



Oriki as Source of Yoruba History

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined *oriki as* a good and reliable source of Yoruba history. It also highlights the place of *oriki* in the other literary genres among the Yoruba people. The data on which this work is based is *orufi (oriki)* among the Ijebu people of Southwestern Nigeria. Data (oral interviews) for this work were collected from 40 informants from the nine Local Government Areas of the Ijebu people in Ogun State and the three Local Government Areas of the Ijebu people in Lagos State considering age and gender equality for data collection. The study proves that *oriki goes beyond mere praises and is a good source of history*. The study is a contribution to the development of Yoruba literary genre as it increases the corpus of *oriki investigation and collection* among the Yoruba. This work will be of immense value to scholars of literary studies and other fields.

INTRODUCTION

In his introduction in *Sources of Yoruba History*, Biobaku (1972) says:

...the aim (of writing the book) was to write an authentic history of the Yoruba peoples from the earliest ascertainable time to the present, using all the modern techniques of recapturing the history of a non-literate society...for practical purposes, the history of the Yoruba up to the nineteenth century is the history of a wholly non-literate people. The reconstruction of the history of such peoples, in the absence of the kind of written documentation on which conventional history depends presents obvious problems...Besides the overtly historical traditions, there exists various forms of oral literature among Yoruba which may contain materials of historical value...Ifa...*oriki*...proverbs and others... thus justifying our dealing on *oriki* in this piece as source of Yoruba history.

Oriki, a literary genre among the Yoruba, is significant. This is because it is central to the composition and performance of all other genres. But the bulk of the works on *oriki* is based on data collected from the Oyo-speaking area of Yorubaland. The reason for the little or no attention paid by scholars

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to the study of *oriki* in Ijebu area could be adduced to the fact that the Ijebu people are stereotyped as a tribe without *oriki*. Hence; there exists an erroneous belief among the Yoruba that “Ijebu o loriki,” that the Ijebu people do not have *oriki*, but this claim had been disproved as the *oriki* excerpts used in this work were picked from the corpus of *oriki* among the Ijebu people in a just concluded research.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim and objective of this study is to examine *oriki* as a good and reliable source of Yoruba history and to highlight the place of *oriki* among the other literary genres among the Yoruba people. The data on which this work is based is *oriki* among the Ijebu people of Southwestern Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Data (oral interviews) for this work were collected from 40 informants from the nine Local Government Areas of the Ijebu people in Ogun State namely Ijebu East, Ijebu North, Ijebu North East, Ijebu Ode, Ikenne, Odogbolu, Ogun waterside, Remo North and Sagamu. Also, the three Local Government Areas of the Ijebu people in Lagos State namely Epe, Ibeju Lekki and Ikorodu. Other towns were visited apart from the local government headquarters and age and gender equality were considered.

Scope of the Study

This work is limited to the Ijebu towns, from the nine Local Government Areas housing the Ijebu people in Ogun State, namely, Ijebu -East, Ijebu -North, Ijebu North-East, Ijebu -Ode, Ikenne, Odogbolu, Ogun waterside, Remo-North and Sagamu. Also, the three Local Government Areas of the Ijebu people in Lagos State, namely, Epe, Ibeju Lekki and Ikorodu were visited for data collection. The study will cover aspects of historical, origin, migration, prowess and achievements of the Ijebu people in their praise poetry.

Significance of the Study

The study is a contribution to the development of historical data collection, especially among the Yoruba. This work will be of immense value to scholars of not only literary studies but also other fields such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, ethnography and cultural studies.

The Ijebu People's Location

The Ijebu people are part of the Yoruba people living in the Southwestern part of Yorubaland to the coast. They occupy parts of Ogun and Lagos States

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of Nigeria. The Ijebuland is bounded on the North by Ibadanland, on the East by Ondoland, on the West by Egbaland and on the South by the lagoon.

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One’s identity could be traced to his/her oriki because happenings in life could easily be seen in it. That is, *oriki* ably well serves the purpose of historiography according to Adeleke (2005). Also, Babalola (1967 and 2000) proves that *oriki* among the Yoruba people always bother on history, ancestral biographical sketches of a race, founders of the various towns and allusion to their rulers and nobles. An instance of this is the excerpt below, from orufi Ijebu -Ode and other Ijebu towns as to the meaning of the word ‘Ijebu’:

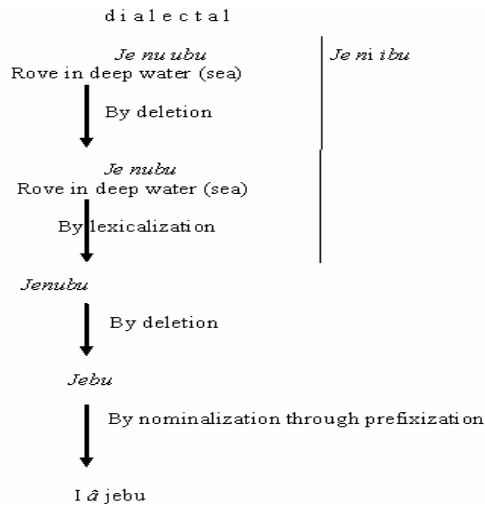
Oni mi *je nubu* omo Oluwari
 Omo *Ajebu josa* de Igbo – bini
 Omo Asale-gege booni noobinren
 A-b’aya-kunle-tititi

Rovers of the deep sea, offspring of Oluwari
 Rovers of deep waters as far as Igbobini
 Whose forebear indulged concubines as if not married
 Whereas his home is full of women

In addition, the above gives the etymology of the word ‘Ijebu’ as:

- a) *Je nubu* i.e. *Je à bu à Jebu*
- b) * *à jebu à Ijebu*

which is better explained morphologically as follows:



I is an agentive from ‘eni ti o’ or ‘awon ti won’ n *je ni ibu*. That is, the

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source/meaning of the word ‘‘Ijebu’’ is ‘‘the people who rove/swim (*Je*) in the sea (*nubu*). This is so because a legend during the course of this research said that the whole Ijebuland, from the beginning, was water-logged and mostly riverine and the people could reach their neighbours like the Igbobinni people only through the waterways.

In orufi Makun-omi, we are able to trace their origin:

Omo Makun-omi Osobiya
Osobiya nita Ajano
Omo Aso
Omo Agbono
Omo Ogidon oloko Makun

Offspring of Makun-omi
Offspring of Osobiya the prince of Ita Ajano
Offspring of Aso
Offspring of Agbono Ogidon

The founding father of Makun

Makun-omi is a coastal town in the Ogun Waterside Local Government of Ogun State. It was said to have been founded by Osobiya, a prince who descended from Ajano, the 19th Awujale of Ijebu-Ode. Also the root of Ogere town is revealed in the following orufi:

Omo won n7 Tagiran
Omo 'Tunmorisagbara
Omo Oke
Omo Obanta
Omo Yemogu
Offspring of people of Tagiran
In 'Tunmorisagbara quarter
Offspring of Oke, the ruler
Offspring of Obanta and a
Descent of Yemogu

The origin of Ogere town is thus traced to a place called Tagiran. The meaning of the name of the town (Ogere) is said to mean ‘ulu okeere’ (a distant town) and that Oke, a ruler and founder of the town himself descended from Obanta, a leader of one of the migratory waves of Ijebu peoples’ settlement in the land.

We have the following source from Or5f8)ke-Sopen *j2b5-Igb9:

{m[Tako Awoye
Omo Ton-on-rin Larinkoye
{m[Ogu-elegi
{m[Abija-parako
Alagbara Ijimiji

Offspring of Tako Awoye
Offspring of Ton-on rin Larinkoye
Offspring of Ogu-elegi

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Offspring of Abija-parako

The strong one of the earliest time

According to a legend, the town of Ijebu -Igbo was founded by a band of hunters led by Ogu-elegi, but the hunters made Prince Onoyelu its first ruler, ably supported by strong people like Ton-on-rin Larinkoye and Abija-parako (meaning someone very difficult to fight) a great medicine man and warrior of his time.

Orufi Sagamu presents the town as:

Omo Koyelu

Omo Egberen

{m[Aseweleri

{m[Kakabijawuta

Omo Oba Aladewusi

Offspring of Koyelu

Offspring of Egberen

Offspring of Aseweleri

Offspring of Kakabijawuta

Offspring of Oba Aladewusi

tracing the origin of *Sagamu* town to Koyelu, the great founding father and a migratory leader of Remo as earlier mentioned. Also are leaders like Egberen and war-lords like Aseweleri. The oriki_lines also trace the history to Oba Aladewusi as one of the earliest Remo Obas.

Further on historiography, some orufi lines give information on the intra-relationship of the Ijebu/Yoruba people. The Yoruba people are in Nigerian states like Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, parts of Kwara, Edo and Kogi States. They are also in the diaspora in neighbouring countries like Benin Republic, Togo and some West African countries along the coast. Yoruba are in Brazil and elsewhere all over the world. Historically, Ile-Ife is the Yoruba centre of civilization and it is from there that the Yoruba got spread all over the world (Atanda 2007:1-14). The Ijebu are related to the other Yoruba people. Despite the fact that they do not speak the Oyo/Yoruba tongue (as earlier mentioned), which is nearest to the Standard Yoruba and the differences in the various dialects of the Yoruba people notwithstanding, according to the excerpts below, the intra-relationship of Ijebu with other Yoruba people is affirmed in the following orufi of Ayepe:

Omo Ilaje maro Ode

A-d'Ado maa k'Ewii

O-k'Ooni gale gale

Offspring of Ilaje from Ode

One who needs not pay homage to the Ewi at Ado –

One who greets the Ooni familiarly

The above shows the Yoruba people inter-relationship and movement from

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one location to the other. Line 1 above shows that some Ijebu people migrated from Ilaje via Ode-omi; line 2 shows that the Ijebu people are related to the Ekiti and line 3 shows Ife as the source. Also, the relationship between the Ijebu and Iwo as well as their relationship with Ikole-Ekiti is revealed in the following excerpt from orufi Ijebu -Ode:

Ara Iwo r'qzwa
A ii ji'wowo
Ikole r'aawa
A ii je'ron ako
Omo Olowu oduru
Omo A-ji-f'epe-sire

Because we are related to Iwo
We as such abhor eating of porridge
Because we are of Ikole origin
We therefore abhor eating of male cattle
Offspring of Olowu-oduru
who specializes in the making of potent curses

The relationship between Owu and Ijebu is expressed in lines 5 – 6. Furthermore, research shows that the Ijebu are not only related to the Olowu but that there are seven Owu settlements in Ijebuland namely Agbole Olowu in Ijebu-Igbo town, Owu-iji in Okun-Owa, Ido-Owu in Ayepe town, Owu-Atan and Oke-Olowu in Ijebu North-East, Owu-Ikijz in Ijebu-East and Owu Ikosi near Agbowa Ikosi in Lagos State. From Orufi Oke -*sopen*:

Omo Olobi wowo-tiwo
Omo Olobi wowo-tiwo
Omo A-dara k'a ni
Agbede susu n'ono Ire

Offspring of Olobi wowo-tiwo
Offspring of Olobi wowo-tiwo
Offspring of A-dara k'a ni
The great smith from Ire town

Lines 1-2 above show that the Ijebu people are related to the Ijesa people because the said two oriki lines (above) are peculiar to the Ijesa people. Line 3 shows the Ijebu people's relationship with the Iremogun ancestry link. From Orufi Omu-Eleni:

Omo A-duro gbo'fa naya
E e gba t'ee neyin ojo ni
Omo Olofija Akitiolu

Offspring of the brave A-duro gbo'fa naya
Whoever behaves otherwise is a coward

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Offspring of Olofija Akitiolu

Lines 1-2 above looks like that of On7k0y7 lineage, while line 3 which also looks like that of Olofija Akitiolu, a known lineage among a large homestead in Iseyin town.

Again from Orufi Aiyeye:

Omo Egba Mogun
Offspring of Egba Mogun

shows that the Ijebu people are related also to the Egba people.

From the personal Orufi of Madam Esufunke Esaogbin:

Yeye Esufunke Esaogbin
Eegun ree natode orun
Esaogbin ara Ogbojo

(Our) mother Esufunke
You're born a masquerade
Esaogbin offspring of Ogbojo

shows that Madam Esufunke Esaogbin, foremost Egungun/Sango worshipper in Ijebu Igbo is related to the Ologbin-in lineage of the Oyo people. Egungun (masquerade), one of the divinities of the Yoruba symbolises their belief in the spirit of their dead ancestors who come back to life annually to bless them. The Ologbin-in lineage is one of the earliest lineages of the Yoruba people, essentially of the Oyo–Yoruba stock, reputed for the Egungun worship and great magical feat. It is believed that Egungun cult got disperse to the other Yoruba people through the Ologbin-in lineage (Olajubu 1972: 1-2). From Orufi Imodi:

Omo Uselu Karaloye

Offspring of Uselu Karaloye

Shows the royal Uselu people of imodi Ijebu people as related to the Benin people because Uselu is a royal quarter in Benin where the crown prince rules as the Eda-Iken of Uselu before ascending the throne as the Oba of Benin. All the above points are affirmative of the Ife link.

CONCLUSION

A cursory look at this work shows that Or7k8 is universal in Yorubaland.

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Oriki dwells on future hope, bravery, petting and praises. *Oriki* shows where someone comes from and the roots of very many towns, information on a race, historical sketches and ancestral history and that the *Oriki* Yoruba is traceable to one root: Oduduwa (ancestry). *Oriki* shows how powerful one's ancestors were, noble things done by the ancestors and their weaknesses (pedigree). *Oriki* dwells on Yoruba peoples' religion, location and relief and *Oriki* is central to Yoruba literature. *Oriki* in one word, could be likened to the Yoruba peoples' data bank, which according to Museum International (2004) is:

Words spoken for didactic or correction/reason remains evergreen
on our hearts for a lifetime like a pix and, hence, spoken words
are a sort of bank, as we have established in this study.

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