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ISAKOLE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND CONFLICTS IN COLONIAL YORUBALAND

ABSTRACT

This paper, with a focus on the people of the Nigerian towns of Idanre and Akure, (re)considers the genesis of land conflicts in eastern Yorubaland of colonial south-western Nigeria. The historical method was deployed. Primary sources, notably archival records from the National Archive, Ibadan, the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria, Owena, and farmers' unions in the two communities, were used. Memories of the descendants of cocoa farmers were collected, paying attention to the growth of cocoa cultivation and the historical relations between Idanre and Akure people in the pre-colonial period, in addition to secondary sources which were subjected to historical analysis. The expansion of cocoa farms and the ensuing rivalry over the collection of Isakole, an indigenous form of tribute or ground rent, instigated acrimonies among Idanre and Akure Chiefs throughout the colonial period. The animosities culminated, however, in unresolved inter-community disputes and land conflicts between Idanre and Akure. The imbroglio, which affected the rhythms of agricultural life in the two communities, was not only a subject of protracted litigation and arbitration; it claimed an immense number of lives and valuable properties on both sides in the colonial period. The paper argues that the land conflicts were fuelled by unmitigated competition for Isakole between Idanre and Akure chiefs, but the divisive posture of the British colonial authorities over the jostling exacerbated the conflict.

Keywords: Isakole, tribute, land conflict, cocoa cultivation, taxation, British colonial capitalism, Idanre-Akure, Yorubaland.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the dynamics of agricultural land conflicts in colonial Yorubaland. The land conflicts between the two Nigerian towns of Idanre and Akure constitute the main case study. Idanre-Akure conflicts became important because the two towns were major cocoa-producing areas of eastern Yorubaland. *Isakole* is an indigenous form of tribute or ground rent.¹ “*Isakole* was a tribute paid to one’s benefactor; in this case, migrants’ payment to indigenous landowners or chiefs in appreciation of the opportunity to cultivate their homelands in Yorubaland”.² It can be made by paying money or sharing harvested goods. It remains a common practice among Yoruba farmers to lavish the chiefs or owners of land cultivated with some financial or material gifts. According to Abiodun Afolabi, “*Isakole* was a form of universal ‘land rent’”.³ It was an ancient practice among the Yoruba people. A legitimate or traditional owner of an immovable property (land) obtained agricultural produce or pecuniary benefits (tribute) from an occupier of his property, either in the form of rent, appreciation, or compensation. It was customary for prominent towns and states to exercise strong influence over neighbouring villages and subordinate towns basically to obtain *Isakole* from the people.⁴ In this case, Baale’s and Oloja’s (chiefs) of the tributary towns and villages were obliged to collate tributes from their wards and send them to the prominent king or chiefs. During the pre-colonial era, some palace officials, warriors, and minor chiefs exploited this to enrich themselves through frequent invasion of farms and villages to demand tributes. In most cases, military and political might were used by chiefs to enforce the collection of *Isakole* in the pre-colonial period. In the context of agricultural land, the payment and collection of *Isakole* varied in different contexts; it mostly depended on prior agreements between a benefactor and beneficiary. For instance, an *Isakole* could be paid with five gallons of palm oil, 20 tubers of yam, or ten pans of cocoa annually based on established consensus and understanding between parties.⁵

Isakole redefined the relations between Idanre and Akure people in Yorubaland during the colonial period. Idanre and Akure were two major cocoa-producing towns in colonial Southwestern Nigeria. Throughout the twentieth century, the two communities produced large quantities of cocoa

1 The author uses the Yoruba spelling *Isakole* instead of the anglicised version *Ishakole*.

2 T Bello and MI Mitchell, “The political economy of cocoa in Nigeria: A history of conflict or cooperation?”, *Africa Today* 64 (3), 2018.

3 A Afolabi, “The colonial taxation policy among Yoruba of South-western Nigeria and its implications for socio-economic development”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 19, 2010, p. 85.

4 Interview: Author with Dr A Oyewale, University of Lagos, 13 August 2021.

5 Interview: Author with Oyewale.

that emanated from Ondo Province, which contributed tremendously to socio-economic change and provided immense revenue for the British colonial administration and the independent state of Nigeria.⁶ Idanre lies within the Equatorial region of Nigeria.⁷ It covers a land area of 619 square miles, about 1 584 sq km.⁸ From the large forest land area of Idanre, the British colonial government in 1918 carved out over 280 square kilometres into what became known as the "Idanre Forest Reserve Area O. A. 5"⁹ and subsequently deforested a larger portion of the forest between the 1920s and 1958 for the development of cocoa farms. As a result, Idanre society hosted over 460 farm settlements and villages, including Odode, Alade, and Atoshin, the major areas, mostly dependent on cocoa farming for their basic livelihood.¹⁰ Due to a lack of reliable data, it is hard to determine the actual volume of cocoa produced in Akure and Idanre in the colonial era. Still, in the post-colonial period, the two towns were major cocoa producers in southwestern Nigeria, especially in Ondo State (see table 1).

Table 1: Cocoa Gradings ('000 tonnes) from all Local Government Areas in Ondo State (1980-1987)

	LGAs	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
1.	Akure	4, 732	66, 762	7, 276	5, 498	5, 964	5, 078	5, 729	7, 671
2.	Idanre/	8, 298	14, 192	14, 096	9, 435	13, 754	10, 690	10, 114	13, 666
3.	Ekiti South	4, 599	8, 772	7, 837	6, 744	6, 058	6, 618	5, 798	5, 018
4.	Ekiti S.W	1, 480	2, 308	2, 412	1, 785	2, 394	1, 588	1, 628	2, 162
5.	Owo	7, 192	1, 288	14, 093	8, 900	9, 759	10, 528	6, 218	6, 177
6.	Akoko N.	2, 193	3, 459	3, 341	2, 257	2, 568	1, 841	1, 985	1, 522
7.	Akoko S.	602	937	1, 122	740	753	628	628	482
8.	Ekiti C.	1, 022	2, 086	1, 999	1, 749	2, 000	1, 789	1, 743	1, 865
9.	Ekiti W.	926	1, 349	1, 331	892	1, 441	927	1, 133	855
10.	Ijero	1, 195	2, 062	1, 891	1, 129	1, 760	1, 164	1, 329	1, 145
11.	Ero	133	287	198	88	167	69	30	60

6 T Falola and S Aderinto, *Nigeria, nationalism and writing history* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p. 63.

7 JO Adefila, "Spatial effects of cocoa production on rural economy in Idanre-Ifedore area, Ondo State of Nigeria", *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development* 3 (2), 2013, p. 58.

8 National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), NP/10996/34, BV Jones, Intelligence Report on Idanre District in the Ondo Division of the Ondo Province. 1934.

9 NAI, Intelligence Report, "Idanre Forest Reserve Area O.A 5," Ondo Div, File, No178, 1928; See also, GJO Afolabi, "Journey to agricultural work in Yorubaland", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 63 (1), 1973, pp. 85-86.

10 NAI, Intelligence Report, "Idanre Forest Reserve Area O.A 5".

	LGAs	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
12.	Ekiti N.	1, 245	2, 089	1, 297	1, 485	1, 554	957	985	1, 004
13.	Ekiti E.	1, 897	3, 524	3, 331	3, 222	3, 391	3, 436	3, 928	3, 305
14.	Ondo	10, 179	16, 353	14, 836	11, 343	15, 756	10, 682	6, 834	10, 224
15.	Ifesowapo	9, 050	18, 021	15, 691	11, 641	21, 247	12, 165	9, 602	17, 320
16.	Ikale	47	96	70	33	126	62	22	120
17.	Ilaje Ese Odo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	5 490	95 193	91 790	66 941	88 347	68 347	5 705	72 581

Source: B Akanji, *Cocoa production under Nigeria's structural adjustment programme* (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1992), p. 49.

This paper argues that the payment of *Isakole* (an indigenous form of ground rent/tribute) transformed the nature of land conflicts between Idanre and Akure under colonial rule. The clashes had their origins in contested claims over the ownership of agricultural land (for cocoa cultivation), land scarcity pressures, and colonial taxation. But these conflicts became exacerbated and protracted, with the legacies still being experienced today because of disputes over *Isakole*. How *Isakole* and colonial taxation reconfigured the historical relations between Idanre and Akure towns is significant in understanding the impact of the British colonial capitalism in Yorubaland during the twentieth century and beyond. The majority of Nigeria's ethnoreligious, as well as enduring economic conflicts, have a land-based agrarian dimension. From the Niger Delta region, the Middle-belt region, to the cocoa-producing areas of southwest Nigeria, the origins of land conflicts in many agrarian communities can be traced back to the impact of colonial capitalism.¹¹ In colonial Idanre and Akure, the British land-use policies, with the growth of cocoa farming, led the Idanre and Akure Chiefs to overstretch their boundaries as a result of their quest for *Isakole*. The competition for *Isakole* reconfigured the age-long relations between Idanre and Akure people beyond the period of colonial capitalism.

The boundary contest first occurred in July 1912 after the colonial authorities gave an exclusive license to Miller Brothers, a prominent

11 S Berry, *No condition is permanent: The social dynamics of agrarian change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); S Berry, *Cocoa, custom and socio-economic change in rural western Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); S Berry, "The concept of innovation and the history of cocoa farming in Western Nigeria", *Journal of African History* 15 (3), 1974; See, T Falola, "Neighbours at war: Conflict over boundaries in colonial Nigeria", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 19, 2010, pp. 1-22; T Falola (ed.), *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or development?* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987); S Aderinto, "Where is the boundary? Cocoa conflict, land tenure and politics in western Nigeria, 1890s -1960", *Journal of Social History* 47, 2013, pp. 176-195.

European Company that operated around Eastern Yorubaland, to extract large timber for commercial purposes from the region and compensate the concerned traditional authorities in the form of *Isakole* (royalties). Based on the Company's previous experiences in Ondo, Odigbo, and Ikale areas, Idanre and Akure were requested to indicate their boundaries to determine the amount of *Isakole* to be paid by Miller Brothers to the appropriate traditional authorities. Surprisingly, this marked the genesis of a future land imbroglio between Idanre and Akure. Akure demanded that all *Isakole* offered by Miller Brothers be paid exclusively to the Deji.¹² This prompted the District Commissioner for Ondo, Akure, and Idanre to summon a meeting that was attended by representatives of the two communities at Alade in September 1912. The two parties alluded to the fact that no boundary existed between Idanre and Akure for centuries. The Deji of Akure informed the Commissioner that his people planted various crops up to the interior of Idanreland in the pre-colonial era. At the same time, the Owa of Idanre also noted that Idanre farmers owned many farms east side of Idanre-Akure road as far as Ofosu River in Akureland.¹³ Based on these affirmations, the Commissioner pacified the two communities and proposed that there should be a boundary between them and that royalties from the exploitation of forest resources be shared proportionately between the Deji of Akure and Owa of Idanre.

Things went smoothly until there was another eruption in 1918 after Idanre chiefs wrote to the colonial authorities that an Akure man was farming on Idanreland without paying *Isakole* to the Owa of Idanre. On the invitation of the Commissioner, the "defaulter" asserted that the Deji of Akure permitted him to farm in the area and bring *Isakole* to him in Akure. On receiving a copy of the petition, the Resident commissioner for Ondo Province instructed the Deji of Akure to expel the man from the land in question.¹⁴ The Deji clandestinely kowtowed, but the situation did not augur with the Akure people, who saw it as an insult to the Deji of Akure. Consequently, Akure people protested and insisted that the land in question belonged to Akure and that Idanre were only allowed to cultivate and develop the area in the interest of Akure.¹⁵ This was the precursor to protracted and intractable land conflicts between the two communities. The ensuing conflicts resulted in several litigations and arbitrations.

The paper offers a new perspective relating to the dominant perspectives in the literature, namely agricultural land and boundary disputes,

12 Deji is the title of the (Oba) in Akure, while Owa is the title of the Oba in Idanre.

13 O Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria: A geographic analysis* (Ile Ife: University of Ife Press, 1975), p. 85.

14 NAI, "Isakole Bye Laws Ondo Province" Ondo Prof, File 0327/2/1, 1926.

15 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 81.

land scarcity, and colonial taxation. The paper is divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction, followed by a brief overview of existing works on *Isakole*, cocoa, and land conflict. The third section examines the pre-colonial geographical and ecological features of Idanre and Akure, followed by the fourth part, which focuses on the origin and causes of boundary disputes and land conflicts between Idanre and Akure during the colonial era. The fifth section is the conclusion.

2. ISAKOLE, COCOA, AND LAND CONFLICT

A lot has been written about various types of ground rents/agricultural tributes in relation to cocoa and land conflict in the African history literature.¹⁶ But no major study has established that *Isakole* was the major source of land conflicts in Yorubaland. In her popular article, "Debating Land Question in Africa", Sara Berry argues that colonial land policy created intense competition over land accumulation, causing farmers and chiefs to fight over agricultural land. Even though this had a debilitating impact on social relations and communal living among Yoruba farmers, Berry did not address the nexus between cocoa, *Isakole*, and land crises in the cocoa-producing areas she covered, as this is a large subject---probably requiring separate case studies. In another study conducted in Abikini and Abulekeji in Ile-Ife, titled: *Fathers work for their sons*, Berry asserts that women's access to the necessary relations of production as well as opportunities for independent accumulation were circumscribed by their husband's fortune.¹⁷ This seems to be the true reality of women concerning land ownership and the cultivation of cocoa in colonial Idanre and Akure.

16 H Bernstein and C Bonnie (eds.), *Contradictions of accumulation in Africa* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985); S Berry, "Supply response reconsidered: Cocoa in Western Nigeria, 1909-44", *Journal of Development Studies* 1 (13), 1974, p.14-17; S Berry, Property rights and rural resource management: The case of tree crops in West Africa, *Cahier des Sciences Humaines* 24 (1), 1988, pp 3-17; S Berry, Social institutions and access to resources in African agriculture, *Africa* 59, 1974, p. 41-55; G Bonneh, The impact of cocoa cultivation on the traditional land tenure system of the Akan of Ghana, *Ghana Journal of Sociology* 6 (1), 1970, p. 43-60; CEF Beer, *The politics of peasant groups in western Nigeria* (Ibadan:Ibadan University Press, 1976); T Falola, "Neighbours at war: Conflict over boundaries in colonial Nigeria", *Journal of African History* 15 (3), 1974, pp. 1-22; A Afolabi, "The colonial taxation policy among Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria and its implications for socio-economic development"; T Bello and MI Mitchell, "The political economy of cocoa in Nigeria: A history of conflict or cooperation.;" S Famoriyo, Some problems of customary land tenure system in Nigeria, *Land Reform, Land Settlement and Cooperatives* 2 (1), 1973, p.11; PC Lloyd, *Yoruba land law*, (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1962); Aderinto, "Where is the boundary?", pp. 176-195.

17 S Berry, *Fathers work for their sons: accumulation, mobility and class formation in an extended Yoruba community* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1985), p 28.

Following the example of Polly Hill in making an economic study of cocoa farmers, using anthropological methods, Berry notes in her book entitled *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Changes in Rural Western Nigeria* that cocoa wealth or (wealth derived from cocoa) made a significant social transformation of Yorubaland in the first half of the twentieth century possible. Indeed, that transformation occurred in terms of capital accumulation and disputes over agricultural land.¹⁸ Berry's most striking polemic in *Fathers work for their sons* is grounded on the analysis of the means of accumulation derived from agricultural surplus and its implication on the development of the relations of production in Western Nigeria. She sees accumulation as the optimum utilisation of resources to sustain the conditions of production and logic of capital. She deploys accumulation interchangeably with economic change as well as material conditions for cultural norms and mobility for class formation, differentiation, and political mobilisation. What is more, Berry tells the story of the spread of cocoa production as a process of capital formation involving the creation of a novel rural export sector through migration, risk, and investment in land. She notes that Yoruba farmers were able to accumulate capital and were encouraged to take the risk of engaging in cocoa farming. However, investment in the cocoa business depended not only on gross receipts but on costs, notably direct labour costs, given that hired labour was used from the outset of cocoa farming.

Capital formation, according to Berry, occurred due to the ability of the Yorubas to take complex risks in commercial agriculture, in addition to the colonial policy framework and application of the vent-for-surplus theory. She argues firmly that the vent-for-surplus theory is broadly correct concerning land surplus but incorrect in assuming that labour was underutilised and could be mobilised without risk or cost. Berry further argues that cocoa farmers in Nigeria are capitalists in their dealings with land and with the market, but not in their relations with labour. She, therefore, notes that economic inequality has not been associated with a clear-cut discussion of rural society into self-perpetuating socio-economic classes.¹⁹ However, her data only comes from the cocoa-growing areas such as Ondo, Ife and Ibadan cocoa farms. By emphasising the conditions of employment of the labour force in line with other forces of production, Berry, contrary to the position of Olatunbosun, Onimode Ihonvbere and Falola, Berry established that the consolidation of the state's power over the means of production in agriculture (particularly land) did not result to the conflicts between different groups of people.²⁰ From

18 Berry, *Cocoa, custom, and socio-economic change in rural Western Nigeria*.

19 Berry, *Cocoa, custom and socio-economic change*, p. 27.

20 T Falola and J Ihonvbere, "The illusion of economic development". In: T Falola (ed.) *Britain and Nigeria: exploitation or development* (London: Zed Books Ltd), 1987, p. 45; JO Ahazuem

Berry's viewpoint, the development of colonial capitalism---especially land policies, contributed to the development of an inclusive agricultural production pattern that aided capital formation for the Yoruba generally.

Saheed Aderinto's "Where is the boundary? Cocoa conflict, land tenure, and politics in Western Nigeria, the 1890s-1960" adds a unique insight into the proliferating literature not only on boundary politics but also on land tenure and the colonial economy in Yorubaland.²¹ Aderinto's work reveals much against the established literature especially, how agricultural commodities like Cocoa interplayed with other variables creating "pipelines for conflict", which transformed the socio-cultural and economic landscape between the Ibadan and the Ijebu farmers. Of particular significance is how the value of cocoa added a new dimension to land ownership and tenure. For example, while in Ibadan and Ijebu in precolonial times, people paid *Isakole* mostly in agricultural produce as gratitude for the opportunity and recognition of "overlordship", the colonial interest in cocoa as a cash crop and the attendant benefits in cultivating the crop brought to the fore changes in the importance of private property, land and land ownership.²² Unsurprisingly, this landscape brought the Ibadan and Ijebu into an interethnic conflict which even degenerated into interprovincial boundary conflicts during this period.

Toyin Falola's "Neighbours at war: Conflicts over boundaries in colonial Nigeria" discusses how colonialism reshaped the boundary and land tenure system in Nigeria often leading to inter-community, inter-ethnic and even inter-provincial conflicts during this period.²³ From conflict over boundaries, conflicts over frontier land to the conflicts over the creation of new administrative units, Falola accurately reveals the underlying causes of land disputes between individuals and communities in colonial Nigeria. The commercialisation of land or the increase in the value of land had reverberating effects on communal relations and destroyed established norms, leading to claims and counterclaims mostly tied to the land and its embedded resources. Interestingly, as Falola shows that the loss of land due to boundary delimitation often transformed former landowners into tenants

and T Falola, "Production for the metropolis: Agriculture and forest products". In: T Falola (ed.) *Britain and Nigeria* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987); See also, D Olatunbosun, *The role of commodity marketing boards in agricultural development* (Ibadan: NISER, 1978); D Olatunbosun, *Agricultural investment strategy in Nigeria* (Ibadan: NISER, 1969); D Olatunbosun *Export crop in Nigeria's economic development* (Ibadan: NISER, 1972); D Olatunbosun, *Nigeria's neglected rural majority* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975).

21 Aderinto, "Where is the boundary?"

22 T Falola, "The political economy of a pre-colonial African state". In: T Falola and R Law, *Warfare and diplomacy in precolonial Nigeria: Essays in honor of Robert Smith* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Press, 1992), p. 50. Quoted in Aderinto, "Where is the boundary?", p. 181.

23 Falola, "Neighbours at war".

that had to pay *Isakole*, which for some was demeaning; this consequently fostered their desire to enter into conflict for socio-economic survival.

Taiwo Bello and Mathew Mitchell's "Political economy of cocoa in Nigeria: A history of conflict or cooperation?" is a comparative analysis of indigenous and migrant conflicts in Ife- Modakeke in Southwest Nigeria and the Ivorian cocoa regions. Bello and Mitchell demonstrate that the pre-colonial and colonial land-tenure arrangements eased migrant cocoa farmers into indigenous host communities, but the introduction of Nigeria's Land Use Act of 1978 upended the status quo.²⁴ The transfer of land ownership from local authorities to the Nigerian State generated disputes and conflicts over agricultural lands in cocoa farms within Ife and Modakeke, as migrants' allegiance shifted away from the local chiefs to governments institutions which also altered the pecuniary and material benefits the chiefs derived from *Isakole*. The Land Use Act did not only impact negatively on the political and economic powers of the indigenous authorities; it created hostilities between them and the migrants they hosted in their agrarian communities.²⁵ While the States in Nigeria distributed land proportionately between migrants and indigenes for the expansion of cocoa cultivation and export, in Ivory Coast, Bello and Mitchell show that the government succeeded in using land for political enrichment and ethnic benefits, which also led to conflicts between landlords and migrants in the cocoa-producing regions. In spite of several inherent weaknesses in the Nigerian Land Use Act, it continues to govern land tenure in Nigeria's cocoa regions despite increasing conflicts.²⁶

Abiodun Afolabi's "The colonial taxation policy among Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria and its implications for socio-economic development"²⁷ examines British colonialism through her taxation policies in Nigeria. His work, based on substantial archival sources, reveals that this policy was intrinsically tied to the extractive character of the colonial economy with an incidental rather than deliberate impact on the socio-economic development of Southwestern Nigeria. What is particularly interesting about the British colonial Tax policy is that it promoted deliberate efforts by the colonial government in sponsoring the successful cultivation of cash crops in the area. This, in turn, had serious implications for the land tenure system. Indeed, one could argue that the Tax demands placed on crops (like cocoa) not only increased the desire to produce more and ensure some profits after tax but also added new pressures on the value of land for the cultivation of cash crops.

24 Bello and Mitchell, "The political economy of cocoa in Nigeria", pp. 71-75.

25 Bello and Mitchell, "The political economy of cocoa in Nigeria", pp. 84-85.

26 Bello and Mitchell, "The political economy of cocoa in Nigeria", pp. 84-85.

27 Afolabi, "The colonial taxation policy", pp. 63-92.

Abimbola Adesoji's "Colonialism and intercommunity relations: The Ifon-Ilobu example"²⁸ adds to the literature on the sources for inter-community conflict during the colonial period using Ifon-Ilobu communities as a case study. Adesoji argues, much like the others, that colonialism brought new dynamics to the question of land ownership in the area. As he reveals, "two major issues characterised Ifon-Ilobu relations during the colonial period: land ownership, control, and usage, and the exercise of authority over chieftaincy matters particularly the powers and the limitation of parties concerned. These two factors combined to engender disharmony between Ifon and Ilobu".²⁹ He argues, much like Aderinto, that the pre-colonial land tenure system in the area was one whose underlying principle was anchored on community and trust. The colonial administration's delimitation of land and the attendant creation of boundaries destroyed this ideal situation, thus becoming a source for conflict between groups during this period. As the author notes, while the conflict between both groups did not originate during the colonial period – there were, in fact, pre-colonial demands for land due to population pressures - inconsistent policies of the British administration and a host of other factors played a huge role in escalating it.

The foregoing review clearly shows that an engagement with the intersections of *isakole* (rents/tributes), cocoa and land conflict in Yorubaland is lacking in existing Africanist literature. It is common knowledge that the majority of the inter-tribal and ethno-communal conflicts in the colonial and post-colonial African social formations were caused by intense jostling for agricultural land and politics of agricultural commodity trade; what is less obvious is the degree to which the political economy of *Isakole* and colonial capitalism exacerbated the problem.

3. PRE-COLONIAL BOUNDARIES AND DELIMITATION IN IDANRE AND AKURE

Idanre occupies the mountainous landmass in the present-day Ondo state in Nigeria. It was formerly categorised under Idanre/Ifedore Local Government Area, with headquarters at Owena.³⁰ Idanre town is located in the present-day Ondo State in Nigeria, about 15 kilometres from Akure. The Ondo State Airport is about an hour's drive from the Idanre Hills. Idanre was traditionally known as *Ufeke* (Ife Oke) in the pre-colonial period. The hills which surround the town housed the people for many centuries until the colonial conquest

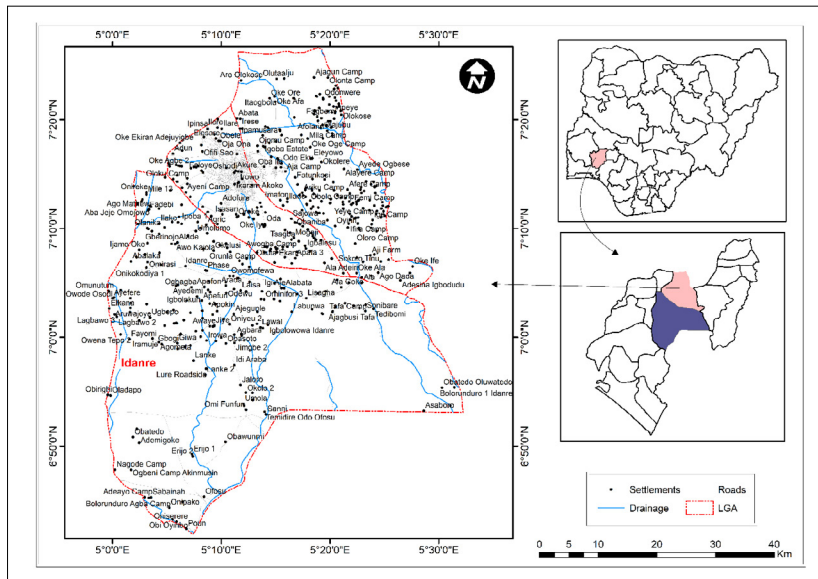
28 A Adesoji, "Colonialism and intercommunity relations: The Ifon-Ilobu example", *History in Africa* 32, 2005, pp. 1-19.

29 Adesoji, "Colonialism and intercommunity relations", p. 7.

30 SA Akintan, *Ufeke: A history of Idanre from the earliest times* (Ibadan: John Archers Press, 2014), p. 22.

in the late nineteenth century when they migrated from the top of the hills to the present areas downhill. Idanre lies between Akure and Ondo to the southwest and northeast, respectively. Alade Idanre, a satellite town founded by a renegade prince in 1928, is about three kilometres from Odode, the main town. Two different roads lead to Idanre from Ondo and Akure through Alade. They are within a distance of 34 and 22 kilometres to Odode, the main town.³¹ Idanre eastern neighbours are the Benin people through the Ofosu River, which is presently the boundary between Ondo and Edo States. To its west is Ondo, with demarcations at Owena River. To the south are indigenes of Siluko, which lay within Delta and Edo States respectively, and Ikale, also of Ondo State. Akure is, however, Idanre's closest neighbour to the north. (see map 1). From Onishere, an Idanre Forest Reserve to Akure, Idanre's boundary is about 42 miles. The boundary with Owena is about 37 miles from Owena to Ala.³² Idanre boundary with the Ikale's is about 46 close to Benin-Lagos Express Road after Ofosu River beyond Onishere.³³

Map: showing Akure and Idanre boundary.



Source: SK Udofia, Remote sensing and GIS Lab (Department of Geography University of Lagos, 2021).

31 NAI, CSO, 20, File No 234/19, "On Production of Cocoa For Export", 1940.

32 NAI, File 4/1/06/071946, Extracted from the Nigerian *Daily Times*, Lagos.

33 FO Ajiola, The Economy of Idanre, 1900-1960 (MA, University of Ibadan, 2012), p. 18.

The land in the pre-colonial Idanre was a collective property of the entire indigenes.³⁴ Land ownership in Idanre was divided into two types: (a) Townland for building purposes (b) Country land for farming purposes.³⁵ Townlands were equitably allocated to indigenous members of families by the Owa of Idanre, who in theory owned all the lands.³⁶ Land given to an individual, household or family by the Owa became the property of the recipient and was hereditary.³⁷ Townlands were also allocated to other non-indigenous families or strangers who had been integrated and acculturated into the community.³⁸ However, occupied land belonging to an individual or family could be revoked and reassigned to another person for optimum utilisation. In most cases, an appeal could be made to reclaim the land after several sanctions.³⁹ The commercialisation of land from one individual to another was illegal, but a transfer could be made to a temporary user subject to the approval of the Owa of Idanre.⁴⁰ However, an occupied land with an immovable property belonged to the owner of the property, although the property was non-transferable. The renting of town land for residential purposes was not permitted in Idanre. Only the Owa had the power to allocate land to users.⁴¹ Landlord-tenants interaction was minimal because ownership of houses was vested in the family and not in individuals. This explains why the mortgage system was not prevalent.⁴² Agricultural land was cultivated through rotation or shifting cultivation. Due to the traditional pattern of farming, only a few acres were given to an individual user.⁴³ The mode of allocation was through the family unit. This made it impossible for an individual or group to acquire large estates in the community.⁴⁴ In effect, the Owa was the head of a large family, and the disposal of all lands was in his hands.⁴⁵ With the advent of colonial rule, "townland" was segmented into two parts: (a) land for food crops, such as

34 NAI, Intelligence Report, "Idanre Forest Reserve--Area O.A 5", Ondo Div, File, No178, 1928. See also Afolabi, "Journey to Agricultural Work in Yorubaland", pp. 85-86.

35 Interview: Author with O Awosoye, Atoshin Idanre, 26 December 2012.

36 Interview: Author with Chief AO Lijofi, Odode Idanre, 26 December 2012.

37 NAI, Intelligence Report, "Idanre Forest Reserve Area O.A 5".

38 NAI, Intelligence Report, "Idanre Forest Reserve Area O.A 5".

39 Interview: Author with PM Akinduro, Odode Idanre, 3 August 2014.

40 NAI, Intelligence Report on Idanre Compiled by Mr HL Wood-Price, File 236/08/119, 1921.

41 Interview: Author with High Chief SA Akintan, Odode Idanre 11 July 2014.

42 NAI, File4/1/06/071946, Extracted from the Nigerian Daily Times Lagos.

43 WB Morgan, "Some comments on shifting cultivation in Africa", *Research Notes* 2 (9), 1957, p. 1; See also WB Morgan, "Agriculture in Southern Nigeria (excluding the Cameroon)", *Economic Geography* 35, 1959, pp. 138-150.

44 AO Olutayo, Development of underdevelopment: Rural economy of colonial south-western Nigeria (PhD, University of Ibadan, 1991), p. 61.

45 NAI, "appendix No 8/135/1917", Certified copy of Bovel Jones's report on Idanre, signed in the presence of D.A Rowe (Acting: Col & Surveyor to H Alfred Willoughby, the Assistant superintendent of L.C, p. 11.

yam, plantain, corn, among others, and (b) land for cultivation of permanent crops such as kola nut, cocoa and rubber.⁴⁶ A member of the community living in another quarter or village, such as Alade, Atoshin or Odode in Idanre, was allowed to use land outside his village. To illustrate, a farmer from the Irowo quarter was eligible to obtain farmland in the Isalu quarter, while a farmer from the Idale quarter could request land in Aweba, Abababubu or Onisere villages, through the approval of the Owa (Oba) of Idanreland.⁴⁷

Akure was also one of the largest towns in the colonial Ondo Province. Akure's proximity to Oshogbo and Benin city attracted large migrants to the town in the colonial period.⁴⁸ The Akure district in the colonial period covered an area of 402 square miles, with a population of 28 611, which included 9137 adult males, 10 740 adult females and 8734 children. The pre-colonial and colonial Akure kingdom was situated in the southern parts of the Ekiti Division. It was bordered on the North by the Ikare, Owo and Ifon Villages in Owo Division.⁴⁹ Akure's Southern boundary with Benin city was along the east bank from the Ogbese River, near Igbatoro and Omifunfun villages on the Ofosu River.⁵⁰ The northern part of Akure around Ogbolu and Ijare was severely hilly and studded with large granite formations. The regions West and South of Ilesha—Akure to Owo were thick forests. The British colonial land-use policies paved the way for the emergence of large cocoa plantations and farms since the beginning of the twentieth century. Akure was blessed with Mahogany and Iroko trees. The land law in Akure was the same with Idanre, Ile-Oluji and Ondo. The Akure was one of the 16 districts in the Ekiti Division and Native Administration of the Ondo Province. The Deji of Akure occupied an important space in the business of colonial administration in Ondo Province, arguably, given that Akure was the administrative seat of Ondo Province.⁵¹ Like Idanre, Akure also had innumerable cocoa farm hamlets and migrant settlements, "Egure". Some inhabitants of the hamlets were also principal landowners in the main town. Besides these, there were about 16 villages in the metropolis which were subject to the Deji (Oba). These included Ipasha, Ilere, Eti, Aiye, Odudu, Oshinigbo, Osi, Ilore, Udope, Ugbomo, Ishafrin, Oda, Igbatoro, Isikan, Iloso and Aule. There were also many sub-villages which were their respective Baale and Oloja. These included Ibule, Ipogun, Ikota, Ilara, Ijare, Obo, Ero, Isharun, Igbara and Oke.⁵² The land was also distributed through the family

46 Interview: Author with OF Arojaye, Akure, 23 July 2014.

47 NAI, File ONDIV 178/9/17, "Intelligence report on Idanre", by Bovel Jones, 1934, p. 21.

48 NAI, CSO 2613 A covering report to an Intelligence Report on Akure District of the Ekiti Division.

49 NAI, COS 2614, Intelligence report on Akure District- Ekiti Division Ondo Province.

50 NAI, COS 2614, Intelligence report on Akure District- Ekiti Division Ondo Province, p 3.

51 NAI, COS 201.8, Ekiti Division, Intelligence Reports—Akure District.

52 NAI, COS 202.8.

units and quarters. The family head was the most senior title-holder in the family and quarter. The quarters were the most functional method of social groupings in Akure. The village unit was another form of social organisation. Like Idanre, all lands were under the custody of the Deji, who distributed it to every member of the community based on need through the various quarters and family heads. These traditional patterns of social organisations were dismantled with the introduction of British colonial rule towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³

4. BOUNDARY DISPUTES AND LAND CONFLICTS: IDANRE VS AKURE

In 1912, the Owa of Idanre and the Deji of Akure signed an agreement with Messrs Kirstein, a colonial surveyor, on their boundary lines in the Forest Reserve, which the colonial authorities had marked as “Area 147” for timber extraction. The royalties (*Isakole*) that accrued were shared proportionately between the two Chiefs—the Deji of Akure and the Owa of Idanre. The two traditional authorities had attested that their people could farm freely on any land situated on the Akure–Idanre boundaries. They had informed the colonial government that farmers from both sides were free to cultivate on any land within their vicinity before the development of cocoa farming in the early 1900s. In a colonial record dated September 19, 1912, Major S.H Wood, the District Commissioner for Ondo Division, had demonstrated in his report to the Colonial Office that “in the pre-colonial period, Idanre people had farms on the East side of the Idanre–Akure road along Ofosu River to Akureland while the Akure people also farmed in Idanreland for centuries”. Major Wood also documented that “the Deji (Oba) of Akure had once told him that he had never heard of a boundary between Akure and Idanre and that the Deji’s Mother was an Idanre woman”.⁵⁴ Indeed, Akure has a long history with the Idanre people, and the two communities had related closely for centuries without any boundaries between them.⁵⁵ Again, quoting Wood, the Owa’s message to the Sashere, an Akure High Chief stated that, “I, the Owa of Idanre say that the Deji’s Mother was an Idanre woman—that the Owa is the owner of all the

53 NAI, No 110/510/13/11/1952, From the Divisional Officer to the District Officer Ondo Division, “Registration–Alade”.

54 NAI, Telegram 23, No 91/3/40, Land Registry Akure to the Native Authority Idanre, “Idanre Farmers on Akure Land”, December 1952.

55 NAI, Intelligence Report on Idanre, Compiled by Bovel Jones. Ondo Div, File-- No72/11, 1934.

55 NAI, “Boundary Dispute Akure Local Government vs Idanre Local Government”, Memorandum Submitted on Behalf of the Owa and Idanre Community to the Ondo State Boundary Technical Committee of Ondo State Boundary Commission, December 1995.

land from Idanre to Akure and the Deji is the owner of the land from Akure to Idanre—that there never was any boundary—that the land was used jointly”.⁵⁶

However, with the massive expansion of cocoa plantations and capital formations that occurred in southwestern Nigeria, prospective and established farmers from Idanre and Akure began to seek land to reinvest or expand their cocoa plantations. The chiefs also wanted to use the opportunity to increase the *Isakole* entitled to them by giving agricultural lands to indigenous and migrant farmers within and without their territories.⁵⁷ By 1926, there had been a great expansion of cocoa farms and hamlets in the villages of Ao, Idesi, Iriji, Odo, Aso and Amu, close to Akure on the Idanre-Akure road. The majority of the farmers and labourers in these villages were migrants from other Yoruba towns. Many of them paid *Isakole* and taxes to Idanre Native Authority. When Akure Native Authority realised that the farmers were adamant about paying *Isakole* to Idanre, the Deji and his people staged a major protest to the Resident Commissioner, Ondo Province, to call attention to the “colonisation” of their villages by Idanre. The Deji asserted that Ao, Idesi, Iriji, Odo, Aso were remnants of Akure villages decimated and abandoned due to Benin’s invasion of Akure in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The Deji also claimed other Akure villages ransacked by Benin in the 19th century but not abandoned, including Oto and Amu. When it seemed that the colonial authorities were not addressing the situation to the satisfaction of the Akure people, the Deji led another protest on 18 January 1927. To attract the sympathy of the colonial government, the Deji claimed that, “the Idanre farmers were extending their farms to Akure’s main town. To worsen the problem, the Deji further claimed that their territory was bordered on the west by the Owena River, on the south by the River Ofosu and Benin Province, on the east by the River Ogbese and on the north by Igbara-odo and Ikere. The Akure people went further to secure the alliance of Owo people to attest that their land stretched up to the left bank of River Owena extending eastwards to their boundaries with Owo and Benin.”⁵⁹ This new claim petition impelled the colonial government to delegate two Assistant District Officers to inspect the disputed area on 12 February 1927. When the colonial delegates visited Idanre to enquire from the people, it was found that “Idanre made three different claims regarding the location of their boundary with Akure”.⁶⁰ The first point was at Iloro (about two kilometres from Akure); the second point was around Adofure, some six kilometres from

56 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 81.

57 NAI, Idanre Local Government—Office of the Executive Chairman, Exhibit P to Suit W/40/1939, presented by Agbo Akintan on Behalf of the Owa and Idanre Community to the Ondo State Boundary Technical Committee of Ondo State Boundary Commission, 1998.

58 Interview: Author with Akintan.

59 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 48.

60 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 48.

Akure, while the third point was close to Akinoro's farm, which was about eight kilometres from Akure. Idanre argued that they had maintained the roads and developed the adjoining villages for over a century. But the Akure refuted the claims and insisted that the boundary transcended the Idanre-Akure road at Alade, which they claimed was founded by one Deji and an influential woman named Olokoju. This claim was repudiated by the colonial officials on the ground that Alade had been a popular market credited to the Idanre for centuries before it even developed into a major settlement in the early 1920s.⁶¹ In assessing the claims, the investigators observed that, "villages to the south of Akinoro's farm were inhabited by Idanre farmers who attended Idanre Native Court, while villages to the north were inhabited by Akures who attended Akure Native Court. They noted that construction work on the new road from Alade to Akure had been carried out as far as Akinoro's farm by Idanres and that the road ceased abruptly there".⁶²

Consequently, the investigators recommended that the boundary be fixed from the Owena River to the Ogbese River, running east to west and crossing the Idanre-Akure road in the vicinity of Akinoro's farm.⁶³ The Deji of Akure and his people frowned at the recommendation and accused the colonial officials of bias. After considering the reports, the government affirmed that there existed a direct route from Idanre to Owo, which was made by the Idanre contrary to the claim made by Akure. In effect, since a large area to the north of the road was cultivated by the Idanre people, a defined boundary was ordered to be marked. Therefore, the government suggested a boundary from the Owena River to the Aponmu on the Ondo-Akure road and from the Aponmu River on the Ondo Akure road by a line passing through Akinoro's farm and ending at the Ogbese River.⁶⁴ The Deji of Akure bluntly opposed the boundary recommendation and instituted a court case against the Owa of Idanre. While the Deji was preoccupied with the litigation, several conflicts broke out in the cocoa farms between Idanre and Akure farmers resulting in many deaths and the destruction of large cocoa farms.⁶⁵ The problem was temporarily resolved in favour of Akure by a court judgement pronounced in 1943. In his pronouncement, the judge remarked that, "the Northern boundary of Idanre was from Aiyede through Alade Market to the eastern boundary of Idanreland".⁶⁶ The judge rejected the claim of the Owa of Idanre that his

61 NAI, "Area A.O.5, Idanre Forest Reserves", Ondo Prof, File No. 3734 of 5/9, 1928. N.A.I CSO,20, "On Production of Cocoa for Export, File No 234/19, 1940. NAI, CSO 1/1/50/7 Annual Report Ondo Province, Volume 1, 1950.

62 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 48-49.

63 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 81.

64 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 81.

65 Interview: Author with Akintan.

66 Morgan, "Agriculture in southern Nigeria", pp. 138 – 150.

territory extended beyond the Akure-Ofosu-Usehin road which has for many years been recognised as Akure road. The northern boundary of Idanre was therefore placed at Gbalegi market, while the Northern boundary line was the Akure-Ofosu-Usehin road.⁶⁷

Given the court's verdict, the Akures demanded that all villages and farmsteads in the area should be administered by the Akure Native Authority, and taxes collected from Akure villages in the disputed areas by the Idanre Native Authority from 1934 onwards should be paid back to Akure Native Authority. Akure also requested that Atoshin Idanre should be considered an Akure village and that taxes paid by the inhabitants to the Idanre Native Authority should be paid instead to the Akure Native Authority.⁶⁸ Furthermore, *Isakole* from cocoa and timber paid to Idanre since 1914 should be refunded to Akure Native Authority. Akure decided to take up the maintenance of the road from Alade to Owena with effect from the date of the judgment and resolved that all existing and new Idanre villages on the Ofosu road should be administered by Akure. Akure further demanded that Idanre farmers within the disputed area should not extend their existing farms or clear new sites for farming purposes without the written permission of the Deji and his Council.⁶⁹ While appealing the case, on the one hand, the Idanre chiefs rebuked the Deji and reminded colonial authorities that the Alade community was founded by some Idanre men with the permission of the Owa of Idanre in the 1920s.⁷⁰

Despite the court ruling, the colonial government did not implement the changes urgently to avoid altering the colonial administrative boundaries between the two communities. No doubt, colonial land management affected the relations between Idanre and Akure, but the rising value of *Isakole* in the two Yoruba communities exacerbated the problem. The conflict led to a break of their historical and cultural relations. Colonial tax and rent schemes in the disputed areas created schisms between Idanre and Akure local authorities.⁷¹ The compulsory land registration policy introduced by the government made the chiefs compete to boost their revenue generation capacities for the colonial treasury and their respective Obas. Apart from 7/6d (5 shillings tax), which a cocoa farmer paid to the colonial treasury through the chiefs in his domain, he also gave one-tenth of his proceeds to the Oba during the harvest of his cocoa.⁷² The Chiefs remitted the taxes to the colonial treasury and took

67 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 50.

68 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*, p. 83.

69 FO Ajiola, Cocoa production and rural development in Idanre, southwest Nigeria, 1900-1996 (PhD, University of Ibadan, 2021), p. 204.

70 Interview: Author with Akintan.

71 Interview: Author with D Ayorinde, Akure, 2 March 2014. See also, D Larry, "Class formation in the swollen African state", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25 (4), 1987, p. 491.

72 Interview: Author with Akintan.

the *Isakole* to their respective Oba. A different system of taxation emerged in 1932 under the Colonial Land Registry Department in Idanre and Akure Districts. The village heads were responsible for the collection of taxes under the Native Authorities. The village heads collected taxes on land and cocoa trees from the farmers and remitted them to the Native Treasury through the Native Authorities.⁷³ To encourage the Chiefs, the colonial authorities increased the wages of the treasury officials. For instance, the Owa of Idanre was placed on £200 annually. Other chiefs, notably Lisa chiefs Osolo, Ojomu, and Sashere, were paid £60 and chief Logboshere £30. The Deji of Akure was paid £456 per annum, in addition to the *Isakole* he collected on all Idanre farms at Ogbese, Akiinoro, and Apomu.⁷⁴ By 1935, colonial taxes had become unaffordable for many cocoa farmers who began to boycott the payment. Most farmers preferred to pay only *Isakole* to the chiefs who reciprocate by erasing their debt records. What's more, some chiefs from both sides encouraged their members to expand their farms to increase the *Isakole* accrued to their paramount ruler. This way, the farmers were loyal to the chiefs and paid *Isakole* only to them.⁷⁵ But this soon led to intense conflicts between the Idanre and Akure people.

The problem continued into the 1940s when the issue of allocation of land to strangers increased in the contested areas. The Akure chiefs had put measures in place to ensure that only Akure natives and other migrants cultivating other crops, such as rubber, palm tree, coffee and kola, were exempted from paying *Isakole* since the Idanre were the major cocoa growers in the areas. Akure further ruled that all Idanre farming in the disputed areas should be issued a "Certificate of Consent" by the Akure Native Authority.⁷⁶ Defaulters were sanctioned with their cocoa farms destroyed. But the Idanre farmers insisted that they would pay *Isakole* only to their Native Authority in Idanre to preserve their cocoa plantation and patrimony.⁷⁷ In April 1945, the Deji of Akure submitted another petition to the Provincial office, stating that taxes and tributes paid by the Idanre farmers to their chiefs within the disputed areas be refunded to the Akure Native Authority, given that investigators in 1931 had ceded the disputed lands to the Deji of Akure. The Akure chiefs further requested that Idanre people farming in the disputed areas must pay the following as *Isakole* per head of henceforth:

73 Interview: Author with O Akinade, Alade Idanre, 12 June 2015.

74 NAI, File ONDIV 178/9/17, "Intelligence report on Idanre", by Bovel Jones, August, 1934.

75 NAI, File ONDIV 178/9/17, "Intelligence report on Idanre", by Bovel Jones, August, 1934.

76 NAI, Telegram AK. N.A. 40/120/ 1952, Control of Alienation of Land to Strangers: Idanre Farmers on Akure Land.

77 NAI, Telegram AK. N.A. 40/120/ 1952, Control of Alienation of Land to Strangers: Idanre Farmers on Akure Land.

9d per 100 cocoa trees bearing fruit
 3d per 100 young cocoa trees not bearing fruit
 1/3d per 2 250 yam heaps.

While recognising the authority of the Deji of Akure, the colonial government did not want to alter the administrative boundaries, as it needed an easy and effective administration and smooth collection of taxes.⁷⁸ The Resident Officer further noted that the finances of the Idanre Native Administration should not be wasted by refunding taxes and *Isakole* to the Akure Native Administration. Nevertheless, the Deji of Akure and Council were empowered to collect the *Isakole* and tax from Idanre farmers in the disputed areas.⁷⁹ What mattered to the colonial government was the remittance of revenue to the government coffer.

In 1953, the colonial government technically complied with the court's decision by enforcing migrant farmers in the disputed areas to reapply to the Akure Native Authorities. In October 1953, the problem of tax remittance erupted again in Alade-Idanre. The Owa insisted that his people should register with the Idanre Native Authority whether or not they farmed on Akure land. Sanctions were introduced for defaulters, especially the migrant farmers.⁸⁰ Several farm arrests were made at Alade and Ipoba, and the cocoa farms involved were barricaded. The Idanre Native Administration insisted that all farmers and migrants within Idanre territories should pay *Isakole* to exclusively the Idanre Native Authority. Some rebellious' Idanre farmers' who went to register with Akure NA (Native Authority) were traced and compelled to pay *Isakole* to the Owa of Idanre.⁸¹ To enforce compliance, the Idanre NA employed Tax Clerks strictly supervised by Albert Ibidapo. The clerks were deployed to the contested areas, especially Ipoba and Apomu, to collect taxes for the colonial government and *Isakole* for the Owa of Idanre. They collected 7/6d instead of the usual 5 shillings as an annual fee from the indigenes.⁸² Because many migrant farmers at Ipoba and Sama had subscribed to Akure NA, they complained and reacted to what they described as double taxation. On 26 October 1952, they protested to the Deji of Akure. They told the Deji that, "we the people of Ipoba and Sama have the honour most respectfully to put this report before you. That we paid *Isakole* and our taxes to Akure NA according to your instruction that we must pay to the Akure NA. But the Idanre NA are forcing us to register our farms and to be paying to them.

78 Interview: Author with Ayorinde.

79 Interview: Author with HRH Oba OA Akinbola, Alade Idanre, 2 March 2014.

80 NAI, File No 110/491, Divisional Office, Ondo Division, 1952, p. 36.

81 NAI, Telegram Akure, 6, No AK.N.A. 40/139, Native Administration Office Akure, 21 October 1952.

82 NAI, Telegram: Akure 23, File No 40/230/ 1952, from Land Registry Akure to The District Officer, Ondo Division "Idanre Settlers on Akure Land".

Idanre people have arrested two of our brethren and imposed an additional two pounds as a sanction for defaulting".⁸³

The Akure NA took the matter to the colonial government. On 5 November 1952, the government delegated some local officials, notably James Olanrewaju and James Falusi, with two court clerks, namely Josiah Ayodele and Issaih Olorunsola, to spy on Idanre farms on Akure land and invite those who had registered their cocoa farms with Idanre.⁸⁴ The District Officer further assigned some members of Akure NA and Constables to take a census of all Idanre people farming on Akure land in Apomu, Ipoba and Aiyetoro.⁸⁵ The Owa of Idanre reacted by considering such measures inimical to the previous resolution of the Joint Land Committee that impelled farmers to pay their taxes and *Isakole* to their local NA.⁸⁶ With the backing of the District Officer, the Akure NA subsequently forcefully collected *Isakole* from Idanre farmers in the disputed areas. This brought about severe tension, which also claimed many lives on both sides throughout 1953. It was exacerbated when Chief Odofin Aladenola led a group of Idanre farmers at Odode to the Provincial Office. The group clashed with members of the Akure NA with many injuries and casualties on both sides.⁸⁷ The Owa of Idanre, however, continued to write to the colonial authorities to complain about how some Akure, including Urhobo migrants, were allocated lands in "Idanre" to produce palm oil and palm kernel. He produced the agreements signed between them and Chief Sashere Ajari and Chief Oshodi of Akure, who authorised them as evidence. By the treaties, the Urhobo group was obliged to give ten gallons of palm oil as *Isakole* annually to the Akure chiefs for allowing them to harvest the palm produce which belonged to Idanre people on their ancestral land. The Idanre people contended that the palm trees did not grow naturally but were planted by their forefathers. Unfortunately for the Idanre, these continued throughout the last decade of colonial capitalism in the area. To worsen the problem, the Agricultural Department evicted many Idanre farmers from their cocoa farms without notice between 1953 and 1954. These farms were therefore placed under the control of the Akure NA.⁸⁸ The result was incessant conflicts and killings in the contested territories throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. As Omolade Adejuyigbe has demonstrated, Idanre and Akure land conflicts are some of the most complex boundary disputes since

83 NAI, "Government decision in the Akure/ Idanre land dispute", File A.N.A.234AKDIV II, 26 October 1951.

84 NAI, Telegram Akure 6, No. AK. NA.40/146/10/1952, "Idanre Settlers on Akure Land".

85 NAI, From Native Office, Idanre the District Officer Ondo Division, No 492/48/22.1953.

86 Interview: Author with High Chief M Atenidegbe, Ojota Idanre, 15 July 2015.

87 NAI, Memo from Chief Odofin Aladenola *et al* to the District Native Authority, District Officer Ondo Division and the Joint Land Committee, March 1953.

88 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*.

the colonial period.⁸⁹ The conflicts claimed the lives of many cocoa farmers, local authorities, labourers, government officials, surveyors and constables.

5. CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussion, I have analysed the genesis and cause(s) of one of the most protracted land conflicts in southwestern Nigeria. The establishment of British colonial capitalism and the massive development of cocoa plantations had a negative impact on the historical and cultural relations among the two ancient Yoruba communities. The paper showed that the desire of the traditional authorities from the two communities to accumulate *Isakole* (rents/tributes) prompted them to discard pre-existing social, economic, political and diplomatic relations they both shared.

In this case, the source of the boundary and land conflicts was not majorly cocoa as Aderinto's study on Ibadan and Ijebu conflicts revealed; neither was it entirely a consequence of scarcity of agricultural land as Berry and others has alluded. This paper rather complements the works of Falola and Bello and Mitchell, which showed with evidence from the Ondo vs Ikale and Ife vs Modakeke land conflicts that the root causes were the political economy of *Isakole*. The quest for sudden wealth derived from *Isakole* paid by members of the agrarian communities caused the Deji of Akure and the Owa of Idanre and their people to adopt petition writings, summons, litigations, arbitrations and physical violence in the colonial period. Colonial mediation mechanisms and processes did not help due to the divisive mediation strategy adopted by the colonial establishments. The colonial authorities were majorly concerned about the unhindered collection of taxes from the agricultural producers for the government. In many instances, the colonial interventions rather pitched the farmers and local authorities against each other. This fuelled inter-tribal acrimonies in the contested spaces. Therefore, the political economy of *Isakole* during the colonial era reconfigured the pattern of social, economic and political interactions between the peoples of Idanre and Akure, a problem that persists to date.

89 Adejuyigbe, *Boundary problems in western Nigeria*. p. 62