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Naming Systems during Yoruba Wars: A Sociolinguistic Study

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The various intra-tribal conflagrations which consumed the Yoruba empire of Oyo were fundamentally economic and political. Oyo was renowned as an extraordinary exporter of slaves in the eighteenth century, and also as the seat of government for millions of citizens spanning the whole of South Western Nigeria and parts of the Republic of Benin. The revolt of Afonja in Ilorin against Alaafin Aole marked the beginning of the end of the great empire. The different battles fought by the Yoruba led to the emergence of new names in Yoruba lexicon. This paper treats thirteen major Yoruba wars and their onomastic imports.

KEYWORDS Yoruba, empty-calabash, *Oduduwa*, *Jalumi*, *Ilari*, *de facto*, *Modakeke*

The Yoruba nation

The Yoruba nation is one of the three major groups in Nigeria. The two remaining are the Hausa and Igbo groups. The populace is spread over the six southwestern states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti as well as Delta, Edo (South), Kwara and Kogi (Middle-belt). It should be noted that Port Novo, the administrative capital of the neighboring Republic of Benin, is also a predominantly Yoruba speech community known as "Ajase-Ipo." The ethnic group is renowned for its bravery and entrepreneurship and in contemporary Nigeria for its educational achievements and advancement (Adeniran 2009). Oduduwa is often referred to as Yoruba's progenitor. A descendant of Lamurudu, a Mecca Prince, he was believed to have migrated to Ile-Ife hundreds of years ago.

The fundamental impetus for the many intra-tribal brawls which consumed the entirety of Yorubaland between 1817 and 1893 was both economic and political. The massive Yoruba empire of Oyo was reputed to be an extraordinary exporter of slaves in the eighteenth century, and also as the seat of government for millions of citizens spanning the Ilorin, Igboho, Ekiti, Ondo, Ife/Ijesa, Oyo/Ibadan, Ijebu/Egba in the South West of Nigeria as well as the Abomey, Ajase-Ipo (Port Novo) and Allada in the Republic of Benin. The revolt of Afonja, the Aare-ona-kakanfo (generalissimo) in

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Ilorin against Alaafin Aole, marked the beginning of the end of the great empire. After 1817, this change was followed by the Fulani invasion during a period of civil strife which culminated in the establishment of a new Oyo (kingdom) by Alaafin Atiba at Ago-Oja in 1837 (Akinjogbin 1971). Crowder (1977) provides an outstanding geographic approximation of this kingdom during this period of time. By the mid-1930s, the ensuing uprisings had engulfed all of Yorubaland. The different battles fought by the Yoruba led to the emergence of many names in the Yoruba lexicon. This paper examines thirteen major Yoruba wars and their onomastic importance.

Methodology

In gathering data for this study, several approaches were used. First, I interviewed ten experienced Yoruba to obtain factual accounts of the wars. I also investigated original textual materials about the history of the Yoruba people. The historical accounts were examined to validate the authenticity of some of the previously gathered eye-witness accounts.

Theoretical approach

The theoretical basis adopted for this study is contextual theory. As noted by Adegbija (1999, 191), context refers to relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance. Crystal (1997, 48) defines it as the place in which a communicative event occurs. Contexts are a means of disambiguating an utterance based on its associate "entities" (Bloomer et al. 2005, 82). Levinson (2005, 8) cites Katz and Fodor who suggest that a contextual theory "would essentially be concerned with the disambiguation of sentences by the contexts in which they were uttered." Scholars (Yule 1985, 129; Adegbija 1999,191; Adegbite 2000, 65; Osisanwo 2002, 76; Levinson 2005, 85) have agreed on three major types of context: the linguistic (or verbal); the situational (or socio-cultural); and the physical.

The linguistic context refers to the company which a linguistic item keeps (i.e. the surrounding words in a phrase or a sentence). The linguistic context is also known as "co-text" (Yule 1985, 129) and it is referred to as verbal context by Adegbite (ibid). The situational context refers to the extra-linguistic factors that guide a decoder in interpreting the meaning of an utterance. Broadly, this context can be divided into two: the context of culture and the immediate context. The cultural context predicts the acceptable norms and mores as well as the sociocultural rules of behavior which must be shared by interlocutors before they can ensure mutual intelligibility. This is essential because what is acceptable in one culture might be taboo in another. Thus, knowledge of conventional rules invokes the ideas of "common sense and communicative competence" (Adegbite 2000, 65) in which linguistic forms are grounded on social norms and situational features for proper inference. Language, therefore, becomes the chief instrument of socialization (Fowler 1986, 19).

The immediate context of a situation is the specific circumstance in which communication occurs in relation to time, place, and other conditions. Events taking place in a communicative setting can influence the participants' choice of words and interpretation. Physical context refers to the physical environment in which an

utterance is made. Conversants pay particular attention to the period and location of an on-going discourse and therefore use expressions that capture the time and place of the linguistic encounter. Such expressions, according to Bloomer et al. (2005, 84), are deictic and the act of using them is deixic. While we shall adopt historical methods in our discussion, each historical account or vignette forms the context within which the names as an utterance are analyzed.

Literature review

One of the relevant studies to our work is Crowder (1977). He examines warfare in Yorubaland and Dahomey including Afonja's rebellion, and the breakup of the Oyo and Ibadan empires. This study serves as a springboard for the present study. Crowder (1977) approaches the wars from an historical perspective to the exclusion of onomastics unlike we intend to do in our study. Awe and Olutoye (1998) research warfare in Yorubaland concentrating exclusively on the role of a woman. Citing the activities of Efunsetan and Ajisafe among others, they contend that women influenced decisions pertaining to war and peace in Yorubaland during the nineteenth century. The study is historically biased against men. The present study is designed to address this shortcoming.

Westney's (2007) research is recipes named after women. Westney discovered that courtesans, noblewomen, and performers had had many recipes named after them over time and that the chief impulse behind the recording of recipes is memory. The study is similar to ours because it is historically based. However, it is different because it blends the culinary with names, while the present study will focus on war and names.

Yoruba war naming systems

There are four systems of naming which were used during the Yoruba wars: 1.) naming based on the cause of a war (e.g. *Agbekoya* War); 2.) naming based on the nature of the war (e.g. *Jalumi*, *Kiriji* and *W'oku ti* Wars); 3.) naming inspired by a military leader in the war (*Adubi*, *Ogedengbe* and *Oluyole* Wars); and 4.) naming generated by the setting (center) of the war (*Ado*, *Ijaye*, *Ife/Modakeke* and *Owu* Wars). The distribution of these patterns is shown below:

TABLE 1

FOUR SYSTEMS OF NAMING DURING YORUBAN WARS

S/N	NAMING SYSTEM	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	DEGREE
1	the cause of the war	2	15.38	55.38
2	the nature of the war	4	30.77	110.77
3	the leader of the war	3	23.08	83.08
4	the setting of the war	4	30.77	110.77
	TOTAL	13	100	360

This study examines the above four types of war names with a view to contributing to the overall understanding of their place in historical onomastics.

The Fulani Invasion

In 1817, Afonja was the Are-Ona-Kakanfo under the Alaafin of Oyo — Aole (the King). According to tradition, the Are-ona-kakanfo did not remain in the same principality as the king. The reason for this tradition was purely pragmatic: the Aare was quite powerful and could pose a challenge to the king. For that reason, he was given a vassal state of his own to control. However, the Are-ona-kakanfo had to be ready to go to war anytime that the Alaafin ordered him to do so. Flaunting this tradition, in 1817, Afonja sent an empty calabash to the Alaafin Aole, thereby signifying that he no longer acknowledged the authority of the Alaafin. According to a Yoruba saying, *Akuku aijoye san ju mo je tan, enu mi ko ka ilu lo* [It is better not to be crowned than to be enthroned and unable to control the citizens]. Aole had no choice but to accept the ramifications of this insult and in accordance with tradition, he committed suicide. But before his death, Alaafin Aole uttered a now famous curse which seemed to take immediate effect. Since then, Yorubaland has enjoyed neither unity nor peace — even today.

According to Akinjogbin (1971, 305), in 1817, Afonja invited Alimi, the Muslim itinerant preacher to Ilorin. Alimi died ca. 1823. Afonja was Alimi's benefactor. It was he and his soldier *Jamat* "many people" who assisted Afonja in dethroning Alaafin Aole. Abdulsalam, Alimi's successor, decided to overthrow Afonja and usurp his claim to the throne. He challenged Afonja and had him burnt in effigy because Afonja 'refused' to fall on the battlefront. Eventually, Abdulsalam became the ruler of Ilorin and its environs which Afonja had kept under his authority since 1797 (Johnson 1956). After settling down in Ilorin, Abdulsalam sent for a Jihadist's flag from Sokoto. He then served as the Emir of Illorin, under the Emirate of Gwandu. According to Johnson (1956), he subsequently declared a jihad against the whole of Yorubaland. Since Abdulsalam's tenure and the Fulani's revolt, Ilorin became the main Yoruba kingdom. The title of its king is *Emir* even today.

The Owu War

With the fall of the Oyo Empire to the Fulani, the Yoruba kingdom was thrown into chaos. The inhabitants of the Old Oyo were dispersed and started new settlements like Ibadan throughout Yorubaland. Before these events, Oyo had occupied more than half of the total land area of the Yoruba country. The collapse of such a vast empire logically had far-reaching effects on the rest of the country.

In 1821, in the wake of these consequences, another civil war, the Owu War, broke out and continued until ca. 1828. The Owu War was sparked by a quarrel between two traders at Apomu over a few cowries' worth of guinea pepper (Akinjogbin 1981, 261). The Olowu attacked Apomu and Ife. Because Owu had gone against tradition by first attacking the cradle of the Yoruba (i.e. Ife), the incumbent *Ooni of Ife* directed all other Yoruba settlements (led by Ibadan) to team up against Owu and scatter its remains all over Yorubaland. The battle was named after Owu. As a result of this battle, there are now small Owu communities all over Yorubaland. Such settlements include: *Owu-Abeokuta* (Ogun state), *Ilemowu-Iwo* as well as *Orile Owu* in Osun state, respectively.

The Gbanamu Battle

After the campaign against Owu (ca. 1828), the warriors from Oyo, Ijebu, and Ife who encamped in Ibadan, came under the leadership of an Ife chief, Okunade, the Maye. Okunade had led the campaign against Owu. Though brave, Okunade was an impetuous and rash ruler. His initial power and prestige encouraged Ife to look on Ibadan as a new extension of its kingdom. Ife earned fame after the destruction of Owu, the alliance of Ijebu, and the control of the resources yielded by the masses of Oyo refugees who sought refuge there. At first, the refugees lived mostly in Ife villages like Ipetumodu, Edunabon, and Moro. However later, the threat of an Ilorin invasion drove them into Ile-Ife itself. In return for grants of land, the refugees worked for the Ife people on their farms. They also served as soldiers and *Ilaris* in the Ife armies and palace, respectively. The *Ilari* were a group of royal messengers who were identified by the way they shaved alternate halves of their heads bare. This practice is what inspired the English traders to refer to them as "half heads" (Akinjogbin 1971, 335).

Ife's ascendancy was short-lived. The ill-tempered administration of Chief Okunade in Ibadan led to an open confrontation between the Ife and the Oyo citizens of Ibadan. In the end, Okunade and most other leading Ife warriors were expelled from Ibadan. Okunade sought to raise a large army. All the while, he was taunted by the Ibadan warriors to come and "hold fire," an English translation for the Yoruba contraction *gba'namu* or *gba ina mu: hence*, the name of the battle. Okunade's attempts to recapture Ibadan were defeated in the Gbanamu battle where he also lost his life. Ibadan then invaded Ife, over-running several towns and villages up to the very walls of Ile-Ife.

The Ife/Modakeke War

In 1834, with the fall of the Oyo Empire to the Fulani, some Oyo settlers who came to Ile-Ife came to be known as the *Modakeke* people. Their name was initially derived from the place given them (by Ife) which was home to a species of bird called the *Ako* "stork"; hence the origin of the appellation *Akoraye*, "the stork has a place." The storks in this location were known for always singing "mo-da-ke-ke-ke." This song name eventually replaced their former name, *Akoraye*. As a result of the Gbanamu, battle coupled with the agrarian prosperity of the Modakeke refugees in Ile-Ife, antipathy and resentment developed against them. The refugees were soon treated like slaves and their children were sacrificed to the Ife gods (http//www.Britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282720/Ile-Ife#ref245173).

In 1849, the Ifes attacked the Modakekes (Ajayi and Akintoye 1980, 280). Ife was defeated twice this time and the reigning Ooni Kumbusu was exiled. He was only brought back in 1854 through an armistice engineered by Bashorun Ogunmola from Ibadan. The hostility rose again in 1881–1849. The Ifes were defeated but later granted amnesty by the Modakeke. However, both the Modakeke and Ife became vassals to Ibadan. They were required to pay tributes and contribute human and material resources to Ibadan's war efforts. Later, Ife began to demand that the *Isakole* (a heavy tax and levy on a colonized community) be placed upon the Modakeke. Thereafter,

war erupted yet again between the two communities on August 25, 1997 before final military intervention. This war was named after the two warring communities involved, the Ile-Ife and the Modakeke.

The Ijaye War

The Ijaye War was fought between 1859 and 1862 as part of Ibadan's expansionist drive. Two major issues were responsible for the war. First was the opposition of Kurunmi (the Aare Ona Kananfo and the military head of the Ijaye) to Adelu's bid for the throne after the demise of Alaafin Atiba in 1858. Second was the ceding of Oke Ogun to Alaafin as part of his empire in order to expand the empire and generate more income. Kurunmi was similarly opposed to this plan as he did not recognize the Alaafin Adelu. Kurunmi argued that Aremo Adelu should have died with Alaafin Atiba, according to custom. Ibadan staunchly rejected Kurunmi's ideas. A battle of supremacy between Ibadan and Ijaye ensued. Despite the support Kurunmi enjoyed from the Egbas, he was ultimately defeated by Ibadan. Since the battle was fought in Kurunmi's territory (i.e. Ijaye), it was named the *Ijaye War*.

The Jalumi War

The defeat of Afonja along with the capture of Ilorin by Alimi and his calvary soldiers (the *Jamaat* "many people") led to the total collapse of the old Oyo empire. Later, Ibadan, another strong principality, emerged after Oyo warriors settled at *Eba Odan* "a place beside the forest." It was the contraction of the name *Eba'dan* that later gave rise to the name *Ibadan*. The Fulani continued with their expansionist drive towards the southern part of the former Oyo empire. One of their early targets was Inisa, a town very close to the Otin River and not far from Ikirun in the present Osun state of Nigeria. As usual, the siege was to be carried out at night. Nevertheless, the Inisa people got word of the Fulanis' plan. Thereupon, they sought assistance from Ibadan.

Having studied the Fulani warriors and their cavalry in the past, the Ibadan warriors planned to destroy the bridge their attackers had intended to cross over to reach their target. More canals were also dug by the Ibadan warriors en route to Inisa. As the Fulani warriors raced furiously towards the town on their horses overnight, they plummeted into the waters one after the other. The Fulani were defeated and a monument was erected at the bank of the Otin River to commemorate the defeat of Ilorin during the war. Today the war is still known as *Ogun jija lu omi* (*jalumi*) meaning "the battle of falling inside water" or "rushing into the water."

The Arakanga (Oluyole) War

Abeokuta was founded in 1830 by refugee warriors from the Egba forest. They were led by Lamodi and Sodeke, both the Balogun and Seriki of Egba, repectively. The former initiated their relocation but died on the way while the latter successfully took them to the promised land. The name of the town was derived from the protection which the fleeing settlers sought under the rock known as *Olumo*. This name is

interpreted in Yoruba as "*Olu fi mo*" or "*Oluwa fi mo*" meaning "God has put a stop to their suffering". This name was given to them after fleeing from inter-tribal wars of between 1817 and 1830.

In 1834, the Ibadan challenged the Egbas to war which resulted in the defeat of the Ibadan in what was known as the battle of *Arakanga* meaning "an unusual or a strange event." This name was given because it was so unusual then for such a small group like the Egba to be able to defeat the Ibadan in war. The Egba's success was in no small measure due to their access to coastal areas and the support they received from the Europeans who supplied them with sophisticated arms and ammunition during the war. The battle is also sometimes referred to as the *Oluyole War* because Bashorun Oluyole led the Ibadan warriors. This also explains a verse in Ibadan's *oriki* (praise name or panegyric) is the following: *Ibadan ile Oluyole* "Ibadan the home of Oluyole."

The Ogedengbe War

Around 1871, when Obadoke Latoosa was the Are-ona-kakanfo in Ibadan, the seat of the paramount ruler in Ilesa became vacant. Two contestants, Odigbadigba (favored by Ogedengbe) and Oweweniye (Ibadan chief's candidate) emerged. Odigbadigba was crowned while Oweweniye was detained in Ibadan before being executed. This action provoked Ijesa to engage in a war of vendetta. Led by Ogedengbe, the Ijesa warriors challenged Ibadan. The war was later named after *Ogedengbe*, the leader of the Ijesa warriors.

The Ado War

In 1873, the Ifes were contending with the Modakekes. Ife then sent emissaries to Aare Latoosa of Ibadan for assistance. Before the arrival of Ibadan, the warring factions had settled. The contingent felt disgraced at the prospect of having to return home without having fought and taken various spoils. Therefore, Latoosa led his team to Ado (Ekiti), conquered it and sacked adjourning towns like Ifaki, Igede, Iyin and Awo. The battle was named after the center of the war, i.e. *Ado*.

The W'oku ti War

This is another battle of expansion waged against the Ekitis by the Ibadans ca.1875. The Ekitis could not withstand their assailants. However, they resisted so courageously and vehemently that Ibadan suffered great casualties during an Ekiti ambush. Due to the great number of deaths suffered by the Ibadan, the campaign was named *Wo oku ti* or *W'oku ti* denoting "the piling up of corpses" (Are-Latoosa 1998, 169).

The Kiriji War

The *Kiriji* War has different designations. It is known as the *Ekiti parapo* "confederacy of the Ekitis War," the Sixteen Year War (1877–1886), and the *Fejeboju War*. The war was due to excesses of the Ibadan warriors. Even though technically the Ibadan symbolically ruled in the name of the Alaafin, in reality the Ibadan ruling class

was a law unto itself (Osuntokun 2006). Ajayi (1998, 365) describes the legal situation with the following observation: "the militaristic Ibadan had over the passage of time become the subject only to the *de jure* but not *de facto* sovereignty of Oyo." This bred hostility and jealousy from other surrounding tribes like the Ijebu, Egba, Ekiti, Ijesa, and Akoko. Meanwhile, Egba and Ijebu closed their access road to the coast where the Ibadan could buy arms and ammunition against Ibadan. Moreover, the Egba supported Kurunmi against Ibadan during the Ijaye War which had just concluded.

So, Ibadan decided to teach the Egba and Ijebu a lesson. The first step in the campaign was to force open the roads to the coast and then annex Egba and Ijebu. This campaign gave other vassal states like Ekiti and Ilesha, and Dahomey the opportunity to revolt and fight for their independence. The Ekitis, Ijeshas, Igbominas and later the Ifes, teamed up with the Ijebu/Egba against Ibadan in different fronts under the leadership of Ogedengbe, the great commander of Ijesha warriors. This leader's name means "a fierce man who flips opponants over in a wrestling competition. Despite this leadership, the confederacy would still not have been able to march to Ibadan if it had not been for the sophisticated guns and bullets that the Ijebu/Egba were able to obtain on the coast from the Europeans.

The Ibadan warriors attempted to describe the sound that the "strange machines" made in the war of the Ekiti Parapo. According to them, the weapons made the following sound: *Ki-ri-ji, Ki-ri-ji*: hence, the name *Kiriji* war. Osuntokun (2006, 7) captures the situation as follows: "The new stiffened Ekiti Parapo army . . . began to rain these hot shots on the Ibadan army and the huge noise these guns made led to calling the war Kiriji (onomatopoeia for loud noise)." Osuntokun further observed that the first major casualty of the War was Ajayi Ogboriefon, the commander in chief of the Ibadan army. Because of the blood of Ogboriefon's and his retinue was said to fill the stream separating the two armies, the War was also called *Fejeboju,* "washing face with blood."

The Adubi War

During the colonial period, life became more difficult for many Yoruba in many ways. In 1918, a direct taxation was instituted in the Yoruba areas of the protectorate. After the taxes were collected, the Egba people rose in protest. Led by Adubi, an Egba warrior, the people rose not only against the taxation, but also against the general incursion of the British-controlled Egba native administration. The Adubi War of June 1918 was a massive uprising in which hundreds were killed. The war was named after the Egba leader, *Adubi*.

The Agbekoya War

The *Agbekoya Parapo* Revolt of 1968–1969, popularly known as *Agbekoya*, was a peasant revolt in Ibadan, Nigeria's former western capital and home to the majority of the country's Yoruba population. It is the most well-known peasant-driven political riot in western Nigeria history. It continues to be referred to by modern grassroots organizations as a successful example of collective action against unpopular government policies.

The revolt was predominantly aimed at a reduction in taxes introduced by the military government of the western state. The name *agbekoya* denotes "the farmers who reject suffering" (Adeniran, 1974). The over-taxation in this context is referred to as *iya* "suffering." The taxation was resisted because it was a poll tax placed on individuals rather than personal income. The farmers, led by Tafa Popoola and others, mobilized from villages. They marched to the seat of government in Mapo, Ibadan. They demanded, among other things, the removal of local government officials who had pillaged their villages, a reduction of the flat tax rate from $8 to $1.10, and an end to the use of force in tax collection.

As the protests continued, the revolt degenerated into anarchy and the military government employed the use of force. This further worsened the situation. Most of the farmers' leaders ran to Akanran village where the battle became fierce. Thereafter, the *Agbekoya* War derived its second name, *Ogun Akanran*, "the Akanran War." The government eventually settled with the farmers thanks to the intervention of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. However, the war in Ibadan (particularly in Akanran) opened another home front while the nation was busy with the Biafran War.

Conclusion

From the examination above, it has become clear that war-related names in the African Yoruba context do not just occur in a vacuum. These names are used as instruments of memory. They validate and perpetuate historical facts traceable to prolonged wars. This study has also demonstrated four systems of naming used during the Yoruba wars: naming due to the cause of a war; naming derived from the nature of the war; naming based on the leader of the war; and naming related to the geographic setting or center of the war. We, therefore, agree with Nwankwo (2008, 13) who contends that "war is Africa's muted index."

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