

## A HISTRIO-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF ALÁÀFIN LAMIDI ỌLÁYÍWỌLÁ ADEYEMI III'S ORÍKÌ WITHIN YORUBA EPISTEMOLOGY

---

R. Olabimpe ADEYEMI  
Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria  
Email: [proudlyqueen@gmail.com](mailto:proudlyqueen@gmail.com) / [Adeyemi.ro@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:Adeyemi.ro@unilorin.edu.ng)  
08035715515

### Abstract

The value attached to Yoruba *oríkì* (Panegyrics) is waning in our contemporary society. Despite the efforts towards stemming the tide, the problem persists. The use of *oríkì* (Panegyrics) is multifarious, one of which is its use to trace the origin of an individual. The *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Alaafin is dynamic in so many ways. It is in this view that this work seeks to explore the historical angle of the *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Alaafin. For instance, Alaafin of Ọyó's *oríkì* (Panegyrics) can be used to tell the history of successive Alaafins. Further to this study is the effort made to look at the linguistic features of this *oríkì* (Panegyrics), which makes it unique among other *oríkì* (Panegyrics) available in the literature. This paper observes that *Oríkì* (Panegyrics) Alaafin is a master key to the secret room of an Alaafin because chanters and listeners can know about the history and strength of an Alaafin. With this traditional relevance, it is suggested that more importance should be attached to *oríkì* (Panegyrics) in the lesson plan both at primary and post-primary schools so that literature and orature of the Yoruba could be sustained.

**Keywords:** Endangerment, *oríkì* (Panegyrics), histro-linguistic, Alaàfin, panegyrics, Yorùbá

### Introduction

Panegyrics is a type of court poetry and one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres of Africa (Finnegan, 1970)<sup>1</sup>. It seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an administration for military achievement. Some of these panegyrics are laudatory, while some are derogatory. Also, some are directed at inanimate objects, individuals, or the general public. In Yoruba society, for example, some individuals have several names which, when recited together, resemble a loosely constructed poem (also called *Oríkì*) about the person praised (Gbadamosi & Beier, 1959)<sup>2</sup>. Despite this, the most frequent subjects for panegyrics are kings and chiefs in Yorùbá society. It is done to laud the kings and exhibit his military achievements as well as trace the history of the culture he represents.

This work is targeted at the *oríkì* of the Alaafin of Oyo. We restricted this work and its data to Alaàfin Ọba Lámídì Adéyemí III for three reasons. First, Adéyemí III is the incumbent Alaàfin and his tenure as the king of Ọyó started about forty years ago, which is a bit close to the time of this paper compared to others; hence, the historical facts through the rendition of his *oríkì* is almost indisputable as it has not been transmitted beyond his tenure as a king. Secondly, the art of chanting royal poetry for the Alaàfin is much more welcomed and advanced during his tenure as the *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Alaàfin is always rendered at every function by his wives who accompanied him. The chant is primarily to entertain and to dig out historical facts about the Alaafin. Thirdly, this paper will not be enough to relate the history of all the Alaafins without distorting some facts.

## Theoretical Orientation

Sociology of literature is largely and primarily used in this work due to its direct approach to social and societal cum cultural issues. The theory tells us the relationship between a literary work and society. The most important belief of this theory is the society and how human beings live in it; the culture, behaviour, religion, language, etc, are very crucial to the proponents of this theory.

Baldick (2004 p. 238)<sup>3</sup> rightly puts it, “Sociology of literature, a branch of literary study that examines the relationships between literary works and their social context, including...kinds of audience....” In line with Baldick’s submission, this work shall focus on the social context, audience, presentation, chanters and the subject. This means that, to critically analyse a particular work of literature, we must do so in relation to the society that produced the work. A work of art cannot be critically analysed in isolation.

There are two schools of thought on the sociology of literature. The first school believes in relating a literary work with the society that produced it. Eagleton (1988) captures it better when he said:

The first form of justification is in the epistemological sense of the term realist’: Literature is, in fact, deeply conditioned by its social context, and any critical account of it which omits this fact is, therefore, automatically deficient.

The second school believes that one does not need to concentrate on a literary work before examining it; instead, it is better to look at the production of the literary work in question, the roles of authors and that of the publishers (1988, pp. 469 – 478)<sup>4</sup>.

They opined that if these factors are probed well, it can analyse the literary work. One of the proponents of this school of thought is Escarpit (1965)<sup>5</sup>, who believes that the impact of the publishers and audience has a lot to do with the content of a literary work. Maybe this is why Bamidele (2000, p.23)<sup>6</sup> asserts that; “Criticism will always have two aspects, one turned towards the structure of literature as a whole and one turned towards the other cultural phenomena that form its environment. Together, they balance each other.”

With this assertion, this work will adopt the first school, as it lays emphasis on the society that produces a literary work when used to analyse a particular time in context. Creativity is mostly important in a work. It is observed that when the structure of a literary work is revealed, it is imperative to find a theory that will lead to the society that produced that work. When talking about human beings, it is pertinent to talk about the culture and society they come from, and that is why it is better for the work to focus on the society that brings about the study.

Also, when discussing sociology of literature, attention must be paid to the use of words in society. Duncan (1961) stressed that;

No one can finish a study of the sociology of literature without feeling deeply how much he has not said about words... for words are wonderful things. They evoke great power for evil as well as for good<sup>7</sup>.

Little wonder why when certain *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Alááfin is chanted, it can change what was going on at the moment. An example is a crying child that was appealed to in several ways with no effect will stop crying when the *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of one of the Alááfin that has the same trace and direct origin as his was evoked. Maybe that is why Hippolyte Taine (1959) stressed what he called, ‘The race’ ‘The milieu’,

'The moment' which can be explained as 'the lineage', 'the character at a particular time', and 'the immediate happenings'<sup>8</sup>.

It is believed, therefore, that using this theory will bring out the strength, the power, the history, and some unforgettable happenings that abound in the *oríki* (Panegyrics) of Aláàfin Adéyemí 111. The theory will also help to trace those things that are hidden in that palace.

### **Brief History of Aláàfin Lámìdì Oláyíwọlá Adéyemí III**

Lamidi Oláyíwọlá Adéyemí was born on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1938. He was the son of Oba Alhaji Adeniran Adéyemí II, who was at a time the king of Òyó that was reportedly deposed and sent into exile in the year 1954. He was said to be in conflict with the then deputy leader of the Action Group. Lamidi Adéyemí succeeded Aláàfin Gbadegesin Oladigbolu in the year 1971, shortly after the end of the Nigeria civil war. Oba Adéyemí III was selected among other interested contestants; prominent amongst them was Prince Bello Sanda of Adéyemí ruling house, who was defeated. Oba Lámìdì Adéyemí was working as an insurance clerk in Lagos before he became the king of Òyó, a lover of boxing as he was a boxer before ascending the throne of his Fathers.

Oba Lámìdì Adéyemí III was a holder of the Nigerian National Honour of the Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (CFR). He was appointed the founding Chancellor of Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, the position he held from 1980 to 1992. He was also appointed Amir-ul-hajj by the then military Head of State, President Ibrahim Babangida, in recognition of the role he played in the consolidation of Islam in Nigeria. Oba Adéyemí was the Chancellor of the University of Maiduguri and Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ògún State. *Ikú Bàbá Yèyè* was a Muslim. He had many wives and children.

### **Histrio-linguistic Study of Aláàfin Lámìdì Adéyemí III's Oríki**

Being the eldest son in the ruling house of Alówólódù also known as Adéyemí, Prince Lámìdì Oláyíwọlá was elected as the Aláàfin of Òyó but with serious protests from the supporters of his opponents amongst whom was Prince Sanda Oládépò, a police officer then whose candidature was rejected by the kingmakers possibly because the town needed a literate Aláàfin so to regain the glory Òyó had lost and leadership position in Yorùbá land. The issue formed Part of his *oríki* (Panegyrics):

A tí n joba l'Òyòò  
A ò tii joba tó mọwé láàfin  
Àf'Àtándá tó gbéèbó, tó gbó wọyọwọyò.  
Ever since we have been having kings in Òyó  
We have never had an educated one in the palace  
Except Àtándá that speaks English language.

Other protests came from different quarters and the two ruling houses after Prince Adéyemí was elected. A suit was later filed on behalf of the ruling house of Alówólódù against their son, Lámìdì Oláyíwọlá Adéyemí seeking interim injunction to restrain the government or its agents from taking further action on the filling of the vacant position of the Aláàfin of Òyó, pending the determination of the substantive suit before the court (Akintunde, 2004, p.234)<sup>9</sup>. This also formed part of Oba Adéyemí 111 *oríki* (Panegyrics) as thus;

Wón kọwé ìkòkò  
Wón kọwé ìbábá  
Lamidi Àtándá, Afobaje ò gbórò o won

They wrote secret letters,  
They wrote furtive ones.  
Lamidi Àtandá, the kingmakers refused to hear them out.

History has it that after trying in the legal way to protest the candidacy of Prince Lámídi Adéyemí and failing in that way, the opposition attempted some metaphysical ways, which equally failed. This also formed some of the *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Alààfin Adeyemi:

Lóníí lóla èké sáré títi relé Aláwo  
Lóníí lóla, wón sáré rò'kè ìgbèti  
Wón dífá dífá owó o wón dawo  
Wón sàagun-sàagun, èrèké wón dàpò  
Igba sigìdì kò ran Àtandá  
Láyíwólá ní e má s'amò lófo mó!  
Láyíoyè oba lómọ Adeyemí

It's a daily affair for the contemptuous to rush about engaging all sorts of Herbalists.  
And it is a torturous daily trip from here all the way to Ìgbèti Hill.  
These unending trips to seek the Ifá Oracle have turned their coarse hands Leathery.  
The tireless, evil consultation has slackened their once-robust cheeks.  
Two hundred voodoo dolls are ineffective against Àtandá.  
Láyíwólá dismissed their efforts. He uncaringly suggested that, "they stop Wasting the loads of moulding clay"!  
Layioye, the king is the son of Adéyemí.

It is also reflected in Oba Adéyemí's *oríkì* (Panegyrics), his calmness and belief in the Almighty Allah, especially in the face of his distractors and oppositions. This makes part of his *oríkì* (Panegyrics) as chanters see him as an upright leader who is open and steadfast:

Wón n' b'oba nihin-in  
Wón n' b'oba lohun-un  
B'Adépojù Àtandá bá síjú w'Allah, a fèrinsí  
Á lohun ó bá w'Olúwa eni ní í se é funní  
Láyíwólá eni tá a té t'Óloun ò té  
Eni a bukù t'Óloun ò bukù  
Eni wón ká lèsè méjèjè t'Óloun ò jé ó subú.

They slander the king here  
They ridicule the king there  
The king smiled, with magnanimity facing the sky  
He said:"As the Lord wishes, so He does as He likes"  
Láyíwólá, the one they attempted to rubbish, but the Almighty honours.  
The same one they ridiculed, but the Almighty exalts.  
The one they tripped over, but the Lord upholds to keep his balance.

Oba Adéyemi III was an exemplary king whose style of leadership was unique. He became the permanent king of Òyó State Council of Obas and Chiefs, whose part of duties was to confer Obaship title as well as some chieftancy titles on his subordinates. His chanters had this to say:

Òjò sùùrùsù lójó o f'Ónjò ládé baba Làtífá  
 Òòrùn gangan lo f'Ólúnìsà ládé oko Ràimótù  
 Onítédé ,Aseyìn, Iba Kìsì  
 Gbogbo won lo dé ládé porongodo  
 Tàà bá nìi puró o, tá à nìi sòrò egàn  
 Lamidi Àtándá, o jegbàágbèje okúnrin lo

A slight drizzle marked the day you gave the Onjo his crown- father of  
 Lateefah  
 It was a bright, sunny day on the fateful day the king of Inisa was crowned by you  
 – husband of Raimotu  
 Onitede, Aseyin, Iba of Kisi were all crowned by you!  
 In truth and in fairness,  
 Lamidi Àtándá, you are more than fourteen thousand men.

This *oriki* (Panegyrics) also tells us the history of how the aforementioned kings became a beaded crown king in Yorùbá. It also tells that Ìnìsà, a town now in Òsun State, was once in Òyó State before it was cut out from it and many more. Oba Làmidì Oláyíwólá Adéyemí 111 was the permanent chairman of Òyó State Council of Obas and Chiefs. This is shown by the chanters in his *oriki* (Panegyrics) as thus;

Okò ò mí dé  
 Olóri alábùradà gbogbo oba  
 Láyíwólá omọ Olúkúewu.

Here comes my husband!  
 The largest umbrella amongst others  
 Láyíwólá the son of Olúkúewu.

Inherent in the *oriki* (Panegyrics) Aláàfin are some linguistic features like hyperbole, metaphors, heroic deeds, etc., to laud the Aláàfin and praise him. Some examples of these are shown below;

**Hyperbole** - These are exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally, as seen in *oriki* (Panegyrics) of Aláàfin Adéyemi III. For instance -

Wón dífá dífá owó wón dawo  
 Wón sààgùn-sààgùn èrèké wón dàpò  
 Igba s̀ìgìdì ò r'Àtándá....

These unending trips to seek the Ifá Oracle have turned their coarse hands  
 Leathery.  
 The tireless, evil consultation has slackened their once-robust cheeks.  
 Two hundred voodoo dolls are ineffective against Àtándá

These are clearly hyperbolic as one's hand can never be leathery, nor consultations ever make one's cheek slackened. Also, it is not very realistic to have used up to two hundred voodoo dolls on a single person, but hyperbolic.

**Metaphor** – Some things and objects are used to represent the Aláàfin as shown below in his *oríkì* (Panegyrics);

Èsù ò sè'kookò,  
 Ajá nínkan n' se  
 Ajá tí o pa lílì ó wèwù èjè  
 He is the Hyena that is totally impervious to danger,  
 Unlike the accident-prone Dog.  
 The reckless Dog trailing a Porcupine shall drench its coat in blood.

In the above excerpt, the Aláàfin is likened to Hyena and Porcupine because of his fierceness, power and authority over his subordinates. Also, in another example, Aláàfin's detractors and enemies were represented and symbolised with bowls, plates and wooden pots, while fire was used to symbolise him.

Igbá túúbá  
 Awotúúbá  
 Ìsaasùn tó lóun ò ní túúbá  
 Làmídì Àtándá, iná ó f'ojú è rí mabo.

The plate bowed,  
 The Bowl surrendered.  
 The recalcitrant pot, hoping to defy his authority-  
 Làmídì Àtándá expressly vowed to make it face the heat from the fire!

**Heroic deeds** – These are some other features shown in Aláàfin Òyó's *oríkì* (Panegyrics), like in other *oríkì* (Panegyrics) or panegyrics meant for Kings and important personalities, especially, warriors. These are related so that the incoming generations will know of what great things their forebears have done before them and how they achieved some feats and attributes given to them through their *Oríkì*. Let's see some of this in *Oríkì* Aláàfin Adéyemí III below:

Omọ ládélàdè ládé Aláàfin Òyó ládé  
 Adé tóoní omọ Adé lôkúkú n' pín fún gbogbo won  
 Kò sèyí tó tó t' Aláàfin jìngbìnni bí owò èsò  
 Òjò suùrùsù níjò o f' Ònjò ládé baba Làtífá  
 Òòrùn gangan lo f' Ólúnìsà ládé oko Ràimótù  
 Onítèdè, Aséyìn, Ìbàkìsì,  
 Gbogbo won lo dé ládé porongodo!

The crowns in your possession are yours  
 Amazingly and generously, you still gift others  
 None reign supreme as the most imperial of all-  
 Aláàfin resplendent in glory as the Unblemished cowry

A slight drizzle marked the day you gave the Onjo his crown- father of Lateefah  
It was a bright, sunny day on the fateful day the king of Inisa was crowned by you  
– Husband of Raimotu.  
Onítédé, Aséyìn, Iba of Kisi wèrè all crowned by you!

### Recommendations

The study recommended, among other things, that scholars undertake research into the application of Oríkì's to the teaching of the yorùbá language.

The effect of memorising this type of oriki will not only challenge the brain for optimal performance but also dig out the event behind each one. The paper also recommends that oral literature be taught at different levels of academic learning.

### Contribution to Knowledge

The main goal of this study has been to provide the Yoruba society with the basics of panegyrics in Yoruba oríkìs. It is to encourage other researchers to apply concepts from the field of history and linguistics perspective and relevance theory to the study and understanding of panegyrics in the area of Yoruba oral poetry.

### Conclusion

*Oríkì* (Panegyrics) in Yorùbá is a praise name of a family lineage, god or clan. Every Yorùbá has his own *oríkì* (Panegyrics), which he accumulates in the course of his life. The threads through which *oríkì* (Panegyrics)Aláàfin is woven are characterised by hyperboles, metaphors, heroic deeds, and historical events, and these are gradually fading out due to non-usage of oral literature in society.

In this paper, we have shown how the *oríkì* (Panegyrics) of Aláàfin Adéyemí 111 can be used to trace different historical happenings before and after his selection as the king of Òyó dated back to 1969 till now, 2023. We are able to see vividly how *oríkì* (Panegyrics) can also be used to see the position of Aláàfin amongst other

Obas in his domain, Òyó State and most importantly, the relationship between Aláàfin and the people of Òyó.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*. (Oxford University Press 1970) Pp.111

<sup>2</sup> Gbadamosi. & Ulli, Bier. *Yoruba poetry*. (Ibadan: Government Press, 1959) Pp. 6

<sup>3</sup> Baldick 2004 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of literary term*. (Oxford University Press 2004) 238

<sup>4</sup> Eagleton. *Literary theory: an introduction*. (Chicago: The University Press, 1988). pp. 469 – 478

<sup>5</sup> Escarpit. *The sociology of literature*. (Michigan: Lake Erie College Press, 1965). Pp.35

<sup>6</sup> Bamidele. *Literature and sociology*. (Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers Nigeria Limited, 2000) pp. 23

<sup>7</sup> Duncan. *From social system to Ecosystem*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). Pp 142

<sup>8</sup> Hippolyte. *Literary theory and criticism*. In Welleck, Rene *Criticism*. (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1959). Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 4.

<sup>9</sup> Akintunde. *Yoruba Royal Poetry: A socio-historical exposition annotated translation*. (Germany: Bayreuth African Studies, 2004). Pp. 234

## **Bibliography**

### **A. Oral sources**

- B.** Collection of oral information on this work was done by the author herself, who learnt under the tutelage of her palace mother, AyabaSulatAdéyemí, the Royal bards and some knowledgeable custodians of history in Òyó.

### **B. Secondary Sources**

Akinyemi, Akintunde. *Yoruba Royal Poetry: A socio-historical exposition annotated translation*.

Bakare, Gbadamosi. & Ulli, Bier. *Yoruba poetry*. Ibadan: Government Press, 1959.

Chris, Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford, New York University

Eagleton Terry. *The sociology of the Literature*. Chicago: The University Press, 1988.

Germany: Bayreuth African studies, 2004.

Lawrence, Bamidele. *Literature and sociology*. Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers Nigeria Limited, 2000.

Otis, Duncan. *From social system to Ecosystem*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.  
Press, 2004.

Robert, Escarpit. *The sociology of literature*. Michigan: Lake Erie College Press, 1965.

Ruth, Finnegan. *Oral literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970.

State University Press, 1959.

Taine, Hippolyte. *Literary theory and criticism*. In Welleck, Rene *Criticism*. Michigan: Wayne