The Yùngbà Panegyric Poem: A Metatext Of The Ọ̀yọ́ Empire

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Abstract

In line with previous studies (Quint 1993, Stetkevych, S. 2002, Bauman and Briggs 1990), which have established the relationship between genre and ideology, this paper is founded on the premise that the literary form and content of the Yùngbà panegyric poem is intimately related to the idea of Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́ imperial hegemony. The paper starts with the argument that the Yùngbà panegyric is a metatext. The study defines a metatext as an independent text created in direct relation to an extant text called a prototext, either as a commentary (Genette 1997) or a translation (Popovic 1976) of the extant prototext. Linking the metatext to the reputation of the extant text, the study maintains that the subject of the metatext, the Aláàfin's (king's) name (reputation), is judged by the volume and ingenuity of the poems composed in his name and his empire. Put differently, the heroic deeds of the king are the main text, which in turn earn the Alaafin a metatext of praise names and epithets, which go on to form the basis of the composition of the Yùngbà praise poem. Finally, the paper argues that the Yùngbà is not just a metatext, but that it is a metatext of empire—specifically a metatext of the Ọ̀yọ́ empire. The Yùngbà promulgates a myth of kingship that legitimizes the king (Stetkevych 2002). The way the Yùngbà is constituted as text (Barber 1999), is a reflexive process on the part of the poet, who is conscious of empire as she weaves her metatext to validate Ọ̀yọ́ imperial hegemony. The study further demonstrates that the Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́ society is a reflective one, revisiting the past by re-enacting it and

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shaping the future through its collective memory. The Empire is the reason for the existence of the royal Yùngbà panegyric genre and vice versa.

Keywords: Yùngbà, metatext, Ọ̀yọ́, Empire, Yorùbá, praise, poetry, metatextuality, praise names.

Résumé

Conformément aux études antérieures (Quint 1993, Stetkevych, S. 2002, Bauman et Briggs 1990) qui ont établi le lien entre le genre et l'idéologie, cet article est fondé sur le principe que la forme et le contenu littéraires du poème panégyrique Yùngbà sont intimement liés à l'idée de l'hégémonie impériale Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́. L'article commence par l'argument selon lequel le panégyrique Yùngbà est un métatexte. L'étude définit un métatexte comme un texte *indépendant* créé en relation directe avec un texte existant appelé prototexte, soit comme un *commentaire* (Genette 1997), soit comme une *traduction* (Popovic 1976) du prototexte existant. Reliant le métatexte à la réputation du texte existant, l'étude soutient que le sujet du métatexte, le *nom*, c.–à–d., la réputation de l'Alaafin (le roi), est jugé par le volume et par l'ingéniosité des poèmes composés en son nom et son empire. En d'autres termes, les actes héroïques du roi constituent le texte principal, qui, à son tour, valent à l'Alaafin un métatexte de noms et d'épithètes d'éloge, qui forment, par la suite, la base de la composition du poème d'éloge Yùngbà. Enfin, l'article soutient que le poème Yùngbà n'est pas seulement un métatexte, mais qu'il est un métatexte de l'empire – en particulier, un métatexte de l'empire Ọ̀yọ́. Le poème Yùngbà promulgue un mythe de la royauté qui légitime le roi (Stetkevych 2002). La façon dont le poème Yùngbà est constitué en tant que texte (Barber 1999), est un processus réflexif de la part de la poétesse, qui est consciente de l'empire, en tissant son métatexte pour valider l'hégémonie impériale d'Ọ̀yọ́. L'étude démontre, en outre, que la société Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́ est une société réflexive, revisitant le passé en le reconstituant et façonnant l'avenir à travers sa mémoire collective. L'Empire est la raison d'être du genre panégyrique royal Yùngbà et vice versa.

Mots clés: Yùngbà, métatexte, Empire, Ọ̀yọ́, Yorùbá, poésie, d'éloge, métatextualité, noms d'éloge.

Each person has two names; there is the presence name, and there is the future name. It is because of the future name that everyone behaves with caution.

Yorùbá Proverb

The Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ́ and the Yùngbà in Context

The Yùngbà is a royal panegyric poem performed solely for the King (Aláàfin) of the Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́ Empire which occupied present–day southwestern Nigeria and Eastern Benin (Dahomey) and peaked in the period 1650–1750. The Yùngbà eulogises the incumbent king as well as his predecessors. It exalts the Aláàfin's lineage, celebrates and immortalizes his achievements, and documents important events in history. The poem contains a large number of names – praise names, epithets, and appellations of persons. Yùngbà is rarely performed publicly, except during significant festivals and ceremonies of the community. The Yùngbà additionally distinguishes itself from other genres of royal panegyrics by the fact that it is solely performed by women. It is theatrical in nature, and incorporates other generic forms. The Yùngbà is thus a poetic form which is intrinsically linked to Ọ̀yọ́ royal history and hegemony. It is this umbilical cord which ties the Yùngbà genre to Ọ̀yọ́ imperial ideology that forms the overarching premise of this study.

I demonstrate the relationship between genre and ideology through my novel reading of the Yùngbà panegyric as a *metatext*[1]. I define a metatext as an independent text created in relation to or from an extant text either as a "commentary" (Genette 1997) or a "translation" (Popovic 1976) of the pre–existing text (*prototext*). The Alaafin's known heroic deeds become the prototext based on which the Yùngbà panegyric is composed as an independent verbal art form in praise of the ruler. I maintain therefore that the king's deeds are a form of *text*, albeit present in the consciousness of the community, which provides the poet with the pre–existing text from which is created a metatextual Yùngbà chant. "Text" therefore assumes a non–traditional definition which the paper later addresses. What is worthy of note here is that the metatextual process is one of the ways in which one text mediates another, and is therefore situated within the theoretical framework of intertextuality (Kristeva 1966), also known as "dialogism" (Bakhtin 1986) or "transtextuality" (Genette 1997). Hence, this

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1   This article is based on a significantly revised chapter of my doctoral dissertation. Bentil–Mawusi (2018). Performing Arab and African royalty: An intertextual approach to the performance of the ʿAbbāsid, Asante and Yorùbá court panegyric. (Publication No. 10823642) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University Bloomington]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

work is essentially a study of the text, textuality, and intertextuality of the Yùngbà panegyric through its analysis as a metatext.

This work builds on a series of unfolding arguments. The first argument is that the Yùngbà is a metatext. The praise names and epithets prevalent in the panegyric are also constituted as metatexts. The fact that the Yùngbà genre is constituted as a metatext that is intimately related to the idea of Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ́ political power leads to my second argument that it is a *metatext of empire*, specifically the (New) Ọ̀yọ́ emipire. It exists to validate Ọ̀yọ́ political ideology by creating a "myth of kingship" (Stetkevych 2002) which legitimises not only the King (Aláàfin) of the Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ́ Empire but also authenticates Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ́ imperial ideology. The Yùngbà must therefore be read in its mythic-ritual paradigm, to avoid any misguided and oversimplified critique of the genre. The preceding arguments will come together to demonstrate that (Yùngbà) literary *form, content*, and (Ọ̀yọ́) imperial *ideology* are fundamentally linked. In Bakhtinian (dialogic) terms, they are *intersubjective* (Bakhtin 1989).

Rationale for the Study

African literature, especially the branch of African oral literature, as an academic discipline is still not being studied enough when compared to the volume of creative works available (Sone, 2018). The first goal of this paper is to add to the growing body of studies on indigenous African literature in order to accord the Yùngbà its rightful place as a genre, deserving academic attention. Secondly, panegyric poetry is sometimes maligned, a phenomenon against which writers like Rebecca Gould (2015) argue. By building on the work done by Suzanne Stetkevych who analyses the Abbasid Royal panegyric within the Arab-Islamic culture, I show here that the Yùngbà is not merely propagandist. Stetkevych (2010, 2002, 1993) proposes that the royal panegyric must be interpreted within a ritual paradigm to understand how it comments on a society and vice versa.

My own analysis of the Yùngbà panegyric draws on Stetkevych's work and applies it to the African context in ways that I explain in detail later. My study, therefore, takes on a cross-cultural approach to the analysis of the Yùngbà. Thirdly, approaches to African oral literature have not read the African oral poetry as a metatext. This novel reading of the Yùngbà royal eulogy as a metatext will demonstrate that African praise poems are not a collection of disjointed phrases without purpose or creativity (Barber 1984) but rather these poems "comment on" (Genette 1997) and "translate" (Popovic 1976) the feats of the ruler into poetic creations performed for communal reflection. Additionally, they point to the

fact that the Yorùbá–Ọ̀yọ́ society is a reflective one, revisiting the past by re-enacting it and shaping the future through its collective memory.

The data for the study are based on Akinyemí's translations of the Yùngbà. Akinyemi's work, *Yorùbá Royal Poetry: A Socio-historical Exposition and Annotated Translation* (Akinyemi 2004). It is the most comprehensive work done on the Yùngbà genre so far in English, which comprises both the original texts in Yorùbá, as well as their translations. The book is a result of fieldwork done by the author with first hand interaction with the performers. All examples of Yùngbà poetry cited in this study are extracted from Akinyemi's work, unless otherwise stated, and form the basis of this study. All claims and assertions are based on the entire data (Akinyemi 2004) from which I cite to support my arguments in this study.

Genre, Ideology and the Yùngbà

The relationship between genre and ideology has elicited studies across cultures (Stetkevych 2017, 2010, 2002; Quint 1993; Briggs & Bauman 1992; Barber 1991; Bakhtin 1989). However, for the purpose of this paper, I focus on the work of Suzanne Stetkevych for the similarity of her study to my analysis of the Yùngbà. In demonstration of the intimate relationship between genre and ideology, Stetkevych (2002 p. ix) contends that the courtly panegyric ode of the ʿAbbassid Empire, "created, encoded, and promulgated a myth and ideology of legitimate Arabo-Islamic rule. The poets created the *badiʿ* ("new," "innovative"), poetic style to articulate the military, political and religious might of the Caliph and the Islamic Empire. The praise poem thus became "a projection or analogue of that power […] the ʿlinguistic correlativeʾ of unprecedented Arab–Islamic rule which culminated in the expression/declaration of an ideology of Islamic Manifest Destiny" (Stetkevych 2017, p. 218)

I maintain that the Yùngbà panegyric of the Yorùbá people of Nigeria exists to authenticate Ọ̀yọ́ imperial hegemony. The Aláàfin's legitimacy derives not only from his achievements, but from the myth of kingship that is promulgated by verbal artists through the composition and performance of the Yùngbà panegyric poem. The Yùngbà panegyric, a sacralised poem reserved for very solemn and dignified ceremonies in praise of only the Aláàfin, exists to legitimize the Ọ̀yọ́ empire and the reigning king. In other words, it speaks for the empire. It legitimises the empire by proclaiming its greatness. The Yùngbà verbally mythicises the Aláàfin and his feats; thereby making it a linguistic correlative of Ọ̀yọ́ imperial destiny..

Metatextuality and the Yùngbà Poetic Expression

This work addresses the mediation of texts by other texts – intertextuality. Intertextuality is a term that Julia Kristeva employed anachronistically to explain

and reformulate Mikhail Bakhtin's earlier concept of language as social phenomenon. Intertextuality has developed a plurality of definitions. It has been captured under umbrella terms such as "dialogism" (Bakhtin 1989), "intertextuality" (Kristeva 1969/1986), and "transtextuality" (Genette (1997). It is Genette's formulation of intertextuality which incorporates "metatextuality" as one of the five categories of Genettian transtextuality.

Any study of intertextuality evokes the long-debated discussion of what constitutes a text, and how such texts dialogue with each other. Defying a single all-encompassing definition, "text" has been defined as "any coherent complex of signs" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.103; Hanks, 1989, p. 95). Barthes' (1977) formulation of the text transcends the oral or written word into other configurations of text (such as film, visual art, and music) from which meaning could be extracted/communicated. Also defined as "all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity" (Blommaert 2005, p. 3) … and as "objectified unit of discourse" (Gal 2006, p. 178), text can be detached from one context (*decontextualisation*), and inserted into another context (*recontextualisation*) during the process of what Bauman and Briggs have termed *entextualisation* – "the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit–a text–that can be lifted of out its interactional setting" (Bauman and Briggs 1990, p. 73). Contending that culture can be read as a text, Silverstein and Urban (1996, p. 2) posit: "text is a metadiscursive notion, useful to participants in a culture as a way of creating an image of a durable, shared culture immanent in or even undifferentiated from its ensemble of realized or even potential texts," as can be argued is the case in the Yorùbá royal context of the performance of the Yùngbà panegyric chant.

The metatext also points to relationships between texts, and has been explained from a variety of angles by different scholars. The metatext has been previously defined as "a statement on a statement, a comment on a statement" (Wierzbicka 1971, p. 106); "a type of predicate that appears in the whole linguistic message, unifying it and indicating its boundaries" (Dobrzyńska, 1978, p. 103); and "a statement, whose topic is the text itself" (Dobrzyńska, 1993 cited in Witosz 2017, p. 108).

In Genette's preferred "transtextual" to "intertextual" approach to texts, he defines the *third* of five classifications – *metatextuality* – thus:

> The third type of textual transcendence, which I call *metatextuality* is the relationship most often labeled "commentary." It unites a given text to another, of which it

> speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it. Thus does Hegel, in The *Phenomenology of the Mind*, allusively and almost silently evoke Denis Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau*. This is the critical relationship par excellence (Genette 1997, p. 4).

Drawing from Genette's definition above, Popovic (1976) classifies translation as a metatext, and not strictly a *hypertext*, as originally configured by Genette. He calls the source text a *prototext* and the recreated target text a *metatext*. One significant observation he makes to the theorizing of the *metatext* is the fluidity of generic boundaries and definitions of text. Popovic (1976, p. 233) also notes that there are "specific styles and the relations between different artistic systems" which have a metatextual product. The metatextual process could transcend generic and thematic boundaries of creation: "the meta-communication of an artistic text by a non-artistic one, *metatexts* of art which have non-artistic *prototexts*, *metatext* in the fine arts whose *prototext* is literary, etc" (emphasis mine). In our specific case, the Yùngbà chant is an artistic *metatext*, whose *prototext* is non-artistic.

For this study, I conceive of (proto) "text" as the heroic military deeds of the patron-ruler – based on which the poet creates a poetic *metatext* in praise of the king. Names and epithets, as we shall see, are entexualized in the Yùngbà panegyric. The *prototext* for the metatextual praise poem, is not a text in the traditional sense. It is the deeds of the Aláàfin which we read as prototext. The ruler's art of leadership earns him names and epithets which in themselves are constituted as *metatexts* that provide a commentary on the Aláàfin's rulership. The Yùngbà poem is the resulting metatext that the poets create, as in the example below.

The following lines of the Yorùbá Yùngbà panegyric poetry briefly illustrate the stages of the metatextual process, that is, the mediational event that creates a *metatext*. The subject of praise in the poem is the Aláàfin Adeyemi III, one of the longest serving rulers of the Yorùbá (1970–2022).

Mopélólá: Kábíèsí!	Your royal Majesty!
Adétóún : Aláṣẹ, èkeji òrìṣà.	Your Lordship, next in rank to the gods.
Mopélólá: Òòsà, baba Akèé,	The god, father of Akèé,
Adétóún: Òòṣà, okọ Móyíólá.	The god, husband of Móyíólá.
Mopélólá: Láyemí ń lowó bí ení lomi.	Láyemí who uses money as if it's ordinary water.

Adétóún: A–náwó–bí–eléda	One–who–spends–lavishly–as–if–he–mints–money–privately.
Mopélólá: Okoò mi ò deda ri,	My lord has never been involved in illegal minting of money,
Owó è ló yà.	He is only generous
Adétóún: Atanda. Babaa Kúdí.	Atanda, father of Kudi.

In the above lines, Mopélólá and Adétóún chant the praises of the Aláàfin Adeyemi III, each completing or complimenting the other's statements in overlapping style. The Aláàfin holds a mythical status. He comes only second to the gods. His great wealth earns him the epithet "One–who–spends–lavishly–as–if–he–mints–money–privately." The literary device of the simile in the epithet portrays his opulence. However, the audience soon learns there is a greater cause for his riches, and that is his generosity to his subjects. It is only then that "spending lavishly" is understood as extreme kindness.

Nevertheless, his kindness should not be taken for granted as his panegyrists chant. He will quell any insubordination from sub chiefs and other subjects for he will "turn the skull of such chiefs into a cup of drink maize paste." The dire consequences of undermining his authority spell out doom. Ascending the throne in his youth, the panegyrists admonish their audience with the epithets to not underestimate his intelligence and military might (l. 278, 279).[2]

Ládèèbó:	Any surbodinate chief who is not in obedience to your authority	
Ògbojà:	Who is disobedient to the authority of the present Aláàfin	
Ládèèbó:	Father of Adétúnjí,	*275*
Ògbojà:	Àsáníkèẹ́[178] will turn the skull of such chiefs into a cup of drink maize paste.	
Ládèèbó:	One–who–is–light–but–who–is–still–heavy–for people–to–lift,	
Ògbojà:	One–who–is–young–but–who–cannot–be–cheated–in–the–midst–of–other–kings.	

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2   Lines 278 and 279 of the poem. I abbreviate the word "lines" to "l" to indicate specific lines in a particular poem I am referring to in the discussion.

Ládèèbó:	*Dúrójayé*, oh warrior! Rise up!	
Ògbojà:	Oh spirit! Rise up!	*280*

Ládèèbó:	Ọba kékeré, tí bá ń ṣe kọ́ńtá díńgbọ́n	
Ògbojà:	Díńgbọ́n, sí baba láàfin tòní	
Ládèèbó:	Babaa Adétúnjí,	*275*
Ògbojà:	Àsáníkẹ̀ẹ́ ní ó forí ọba ọ̀hún fọ́kọ mu.	
Ládèèbó:	A–fúyẹ́– gẹgẹ–má– ṣeé–gbé,	
Ògbojà:	A–kéré–má–jùú–yànjẹ–nínú–ọba.	
Ládèèbó:	Dúrójayé, Ológun dìde!	
Ògbojà:	Ẹbọra, dìde!	

The king's deeds of kindness and the awe he instils in his subjects provide the prototext for creating the metatextual Yùngbà. Read differently, the poet creates an artistic "commentary" of the Aláàfin's accomplishments through the creation of the encomium. The panegyric is thus a 'commentary' on the ruler's reputation. The chanters "translate" his deeds into an aesthetic poetic metatext. but more importantly, a 'commentary' on the empire. for which, and in whose name the Alaafin is enstooled. In other words, the poems provide another medium, albeit condensed for the elaboration of the ruler's achievements and the Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom's hegemony, justifying its legitimacy. The praise poem does not 'narrate' the events but renders them in a condensed form, which Barber (1984) has termed "quotations" needing exegesis.

Features of the African Metatext

The idea of the prototext poses a number of problems in the African context. The first, which I have discussed above, is that the text is not confined to print or even spoken acts, but they indicate "meaningful semiotic human activities" such as winning a war. Secondly, the prototext is not always conceived of in material terms. The community believes in the metaphysical existence or creation of these poems by the deities who then pass them on to the poet-reciters/performers. This is a common belief in many African societies. In such situations, the prototext is not physically accessible. What we would call a prototext would rather be an oral metatext of an extant spiritual prototext inspired by the gods. In this regard, Drovak (1974) proposes another term, *archetext* for prototexts that fall in this and other categories:

> Whenever it is impossible in folklore to determine the prototext empirically, this determining can only be done in a theoretical way, by replacing the concept of prototext with that of archetext. [···] Such an archetext is not embodied in any concrete variant, but rather in the invariant shared by a number of metatexts which exist in the communicative consciousness of the receivers of dance and folklore. This relation can be represented as follows: archetext (prototext) metatext. (footnote 6, p. 231 emphasis mine.)

Finally, the metatextual praise poems are not limited to a single version. They are orally handed down. The metatext is continually emerging since the recitation and performance of these genres are not a one-time occurrence. The emergent praise chants could then be read as *meta-metatexts*, that is, metatexts of a metatext. Therefore, I argue that the idea of a single prototext based on which a single metatext is created is not a standard criterion for the African oral praise poem such as the Yùngbà. In the same way, names occur as meta-metatexts in these poems as they are decontextualised and recontextualised as "quotations" (Barber 1999) due to their iterability. The recurring name motifs attributed to the Aláàfin in the Yùngbà do not happen by chance. He earns them. His royal names are always tied to an event, a person or a place associated with his achievements. As Samuel Obeng (2001, p. 6) contends, "African names [are] anchored in socio-cultural discourse" and are thus connected to the everyday life of the name-givers." Names can be acquired throughout the course of life of a person (Ehineni 2022, Obeng 2001).

Since the poems do not give a linear narration of the king's successes, the names he acquires are constituted as quotations in the poem – objectified texts which invite exegesis and analysis in order to understand their culturally determined meaning and import. Building on Barber's (1999, p. 18) argument that some Yorùbá texts "are constituted to have object-like properties," I argue that name motifs are "quotations" in the Yùngbà which are created from public knowledge as metatexts, and in turn act as prototexts forming the underlying nominalised structure of the panegyric. The names are metatexts because they are independent texts created from the king's deeds. They are also intertextual in that they can be inherited from other people and can also be extracted from other texts like proverbs. They are *meta-metatexts*.

From the foregoing, I maintain that the empire is as powerful as the textuality of its ruler's name. Praise names and epithets acquired in a ruler's lifetime constitute his "oral" achievement-biography. The king's biography is a direct reflection of the success (or failure) of the empire. As the ruler accomplishes new things, he amasses new names and epithets that make up his biographic repertoire of achievements– a metatext of praise poetry. It is the mythicising power of names to create a legitimising myth of kingship, which gives meaning to the abundance of names and epithets in the African panegyric. The more names the king acquires, the greater the myth and grandeur that surround his name. As Mirenayat (2015) sums it:

> Metatextuality plays a significant role in establishing the "reputation" of a writer. Conversely the absence of metatexts for a text diminishes it and restricts its appeal. Good text invites an inexhaustible tradition of interpretations from which it is inseparable (Mirenayat 2015, p. 535).

The subject of the metatext, in this case is the Aláàfin. His reputation as king must always be unparalleled. The names he acquires could make or unmake him, giving him an enduring metatext of names and praise chants either to his glory or to the unlikely event of his shame. Therefore, the king is his name and his name is his empire.

The Intergeneric Yùngbà: The Oriki, Yorùbá naming par excellence

Fundamental to naming in the Yorùbá culture is the *Oríkì*, another praise genre that the Yùngbà incorporates in its text, as a sign of its generic intertextuality. The "oríkì are composed as poetic elaborations of individual names" (Adeeko 2001, p. 82). The oriki poems are made up of "appellations or attributive epithets" (Barber 1984, p. 503). The iterability of the oríkì is one of its most unique features, but it is its etymology which makes it more fascinating to study. The *ori* is of dual nature. As Segun Gbadegesin (1998, p.154) explains, the ori first "refers to the physical head and, given the acknowledged significance of the head vis-à-vis the rest of the body, ori is considered vital even in its physical character" [and second, the *ori* is] "recognised as the bearer of the person's destiny as well as the determinant of personality" (ibid, p. 155). It can be inferred from the Yorùbá that the ritual practice of singing or chanting someone's oríkì is an act that validates their identity in the same way that naming does. Defending the fact that the "coherence" of the *oríkì* is not determined by the West's definition, Barber notes:

> But the subject of an *Oríkì* is a constitutive factor in the text
> in a more important sense than this. The *Oríkì* has no formal
> center, the words of the chant are not arranged according
> to any overall design, but it is coherent. This is because
> the subject of the *Oríkì* is the center of the *Oríkì* to which
> every unit is addressed as the equivalent of his/her name.
> *The subject is the reason for the oríkì's existence and the*
> *principle of its constitution* [and therefore the reason for its
> coherence] (Barber, 1984, p. 512; emphasis mine).

Barber explains above that the organising principle of the oríkì, which also makes it 'coherent,' based on its African context, is the subject of praise in the poem. If the subject is the reason for the existence of the oríkì, then so is the Aláàfin and the Ọ̀yọ́ empire the reason for the existence of the Yùngbà. The importance of the materiality of the spirit world and the primacy of the spoken word in many African cultures must be understood to better appreciate the illocutionary force that accompanies names, and the rituals associated with naming ceremonies among the Yorùbá. In line with this assertion, it is important to stress that names and epithets effect their meanings. Thus, there is a creating and performing aspect to calling out/declaring a name because of their mythical quality. A name, in that sense, carries a seed of identity that is expected to grow and flourish with time, as expressed in the following Yorùbá communicative maxim: *"Orúko ìso omo níí mó omo lára"* – "A child gets used to behaving like his/her name." The above discussion has so far established that the Yùngbà is a metatext of Ọ̀yọ́ empire. The panegyric is performed to mythicize the Aláàfin in order to legitimise him.

Mythicising the King – a strategy of legitimisation

In the ensuing section, the analyses of selected portions of the Yùngbà, will demonstrate how the Aláàfin's mythic qualities, his military prowess, his divine sanction, and excellent art of leadership create a myth of kingship that legitimises him. The importance of the ritual paradigm within which the panegyric is performed is also addressed.

A. Divine sanction by the gods

One of the mythicising qualities of the Aláàfin which validates him and his rule is the belief that the Aláàfin's reign is initiated and backed by the gods. His enthronement is solely a divine act, "it was never the wish of the people but

that of God" sings Ògbojà, to which Ládèèbó replies "It was God that enthroned the child of *Ìkólàbà* as king, (l. 127, 128). This time, the subject of praise is the Aláàfin Adeyemi III whose half a century reign (1970–2022) is testament to the fact that he was chosen by God. Ládèèbó and Ògbojà validate the kingship of the Aláàfin Adeyemi III through the literary device of repetition as one enthroned by God as king.

Ládèèbó:	Ọba lọmọọ Adéyẹmí	
Ògbojà:	Ọlọ́run ló fọmọ Ìkólàbà jọba	125
Ládèèbó:	Ọlọ́run ló fọmọ Ìkólàbà jọba	
Ògbojà:	Ènìyàn kó wí, Aálà mà ló wí	
Ládèèbó:	Ọlọ́run ló fọmọ Ìkólàbà jọba	
Ògbojà:	Ènìyàn kó wí, Aálà mà ló wí	
Ládèèbó:	Láyíwọlá jọba ọ̀yọ́ tòrò kinkin	130
Ògbojà :	Ìbàdàn ò bínú, Èkó ò bínú	
Ládèèbó:	Àtàndá, jọba ọ̀yọ́ tòrò kinkin	
Ògbojà :	Ènìyàn ò bínú, ọlọ́run ò bínú	
Ládèèbó:	Àlátàndá jọba	
Ògbojà :	Ọyọ́ tòrò kinkin	

Ládèèbó:	Child of Adéyẹmí is the king.
Ògbojà:	It was God that enthroned the child of Ìkólàbà162 as king, 125
Ládèèbó:	It was God that enthroned the child of Ìkólàbà as king,
Ògbojà:	It was never the wish of the people but that of God
Ládèèbó:	It was God that enthroned the child of Ìkólàbà as king,
Ògbojà:	It was never the wish of the people but that of God
Ládèèbó:	Since Láyíwọlá was enthroned king, there has been absolute peace in Ọyọ́
Ògbojà :	Both *Ìbàdàn* and *Èkó* (Lagos) have been at peace with him 130
Ládèèbó:	There has been absolute peace in Ọyọ́ since Àtàndá was enthroned king
Ògbojà :	God has been at peace with him; likewise human beings
Ládèèbó:	Since Àtàndá was enthroned king,
Ògbojà :	There has been absolute peace in Ọyọ́

In the above lines, Ládèèbó and Ògbojà each repeat the same lines after each other (l.126–126). Whereas Ògbojà distances any human involvement in the enstoolment of the Aláàfin, Ládèèbó confirms the God factor in the crowning

of the Aláàfin as king. The women utilise the art of repetition to depict the image of a divinely–backed king.

A sign that the Aláàfin's reign is divinely sanctioned by God, or the gods, is the peace and prosperity enjoyed by his subjects/the empire. The deities, humans (subjects) and the Aláàfin are also at peace with each other. So peaceful is his reign that the Aláàfin does not go to war with surrounding towns like Ibadan and Eko (l.130). The success of the ruler, leading to peace and prosperity of his subjects is evidence that the gods are with him. The Yùngbà legitimises the Aláàfin by creating a myth of kingship which depicts him as one whose reign is divinely instituted and validated.

B. Mythic, fearful qualities of Yùngbà in Honor of Aláàfin Olúkúewu Àtìbà

The myth–making strategy that the poet uses in the above lines is to ascribe the indomitable and inevitable power of death to the Aláàfin Àtìbà, founding ruler of the New Ọyọ́ Empire. Secondly, they deify the Aláàfin by attributing to him divine qualities of the most revered deity, Ògún.

Ládèèbó:	Àtìbà, kínkín ọgbọdọ̀ gbin.	
Ògbojà :	Adébísí, a–romọ– jogbo.	
Ládèèbó:	Dáódùu baba	
Ògbojà:	Àjùwọ̀n, babaa Ṣàngó	
Ládèèbó:	Àtìbà,janganjangan	5
Ògbojà :	Má– bòòṣà–jẹ́.	
Ládèèbó:	Ikú níí jẹ́ gbàǹgbàlàkogbà	
Ògbojà :	Olówóò mi níí jẹ́ gbàǹgbàlàkogbà	

Ládèèbó:	*Àtìbà*, in whose presence total silence must be maintained	
Ògbojà :	*Adébísí*,[1] one-who-scolds-the-child-mercilessly.	
Ládèèbó:	First male child of his father.	
Ògbojà:	*Àjùwọ̀n*[2], father of Ṣàngó[3]	
Ládèèbó:	*Àtìbà, janganjangan*[4]	5
Ògbojà :	He-who-will-not-bring-the-gods-into-disrepute.	
Ládèèbó:	While death bears the name *gbàǹgbàlàkogbà*,[5]	
Ògbojà :	It is my lord who bears gbàǹgbàlàkogbà'	

Aláàfin Àtìbà's appearance produces silence inspired by fear. He inspires awe both as a warrior who provides security to his subjects, and as a terrifying

enemy to the enemies of his kingdom. Although his epithet appears harsh with the "child", (his subjects), he does not use the "whip" on the child he scolds, as one of his epithets states: "One–with–the–whip–which–he–never–used–to–scold–any–child" (*A-lọ̀rẹ́-má-namọ* Akinyemi, 2004 p. 208). Moreover, as we have earlier on established, the auditory space is a tangible one within African societies, and so the onomatopoeic rendition of the awe of Àtìbà's presence in line 5, creates an aural–poetic effect on the listeners. "*Janganjangan*" is an onomatopoeic appellation of the Aláàfin Àtìbà, which translates the audible sound produced by the charms and amulets that adorned his warrior costume/attire, as they jingled and tinkled with every heroic move during the battles that preceded his reign. Not only is this auditory effect magical, as argued by Ong (2013), the mythical effect (sharpness) of his metaphysical armory/arsenal is culturally and religiously understood as a statement of spiritual supremacy.

Ládèèbó and Ògbojà further exploit another onomatopoetic device, this time, the sound of the ultimate power–death, *gbàngbàlàkogbà* (l. 6). The mythic power of Àtìbà is analogous to the unparalleled power of death, both in its inevitability and its finality. In fact, the Aláàfin shares a name with Death – *gbàngbàlàkogbà* (l. 6, 7). Just as it is impossible to free oneself from the grips of death, so the enemy of Àtìbà cannot free himself from the grips of the powerful warrior–king. Note also that the morphophonological feature of reduplication signifies intensity of action and the quality as well as extent of the feature being verbalized, be it conquest, fearsomeness, or sheer power. The Yorùbá affirm: "*Aide iku la mbo Ògún; aide iku la mbo orisa; biku ba de iku o gbebo.*" "It is when death has not called that one sacrifices to Ògún; it is when Death has not called that one sacrifices to gods; when death comes calling, Death does not heed sacrifices. (There is no medicine [magical power] or sacrifice to stop Death when his/her time comes)" (Owomoyela 1982: 38). I have used uppercase letters to personify Death to show how s/he is perceived in Yorùbá.

It is important to understand here that Ògún is considered one of the most powerful spirit beings (òrìṣà). He is a warrior and the god of metal and iron. In a chapter entitled "Ògún, the Empire Builder," Barnes and Ben–Amos (1997, p. 39) maintain that the expansionist agenda of African empires such as the Edo Kingdom of Benin, the Fon Kingdom of Dahomey, and Yorùbá Kingdoms such as the Ọyọ́, "shared a symbolic complex that incorporated three elements: iron, warfare, and state–building. This complex centred on Ògún (also known as Gu), given the major role that "highly developed iron technology" played in their rather well–organised and heavily equipped and aggressive armies. Furthermore, "the myths and rituals of the Ògún complex

served as a kind of 'ideology of progress' devised" to articulate their hegemonic political status (ibid, p. 42). Ògún thus became a regional symbol. It therefore matters in this proverb that even Ògún cannot save a person from Death. The sound imagery of death is portrayed simultaneously as *"nonsensical"* (ideophonic) word/s, but *meaningful* (of semantic value) to the audience.

Akínyemí (2004, p. 255) describes the creativity of this specific poetic style as a "tonal counterpoint, which involves the use of contrastive tones through a deliberate choice or distortion of lexical items." Aláàfin Àtìbà's power defies reason, just as death does, thus creating a myth of kingship that deifies the Aláàfin.

The praise singers also deify Aláàfin Àtìbà based on his lineage. Aláàfin Àtìbà is a descendant of two memorable ancestors: – Àjùwọ̀n, the King who succeeded Oranyan, the founder of old Ọyọ́ and Sango, the younger brother of Àjùwọ̀n. Sango is famous for deposing his brother, the Aláàfin Àjùwọ̀n, restoring stability to old Ọyọ́ by securing its borders once again. Of "wild disposition, fiery temper, and the habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth," Sango was deified after his demise as the god of thunder and lightning, which had distinguished his personality (Akínyemí 2004, p. 255). The praise singers' reference to Sango transfigures the Aláàfin Àtìbà's person into one of godlike awe.

C. His art of rulership – War and Diplomacy

When Àtìbà became Aláàfin, his goal was to make the new Ọyọ́'s glory comparable to the Old Ọyọ́, as his name Adebesi ("crown has increased") declares. The "bead-embroidered crown with beaded veil" worn solely by Yorùbá kings (*Oba*), not only identifies them, but "the crown incarnates the intuition of royal ancestral force, the revelation of great moral insight in the person of the king, and the glitter of aesthetic experience" (Thompson 1970, 8). That is precisely the myth of kingship that his name metatext portrays in the imagination of the audience. The Aláàfin Àtìbà consolidated his power by invading and annexing neighbouring towns and villages, which he made his subjects (Akínyemí 2004, p. 136, 138), earning the epithets "the swamp the swamp that takes over the whole place in style" and "one-who-fights-*other-*people" (emphasis mine), he successfully quelled the Fulani aggression and the increasing power of the Dahomey.

The Aláàfin's art of rulership – his ability to fight and win wars outside the empire, maintain peace within, and his strategic diplomatic alliances – promulgate

a myth of kingship to legitimize him. On the one hand, he is a powerful destroyer to his enemies and on the other, he is a powerful protector of his subjects. This duality is what makes Ládèèbó chant that whereas they "enjoy life and royal authority" on account of the Aláàfin, he is the "One-whom-neigbours-hold-grudges-against, because he is to them Feared One- Death, Ògún, Egungun. The resulting peace and stability within the polity created a flourishing New Ọyọ́ Empire.

Ògbojà:	Olówóò mi, àbàtà se kèèkè gbalè.
Ládèèbó:	Ógbórí òkè
Ògbojà:	Óránni s'Áké.
Ládèèbó:	Ógborí Ifá
Ògbojà:	Óránni s'ÁkÒgún.
Ládèèbó:	Rógun-má-tèé··· Enì kan ì í jagun l'Óyòó
Ògbojà:	Ayé àtoba là n je.
Ládèèbó:	Òrò Àtìbà
Ògbojà:	Tótó fùn-ún-ùn!
Ládèèbó:	Ayé àtoba,
Ògbojà:	Là n je; là n tà.
Ládèèbó:	Múlé-gbodì,

Ògbojà:	My lord, the swamp that takes over the whole place in style.
Ládèèbó:	He who stays on top of the hill
Ògbojà:	To send emissaries to Aké town.
Ládèèbó:	While he was consulting Ifá divination oracle, 135
Ògbojà:	He sent emissaries to the war chief, Akogún.
Ládèèbó:	The one-who-is-never-put-to-shame-in-war . . .
Ògbojà:	We do not wage war in Òyó
Ládèèbó:	We only enjoy life and exercise royal authority.
Ògbojà:	Matters concerning Àtìbà
Ládèèbó:	Must be handled with care!
Ògbojà:	Royal authority,
Ládèèbó:	That is what we enjoy; that is what we trade in

However, if martial prowess earned Àtìbà his throne, it was diplomacy that established him. The shift in Àtìbà's governing approach as he transitioned from war to diplomacy is captured in his epithet "one who-stays-at-his-home-base-to-neutralize-poison" (Akinyemi 2004, p. 261) — a political homemaker,

in a sense, cultivating and nurturing a nascent polity. Àtìbà tactfully placed his faithful warriors in prominent positions, keeping his promises to them, and also made peace with the royal family members of the Old Ọyọ́ in order to earn their loyalty. Ládèèbó and Ògbojà depict him as sending emissaries to Ake, one of the prominent towns of Old Ọyọ́ that Àtìbà worked to incorporate into the New Ọyọ́ (l. 49). It is said in praise metaphor of Àtìbà's consolidation of power and reviving the glory of the Old Ọyọ́: "My lord, the swamp that takes over the whole place in style" as he enlarged his territory (Akínyemí 2004, p.132).

Àtìbà's successes at these political negotiations are also ascribed to the wisdom he possesses, which his subjects can measure from his utterances: "the mouth cannot say beyond one's wisdom" Ògbojà boldly asserts (Akinyemi 2004, p. 255). Àtìbà acquires this wisdom "while consulting Ifa" (l. 135). *Ifá*, according to Bascom (1943, p. ix), is "both a method of and a deity of divination" that is practiced primarily in West Africa and its diasporic communities around the world. Ifá worship is an orally transmitted (but now printed) literary corpus, the *Odù Ifá*; and has diviners, the Babalawo; and a deity, the Orunmila (also *Ifá*), who is distinguished as a source of wisdom. It is this spiritual source of wisdom that Àtìbà draws on to insightfully navigate fragile but crucial relationships during his reign. It is also why his success translates into the epithet "he-will-not-bring-the-gods-into-disrepute." Àtìbà works in conjunction with the gods as stated earlier and they reciprocate one another's honour.

Honour is the ultimate name (reputation that creates a myth of kingship) which Àtìbà obtains, and also defines his enduring, prosperous twenty-two-year reign. His regnal name, Ọlátójẹ̀ẹ́ translates to, "Honor is sufficient to bear as a name" (ibid, p. 261). His integrity justifies his ascension to the seat of highest power, just as his nobility and might are expressed via the animal metaphor, "the-elephant-that-relies-on-its-own-honor" (ibid, p. 261). As Samuel Obeng's (2001) study notes, a person's political anthroponym can be derived from the physical attributes of an animal, which in this case is the elephant, "the Mighty One". Performers Ládèèbó and Ògbojà can only chant:

63. Ládèèbó: No one fights in war in Ọyọ́
    Ògbojà: We only enjoy life and exercise royal authority. 211

Such is the enduring imagery of peace, stability and prosperity under Àtìbà's rule. By all indications, the empire's subjects would like things to remain the same, which is for his reign to endure, because it guarantees their prosperity.

And so Ládèèbó expresses in her wish on behalf of her community: "I cannot wish evil for the king's destiny" (Akinyemi 2004 l. 39). Goodwill abounds towards the emperor because he fulfills the desire of his people. This reciprocity reflects the ritual paradigm that contains the emperor, the poet, and the imperial subjects.

D. The Ritual Paradigm

I revisit the argument that the royal court ceremonial during which the poet recites/performs the panegyric should be interpreted within a ritual paradigm "whose logic or connection lies at a deeper, nonnarrative structural level (Stetkevych 2002, p. xii)". The ritual function of the praise poem therefore is a commodity in a gift exchange based on Mauss's Gift. Building on the above argument, this paper contends that the Yùngbà is a commodity in a gift-exchange ritual that involves the poet and his patron–Aláàfin within the context of court ceremonial. It is also a means through which the poet pledges or abrogates his allegiance to his patron in speech acts. The patron–ruler (Aláàfin) takes an oath to protect his subjects, while his subjects enact their part in the covenant by paying homage to him.

> We can reduce the qaṣīdah ceremony to the simplest case or pattern: a poet comes before a patron offering him a poem praising his generosity and requesting a gift. The patron, if he denies the request, at the same time denies the claim of the poem, that he is generous, and in doing so undermines his own moral authority. To legitimize himself, that is, to confirm the veracity of the virtues enunciated in the panegyric, the patron must accede to the poet's request or demand. (Stetkevych 2002, p. 184)

The poet offers the qaṣīdah to the patron as a gift, conferring legitimacy on the patron–ruler. The patron, "in rewarding of the prize… [makes his virtue] immediately verifiable, thus establishing by attraction, the veracity of the other virtues elaborated in the madīḥ" [praise poem] (ibid, p. 184). The Yùngbà chanter also recognizes the ritual aspect of the performance within the court ceremonial. So, after a performance – a "display of communicative competence" – they exhort their patron to fulfil his part of the gift-giving ritual by rewarding them, chanting "acknowledge the bards!" (Akinyemi 2004, p. 269).

The interpretation of the king's reward to the poet must not be misguided as paid propaganda. Stetkevych (1993) based on Marcel Mauss's (1950) seminal study on the gift exchange, has argued that the royal praise poem must be read in the context of a ritual paradigm of a court ceremonial in which the poet,

through his performance, dedicates the poem as a gift to the ruler, for which the latter rewards the poet in fulfillment of the requirements of the gift exchange ritual. Mauss, a French anthropologist states:

> Between chiefs and their vassals, between vassals and their tenants, through such gifts a hierarchy is established. To give is to show one's superiority, to be more, to be higher in rank, *magister*. To accept without giving in return, or without giving more back, is to become client and servant, to become small, to fall lower (*minister*) (Mauss 1967, p. 95).

The poet, by offering the poem as a gift to the ruler confers legitimacy on him, and the ruler when he reciprocates the act by rewarding the poet, validates him. More importantly, the occasion offers the Aláàfin "the opportunity to give a concrete demonstration of his justice, generosity, and other praise-worthy qualities, thereby establishing a paradigm of the relation of the ruler to all of his subjects" (Stetkevych 2002, p. 205). Mary Douglas remarks in the foreword to Mauss's The *Gift* that, "each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged" (Mauss 1967, p. xi, 10). Therefore, the Aláàfin must reward the poet on an even larger scale. If to give means that "one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence", then the bond that ensues between the patron and the poet is also one that represents the same bond between the ruler and his subjects. When this ritual transaction is successfully enacted, it legitimizes the patron-ruler by creating a myth of kingship in the minds of his subjects. Kapchan (1995, p. 479), asserts that "to perform is to carry something into effect — whether it be a story, an identity, an artistic artifact, a historical memory, or an ethnography. The notion of agency is implicit in performance". The "something" in this case is the validation of the Aláàfin's power through the "agency" of the bards not only as representatives of the entire community, but also as qualified artists. The interpretation of the poem through a ritual framework is critical to understanding the vision of the empire's hegemony, which is a metatext to the Aláàfin's person, the sum of his names — his name.

E. Concluding Section: The "future name."

The epigraph at the beginning of this study points to the ultimate import of names within the Yorùbá-Ọ̀yọ́ culture — their enduring meaning. Here, I refer

to the lasting reputation – the immortal name – of the king. The king is his name, and his name is his empire. He is the sum of all his names. The king cannot outdo his name. His reputation is tied to his name, his life is an enactment of his name, and his *name* (timeless metaphor) is the sum of all his names. The sum of the king's names is his "future name" – reputation, the enduring metatext. The king's name (reputation, enduring metatext) is dialogic/intertextual because it is itinerant. Not only has Àtìbà lived up to his personal names, 'Lankalu' and 'Adebisi', he has preserved the honorable name of his father, Aláàfin Abíọ́dún, whose thriving reign he emulates and even supersedes, as I will argue shortly.

The following verses about the Aláàfin Abíọ́dún (1774–89) and his immediate successor Aláàfin Awole Arogangan (1789–96) use contrasting imagery – their enduring *names* – to portray their success and failure respectively

1. Adétóún: Ayé Abíọ́dún,	During the days of Abíọ́dún,
Mopélọ́lá: La rójú ṣiṣẹ́.	We had time to engage in labor.
Adétóún: Ayé Abíọ́dún,	During the days of Abíọ́dún,
Mopélọ́lá: La rówó ṣayé.	We had money to enjoy life.
5. Adétóún: Ayé Abíọ́dún,	During the days of Abíọ́dún,
Mopélọ́lá: La fígbá wọnwó	We measured money in calabash
Adétóún: Ayé Arógangan,	During the days of Arógangan,
Mopélọ́lá: Lọ̀pọ̀lọ́ gbòde	Frogs took over the whole place.
10. Adétóún: Ayé Aọ́lè Arógangan,	During the days of Aọ́lè Arógangan,
Mopélọ́lá: La fagbọ̀n dẹrú kalẹ̀	We packed our luggage in the basket (Akínyemí 2004, p.87).

Aláàfin Abíọ́dún Adegoolu's flourishing reign was unfortunately followed by his successor Arogangan's turbulent one (Atanda, 1973, p. 28; Johnson and Johnson 1970, p. 188–192). Abíọ́dún's subjects "enjoyed life" due to economic prosperity. However, Arógangan was unable to secure his borders and suffered more from internal rebellion. His Chief of Army, called Afonja, led a bitter rebellion against him that led to the suicide of Arógangan (Johnson and Johnson 1970, p.188–192). The hardship arising from political instability led to a mass exodus of his subjects out of Old Ọyọ́ – "we packed our luggage in the basket." According to historical sources and oral tradition, Afonja cursed Ọyọ́ before committing suicide, which led to the plague of frogs on the land (l. 8). Furthermore, successive rulers died within months of assuming power as Aláàfin till the throne was vacant for a time (Johnson and Johnson, 1970, p.188–192).

In the context of Yorùbá royal power, two names, Abíọ́dún and Arogangan, have come to mean success/prosperity and failure/calamity respectively. Thus, for Àtìbà, who is a successor to that throne, another reading of his name

'*Látúnbọ̀sún*, child of Arolu (Akinyemi 2004 p. 269) offers us a second layer of meaning. As a true child of Arólú, (another name for his father, the former Aláàfin Abíọ́dún Adégoólú who reigned from1774–89), the emphasis this time is not on their biological kinship, but on the spirit of Aláàfin Abíọ́dún's character and reputation, his enduring imperial name. Aláàfin Àtìbà indeed moves honor forward as his name, 'Látúnbọ̀sún, implies, thus continuing in the cherished tradition of his father.

Clearly, the names of the Aláàfin provide a metatextual commentary on his deeds – explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text. Mirenayat and Soofastaei (2015) maintain that "criticism or commentary is not extraneous to the meaning of a text but integral to it because no text is written not to be read and interpreted" (p. 535). The Yùngbà poetry legitimises the ruler, increasing the number of metatextual commentary on the ruler, and thus establishing his reputation across generations. A *good imperial name* "invites" more names for the Aláàfin, and ultimately, beautiful panegyric poetry that comments on and responds to his flourishing reign. In effect, names are a form of condensed narratives, like proverbs, which need to be "expanded" (Barber 1999, p. 17). Most importantly, naming is a metatextual phenomenon that draws from the entirety of the sociocultural fabric and practices of the *specific* community.

> We need to presume that textuality itself is culturally specific: that there are different ways of being "text," and that genres recognized as distinct within a given cultural field may nevertheless share a common textuality." To grasp the specific aesthetic mode of any verbal art, then, we need to understand how it is marked, and constituted, as text (Barber 1999, p. 17).

Names as metatexts, therefore, further legitimise the ruler because they validate his person and office. The creation of metatexts in the royal setting is inevitable, but their continuous creation, their quality and quantity will speak to the magnitude of the rulers' *names*, their reputation. Therefore, there will be more praise poems for Aláàfin Àtìbà than there will ever be for Aláàfin Arogangan; for out of Àtìbà's names come more praise metatexts.

We must, however, not lose sight of the fact that it is the ideology of empire that matters the most, and not just the individual occupying the seat of power. This explains why in the Abbasid era, praise was still offered to the ruler

even in circumstances of defeat. The victory ode was still performed even after the Caliph lost a war (Al-Mallah 2009). This apparent contradiction demonstrates that the praise poem is not always meant to be indicative of the now, but rather focuses on the timeless ideology of imperial hegemony. A defeat in war may be time-bound but not the idea of a conquering empire. Through a similar manoeuvre, the Akan royal panegyric called the Apaee can praise a sitting King by addressing him with the names of his predecessors (Yankah, 1981). This is because the praise dialogically invokes the past and the present occupants of the royal Stool (throne). The Asante Empire is more the subject of the praise than the incumbent king. The performance is a ritual that ensures continuity of the kingdom, its history, its ontological beliefs. Praise poetry should not merely be seen as propagandist or a lopsided narrative of the conquerors, but an act that binds society together with a shared past and future.

The kind of name an Aláàfin makes ultimately determines who is named as his "ancestor" (used here as one he emulates), since he is either dialogically rooted in a chain of good names or in a chain of bad ones, as the names Abíọ́dún and Arogangan signified in the earlier discussion. The Aláàfin's *name* will also determine *whether* and *how* his successor will bear his name. This is exemplified through the Yorùbá proverb – *Whatever we do today is history tomorrow* ("*òun tí a bá ṣe lónǐ, òrò ìtàn ni b'ódòla*"). I contend that "history," in this context, is our immortalised name, the sum of the many names we have acquired or will acquire in life. Metatextuality offers us another way to read and interpret African praise poetry in general, and Yorùbá royal panegyric poetry, in particular.

Conclusion

This study has advanced the argument that the Yùngbà poem/chant is constituted and must be read as a metatext of the Ọ̀yọ́ empire. The metatext of praise is created from the given and earned names of the Aláàfin which are recurring motifs found in the Yùngbà royal poem. The name motifs are in themselves prototexts created from the king's deeds over time. In relation to this, I argue that names are not irrational repetitions which are seemingly put together with no logical purpose by poets who lack creativity, but are rather the linguistic building blocks of the ruler's empire. The praise chants are a poetic metatext whose meticulous and ingenious composition are intended to parallel the greatness of the emperor and empire. This linguistic parallel of imperial power in the form of the royal panegyric is what has been called the "linguistic correlative" of imperial ideology of empire, in this case the Ọ̀yọ́.

When the composition and performance of the Yùngbà is understood within its mythic and ritual paradigm, it ceases to be wrongly labelled as merely propagandist. Rather, we see a community that is in continuous reflection, fully aware of its ontological self, a reflexivity which informs every aspect of their lives. In the context of the royal courts, the metatextual poetic chants create a myth of kingship that legitimises the ruler-patron. Most importantly, the metatextual process is a multi-layered one. The king's deeds become the prototexts for the production of name metatexts, which become prototexts for the creation of Yùngbà poetry. All these mediations of texts at different levels, are also *translations* of genres into other genres, some incorporating others as generic intertextual forms, such as the oríkì found in the Yùngbà.

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