



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

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Received: 23 / 01 / 2025

Accepted: 04 / 05 / 2025

Published: 15 / 07 / 2025

### 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 *Basòrun 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.

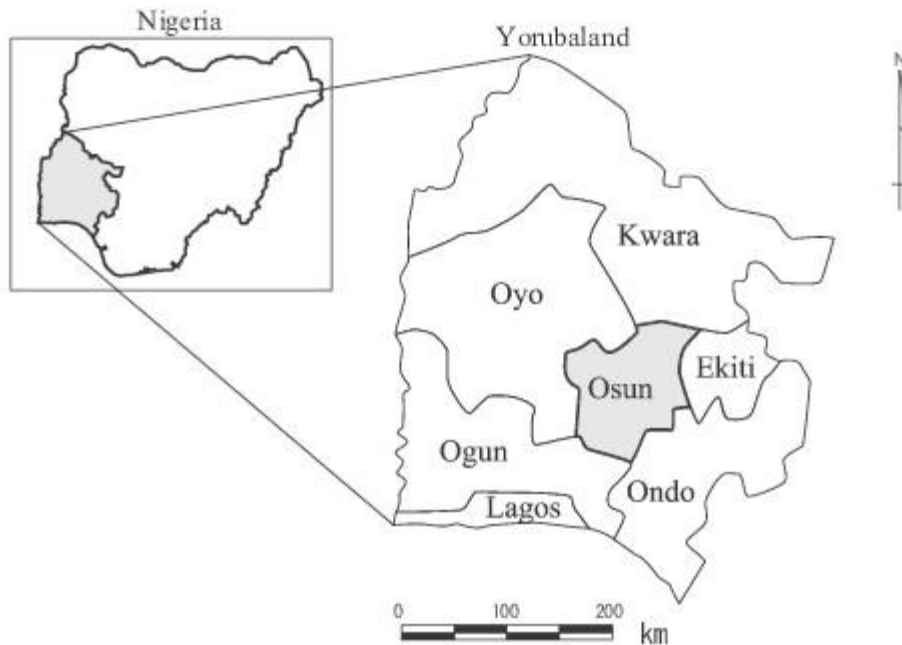
**Keywords:** Ekiti-Parapo War, war and peace in Yorubaland, Yoruba civil wars, Yoruba historical drama, Yoruba nationalism

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol06no02.13>

## 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 18<sup>th</sup> Century and terminating in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 *Basòrun 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 *Basòrun Gáà* is a narration and re-interpretation of the internal crisis between Aláàfin Abíódún and Basòrun 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 Basòrun and how Aláàfin Abíódún stooped to conquer upon the latter's enthronement. The plot starts with the public execution of Aláàfin Májèógbé, who has been found ineffective and autocratic. Following the death of Aláàfin Májèógbé, Basòrun Gáà suggests that Aláàfin Abíódún should be the next Aláàfin of Òyó. Reluctantly, Aláàfin Abíódún ascends the throne but with the secret intention of reducing the might of the dreadful Basòrun Gáà. As the events unfold, Basòrun Gáà kills the only daughter of Aláàfin Abíódún (Àgbònyín) while the former is preparing a fame and money ritual. This latest cruelty of Basòrun Gáà propels Aláàfin Abíódún into action to put an end to Basòrun Gáà's autocracy. Subsequently, Aláàfin Abíódún travels to Jàbàtá to seek military assistance from Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakańfò (Oyábí). A war is waged against the home and household of Basòrun Gáà. In the war, Oyábí and Òyó force annihilate Basòrun Gáà's family and generation.



Figure 2. The cover image of Adebayo Faleti's *Basòrun 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 Basòrun. 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 Bashòrun 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 Basòrun. Owing to the unhealthy power relations between the offices of Aláàfin and Basòrun, the whole empire and by extension the whole of the Yoruba race are in strict bondage to Basòrun Gáà.

The argument on kinship in relation to the status of Basòrun Gáà in the history of the 18th and 19th-century Òyó Empire reveals that there is no way in the history of the empire where it is stated that any of the chiefs among the Òyó Mèsì, particularly Basòrun, had assumed the office of Aláàfin. Basòrun Gáà, himself, acknowledges the fact that it has not been in historical records that a Basòrun became the king of Òyó. 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!  
 È má se mí ní Kábíyèsí mọ  
 Èmi 'l'í sọba, ènyin náà sì mọ.  
 Mo le ló'lá kí n n'ípò nínú ìjòyè, ẹ ti mọ  
 P' énit'á bí l'Òsòrún 'ò le gorí ọba.

Àwọn Ìjòyè: Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí! Kábíyèsí!

Àwọn 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 Basòrun cannot be a king.

The above excerpt shows the fact that Basòrun Gáà acknowledges his lack of qualification for the throne. At the same time, Faleti attempts to interrogate history that Basòrun Gáà had the possibility of becoming the king of Òyó if Aláàfin Abíódún did not take an urgent step at then. This interrogation of history questions the cultural episteme of noble and royal power. Basòrun 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 Abíódún, with the assistance of Oyábí (Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakańfò), overpowered him.

Prior to the death of Basòrun Gáà, the whole of the empire felt unsafe, and this informed the habit of Aláàfin and other chiefs paying homage to him (Basòrun Gáà) in his home. This practice upholds Derrida's description of *bricoleur* because Basòrun 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*, Basòrun 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 Basòrun Gáà, no young or old member of the royal family wants to ascend the throne.

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

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

Abíódún: Ìyá wa! Kúdèfù, èrù mbà mí  
 Mo jòba lásán ni, ng' ò l'á sẹ ọba l'ènu.  
 Gáà l'ó fi mí jòba,  
 Níjọ t'ó bá wu Gáà, ó sì le yọ mí l'ọba.  
 Ègbèjì s'arẹmọ fún ni - àgàn híyọ,  
 Àgàn má yọ mó  
 Ènià tó s'arẹmọ fún ni l'ágàn,  
 Ó le p'omọ ẹni b'áa bá d'ábiyamọ.  
 Mo ti wí fún gbogbo Ọyómìsì  
 Wípé ng'ò joyè  
 Mo kéré, ng kò tópò ọba í se:  
 Nwón ní láá, Adégoólú n'Ifá Gáà mú  
 Mo kéré ng'ò lénìkan, mo gorí ọba.  
 Aá tí i se.....

(*Bashòrun Gáà*, p. 18)

Abíódún: Our mother! Kúdèfù, 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.  
 Ègbèjì 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 Ọyómìsì  
 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 Abíódún – Gáà's relationship. Since Gáà cannot be enthroned as the king of Ọyó, 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 Abíódún 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 Awónbíojú (who spent 130 days on the throne), Aláàfin Agbólúajé and Aláàfin Majéogbé. Aláàfin Abíódún, however, is in the knowing of this ploy of Basòrun Gáà because the former has availed himself the opportunity of the historical knowledge of the unpleasant fate of his predecessor following Basòrun Gáà's scheming. With the expression "how do we do it", Aláàfin Abíódún is soliciting popular sympathy and support

on how to subdue or overcome the excesses of the power-corrupt Basòrun. This study further argues that the use of ellipsis is to register the mood of future uncertainty about overcoming the excesses of Basòrun Gáà. The interpretation of the power play between Aláàfin Abíódún and Basòrun Gáà is rooted in the urge to have political power over the domains of Òyó 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 Abíódún 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 (Àgbònyín) to Basòrun Gáà. The failure of this arrangement, however, is foreshadowed by Àgbònyín, who is of the view that her freedom, like that of the entire Yoruba race, is not guaranteed with the towering influence of Basòrun Gáà. The following excerpt reveals this.

Àgbònyín: Akínkúnmi,  
S'ó o mòpé n' kì í s'òminira ara mi.

Akínkúnmi: Nígba t' íwo bá tún íso p'o ò l'òminira  
Kíni k'írú wa ó se?  
Aiyé ti dàrú...  
Gbogbo Òyó ni ò l'òminira.....

Àgbònyín: Má sọ t'òminira Yorùbá  
Òminira t'èmi ni k'á so.  
Lásán ni mo j'òmọ ọlá.....  
Ng' ò le dá nkankan gbé se.

(*Bashòrun Gáà*, pp. 77 - 78)

Àgbònyín: 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 Òyó is not independent.....

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

Another diplomatic move is that Aláàfin Abíódún, with other chiefs, pays daily homage to Bashòrun 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 Basòrun Gáà - Aláàfin Abíódún power relations. With this inversion of cultural norms and practices, Basòrun Gáà sees himself on top and in control of every situation in the empire. The inference from Aláàfin Abíódún'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 Abíódún prompts the confrontational approach, which follows Basòrun Gáà's murder of Àgbònyín. With the aid of Oyábí (Ààrẹ̀ Ònà Kakańfò), Aláàfin Abíódún defeats Basòrun Gáà with his cohorts and pedigrees, except few who can escape from the consuming war. Although the death of Basòrun Gáà brought to an end the years of terror in Old Òyó 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 Basòrun Gáà ushered in new episodes of peace and tranquillity in the history of the Old Òyó 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 Abíódún 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 Abíódún in 1789. (p. 108)

The Gáà- Abíódún crisis and the tragic end of Basòrun 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 Òyó 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 Basòrun Gáà and Aláàfin Abíódún. For instance, Bashorun Asamu has a kinship relationship with Bashòrun Gáà (Falola, 2021; Ajayi and Smith, 1971). Bashorun Asamu was one of the rivals of Aláàfin Áólè, who reigned after Aláàfin Abíódún. This rivalry may be connected to the deformed structural peace that happened after the death of Bashòrun Gáà and during the long reign of Aláàfin Abíódún. Similarly, Àfònjá (the Yoruba War Generalissimo) was not offering the required military support to Aláàfin Áólè. The manifestation of structural peace is also found in the action of Ojo Agunbambaru to avenge the death of his father (Basòrun 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 Áólè led to the collapse of the Old Òyó Empire and the takeover of Ilorin by the Fulani jihadists. Lack of structural peace in the Old Òyó Empire after the death of Basòrun 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 Abíódún 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 *Kiriji* 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.

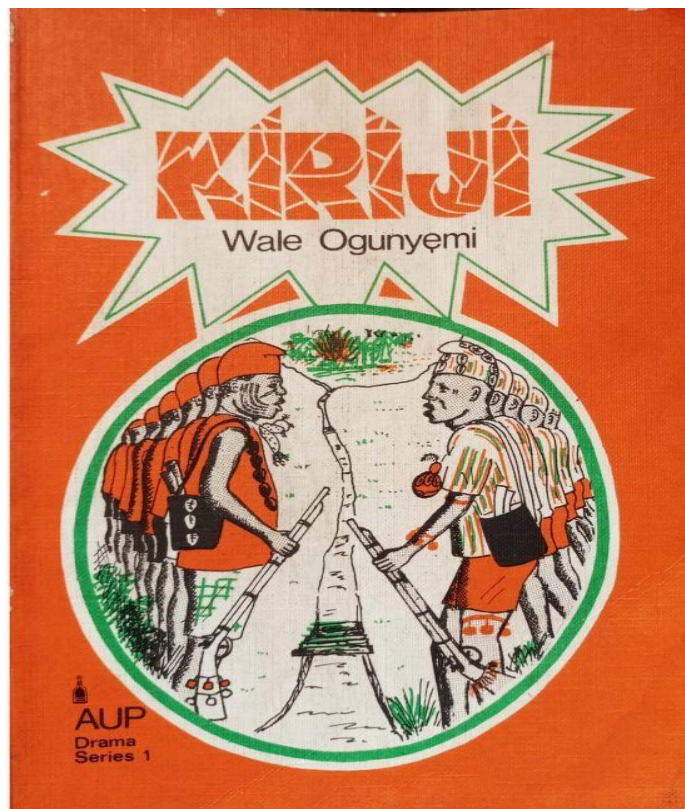


Figure. 3 The cover image of Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*

The plot of Ogunyemi's *Kiriji* 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 Abíódún – 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 Abíódún and Bashòrun 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 Òyó 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, Luluwoye 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 Òyó Empire. This historical information forms the background of Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*. 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 Ọ̀yọ́ 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 Ọ̀yọ́ 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 Ọ̀yọ́ 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 altered 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 *Basòrun Gáà* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*. In its approach, the article establishes historical causality between the Abíódún-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 Abíódún, 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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### Declaration of AI Refined

This document has benefited from the application of AI-driven tools, including Grammarly and Scholar AI Chat, to refine its linguistic aspects. These tools were utilised to correct grammar and spelling and improve the overall writing style. It is acknowledged that the use of these technologies may introduce certain AI-generated linguistic patterns. However, the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented remain the sole work of the authors.

### Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

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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**Cite as**

Sesan, A. A., & Ilori, S. I. (2025). Representations of Yoruba Political History in Drama and their Implications for Yoruba Nationalism. *Atras Journal*, 6 (2), 202-219