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Representations of Yoruba Political History in Drama and their Implications for Yoruba Nationalism

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Abstract

The political history of modern Yoruba society is replete with ancient civil wars that nearly tore apart the entire Yoruba nation. The significance of these wars lies in how their understanding and reinterpretation have influenced and reshaped certain cultural epistemes of Yoruba identity, as represented in cultural products such as drama and film. Playwrights of Yoruba extraction have published a considerable number of dramatic texts on Yoruba political history and civil wars. However, only a few of these playwrights go beyond merely chronicling events as they occurred in the past; most do not attempt to reinterpret these incidents to foster a robust Yoruba national consciousness. This paper, therefore, critiques two dramatic texts—Adebayo Faleti's *Basọ̀run Gáà* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*—because of their relevance to discourses on the quest for internal cohesion within the Yoruba ethnic group. The study finds that the genesis of Yoruba internal crises, which eventually culminated in the civil wars, can be traced to the mismanaged euphoria that followed the Abiodun-Gaa power tussle in the Old Oyo Empire. *Kiriji*, on the other hand, reveals that the last major Yoruba civil war—the Ekiti-Parapo War—ended only physically at the battlefronts, with little effort made to reconcile the underlying issues that led to the conflict. Although Yoruba playwrights have taken significant steps to document these civil wars, they could make a greater impact by infusing their works with creative reinterpretations of these historical events, thereby contributing to the broader project of Yoruba nationalism.

Keywords: Ekiti-Parapo War, war and peace in Yorubaland, Yoruba civil wars, Yoruba historical drama, Yoruba nationalism

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Introduction

Yoruba people have enjoyed diasporic spread across the globe, but still retain their aboriginal presence in the southwest region of Nigeria. Prominently, the aboriginal Yoruba people are found in Oyo state, Osun state, Ogun state, Lagos state, Ondo state and Ekiti state. The Yoruba-speaking population is also found in Kwara and Kogi states, which have been categorised under the north central region of Nigeria. The following is the map showing the Yoruba–speaking states in the southwestern part of Nigeria and Kwara state.

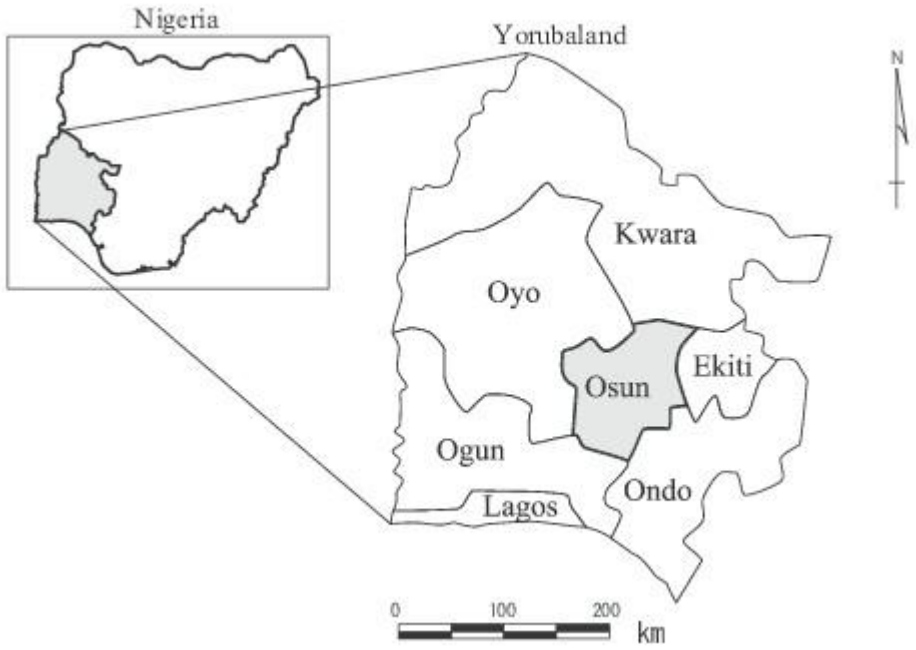


Figure 1. The states that make up Yoruba land in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, including Kwara State (Abimbola, 2008, p. 53)

The Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria have unique characteristics of historical unilinearity with one historical event precipitating another in a chronological or sequential order starting from the 18th Century and terminating in the 19th Century with the catastrophic war between the Ibadan and Ekiti Parapo armies. This is not to say that wars were the only events that happened in the past Yoruba history. Rather, the manifestations of the past internal struggles and major wars in Yoruba land are seen in the contemporary sociology and psychology of contemporary Nigerian societies. Historians such as Ajayi and Smith (1971), Akinjogbin (1977), Awe (1964) and Ogunyemi (2015) have identified and discussed the remote and immediate causes of the fall of the Old Oyo Empire and the disintegration of the Yoruba race as evident in the internecine wars within Yoruba communities. On the remote and immediate causes of the civil wars and disintegration of Yoruba communities, Falola (2017) avers that:

> The remote causes that have been emphasized in most of the existing works can be summarized as follows – inherent weakness in the constitution of the central government of Old Oyo; loose connection between the central government and the provinces of the empire; the vastness of the empire which made it impossible to govern effectively in the face of inadequate means of communication; deliberate weakening of the army by Alaafin Abiodun; the rise of powerful neighbours like Dahomey, Nupe and Borgu; weak Alaafin on the throne of Old Oyo in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century; and 'a steady shift of the centre of gravity of the empire from the north to the south'. On top of these remote causes, two immediate causes have been listed: some emphasise the effect of the Fulani jihad, while others capitalise on the breakdown of central authority. (pp. 288-289)

A careful consideration of the causes of the fall of the Old Oyo Empire traces the genesis of the whole collapse of the empire to the tenure of Alaafin Abiodun, who inherited weak political structures from his forebears. Similarly, Alaafin Abiodun bequeathed a weak military structure to his successors on the throne. These remote and immediate causes of the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire and the disintegration of the Yoruba nation have been re-enacted in dramatic texts that chronicle the historical events of the 18th and 19th centuries of Yoruba land. Although these dramatic texts present the histories of Yoruba civil wars from different epistemological and historical perspectives, their authors demonstrate apt historical knowledge of the plot.

Thus, the present article aims to explore how Yoruba political history is represented in Adebayo Faleti's *Basọ̀run Gáà* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji* within the context of its implications for the attainment of Yoruba nationalism. Specifically, the article is set to (i) critique the use of language in the representation of Yoruba political history with its implications for Yoruba nationalism (ii) examine how the playwrights deployed characterisation in the representation of Yoruba political history and (iii) review the Yoruba internal crises from the Old Oyo Empire with their implications for the attainment of Yoruba nationalism. The article's significance is seen in its contribution to scholarship on Yoruba political history, warfare and Yoruba nationalism. The review of the plays will also help prospective playwrights in the handling of history in a drama text. Essentially, historical dramas/plays are not meant to only chronicle history, but they should also provide critical insights to avoid past mistakes. The article, apart from extending the frontiers of knowledge on Yoruba history, dramatic literature, Yoruba warfare studies and Yoruba nationalism, will also provide a background for further studies in the subject areas.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative approach of textual analysis and literature review. The two plays are closely read to extract data on the Yoruba civil war and nationalism. The plays' extracts are analysed and discussed within the article's focus.

Analysis

Abiodun-Gaa's Crisis in Historical Context

Published by Onibonoje Publisher in 1976, Adebayo Faleti's *Basọ̀run Gáà* is a narration and re-interpretation of the internal crisis between Aláàfin Abíọ́dún and Basọ̀run Gáà (the head of Oyo Mesi, the chief-in-council). The drama text presents the internal crisis and intrigues between the office of Aláàfin and Basọ̀run and how Aláàfin Abíọ́dún stooped to conquer upon the latter's enthronement. The plot starts with the public execution of Aláàfin Májẹ́ógbé, who has been found ineffective and autocratic. Following the death of Aláàfin Májẹ́ógbé, Basọ̀run Gáà suggests that Aláàfin Abíọ́dún should be the next Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́. Reluctantly, Aláàfin Abíọ́dún ascends the throne but with the secret intention of reducing the might of the dreadful Basọ̀run Gáà. As the events unfold, Basọ̀run Gáà kills the only daughter of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún (Àgbọ̀nyín) while the former is preparing a fame and money ritual. This latest cruelty of Basọ̀run Gáà propels Aláàfin Abíọ́dún into action to put an end to Basọ̀run Gáà's autocracy. Subsequently, Aláàfin Abíọ́dún travels to Jàbàtá to seek military assistance from Àárẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò (Ọyábí). A war is waged against the home and household of Basọ̀run Gáà. In the war, Ọyábí and Ọ̀yọ́ force annihilate Basọ̀run Gáà's family and generation.



Figure 2. The cover image of Adebayo Faleti's *Basọ̀run Gáà*

Although the plot of the drama text looks simple, its depth contains some of the events and actions within the political structure of the Old Oyo Empire that later led to the fall of this mighty Yoruba Empire and the overall disharmony among the Yoruba people. This argument is premised on Falola's (2021) coinage of *Alaafinology* and Levi-Strauss's (1972) *Structural Anthropology*. The adoption of these two concepts underlines the influence of individualism and collective consciousness in the determination of power relations between the office of Aláàfin and Basọ̀run. These are the two parallel but complementary offices that legislate and execute laws and policies for the internal cohesion of the Yoruba people. Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology explains kinship as a primary determinant of the right to the throne in the entire Yoruba land. By Levi-Strauss's (1972) view, kinship exists "only in human consciousness; it is an arbitrary system of representations, not the spontaneous development of a real situation" (p. 50). The arbitrariness of Bashọ̀run Gáà in the exercise of his constitutional and political powers, perhaps, is a problem of representation of the collaborative roles between the offices of Aláàfin and Basọ̀run. Owing to the unhealthy power relations between the offices of Aláàfin and Basọ̀run, the whole empire and by extension the whole of the Yoruba race are in strict bondage to Basọ̀run Gáà.

The argument on kinship in relation to the status of Basọ̀run Gáà in the history of the 18th and 19th-century Ọ̀yọ́ Empire reveals that there is no way in the history of the empire where it is stated that any of the chiefs among the Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì, particularly Basọ̀run, had assumed the office of Aláàfin. Basọ̀run Gáà, himself, acknowledges the fact that it has not been in historical records that a Basọ̀run became the king of Ọ̀yọ́. This opinion is expressed in his response to the speeches and actions of other chiefs who treat him as a king. This situation is given in the excerpt below:

Àwọn Ìjòyè:	Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí!
Àwọn Ìjòyè:	Kábíyèsí! O wí i re! Kábíyèsí!
Gáà:	Kábíyèsí tó! Ó tó! Ẹ má se mí ní Kábíyèsí mọ́ Èmi 'ì í sọba, èniyin náà sì mọ̀. Mo le lọ́'lá kí n n'ípò nínú ìjòyè, ẹ ti mọ̀ P' énit'á bí l'Ọ́sòrún 'ò le gorí ọba.
Àwon Ìjòyè:	Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí!
Àwon Ìjòyè:	Kábíyèsí! You have said the right thing! Kábíyèsí!

(Bashòrun Gáà, p. 5)

Gáà: Stop calling me Kabiyesi! Enough!
Don't call me Kabiyesi anymore.
I am not a king, and you all know the fact.
I may be rich and influential among the chiefs, but you all know that whoever is born as Basọ̀run cannot be a king.

The above excerpt shows the fact that Basọ̀run Gáà acknowledges his lack of qualification for the throne. At the same time, Faleti attempts to interrogate history that Basọ̀run Gáà had the possibility of becoming the king of Ọ̀yọ́ if Aláàfin Abíọ́dún did not take an urgent step at then. This interrogation of history questions the cultural episteme of noble and royal power. Basọ̀run Gáà surreptitiously hoped for a kingship position. To make up for the gap of his limitations, he consolidated his position through the constitutional arrangement that made him the head of the kingmakers. He used his office to dethrone any Aláàfin that failed to do his will. He continued in this tradition for twenty years (1574-1774) until Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, with the assistance of Ọyábí (Ààrẹ Ọ́nà Kakaǹfò), overpowered him.

Prior to the death of Basọ̀run Gáà, the whole of the empire felt unsafe, and this informed the habit of Aláàfin and other chiefs paying homage to him (Basọ̀run Gáà) in his home. This practice upholds Derrida's description of *bricoleur* because Basọ̀run Gáà used everything at his disposal to sustain himself in the position of power. In the description of *bricoleur*, Derrida (1992) avers that:

> The *bricoleur*, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses 'the means at hand', that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous – and so forth. (p. 157)

As a *bricoleur*, Basọ̀run Gáà deploys all the material and supernatural resources at his disposal to limit the political rights of Aláàfin. With the consciousness of the tyranny of Basọ̀run Gáà, no young or old member of the royal family wants to ascend the throne.

At his enthronement as the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́, Aláàfin Abíọ́dún has latent fear and insecurity. This is because no one can predict the next action of Basọ̀run Gáà. In the view of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, Basọ̀run Gáà can dethrone or kill any of the kings at any time he wants. This psychological state of mind of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún is informed by precedents: the fate of his predecessors in the cruel hands of Bashọ̀run Gáà. With this, the king sees himself helpless, powerless and hapless with the domineering influence of Basọ̀run Gáà in the political administration of the time. Hence, there is a latent sense of insecurity and fear in Aláàfin

Abíọ́dún that Basọ̀run Gáà may strike at the latter's convenience. This situation is given in the drama text:

Abíọ́dún: Ìyá wa! Kúdẹ̀fù, ẹ̀rù ḿbà mí
Mo jọba lásán ni, ng' ò l'á sẹ ọba l'ẹ́nu.
Gáà l'ó fi mí jọba,
Níjọ́ t'ó bá wu Gáà, ó sì le yọ mí l'ọ́ba.
Ẹ̀gbẹ̀jì s'arẹmọ fún ni - àgàn ńyọ̀,
Àgàn má yọ̀ mọ́
Ènìà tó s'arẹmọ fún ni l'ágàn,
Ó le p'ọmọ ẹni b'áa bá d'ábiyamọ.
Mo ti wí fún gbogbo Ọ̀yọ́mìsì
Wípé ng'ò joyè
Mo kéré, ng kò tópò ọba í se:
Nwón ní *láá*, Adégoólú n'Ifá Gáà mú
Mo kéré ng'ò lẹ́nìkan, mo gorí ọba.
Aá tí i se.....

(Bashòrun Gáà, p. 18)

Abíọ́dún: Our mother! Kúdẹ̀fù, I am afraid
I am only the king by title and not by order.
It was Gáà who made me the king,
And he may dethrone at will whenever he wants.
Ẹ̀gbẹ̀jì made a fertility potion for the barren - she is happy
The barren do not rejoice
The person who did the fertility potion for your barrenness
It may kill the child at the stage of motherhood.
I have told the whole of Ọ̀yọ́mìsì
that I am not interested in being the king
That I do not want any kingship title
I am too young, I am not mature enough to be the king:
They all said no, the divination of Gáà had chosen Adégoólú
I am too young with nobody, and I am enthroned as the king
How do we do it.....

Some deductions are made from the excerpt above in relation to Abíọ́dún – Gáà's relationship. Since Gáà cannot be enthroned as the king of Ọ̀yọ́, he makes a way for himself to have control of the throne by appointing weaklings who will not have the courage and resources to challenge his authority. His choice of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún aims at attributing all the inactions and misdeeds of the latter to youthful exuberance and inexperience. The consequence of this will be dethronement or killing of the young innocent king, just like his predecessors - Aláàfin Lábísí (who spent just 17 days on the throne), Aláàfin Awọ́nbíojú (who spent 130 days on the throne), Aláàfin Agbólúajé and Aláàfin Majẹ́ógbé. Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, however, is in the knowing of this ploy of Basọ̀run Gáà because the former has availed himself the opportunity of the historical knowledge of the unpleasant fate of his predecessor following Basọ̀run Gáà's scheming. With the expression "how do we do it", Aláàfin Abíọ́dún is soliciting popular sympathy and support

on how to subdue or overcome the excesses of the power-corrupt Basọ̀run. This study further argues that the use of ellipsis is to register the mood of future uncertainty about overcoming the excesses of Basọ̀run Gáà. The interpretation of the power play between Aláàfin Abíọ́dún and Basọ̀run Gáà is rooted in the urge to have political power over the domains of Ọ̀yọ́ irrespective of the ancestry.

With reference to the internal intrigues and how to overcome them, Falola's *Alaafinology* is relevant to this discourse. In the conceptualisation of *Alaafinology*, Falola (2021) writes thus:

> To talk about Alaafinology, in whatever form kingship is defined, is to speak to ideas about the centralisation of power, the forms of government, the theory of power (distributive, absolutist, divine, monarchical, predatory, pre-modern, modernist, etc.). Alaafinology can speak to the theory of checks and balances, but with moments of ruptures to the system and the move towards absolutism. Alaafinology is about the ability to manage conflicts and wars. Conflicts were very endemic to the kingship system. It was hard to manage an extensive empire. Similarly, it was certainly hard to manage the competing forces within the palace and capital. It was hard to manage sibling rivalries. (p. 5)

In line with Falola's conceptualisation of Alaafinology, Aláàfin Abíọ́dún makes attempts to ensure peace and sustainable social relations within and around the empire. In this direction, he deployed two approaches – (i) diplomacy and (ii) confrontation. The deployment of diplomacy is found in his decision to marry his only daughter (Àgbọ̀nyín) to Basọ̀run Gáà. The failure of this arrangement, however, is foreshadowed by Àgbọ̀nyín, who is of the view that her freedom, like that of the entire Yoruba race, is not guaranteed with the towering influence of Basọ̀run Gáà. The following excerpt reveals this.

Àgbọ̀nyín: Akínkúnmi,
S'ó o mọ̀pé n' kì í s'òmìnira ara mi.

Akínkúnmi: Nígbà t' íwo bá tún ńso p'o ò l'ómìnira
Kíni k'írú wa ó se?
Aiyé ti dàrú…
Gbogbo Ọ́yọ́ ni ò l'ómìnira…….

Àgbọ̀nyín: Má sọ t'òmìnira Yorùbá
Òmìnira t'èmi ni k'á so.
Lásán ni mo j'ọ́mọ ọlá……..
Ng' ò le dá nkankan gbé se.

(Bashòrun Gáà, pp. 77 - 78)

Àgbọ̀nyín: Akínkúnmi,
Do you know that I am not independent?
Akínkúnmi when you claim that you are not independent

What do you want people like us do?
The whole world is in disorder……..
The whole of Ọ́yọ́ is not independent……

Àgbọ̀nyín: Do not talk of the independence of Yorùbá race
Let us talk of my own independence
I am only from a wealthy background
I have no independence.

Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, perhaps, plans to achieve two things: (i) Àgbọ̀nyín will be under strict protection of Bashọ̀run Gáà (ii) being the in-law of the king will soften Basọ̀run Gáà's high-handedness. Unfortunately, this diplomatic arrangement does not achieve the expected result. Basọ̀run Gáà kills Àgbọ̀nyín for ritual.

Another diplomatic move is that Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, with other chiefs, pays daily homage to Bashọ̀run Gáà. This type of diplomacy is not consistent with Yoruba cultural episteme because a king is not expected to prostrate for anyone upon enthronement. In an ideal cultural matrix, the king is not expected to pay a visit or homage to anybody. If it is necessary for the king to condole or show solidarity with anybody in the kingdom, he sends chiefs with his staff of office. This is not the situation in Basọ̀run Gáà - Aláàfin Abíọ́dún power relations. With this inversion of cultural norms and practices, Basọ̀run Gáà sees himself on top and in control of every situation in the empire. The inference from Aláàfin Abíọ́dún's adoption of diplomacy makes people think of him as a weakling whose royal power is ineffective.

The failure of the diplomatic approach adopted by Aláàfin Abíọ́dún prompts the confrontational approach, which follows Basọ̀run Gáà's murder of Àgbọ̀nyín. With the aid of Ọyábí (Àárẹ Ọ́nà Kakaǹfò), Aláàfin Abíọ́dún defeats Basọ̀run Gáà with his cohorts and pedigrees, except few who can escape from the consuming war. Although the death of Basọ̀run Gáà brought to an end the years of terror in Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire, the success of the war has far-reaching effects on the peace, internal cohesion and sustainable inter-ethnic/intra-ethnic relations in the whole of Yoruba land. Thus, the death of Basọ̀run Gáà ushered in new episodes of peace and tranquillity in the history of the Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the entire Yoruba land. Consequently, there was internal harmony and economic prosperity in the absence of war. On the other hand, Sesan (2017) avers that "the consequence of this was that the empire lost its military prowess" (p.110). In this situation, Falola (2017) also writes that:

> Although Abíọ́dún was able to establish a stable and prosperous reign, he was unable to prevent some of Gáhà's atrocities from having repercussions on the empire. For example, the ruthlessness with which Gáhà and his agents ruled the province caused some tributary states to rebel. An example was the successful rebellion of the Egba

> kingdom under the leadership of Lisabi. Besides, Gáhà's rape on the constitution was a precedent which people of like ambition followed after the death of the able Aláàfin Abíọ́dún in 1789. (p. 108)

The Gáà- Abíọ́dún crisis and the tragic end of Basọ̀run Gáà with the eventual consequences on the conflicts, wars and peacebuilding in Yoruba land can be interpreted with Leshem and Halperin's (2020) lay theory of peace. In their view, there are three models of the interpretation of peace theory: (i) negative peace, which is the end of war, (ii) positive peace, which is a harmonious relationship and (iii) structural peace, which is justice. Leshem and Halperin (p. 379), however, caution that "what counts as one's lay theory of peace is the balance between the three, namely, which interpretations dominate, and which are more peripheral". In the Ọ̀yọ́ history of post Gáà's death, therefore, negative peace and positive peace were visible with the manifestation of harmonious relationships among the people in the empire and the whole of Yoruba land. Unfortunately, little attention is paid to structural peace, which later became the albatross to the sustainability of peace in Yoruba land. The fault is found in the lack of attention paid to the reconciliation and psychological rehabilitation of all the parties whose egos were bruised during the conflicts between Basọ̀run Gáà and Aláàfin Abíọ́dún. For instance, Bashorun Asamu has a kinship relationship with Bashọ̀run Gáà (Falola, 2021; Ajayi and Smith, 1971). Bashorun Asamu was one of the rivals of Aláàfin Áólẹ̀, who reigned after Aláàfin Abíọ́dún. This rivalry may be connected to the deformed structural peace that happened after the death of Bashọ̀run Gáà and during the long reign of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún. Similarly, Àfọ̀njá (the Yoruba War Generalissimo) was not offering the required military support to Aláàfin Áólẹ̀. The manifestation of structural peace is also found in the action of Ojo Agunbambaru to avenge the death of his father (Basọ̀run Gáà) and to claim his title. Johnson (2008) offers this historical account as follows:

> Ojo, surnamed AGUNBAMBARU, was one of the surviving sons of the renowned Basorun Gaha. He had escaped to the Bariba country at the general massacre of Gaha's children and relatives in the reign of King Abiodun. Hearing of the present state of the country, he thought there could never be a more favourable opportunity for him both to avenge his father's death and also to obtain his title without opposition. (p. 194)

These internal intrigues during the reign of Aláàfin Áólẹ̀ led to the collapse of the Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the takeover of Ilorin by the Fulani jihadists. Lack of structural peace in the Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire after the death of Basọ̀run Gáà degenerated to a series of internal conflicts and civil wars within and around Yoruba land. Among the wars that came up after long years of the peaceful reign of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún were Ijaye War, Gbogun War, Eleduwe War, Mugba Mugba

War, Ogele War and the most catastrophic Ekiti Parapo/Kiriji War (Johnson, 2008; Akinjogbin, 1977; Falola, 2017).

Historical Heroism in *Kiriji*

First published by African University Press in 1976, Wale Ogunyemi's *Kírìjí* centres on the war between Ìbàdàn and Èkìtì Parapo (Èkìtì Confederation) in the 19th century of Yorùbá History. The playwright chronicles the events that culminated in the catastrophic war between the Ibadan army and the military from the Ekiti confederation and Ijesha. The play also emphasises the heroic roles of Fabunmi from Oke Imesi in conjunction with Ogedemgbe's heroic roles before and during the war. The war ends in a stalemate with the intervention of the colonial government.

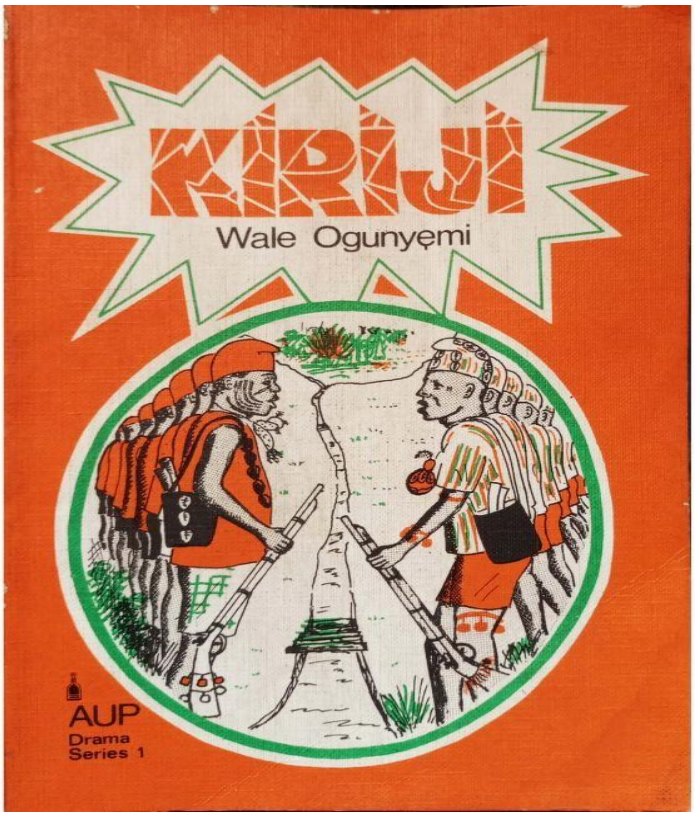


Figure. 3 The cover image of Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*

The plot of Ogunyemi's *Kírìjí* reveals historical diffusion (this is the term adopted by the present writers to describe the overlapping relationship and causality among different historical events and epochs) among all the major events and wars in Yoruba land. The chronology of the historical events in Yoruba land reveals systemic weakness in the political structure and governance in the entire Yoruba nationality, with the evidence drawn from the ineffectiveness of Alaafinology before, during and after the reign of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún – a situation which led to

the emergence of Ibadan's strong military force. In light of this position, Soetan (2005) averred that Ibadan's rise was a result of the previous Oyo Empire's decline. While further substantiating the impact of the ineffectiveness of Alaafinology, the present writers uphold the view of Oluwafemi (2023) that "the Oyo Empire's decline and final demise were signalled and expedited by Bashorun Gaha's uprising against the Alaafin" (p. 67). Oluwafemi's analysis of the historical context of the war, therefore, corroborates the view of the present writers that the mismanagement of the crises between Aláàfin Abíọ́dún and Bashọ̀run Gáà degenerated into a series of Yoruba civil wars that terminated with the Ekiti-Parapo/Kiriji War.

Thus, the failure of Alaafinology encouraged vassal villages and towns to become rebellious to Ọ̀yọ́ Empire, and also, there was the emergence of new settlements of displayed warlords. Ibadan is one of the new settlements that emerged with more inclination towards wars owing to the presence of warlords such as Oluyole, Ibikunle, Ogunmola, Ogboriefon, Laluwoye and Ali (Ogunyemi, 2015; Atanda, 1980; Balogun, 2011). With the weak administrative mechanisms in the collapse old Oyo Empire, Ibadan became bloated with its military prowess to the extent of terrorising other Yoruba towns in Ekiti, Ijesha and Egba. Ibadan sustained its hegemony with the *alibi* of promoting the interest of Aláàfin and the entire Ọ̀yọ́ Empire. This historical information forms the background of Wale Ogunyemi's *Kírìjí*. This assertion is also consistent with the view of Akinyemi (2010) that:

> …. For instance, in his other historical play, *Kiriji War* (sic.), Ogunyemi goes to the extent of inserting actual dates of events as subtitles in the play, showing his closeness to his historical sources. Thus, in handling historical events to create plot, theme, and characters, Wale Ogunyemi does not lift his gaze beyond history. (p. 837)

The inference from Akinyemi's submission is that there is a cognitive pact between historical [re] presentation and interpretation, regardless of the interpretive models – surface, deep, associative and connotative – adopted by readers and critics.

The historical background to the play is recounted through its plot. Fabunmi, the presumed hero of the Ekiti-Parapo war, states the primary ideologies of the war: (i) the intolerance of Ekiti people to the autocracy and highhandedness of Ibadan, (ii) the quest for liberation of Ekiti people from the bondage of Ibadan land. In a way of declaring war against Ibadan, Fabunmi avers thus:

> *Fabunmi*: Kill all Ajele in Ekiti! Kill all Ajele in Ijeshaland! Massacre all Oyo sons and daughters! Break the cord of tyranny and oppression! Killllllll! *Brandishing his cutlass, he runs out wildly. Sharp blackout.*
>
> (*Kiriji*, p. 22)

Fabunmi's rebellious spirit and heroism are triggered by the sexual assault on his wife by Ọyọ́ and Ìbàdàn *ajele* (the commissioners in charge of tributes). In the process of his anger, Fabunmi beheads a few of these ajeles and declares war on Ọyọ́ and Ìbàdàn. Apart from initiating the war, Fabunmi offers all the logistics and strategies required to execute the war, transcending all military and psychological limitations. In light of this argument, Umukoro (2011) describes Fabunmi as the dramatic hero of the war, while Ogedemgbe is only appreciated for his belated involvement. The determination of Fabunmi to implement the war for the liberation of the Yoruba race from the shackles of Ọyọ́ and Ìbàdàn political cum military hegemony is further shown in the following excerpt.

> *Fabunmi:* Forget your fathers, forget your mothers. Forget your wives and children because it's going to be tough. It's going to be rough and it's going to be bloody. We'll first fall on Igbajo. If we could seize that formidable border town from Latosa, Ekiti country would be protected in the eastern part. If we don't, Latosa and his warriors will have free access to the mountains surrounding the town and jump into our country. We must not let them. When Igbajo is taken, our target will then be Ikirun. There we shall split into two – one half fighting towards the Ilorin and Fulani, and the other half towards Ibadan itself. Then Ekiti is saved at home and abroad. Remember, this is a fight to finish! (*Kiriji*, pp. 29-30)

The dialogue further reveals the fierceness with which the war was planned from the start. Fabunmi's resolution to fight against Ibadan despite the military prowess of the latter is, perhaps, informed by the sociological and political climates of the period. This is because Ekiti people had been having access to the European guns and cannons (Ajayi & Smith, 1971; Balogun, 2011; Olomola, 2005). The war persisted for a period of sixteen (16) years, claiming casualties from both sides. One of the important indices of the war was the use of sophisticated war weapons – guns and cannons. The access of Ekiti Parapo warriors to cannons made them sustain the tempo and fierceness of the war. Olomola (2005) and Balogun (2011) averred that most of the Ekiti indigenes in the diaspora saw the war as concrete efforts to liberate the Yoruba people and thus, no investment and sacrifice was considered too much. In the war, Ibadan recorded more casualties owing to the use of cannons by Ekiti Parapo warriors. A textual reference to this situation is shown in the following excerpt from the play.

> The cannon shot thundered on the Ibadan. And there is silence in the midst of heavy smoke, except the sound of the gun amplified by the echo. When the smoke clears. (sic.) OSHUNGBEKUN, MOGAJI and OSI are all out of view. LATOSA wriggles in a pool of blood like an earthworm besieged by black soldier ants. Soon, OSHUNGBEKUN, OSI and MOGAJI come back. They watch LATOSA until he dies. Other WARRIORS of the Ibadan come in. (Kiriji, p. 66)

Despite the death of Latoosa in the war, the war persists, with Oshungekun taking over the command of the Ibadan army. Another reason for the persistence of the war was that some other Yoruba towns and communities formed allies with the Ekiti Parapo army to unseat Ibadan and Oyo hegemony (Akintoye, 1971; Ogunyemi, 2015). In the previous wars with Ijaye, Owu

and Egba, Ibadan had lost its popularity with these places that saw the war as an opportunity to avenge or take revenge for the evils of Ibadan and Oyo (Falola and Oguntomisin, 2009).

Despite that the Ekiti Parapo War lasted for sixteen years, it ended in a stalemate with the general belief that there were no vanquished and no victors. The present writers, however, differ from this general opinion about the suspension or termination of the war. The Ibadan-Oyo armies suffered considerably as the party recorded some losses that have not been recovered till today – (i) Ibadan lost its political and military hegemony during the war based on the fact that the underrated Ekiti Parapo armies could withstand the heat of the war for sixteen years without any sign of retreat (ii) major warlords of Ibadan such as Aare Latoosa lost their lives in the war (iii) the expansionist projects of Ibadan and Oyo Empire were alted with the peace treaty. At the end, Fabunmi can achieve the goal of the war – a stoppage to the political and economic exploitation of Ekiti and Yoruba people by Ibadan and the Oyo Empire. Wale Ogunyemi, in the drama text, thoughtfully accounts for the intervention of the white men to bring the war to a cessation. The following excerpt from the play reveals thus:

> *Moloney:* Very good. Well, I would put certain points before you this afternoon, and you will sign if you feel at liberty to do so. The Ibadan and Ekiti, who are the principal parties in the dispute, say they desire peace. I am happy to hear that with regard to a treaty of peace, friendship, and commerce to be concluded between you, I will now explain the main points which would constitute the preliminary treaty to be signed by you later. *(Unfolds scroll.)* One, the present independence of Ekiti, as agreed to in the letters of the kings and chiefs, must be maintained.
>
> *Ekiti Kings:* Good! (*They clap.)*
>
> *Moloney:* Two, there must be mutual respect of each other's territories by the contending parties and no reprisals.
>
> *Alore&Ami:* Good!
>
> *Moloney:* the boundary line between respective territories to be organised, as at present, and with regard to the towns of Otan, Iressi, Ada and Igbajo; those inhabitants who wish can go to Ekiti, but the towns themselves will remain Ibadan.
>
> (*Kiriji,* p. 74)

The peace treaty signed by the principal parties to the war – Ibadan and Ekiti – physically brought the war to an end, but with the psychological impact on the attainment of Yoruba nationhood and nationalism. That Ibadan lost control of Ekiti and other parts of Yoruba land did not go well with the Ibadan warlords. The contents of the treaty constrained Ibadan from waging expansionist wars against other Yoruba towns and communities (Oyeweso, 2012; Ogunyemi, 2015). The British government also

benefitted from the peace treaty as stated by Oyeweso (2012) that "most importantly, the Kiriji war paved the way for easy colonization of Yorubaland by the British who not only supervised the negotiation of peace treaty of 1886 but also brought military forces to ensure that the terms of peace were enforced in the 1890s" (p. 7). The colonial government in Nigeria was able to penetrate the Yoruba heartland towards the actualisation of the colonial agenda. The following image is the cenotaph of the spot where the peace treaty was signed to put a stop to Ekiti Parapo War.



Figure 4. The cenotaph shows the place where the peace treaty was signed (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2018)

Although the peace treaty lasted in theory, a thoughtful evaluation of inter-ethnic relations in Yoruba land reveals instances of unity in diversity. This is evident in the demonstration of ethnic loyalty among a large number of Yoruba people, with an overarching effect on the attainment of nationalism. The British government only made Yoruba warlords sign the peace treaty with no effective provision for the reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation after the cessation of the war. Consequently, the war that was physically suspended continued psychologically through the manifestation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that has become generational in Yoruba inter-ethnic relations.

Proactively, Wale Ogunyemi foreshadows that Yoruba nationalism will be difficult to attain because we have not learnt critical lessons from the war. This point is illustrated further with the excerpt from the play.

Ami:

> We may bid arms goodbye today, but there will always be wars, my friend, until the day the cat and the mouse learn to live together as brothers. But I am afraid that day will never come.
>
> *Cannon booms and the stage is engulfed in smoke. AMI and ALORE run quickly out, each going in the direction of his own camp. The gun continues to boom until darkness marks the end of the drama.* (*Kiriji*, p. 76)

The underlined message in the excerpt is that Yoruba true nationalism can be achieved only when we review our past histories for the harmonisation of all the differences for altruistic peace with no condition. Ogunyemi further expresses his scepticism with how the play is concluded with gun shots, smoke and darkness. These are the indications of chaos and unsettledness among the strata of Yoruba societies. On this matter, Oyeweso (2012) also stated that Yoruba politicians have not learnt from the lessons of the Yoruba civil wars to rechannel the course of history for true Yoruba nationalism.

Conclusion

This article discusses Yoruba civil wars as represented in the drama texts. It is historical and sociological with the textual analysis of Adebayo Faleti's *Basọ̀run Gáà* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Kírìjí*. In its approach, the article establishes historical causality between the Abíọ́dún-*Gáà*'s political crisis and how its mismanagement has degenerated into the catastrophic Ekiti Parapo War. The events of the wars in Yoruba land have altered human and social relations across Yoruba communities, with individuals reliving the traumatic experiences of the war, thereby prompting disaffection among the progenies of the victims and survivors of the war. Writers of historical plays have, therefore, been chronicling the historical actions to review or comment on the historical situations for posterity and the sustainability of internal cohesion. The textual analysis and discussion of the excerpts from the plays reveal instances of historical diffusion, which underlines the internal coherence in one historical action precipitating another. The mismanagement of the long reigns of peace in the Old Oyo Empire, most especially during the reign of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, had multiplier effects on the attainment of sustainable nationalism in Yoruba land. The historical diffusion is further enunciated with Falola's *Alaafinology,* which explains the significant position of the Aláàfin of Oyo in the maintenance and sustainability of ethnic nationalism among different Yoruba communities. The failure of Alaafinology thereby encouraged the struggle for independence and the emergence of Ibadan as a powerful settlement of warlords. The core issue raised in this article is that altruistic and unconditional Yoruba nationalism cannot be attained until there is a holistic review of the past mistakes and inactions for unalloyed catharsis.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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