

## The Yoruba people's historical overview: Extrication of facts from myth and examining the hierarchy of the Obas classification

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### Abstract

Drawing on existing historical accounts, this article explores the diverse perspectives on the origins of the Yoruba people, tracing them back to the ancestor Oduduwa and the traditional Oba system centred in Ile Ife. Many intricate and complicated traditional stories describe Ile Ife's history, from Oduduwa's era to the modern day. Despite the vast number of traditions and versions, this summary was carefully constructed to add to the existing Yoruba literature of origins and identity, including the Yoruba Obas (Kings) hierarchy and the development of their towns. Although Yoruba scholars have tried to establish the origins of the Yoruba people through rigorous research, they have had limited success. By exploring the variations in origin, identity and developments in Yoruba land, this paper provides fresh perspectives on previously historical-interpreted themes, leading to new conclusions.

**Keywords:** Yorubas; Oduduwa; Ile Ife; Oyo; Oranmiyan; Oba; Hierarchy

### 1. Introduction

The Yorubas are groups of people living in the South-western part of Nigeria. According to Adeoye (2005), the Yoruba people are some of the most widely distributed ethnic groups across many parts of West Africa. Considerable portions of Nigeria, Togo, and Benin are home to these people. Ayandele (2004: p. 121) reports that over 40 million people speak the Yoruba language in Nigeria. The history of early West African populations in modern-day Nigeria is poorly understood, yet the Yoruba's rise may have occurred in the late Stone Age (Aderibigbe, 1976). Archaeological evidence suggests human activity in what is now Nigeria, in areas historically dominated by the Yoruba, dates back as far as 12,000 BC (Adetugbo, 1982).

Yoruba historical preservation efforts notwithstanding, the origins of the Yoruba people are still a source of significant contention and obscurity (Akintoye 2004: p.3). Ancient myths and legends obscure the ancient history of the Yoruba people, revealing their foundational beliefs. Shokpeka (2005) postulates that Vansina (1965) identifies myths by their subject matter and talks about them as those stories that deal with and interpret the relations between the natural and the supernatural and are concerned with all that part of religious life that lies beyond the moral order. Afigbo (1977), in turn, considers myths as explaining historical institutions and development by appealing to nonhistorical factors and forces – such as stories that see the supernatural acting at times through the agency of man, through the agency of the lower animals and at other times even through the agency of inanimate object, as the original and continuing causes of motion in society. In this day and age, one can delve deeper into myths through critical thinking. In this context, this journal will discuss three accounts, one of which will be focused on that best suited to the Origin of the Yorubas based on critical thinking and literature studies.

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- The first is the creation myth, which throws Ile Ife up as the centre of the creation of the universe, thus attracting the expression, Ife o'ndaye, ibi ojumo ti mo wa (meaning: Ife, the point of creation where the day dawns (Akinjogbin, 1980). This goes further in some quarters, with the belief that Oduduwa came down from heaven with a chain. According to various legends, Oduduwa descended from the heavens with a golden chain and a calabash filled with soil (Saunders et al., 2019). This descent marks the beginning of the creation of the Earth. The descent of Oduduwa from heaven was the celebration of the Olojo festival when the Ooni of Ife wore the Aare Crown (Agunlejika, 2018). According to Saunders et al., (2019), Oduduwa's brother is Obatala, the elite of the Orishas, given the task of building the Earth. Their father, Olorun, the God of the Sky, gave him a handful of mud, a chain, a five-toed chicken, and detailed instructions to get him started. But like many builders throughout history, Obatala failed to turn up at the appointed hour. Instead, he had gone to a party. Seeing his chance for fame and glory, cheeky little brother Oduduwa purloined the holy building materials and attempted to create the Earth himself. Advised by a friendly chameleon, he lowered the chain over the edge of heaven, climbed down, and tossed the lump of mud into the primaeval sea. The five-toed chicken hopped into the mud and began scratching it in all directions. Pretty soon, there was a decent landscape of size, and thus, the Earth was born. For an amateur builder, it wasn't bad. Even though it was rough around the edges, and some of the mountains weren't straight, at least the job was done on schedule (*Ibid*). Olorun was so pleased with his son that he promoted him to God of the Earth, while the sodden older brother Obatala sunk into disgrace and was forced to create humanity as punishment. Oduduwa later went down to Earth to rule over the Yoruba people, becoming their first King, ancestral folk hero, and legendary home improvement expert (Saunders et al., 2019).
- A similar version in tandem with the above paragraph narration, according to Ife Community Trust Foundation (2005), is that when Olodumare (God), the Supreme Being and Creator who owns the heaven and universe and whose power spreads around the whole universe decided to create the world. Then Olodumare sent Obatala with 'apo-iba' (bag of wisdom) comprising soil and six-toes cockerel to spread the soil over the marshy land. On the way, Obatala met Ogun, the god of iron, who gave him (Obatala) palm wine to drink. Obatala got drunk and slept. Waiting impatiently, Olodumare sent Oduduwa to inquire about what was happening to Obatala, but Oduduwa met Obatala drunk. He then decided to take over the assignment. He (Oduduwa) carried out the assignment successfully. When Obatala woke up and realised what had happened, he vowed never to drink palm wine again. To this day, all the followers and family members of the Obatala deity do not drink palm wine. Instead, they drink raffia-palm wine (Oguro). After some time, he sent a chameleon to inspect the universe to see if the soil was dry. It was thereafter that Olodumare sent men to the world after Obatala had moulded man and the life given to him by Olodumare (*Ibid*).
- It is thought that the Yoruba originated from the northeastern region of Africa, perhaps Egypt or Mecca. Afigbo (1977) suggests that their origins lie in the constant westward and southward migrations of tribes across the continent before 600 AD. In 1812, Mohammed Belo posited an Arab origin for the Yoruba people (Muhammad, 2013, p. 19), a theory contrasted by Samuel Johnson's later suggestion (circa 1890s) of a Coptic Egyptian or Nubian ancestry. He tried dissociating the Yoruba origins from Arabia and Islam (Johnson, 1921: p. 5; Agai, 2021). According to Johnson (1921, p. 3), even though some Yoruba oral traditions link their origins to the east, often interpreted by those he interviewed as Arabia or Mecca, citing the belief that the Yoruba originated from Lamurudu, a Meccan King, notwithstanding, Johnson still has doubts. He said that the east might have meant Egypt and not Mecca. He further expressed that the Yorubas are not of Arabian Origin: 'The Yorubas are certainly not of the Arabian family, and could not have come from Mecca' (Johnson, 1921: p.5; Agai, 2021). According to Folorunso (2003: p. 87), Arab influence on the Yorubas remains relevant and needs to be studied in depth.

While early Yoruba historical accounts, including oral traditions cited by Belo, Johnson, and Adeyemi, suggest an Arabian origin (Muhammad, 2013: p.11), many contemporary scholars dispute this theory. Notwithstanding, it is therefore not surprising that Geoffrey Parrinder believed the Yoruba culture has some similarities with the customs of the Arab people. He suggested the Yoruba culture might have originated from Arabia and, by inference, the Yoruba people (Parrinder 1951: pp.205-209; Agai, 2021). Similarly, Dr Saburi Oladeni Biobaku believed the Yoruba culture could not be separated wholly from the culture of the Arabians. He is of the view that it does not matter where the Yorubas originated: whether Egypt or Israel or Etruria or Meroe or Yemen, what is significant for him is that the Arabs influenced the Yorubas, that the Yorubas came under Arab influences in their old home, and their subsequent migration was connected with Arab movements' (Biobaku n.d: pp.63-64; Agai, 2021). Yoruba people like Biobaku do not support the theory of the local Origin of the Yorubas. He believed, amongst others, that the Yorubas origins were presumably influenced by some superior races from the ancient world near the Middle East, mainly the Arabs. Therefore, the Arab theory of Yoruba origin could have originated from anywhere within West Africa or outside West Africa, a theory further disseminated by West Africans and non-West Africans.

In contributing to knowledge and analysing the two, a significant problem that this paper seeks to solve is probing deeper into traditions that lack historical validity and acceptability since researchers deal with facts that have rational

interpretations, which, unfortunately, some of the Yoruba traditions of origin do not provide. Notwithstanding, what the researcher believes is more credible is the migration context from the Middle East to the present day Ile Ife in Yoruba land, which is more plausible and critically discussed in this paper. In this context, others may have different opinions, but it is paramount that others' freedom of expression and personal beliefs are respected, even when you disagree with them without rancour. We must share thoughts and experiences positively and respectfully, and try to find common ground or areas of interest. Finding common ground or areas of interest is crucial for fostering positive relationships, improving communication, and achieving collaborative goals in Yoruba land. It involves identifying shared interests, opinions, or experiences that can be built upon to strengthen connections and facilitate better understanding, even when disagreements exist.

## 2. Methodology

Folklore Studies, also known as Folkloristics-traditionally considered oral tales of a society, in more broadly term that refers to all aspects of a culture – beliefs, traditions, norms, behaviours, language, jokes, music, art, foodways, tools, objects, mythology, historical-a systematic collection of people's testimonies about their own experiences and literature review of past and current knowledge including substantive as well as theoretical and methodological contributions of various books and journals guided the researcher in delving deeper into the history of the Yorubas.

## 3. Oduduwa - Progenitor of the Yoruba people

Even though most of history passed down by forebears is shrouded in myths, some critically analysed are much more credible than others. One of these is that of the deity Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba people or race sojourn from the east to Ile Ife. In this context, this journal will not take shape and conclude logically without discussing Oduduwa and his sojourn to Ile Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba people. According to Samuel Johnson, the word Oduduwa might have originated from the phrase *Odu (ti o da iwa)*. The Yoruba phrase *ti o da iwa* signified anything large or big regarding strength. Johnson (1921: p.143) specifically used the term *Odu* to describe a large container or pot. Johnson's connection of the word *Odu* with Oduduwa emphasised the strength and the greatness of Oduduwa as the author of existence. Johnson regarded Oduduwa, according to the Yoruba oral tradition, as the source of creation or a great container. He said the term *Odu* '... implies the great container [*sic!*] the author of existence' (Johnson, 1921: p.143).

Building on Johnson's etymology of "Oduduwa," 21st-century Yoruba historians such as Afolayan continued to link the term to the creator. Similar to Johnson and Lucas, Afolayan (2004: p. 32) posits that Oduduwa is a shortened form of "Odu ti o da iwa," implying that the entity Odu (deity or mystery) created existence, life, and character. Johnson may have been the first 19th-century writer to connect the word "Oduduwa" with Yoruba origins, a connection later expanded upon by authors such as Lucas Olumide and Ellis, building on Johnson's interpretation in *\*The History of the Yorubas\**. Primarily drawing on the accounts of Oyo elders (Johnson 1921: p.3), Johnson documented the Oduduwa oral tradition. However, various Yoruba groups offer varying interpretations of the Oduduwa oral tradition. Johnson (1921: p.4) postulates that Oduduwa came to Ile Ife and met people there, including Agboniregun (Setilu), who was said to be the founder of Ifa worship. Muhammad (2013) argued that Oduduwa met other ethnic groups that lived in the present day Yorubaland when he came, and that it was impossible for Oduduwa to subdue the people he found in Yorubaland. This led to a compromise that resulted in the formation of the 'Yoruba' people. The arrival of Oduduwa and his group is believed to have led to a political conflict, disrupting the existing structure of the 13 communities led by Obatala. This conflict is thought to have been a catalyst for early migrations away from Ife. Some theories suggest that Oduduwa and his followers might have had superior technology or military strength, allowing them to establish dominance and a central government with Oduduwa as the supreme ruler (Jonhson, 2021). In essence, Oduduwa's arrival in Ile-Ife was a significant event that disrupted the existing social and political landscape, establishing a new power structure and influencing the subsequent migrations and development of the Yoruba people.

An example of this is what transpired in Britain in the mid-5th to 7th centuries AD when Anglo-Saxon migrants from what is now northwest Germany, southern Denmark and the Netherlands migrated to the British Isles shortly after the Romans vacated the British Isles; in a way, bringing with them an advance culture. The Anglo-Saxons settled on the British Isle in the mid-5th century and came to dominate the bulk of southern Great Britain. When they arrived in Britain, they met the Britons referred to as Celts. While some integrated with the Anglo-Saxons, others migrated to the present day Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Their language originated as a group of Ingvaenonic (North Sea Germanic), a linguistic grouping within West Germanic, encompassing Old Frisian, Old English, and Old Saxon, as well as their descendants. It's named after the Ingaevones, a Germanic cultural group described in classical antiquity as inhabiting the North Sea coast. (Barrack, 1978). languages spoken by the settlers in England and southern and eastern Scotland in the early Middle Ages, displacing the Celtic languages, and, possibly, British Latin that had previously been dominant (Grimmer, 2014). Also, there are equally undoubted instances of alliance and accommodation (*Ibid*). The main reason

today the majority of the Kings and Queens of Britain, through marriages with the natives (Celts), trace their lineage to the Anglo-Saxon, and later on, Normans-of French origin migrants starting from King Egbert (Ecgherht) 827-839 (Historic UK, 2025). There was a transparent folk migration of massive numbers of Germans into what became England, and their culture was adopted wholesale by the native peoples whom they conquered. The same can be argued to have manifested in Ile Ife when Oduduwa and his people arrived, essentially making the Yoruba culture dominant. This sort of process has likely occurred many times throughout human history.

According to Johnson (2021), Oduduwa had many children, the eldest of whom was Okanbi, who, in order of age, were: 1. The mother of the Olowu, 2. The mother of the Alaketu, 3. The King of Benin, 4. The Oranyan of Ila, 5. The Onisabe of Sabe, 6. The Olupopo of the Popos, and 7. Oranyan, the first Alafin of Oyo. However, it is pertinent to state the historical error regarding Oranyan in the list of Rev. Samuel Johnson (1921). Having installed his son Eweka as Benin's ruler, Oranmiyan returned to Ile-Ife. On his way before arriving in Ile-Ife, he moved northwest to find the Oyo Kingdom. Referencing contradictions in Samuel Johnson's write-up concerning the positions of Obas in Yorubaland. Samuel Johnson's write-up is based on oral history (Akintoye, 2004: p.3; Falola, 1999: pp.33-34; Agai, 2021). He interviewed many Yoruba leaders, elders and the royal bards or *arokins* who worked in the King's palace, especially in Oyo. The *arokins* served the *Alaafin* (King) of Oyo as oral traditionalists, historians and musicians (Johnson, 1921: viii; Muhammad 2013: p.5; Agai, 2021). Johnson also said that at the palace of the Oyo king, there were bards, the King's drummers and cymbalists whom we relied upon to obtain information regarding the Yoruba Origin: it is on them he depends as far as possible for any reliable information we now possess' (Johnson, 1921: p.3; Agai, 2021). In this circumstance, one can deduce that most informant will give their account of Yoruba Oba history to suit their people and ego. Furthermore, based on literature, one can argue that the position of the Oba of Ile Ife is unquestionable as the foremost King of the Yorubas.

Another account by Akande (2020) stated that Okanbi was the only son of Oduduwa, the progenitor of Yoruba. He had six sons who were all Kings. They were never successors to their grandfather's throne. They spread out in different directions at different times to find their towns and presided over the affairs of their kingdoms. The six sons were Olowu of Owu, and Alaketu of Ketu, not in present day Nigeria. Onisabe of Sabe, (not in Nigeria). Oranmiyan, Oba of Benin and Founder of Oyo empire; Onipopo of Popo (not in Nigeria) and Orangun of Ila. The impression given by this account is that the great progenitor of the Yoruba did not give birth to grand princesses. This may not be true. There is a high level of temptation to believe that sons were emphasised on because the male is regarded chiefly as being who has what it takes to find a town or start a community or a settlement. This was connected with the required provision of security and safety for residents of such a community, which a woman is suspected not to be built for. Also, another story stipulates Oduduwa had sons, daughters and a grandson who found their Kingdoms and Empires, namely Ila Orangun, Owu, Ketu, Sabe, Popo and Oyo. It was generally accepted that Obalufon Ogbogbodinrin was the eldest son and Oranmiyan the youngest. Okanbi was the eldest daughter who beget the Olowu of Owu and six other famous Kings (Fabunmi, 1985).

On pages 18 and 19 of his book: "This is Ile-Ife" published in 1986, Omotoso Eluyemi asserts that the children and grandchildren of Oduduwa who left Ile-Ife to found other kingdoms were:

**Table 1: Children and grandchildren of Oduduwa who founded major Yoruba towns.**

| S/no. | Name of founder    | The kingdom founded                                  |
|-------|--------------------|--|
| 1     | Oranyan (grandson) | Benin and Oyo  |
| 2.    | Ajagunla           | The Oranangun of Ile-Ila                             |
| 3.    | Seropasan          | The Alaketun of Ketu (now in Benin Republic)         |
| 4.    | Ajaleke            | The alake of Egbaland                                |
| 5.    | Ajibogun           | The Owa of Ilesha                                    |
| 6.    | Lagborogan         | The Awujale of Ijebuland                             |
| 7.    | Obarada            | A Kingdom in Benin Republic                          |
| 8.    | Oninana            | A Kingdom in Ghana                                   |
| 9.    | Onipopo            | (Okanbi) Popo Kingdom in Benin Rep (Egun) at Ailada) |
| 10.   | Onisabe            | Sabe Kingdom In Benin Republic                       |

|     |                                       |   |
|-----|---------------------------------------|---|
| 11. | Pupupu                                | The Osemawe of Ondo   |
| 12. | Ajaponda                              | The Deji of AKure   |
| 13. | Ajibosin                              | The Olowu of Owu  |
| 14. | Awamaroi                              | The Ewi of Ado-Ekiti  |
| 15. | Arereo                                | The Olowo of Owo  |
| 16. | Adarawale                             | The Alara of Aramoko  |
| 17. | Ogbe                                  | The Ajero of Ijero  |
| 18. | Owafanran (Owore)                     | The Owore of Otun Kingdom destroyed by the Fulanis in Ilorin Province |
| 19. | Akinsola                              | The Elekole of Ikole  |
| 20. | The Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo            |   |
| 21. | The Olosi of Osi Ekiti                |   |
| 22. | The Alaye of Ipole Aaye (Efon Alaaye) |   |
| 23. | The Olujudo of Ido                    |   |
| 24. | The Owa Arigbajo of Igbajo            |   |
| 25. | The Owa Otan of Otan Aiyegbaju        |   |

### 3.1 The Aboriginal people conundrum

Saunders et al., (2019) describe Obatala as the brother of Oduduwa. According to the oral traditions of Ife, the mortal Obatala was the founder and King of Ife during its classical period. His position as the King was challenged by Oduduwa when he arrived in Ile Ife and assumed leadership of the town, dominating others as well, such as existing communities and groups, including the "Ooye Merindinlogun" (Sixteen Elders) and the Ugbo's different from the Igbos of the Eastern part of Nigeria. These included figures like Agboniregun (Orunmila), associated with Ifa worship. Oduduwa and his group were initially perceived as outsiders, descending from Oke Ora, a hill east of the 13 communities in the Ife Valley. This arrival disrupted the existing political structure led by Obatala, leading to some early migrations from Ife.

### 3.2 Yoruba Obaship Hierarchy

Oduduwa is known to be the foremost paramount King of the Yorubas. In essence, the Ooni dynasty traces its origins back to Oduduwa, making the Ooni the custodian of a rich history and cultural heritage (Obateru, 2003). It can be argued that notwithstanding that an Ile Ife King is born by an enslaved woman impregnated by Oduduwa and inherited the throne, he is the foremost paramount ruler of the Yorubas. Also, perhaps, it is possible that the enslaved woman impregnated by Oduduwa's son eventually ascended the throne belonged to the nativity class in Ile Ife at the time. According to Obateru (2003), Oduduwa took as his wife an enslaved woman called Lakange, captured by Ogun in Ile-Ife. Chief Samuel Ojo Bada, the Bada of Saki, said she was a Princess of Oore Otun (Owafonran), one of the aborigine Obas who opposed Oduduwa administration. She gave birth to Oranmiyan (also known as Odede), who was light-skinned like Oduduwa and black-skinned like Ogun, who captured her. The insinuation is that Oduduwa and Ogun probably have canal knowledge of the enslaved woman one way or the other, and that the issue out of it, Oranmiyan, belongs to Oduduwa and Ogun. From the researcher's view, perhaps because of a deficiency in knowledge at the time, something of that nature is impossible. Oduduwa was portrayed as light-skinned, and the enslaved woman he made as wife and copulated with who was of dark skin gave birth to Oranmiyan, who took the colour of his father. This story possibly lays credence to the story that Oduduwa might truthfully migrate from the Middle East to the present day Ile Ife, and he is of Arab descent associated with having light skin.

We must understand, brushing aside the contradiction of historians, that Oranmiyan, Oduduwa's son, was one of his father's principal ministers and overseer of the nascent Edo Empire, after Oduduwa granted the pleas of the Edo people for his governance. On historical account, when Oranmiyan decided to go back to Ile Ife after a period of service in Benin, he left behind a child called Eweka (Owo mi ka) that he had with an indigenous Princess in his place, "thus giving the Benis the long line of Kings from the Oranmiyan dynasty, The young boy became the first Oba ruler of the second Edo dynasty, in the present day Benin (Bondarenko, 2003). Furthermore, after leaving Edo, on his way back home to Ile Ife,

Oranmiyan later found the Oyo empire that stretched at its height from the western banks of the River Niger to the Eastern banks of the River Volta. It would serve as one of the most powerful of Africa's medieval States before its collapse in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Bondarenko, 2003). It is a well established fact that Oranmiyan, described as "a man of great physical power and mighty conqueror", founded Oyo and installed his son, Ajaka, as the first Alaafin of Oyo before returning to Ile-Ife to occupy the throne of his father, Oduduwa, until his death (Johnson, 1921). Another account explained that Oranmiyan first became Oba of Benin before returning to Ile-Ife, expecting to take over Oduduwa's throne. To his surprise, however, he met a King, an Ooni of the same lineage on the throne. To avoid unnecessary violence, which his contestation could engender, he preceded out of the Ile-Ife with his large followers to found Oyo. Whichever is the case, it is evident that the stool of the Oni of Ife existed before that of Benin and Oyo (*Ibid*).

### 3.3 On the Oranmiyan dynasty, taking into consideration supremacy battles among Obas

It is evident that Eweka was the first Oba to rule in Benin after the Ogiso dynasty and that he had a Bini mother. However, the precise date of his reign was not specific because Eghareuba (1960; 1965) gave the date as 1200 and Bradbury (1959) was around 1300. Also, it is evident from literature that Oranmiyan founded Oyo Ile, which his descendants then expanded into the Oyo Empire, and he was the first Alaafin in the year 1300, before vacating the stool for his son Ajaka and returned to Ile Ife. In the same manner, one can say that the period of the reign of Oranmiyan as the fourth Ooni of Ife cannot be precisely dated (*Ibid*). Oral history from our forefathers at Ife told us that even though Oranmiyan was on the throne as Ooni of Ife, he was often away from Ile-Ife on his war expeditions against the neighbouring hostile nations to other parts of the country.

Against this background, if Oranmiyan was sent on an errand by the father Oduduwa, the current King of Ile Ife, the cradle of the Yorubas, to Edo, and on his way back to Ile Ife, he established Oyo and enthrone his son Ajaka and later left for Ile Ife. It can be deduced that Ile Ife's throne supersedes that of Edo and Oyo, because the throne of Ile Ife existed way before the throne of Benin and Oyo. And as acknowledged in so many quarters in Yoruba land that Oranmiyan, the youngest son of Oduduwa, reigned, died and was buried in Ile-Ife, and all Yoruba Kings, as part of their ascension and coronation ceremonies, were expected to receive and handle the most significant symbol of Oranmiyan's strength-Oranmiyan's sword (Ida Oranmiyan) as representing their sword of office from Ife, and also been the custom for many years for most crowned Yoruba Obas to visit the grave of Oduduwa in Ile-Ife for blessings during their coronation ceremonies, this makes the Oba and throne of Ile Ife supreme and foremost in Yoruba land. One can not place the thrones of the sons above that of the father. In this circumstance, one can deduce that most informant will give their account of history to boost their ego and status rather than saying it as it was from the beginning.

Tomori (n.d), stipulates that "The Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III in a publication in (Tribune-Nigeria daily newspaper) agreed that "Oranmiyan founded Oyo Empire". Furthermore, Tomori explained if it is then logical for any Alaafin who descended from Oranmiyan to be a son of the Ooni who is not the son of Oduduwa but Omo Oluwo' ni-that is a child of an enslaved person.' Debunking the notion that one is the son of an enslaved person, it is on record that when Oduduwa got to Ile-Ife, he married the aborigines (Females) and gave birth to princes and princesses such as Olowu's Asunkungbade's mother, Aleketu's mother, Oranmiyan's mother, Orangun of Ila's mother and the mother of Owa Obokun of Ilesa, Oranmiyan gave birth to Eweka, the first Oba of Benin after Ogiso's dynasties who became King in 1170 AD after Oranmiyan has returned to establish Oyo Kingdom. He also gave birth to Dada Ajuwon, a.k.a Ajaka and Sango, a.k.a. Olukoso (*Ibid*). Taking into consideration the views of various scholars, it can be argued that the majority of Oduduwa wives who gave birth to princes and princesses, including Oranmiyan who gave birth to Ajaka (Oyo) and Eweka (Edo), whether it is accepted or not are placed in the realm of an enslaved person, leading to the notion that we should stop classifying a person as an enslaved person. According to a Yoruba adage, (Bi ati bi eru ni a bi omo. That is, the enslaved person and the child are both humans and deserve dignity).

According to Babatola (2019), for ease of reference, the crisis between the King (Akarigbo of Remo) and the King (Elepe of Epe) that started in 1899 on the matter of beaded crown between Akarigbo and Elepe brought to the fore the paramount position and supremacy of the Ooni of Ife in Yoruba land. Serious violence and loss of life resulted from a dispute between the Akarigbo of Remo and the Elepe of Epe over the Elepe's wearing of a beaded crown without the Akarigbo's permission. Consequently, as postulated by Babatola (2019) and Sijuwade (2025), the then British Government intervened in the matter. The Alaafin of Oyo, when approached by the government for assistance, deferred to the Ooni of Ife, stating that only he held authority over the beaded crowns of all Yoruba Obas. At the time of the crisis, the Ooni on the throne of Ife was Oba Adelekan Olubuse (Babatola, 2019). To resolve the matter, the Governor personally visited the Ooni of Ife, requesting his intervention and presence in Lagos. Ile-Ife's palace declared it forbidden for the Ooni to leave at that time, yet the Governor, citing his mandate from the King of England, insisted the Ooni assist in resolving the crown dispute. The Nigerian National Archives contain records, cited by Babatola (2019) and Sijuwade (2025), that detail governmental provisions made to fulfil the Ooni's demands. Also, it was documented that the then

(8<sup>th</sup> Obanikoro of Lagos – Ajayi Bembe (1897-1906), was the interpreter between the Ooni of Ile Ife and the Government. Furthermore, It was stated in the reports that was Gazetted that all Yoruba Obas, including the Alaafin of Oyo, vacated their palaces and slept outside the walls of their palaces on hearing the news that Ooni was on his way to Lagos and remained there until his return back home (*Ibid*). To this end, with no dissenting voice from any Oba in the Western Region, including the Oba of Benin, who attested to the supremacy of Ooni of Ile Ife, the inquiry was held at Lagos City Hall on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1901. It was stated by the Ooni of Ife that Elepe of Epe had no right to a beaded crown and that Akarigbo of Remo was right in his actions to demand the removal of the crown from Elepe (Babatola, 2019; Sijuwade, 2025).

During this period, the Ooni of Ife accordingly presented the list of Yoruba Obas entitled to wear beaded crowns and what traditional materials needed to be presented before being given or allowed to wear beaded crowns. Thus, the Government Gazette of 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1903 put to rest the issue of the most paramount ruler in Yoruba land (Babatola, 2019; Sijuwade, 2025). According to Akinjogbin (1966), regarding political administrations and stable structures, Oyo had no equality in Yorubaland. Also, without doubt, culturally, Oyo played a vital role in preserving and spreading Yoruba traditions. Oyo, because of its position as the central military garrison (of the Yorubas), through the formidable prowess of its generalissimos in the likes of Aare Ona Kakanfo and others, was able to expand the land mass of the Yorubas through conquest. A key factor in Oyo's success was its military strength, particularly its well-trained cavalry, which distinguished it from other Yoruba states. The empire's army conducted campaigns across West Africa, subjugating neighbouring territories, including the Kingdom of Dahomey, which were forced to pay annual tribute after being defeated in the early 18th century. Oyo's dominance extended northward into Nupe and Borgu lands, frequently launching raids and extracting resources (*Ibid*). The empire's ability to sustain these military conquests was closely linked to its political structure, which was designed to maintain internal stability while enabling territorial expansion (Akinjogbin, 1966; Ayandele, 2004). Moreover, when the Yorubas were expanding their territories, daring conquest makes the Alaafin of Oyo to be at the forefront of the most well known Oba in Yoruba land. Still, suppose tradition and classification of Obaship is duly followed right from Oduduwa time, in that case, this does not make the Alaafin of Oyo the most superior Oba in Yoruba land. Furthermore, in some quarters, Oyo, as the military outpost for the entire Yoruba land, makes it superior to Ile Ife, but from critical analysis, it is not the case. Ile Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba people and its throne still reigned supreme, and if due process is followed and maintained, exists before Oyo and its throne, and should be considered as no equal to Oyo in terms of Kinship.

On the strength of the above, one can argue that there was no contest between the Ooni of Ife and Alaafin of Oyo throughout the Colonial rule. Thus, Ooni of Ife was the chairman of the first Council Of Obas meeting in Oyo in 1934. with four other Obas listed: (1) Ooni of Ife, (2) Alaafin of Oyo, (3) Oba of Benin, and (4) Alake of Abeokuta. (Now Alake of Egba Land). (5) Awujale of Ijebu Ode. (Now Awujale of Ijebu Land) and the Governor in attendance. Subsequently, the meeting venue was rotated at the domains of the Obas listed above, and in all the meetings, the Ooni of Ife presided overall. Records available at the National Archives attested to this fact (Babatola, 2019; Sijuwade, 2025). Furthermore, in view of the foregoing, this explanation gives credence to Ooni of Ife's superiority among the Obas, not based on myth, but credible research findings that are factual. It is noteworthy to understand that the integrity of historical accounts depends on accurate reporting backed by verifiable facts, figures, and dates from authentic documents; otherwise, credibility is compromised. Thus, the need to have confidence in research findings that are believable and trustworthy grounded in employing diverse sources, perspectives, or methods to assess a phenomenon.

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#### 4. Conclusion

From the need to move on from myth to fact, the Yoruba narratives examined above contain certain features representing factors of identity formation among the people. These unique traits are primarily a shared heritage, a common tongue, and a common religious faith. Yoruba origin myths and migration accounts underpin the foundation of Ile-Ife, their ancestral home. Even into the twentieth century, prominent historical scholars accepted Samuel Johnson's theory that Oduduwa originated in a faraway eastern land, outside of present-day Nigeria, and came to Ife as a conquering prince. To this extent, it is probable that the said east where Oduduwa came from might be Egypt-once thriving cradle of civilisation that is considered to be part of the Middle East according to Harding (2024), due to its geographical location, cultural ties, and historical influences compared to Benin, an assertion by Oba Edu Akenzua, of which his son the current Oba of Benin has set the record straight. Even though most of Egypt's landmass is in Africa, its eastern part extends into Asia. Oduduwa's rule over Ife is recounted in many elaborate traditional narratives, detailing both progress and adversity; these stories have given rise to countless versions, each with its own distinct angle. This foundational traditional narrative was created by meticulously reviewing a wide range of literature, thereby adding to the existing Yoruba understanding of origins and identity. It's plain to see that the different story versions are linked. Perhaps the political narrative accurately reflects Ile Ife's origins through conquest and by introducing a dominant culture. In addition, the absence of an official document or law detailing the Yoruba Kings' hierarchy leads to

varying interpretations. Rather than a defined legal or political framework, the hierarchy of Yoruba Kings rests on tradition, historical influence and the perception of their authority. Based on the literature reviewed, the Oni of Ife is arguably the most prominent ruler in Yorubaland, with the Alaafin of Oyo second in rank. Supposedly, if the Oba of Benin is brought into the equation, in that case, one can argue that after the Oni of Ife comes the Oba of Benin, followed by the Alaafin of Oyo based on Oranmiyan sojourn from Ile Ife to Benin, afterwards to Oyo, before finally returning to Ile Ife.

## Compliance with ethical standards

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No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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