of his journey, he got to a market known as *Gogo* in *Ugbo Aje* and decided to procure some items that would help him in his journey. The *Aworokin* who was still at *Ugbo Aje* got information about his presence and he invited him to inquire about his movement. He told them the story behind his movements and the leaders of *Ugbo Aje* group, who were in need of more people for security reasons [22] requested him and his people to stay and live together with them. He pledged to stay and live with them provided they could recognize him as their ruler. The people eager to expand their community accepted his terms.

No sooner had Prince Adeyemi Adeoba relocated to *Ugbo Aje* than unexpected turn of events unfolded. His brother, Adeola Dalla 11, who had been installed instead joined the ancestors., leaving the position vacant. He was beckoned to return home to become the Olupo of Ajase. He declined the offer and responded in his native *Igbomina* tonque '*Ee ya mo teri, Olupo yii fe je eetimo*- which literally means- "the king we want to become we have gotten it here and no more pushing for us. [23]This was translated to mean the word *Ipo – ti*, hence the name of the town up to the present time. Thus, Prince Adeyemi Adeoba became the first traditional ruler of Ipoti-Ekiti after the Owa and Ipoti had come together to live as one. History has it that it was after the implementation of the *Ugbo Aje* accord, led by the Obalaye of Ejiyan swiftly and unanimously agree, prompting the other group to burst into joyful exclamation: *E kan jiyan*[24]– meaning 'they did not even argue at all', the name which they were known up till now.

The installation of Prince Adeyemi Adeoba as the first Olupoti of Ipoti began a monarchical system model in accordance with the established one by Oduduwa in Ile-Ife. This brought to the town central authority with the Olupoti at the head of the political organogram which began to give the community a common sense of patriotism and brotherhood.

SELECTION OF OLUPOTI

The installation of Prince Adeyemi Adeoba began a monarchical system modeled after the one established by Oduduwa in Ile-Ife. The tradition bestowed the right to rule on the descendants of Oba Adeyemi Adeoba, with the *Amilede* ruling house being the primary royal family which consist *Emila, Asao* and *Ejemu*. However, latest development

Babcock University Journal of History and International Studies (BUJOHIS) 2024,Vol. 6 (1) DOI: 10.61955/IBDOCZ

BOldscholar

due to the successional disputes after the death of Oba Ajiguna Ajayi the X1, increased the numbers to five with the addition of *Ejisun* and *Olomo* known as the *Onidasa* Ruling House.[26] The installation of Oba Elijah Oladele Ayeni from the *Ejisun* compound-the Olupoti of Ipoti (1988 – 2012) was marked with a prolonged legal battle. The *Amilede* ruling house challenged his rights to the stool on the basis that he shared no historical antecedent with the first *Olupoti* and that he was not part of the *Ajase Ipo* migrants. Prince Joseph Adebayo Osaguna of the contestants to the stool challenged this position on the ground that:

> 'The Asao and Ejemu families/branches otherwise known as Amilede houses are the only and true sons (princes) of the Onidara ruling house of Ipoti Ekiti and the only and truly the families/barnches of the said s ruling house that can lawfully nominate a candidate(s) for selection into the vacant stool of the Olupoti of Ipoti by true kingmaker namely the Iwarafa mefa (the inner circle) excluding the Olupoti of Ipoti namely chief Odofin of Ipoti, Sajiyan, Odofin Ejiyan, Ajana Owa and Odofin Owa in accordance with customary law of the Ipoti-Ekiti.[27]

The Supreme Court Nigeria in his judgement held on Friday 20th January, 2012 presided over by Justices Walter Samuel Nkanu Onoghen, John Afolabi Fabiyi Suleiman Galadima, Nwali Sy Vester Ngwuta and Mary Nkaego Peter Odili with suit no SC 19/1997 held that there were five ruling houses in Ipoti-Ekiti namely: *Ejemu, Emila, Asao, Ejisun and Olomo* and not three. Thus, the Supreme Court laid to rest the controversies surrounding the ruling houses in Ipoti-Ekiti.

Historically, Ipoti-Ekit had a unique system of succession different from what was obtainable in other Yoruba communities because most of the towns in Yorubaland rotated the stool among the royal families. However, the Ipoti system was not on rotational basis amongst the royal families but traditions allowed for all the princes amongst the ruling houses to contest for the position and anybody that was picked through the *Ifa* divination became the king.[28] Although, the Owatedo group in Ipoti, in a communique submitted to the Ekiti State Government when seeking separate community claimed that the *Olupoti* stool was rotated between the *Ipo* and the *Owa*. This position was premised on the arrangement reached by the two hunters – *Ogbo-nagiri-mo-fa* and *Ekooro*, during the formative period of the community at *Umuto* located in the present *Okerele* quarters in Ipoti-Ekiti. This position could not be justified by the facts as all those who had installed as the Olupoti in the past came from the *Amilede* except the immediate past Olupoti-Oba Elijah Oladele Ayeni from *Ejisun* Compound, with no reference to anybody from Owa.

The Role of Ifa in the selection of king in Ipoti-Ekiti

Consultation of *Ifa* oracle was the most important tool used in picking the most eligible candidate to occupy Olupot of Ipoti stool. *Ifa* a mystical figure, regarded by the Yoruba

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POldscholar

as their deity of wisdom and intellectual development.Ifa divination was the process of requesting from the Supreme Being in making a choice for the people, whenever an individual or collective decision has to be made. The *Ifa* [Orunmila], god of divination, fate and wisdom informs mortals of the wishes of *Olorun*, (the Sky god). This attested to the fact that the Yoruba strongly believed in the concept of the Supreme Being as the omnipotent. Among the Yoruba people, it was customary to consult *ifa* through a diviner or chief priest before taking any step.

In selecting the *Olupoti*, *Ifa* played a very significant role as the king was the representative of God on earth, *alase igba keji orisa* , therefore the choice should made known by him among the princes. The kingmakers would go spiritual making enquiry from the Supreme Being by invoking the spirit of *Ifa* to reveal the rightful candidate that would be beneficial to the town.They believed that it was better to keep it real by consulting *Orunmila,* so as to protect the tradition of land.[29] The choice of who became *Olupoti* required the traditional process of making enquiry from the Supreme Being through the *Ifa* oracle to enable the kingmakers to determine the character and lineage of the candidate. Thus, *Ifa* Oracle is seen as an indirect assess to *Orisa* (deities and ancestors) who would review the decision of the deities in the selection of a suitable candidate and to give him spiritual backing. The employment of Ifa was seen as a way of preserving their traditions, customs and ancestral heritage; most importantly through divination, rituals and consultation which helped in assessing the wisdom, character and abilities of potential candidates for kingship including providing an insight into the personality threats, leadership qualities, suitability for the responsibilities of a king.

The most important reason why the *Ifa* Oracle that was seen as an important issue in the selection of a king was that it helped greatly in maintaining social order and balance within the community. The people believed that by consulting *ifa,* they ensured selection of a just and righteous king who would rule with fairness and uphold the community's value. It also prevented any rift that might occur after the selection because all contestants and actors would have no option but to agree that the choice made was from *Olodumare* who could not make any mistake.

Process of Selection and Installation.

Traditionally, the search for a new king began exactly three months after the incumbent joined the ancestors because it was forbidden for the stool to be vacant for a long time.[30] The gap was to give room for all the completion of all traditional rites of passage for the late king done in secrecy, but there were some aspects carried out in public which allowed for full participate of the people. One major rite of this was the killing of domestic animals such as goats and the cutting of all *odan* trees in the town by the *Omo ogbonlu.*

The process began exactly three months after the demise of the incumbent,with the kingmaker's sending emissaries to the royal families - the *Onidasa* Ruling *Houses asking*

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for nominations to fill the vacant stool.[31] In response, families would send names of eligible princes to the kingmakers who in turn send the names to the *Aworos* which included; *Aworokin, Aworojasin* and *Asalu* through high Chief *Odofin Ipoti* at the *Aworokin* chamber. The roles of the *Aworos* were to help in consulting *Ifa* Oracle to inquire from the Supreme Being his choice. The candidates were represented by symbols- *Ikerike igi* (shortsticks) which were brought handed over to the *Asalu* at the entrance of *Aworokin* chamber. The *Odofin Ipoti* was not allowed into the *Aworokin* chamber, but wait at the entrance to avoid interference in the process as he was one of the kingmakers that prepared the symbols. In the olden days, the sticks were sent out to diviners in the neighboring town for transparency. The practice which changed over time as consultation of who becomes the king was done at the *Aworokin* Chamber. The diviner after the consultation with *Ifa,* picked one of the *Ikerike Igi* denoting the chosen candidate. The process of sending the stick back was also done in a reverse order. The Asalu would hand over the *ikerike igi* and to *Odofin Ipoti* at the entrance, who in turn took it to the kingmakers who waiting anxiously at his chamber. The kingmakers on receiving the *Ikerike Igi* from the Odofin Ipoti automatically knew the chosen candidate and would go ahead to prepare the ground for traditional installation.

However, it was not a must that *ifa* must pick somebody from the candidates presented by the kingmakers. All the candidates could be rejected if any of them was not the choice of the Supreme Being. As *ifa* was regarded as *Ari nu ro de* (one who sees the future) in the Yoruba parlance, through divinity the reign of the would be king must have been revealed whether it would peaceful or not. However, if it would not be peaceful the ruling houses would be asked again to present new candidates and, in a situation, where none was found suitable, the *ifa* would pick one as revealed to him by the Supreme Being.[32] If the choice was not living in the town emissaries would also be sent, inviting him on the pretext that that his attention was needed by the *Igbimo Agba.* Immediately, he appeared he would be called *Kabiyesi* while his clothes removed and dressed with a kingly regalia while the traditional installation would be performed by the Aworos. This was exactly the way HRM (Oba) Ajayi Ajigunna, the Olupoti of Ipoti X1 (1936-1982) was invited home from Kafachan in the present Niger State installed as king.

Traditional Rites Installation Rites.

The above ended a period of tension, anxiety and waiting in the community. This was followed by the traditional rites of installation which according to the Yoruba tradition was the most important aspect of the process in Yorubaland. The king in the true sense of the world was a divine personality, and as such he personifies the spiritual well-being of the town.[33] This explained that the king from the historic past have been the representative or companion of gods on earth showing their sacred mandates and ancillary attributes. Thus, Kings elect would not assume the position until the traditional rites and rebirth ceremony had been performed as a mark of unity by the *Aworos* with the

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POldscholar

Orisa. The rebirth ceremony, set the Yoruba kings apart from the rest of society which made the kings to became extraordinary human beings with sacred mandates.[34]

The rites took place on a day after the consultation with the Ifa oracle when the kingmakers would lead the king elect to the *Aworokin* chamber for the installation proper. This was usually a festive period that attracted indigenes from all spheres of life at the *Aworokin* palace to have a first glimpse of the king elect. Different *elegbebge* (age group), quarter heads, minor chiefs, *ode,* (hunters). *Obinrin Ilu*(women), *Okunrin Ilu* (Men)*Omo Ogbonlu*, *Ologun*, the *elewes*, young and old indigenes would gather in front of the Aworokin's chamber, rendering different songs accompanied with traditional beats like *pangidi, gire, gangan* and *ikoko* to witness the unveiling of the new king. The ceremony began with the *Aworokin* appearing from the front entrance of his chamber holding the hand of the king elect, wrapped in traditional *aso oke,* with caps and face painted with *efun* white kaolin and asked from the people, *ore in abi ere innn* (Do you want him or not?)[35] and the people replied in unism, *oreee aaa* – (we want him) which signaled peoples support for and acceptance of the king. By this time men would take off their caps to prostrate, while women remove their *gele* (Head gear) and kneel down chanting *Kabiyesi* pledging their unflinching supports. The king elect would be taken inside the *Aworokin* chamber for the second time for the final rite.

Thus, with the traditional installation completed by the *Aworo* [Aworokin,Aworojasin and Asalu] the newly installed king would come out at the eastern outer gate led by the *Aworos* now joined by the kingmakers to the four *odi* (entrance) of the town where prayers would be offered to the ancestors. The outer gate at the *Aworokin* compound was exclusively reserved for the installation ceremony which remained closed until he next installation. After touching the four *odi* of the town, the king would be led to the *Odofin Ipoti* chambers for the three-month seclusion at *ipebi*. The performed roles by the *Aworokin* and *Aworojasin* in the installation of king in Ipoti-Ekiti was due to the fact that when Prince Adeyemi Adeoba came to *Ugbo Aje*, it was chief *Aworokin Omilatekin* that offered him the kingship position and he made sure that the agreement was implemented. Thus, since the inception of the kingship system the installation has been performed by the successful *Aworokin* and *Aworojasin*, as a sign of respect to mark the agreement reached at *Ugbo Aje*.

Period of Seclusion.

A three-month seclusion period accompanied with different kinds of rituals and ceremonies was an important aspect of installing kings in Ipoti-Ekiti. Traditionally, this process is compulsory as any king who failed to undergo the restriction movement was seen not to have completed the rites of installation. The seclusion period was so significant because it was from here that the king would be initiated to the sacred part of his office and assumed total dignity befitting royal office. The king would be invested with paraphrenia of royal office which included robes, crown, scepter, horse tail,

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umbrella and beads. The kingmakers would place on his head ade-(Crown) depicting *ori ade kin gbofo* (the king head must always be covered) which was the most important insignia of office on his head. O.B. Olaoba emphasized the importance of crown among the Yoruba people as a mark of royalty upon which his sacred power rests.[35] The crown was seen as a sign of divine thing as it incarnated the institution of the royal ancestral force and the revelation of great moral insight in the person of the king.[36] Thus, the practice of seclusion was deeply rooted in the Yoruba cultural heritage where the king would be taught in the dos and don'ts of his person. As a spiritual leader he would be taught on how not to eat and act in the public. One of such, was that it was traditionally forbidden to see the king eating in the public place as explained in the local palance: *a kin ri enu ojiji mon mon* (We don't see the king while he eats). Oral traditions pointed out that while at the *Odofin's* chamber, he would be presented with the preserved path of the immediate past king to eat, while he would be asked what he just ate and he would reply '*mo je oba*' (I am now a king). Although, there were divergent views about this as some claimed that the practice if it happened at all must have been during the pre-colonial period.

As generally practiced in Ipoti-Ekiti, the period of seclusion gave the king the opportunity to reflect and prepared him for the great responsibility ahead of him. It majorly helped to maintain deep secrecy around the king's identity to make sure that the security of the monarch during the transition is guaranteed and to prepare palace ready for his occupation. This period was also a celebration time colored with full traditional ceremonies. The king would be allowed to receive different groups of people who paid him homages thrice during the seclusion period. He would come out in the evening to receive groups such as the *elegbegbe*, the *Ologuns*, elewe, *elebebi*'s, age grades, hunters, *oloris* princes and princess. The groups visited at different times rendering with pomp and pageantry to pay homages. The king dressed in regalia would dance and wave his horses at them to the administration of the people. He would offer prayers and blessed his subjects, an act which continued for three months the seclusion.

However, on the last day of the seclusion the king would move to the palace led by the kingmakers, titled traditional chiefs and indigenes to the *Aworojasin* chamber for the final rites. Although, the activities here were conducted in secrecy with the *Aworojasin* and the king in a room, oral source gave the account that the king would serve the *Aworojasin* palm wine who would then pray for him and pronounce him as the king. The significance of this was that the king could assume his kingship position not serve to be subservient to anybody again but instead he would be served and revered. This ceremony brought to a close the process of selecting, installing and secluding of a king in Ipoti-Ekiti as the king would from here move to the palace that was made ready when he was observing the secluding period.

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BOldscholar

Changes to the Selection of Kings Ipoti-Ekiti

The selection, installation and seclusion of the Kings in Ipoti-Ekiti, have a rich cultural significance. However, changes have occurred due to colonialism, religion education and government interference which has introduced new dynamics to the process. The subjugation of Yorubaland in 1900 by the colonial conquest inescapably meant that the British rule began at different dates in various parts of the Yoruba countries.[37] The implication of this was that the British government introduced the Native Authority system that placed the traditional rulers under the colonial system with limited powers to collect taxes, maintain order and administer justice before independence in 1960.

However, between 1950-1960 the colonial government in the different regions took steps to replace the Native Authority system with the new local government structure through various constitutional reforms the idea which continued after independence. However, by 1976, a unified local government structure was established in Nigeria placing the affairs of Kings under the local government administration. Consequently, the powers of the traditional rulers as the sole authority of their community became were subjected to the dictates of the government of the day. For instance, the choice of whom became the kings lied on the final decision of the local Government Authority as an approval had to be sort before the commencement of the process. The effects of democracy have altered the selection process, with the government playing active roles in the selection process contrary to the system that was in existence during the pre-colonial period.

The above gave room to successful governments both military and political classes in Nigeria to tinker with the traditional institutions. The strategic position occupied by the kings in Nigeria, placed them in a good stead for government to see them as important ally to shore up their popularity amongst the populace. The closeness of kings to the people made them to be able to influence the electorates during elections and after and they were also used to mobilize support for the government and also helped to propagate government policies in the local areas.[38] This has led to stiff competitions among the princes to curry the favour of the government in power to become traditional rulers. The effect of this was that, a qualified aspirant could be sacrificed of not being the friend of the government in power. This has diluted the role played by the kingmakers in the selection process as they now worked in conjunction with the government officials to navigate modern political and social dynamics, balancing tradition with contemporary realities.

Moreover, in ipoti-Ekiti, the criteria for selecting a king have embraced modern requirements such as education and exposure. This has undermined the role played by the *Ifa* oracle in picking the most eligible candidate due to the advent of Christianity and Islamic religion. Thus, instead of *Ifa* Oracle to pick a candidate, the choice of who became the king now lied with the government as kingmakers played minimal or no role at all. The Oluwo of Iwo in Osun state, Oba Abdulrasheed Akanbi corroborated this position,

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when he said "there is no *Oba* in Yorubaland that will say Ifa picked him. It is after the governor picks you that you now become a king. *Ifa* doesn't have any power over the government"[40] This had also led to serious struggle amongst the royal families, as people began to query the choice of the *ifa a*nd the kingmakers while pitching the royal families against one another while creating disunity and division amongst the royal families and the town at large. In addition, there had been controversies on who were the kingmakers among the chiefs due to lack of written records.

In addition, the outcome of *ifa* divination in recent times had come under scrutiny as a result of modernization and exposure. Aspirants to the throne became desperate as they struggled to be made the king due to the benefits and status now attached to the position. The choice of who became the king which nobody queried was now rejected by the aspirants that lost out or not picked by *ifa* Oracle. As a result, court cases were instituted to challenge the position of the kingmakers and the *Aworos*. Moreover, In Ipoti-Ekit, aspiring candidates were no more considered based only on character and divine approval but on moral requirements as education, wealth and exposure, contrary to when money was not the determinant. Though, the Present Olupoti of Ipoti, His Royal Majesty James Kolade Oladipupo was picked through *ifa* divination, his co-contestant did not agree, as the diviner was accused of manipulation and therefore decided to go to court to seek redress. This was a new trend in the choice of a king as nobody queried the position of *Ifa* oracle

Urbanization and modernization had a significant impact on the seclusion practice of the town. This gave room to the installation of cosmopolitan kings who would not be able to observe the compulsory three months of seclusion due to work engagement as a business man or government worker. The traditional practice of three months seclusion has been reduced to nine days if not less and no longer in the *Odofin Ipoti* chambre. Thus, in Ipoti-Ekiti This king only visited the designated place briefly immediately after the installation and move to his personal house for the next three months before the coronation. TThus, most of the traditional rites were left undone or done in a hurry which raises questions about the erosion of traditional authority. This was the case when the present Olupoti of Ipoti, was installed. He only visited the *Odofin Owa* chambre on the day of installation and moved to his personal house for the continuation of the traditional rites.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the process of selecting, installing and seclusion of kings in Yorubaland most particularly in Ipoti-Ekiti. The installation of kings in Ipoti-Ekiti is a revered and intricate process which has ensured continuity of Yoruba monarchical system. The practice weaves together spirituality, culture and interactions between the king and his subjects. The process of installation of kingship was not complete until the

Babcock University Journal of History and International Studies (BUJOHIS) 2024,Vol. 6 (1) DOI: 10.61955/IBDOCZ

BOldscholar

consultation of *Ifa* oracle which was a major step before the king elect would undergo serious preparations, spiritual purification and leadership training until the grand installation where the new king received sacred symbols of office The position of *Ifa* oracle has been challenged with the advent of foreign religion which had termed it as fetish , while modernity and westernization had introduced to an extent changes to practice. The changes no doubt, led to subtle erosion of cultural authenticity. However, to resolve the matter between tradition and modernity, the paper recommends the following:

1. Traditional practices should be maintained, and the position of *Ifa* in selecting kings should not be jettisoned.
2. Government should not interfere in the selection process, as it is a traditional institution.
3. The selection process should be devoid of political coloration to maintain the sanctity of the institution.

Babcock University Journal of History and International Studies (BUJOHIS) 2024,Vol. 6 (1) DOI: 10.61955/IBDOCZ

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