Traditional Songs of Ìlọrin: Enacting Identities, History, and Cultural Memories

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Abstract

Ìlọrin is a distinct community and a melting pot where people of diverse ethnic and cultural identities came together to form a settlement in the 17th century. These ethnic groups include Yorùbá, Haúsá, Fúlání, Núpê, Kànniké, Kéńbérí, Bàrúbá, and Malians, Arabs, among others. However, despite these ethnic and cultural diversities of Ìlọrin and the Fúlání political hold on it, Yorùbá language is the lingua franca of the community. How these ethnic groups find their voices and articulate their historical and cultural identities within this unified framework becomes a source of concern. As a response to this concern, traditional songs of Ìlọrin like dàdàkúàdà, bàlúù, agbè, wákà, kèngbè, orin ọlọmọ-oba Ìlorin, among others sung in Yorùbá language become a site of contestation of ethnic and cultural identities. The focus of this essay is to analyze Ìlọrin traditional songs as they portray and contest ethnic identities, reconstruct history, and revitalize cultural memories of indigenes. The paper argues that given such a diverse ethnic and cultural origins, performance of Ìlọrin traditional songs become a reminder of family histories, origins, political structure, hegemonic influences, myths, legends, Islamization of Ìlọrin, and a way of ensuring harmony and bridging generational gaps among the various groups in a state that is known as the “State of Harmony”.

Introduction

It has been pointed out that oral artists are part of the custodians of cultural heritage due to their rich knowledge about their communities which they transform into songs. These songs are usually embedded with the themes
of what has happened in the past, the present happenings, and possible legacies that will enhance peaceful co-existence of the future generations. This paper, therefore, uses Òlùrìnyò traditional songs as a medium to mirror the historical reconstruction of different family’s ancestral origin. Òlùrin is a multi-ethnic community comprising of many tribes that successfully came together to form a distinct community that has adopted Yorùbá as its lingua franca. The memory and remembrance through the traditional song plays prominent roles for different families whose fore-fathers left their ancestral homes decades and centuries ago to trace their original ancestral origin. It even allows some families to re-unite.

Some foreign scholars had erroneously denounced African unwritten literature using the lenses of the Western written literature as the yardstick for all forms of literature. These scholars argue that anything unwritten cannot be regarded as literature. But this is totally untrue because there is cultural differentiation which arises from relativity in the sensorium of different cultures. Therefore, either oral or written, the function of literature as the channel that mirrors the society is of paramount importance to every society that has it (Ajíbádé, 2012: 30-31). This paper, which utilises Òlùrin traditional songs as one of the oral genres that are prominent in African society is an approach to prove that traditional music through the rendition by the oral artists serves as tools for rememberance, fact findings, memory, and historical reconstructions. As Finnegan (1992) opined, “...interests in the oral tradition and verbal art is to understand people’s cultural activities and artistry...” (25). What this implies is that many facts are richly embedded in oral traditions which serve as mirror of the society. In a nutshell, the oral traditional singers are like contemporary computer memory cards that stored information in their memory that could be explored for different purposes whenever needed. It has also been noted that oral tradition is the vast field of knowledge through which cultural information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another. It is the complex corpus of verbal arts created as a means of recalling the past. Sometimes oral tradition is used interchangeably with folklore or elements such as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; what gives a community its cultural and national identity. In contemporary usage, oral tradition or folklore means popular and group-oriented expressions of culture (Akínyêmi, 2011).

The opinions of Ajíbádé, Finnegan, and Akínyêmi above center on the power of orality in any given society to remember the past and to update their memory. In a similar vein, Okafor (2005) maintains that,

Through song texts, a person learned the moral codes of his land, its chronology and history, and the guiding principles and ethics of his land.
Traditional Songs of Ilorin

He also learned about his own language, the things his people lives by, and how the society worked. All these were learned through music that ranged from folk tunes to highly specialised ritual music, including chants, incantations and minstrelsy (209).

The above opinion of Okafor also implies that oral literature mirrors society it focuses on and that it is useful in the maintenance of such society.

The analysis of our data in this paper hinges on sociological approach and diffusion theory. According to Barber (1979), “Sociology is a way of trying to understand society, its structure, how it works, and the forces that bring about changes in it” (1). This is in tandem with Ògúnsína (1987) who portends that, “Literature is concerned with men and his society. It is an art composed of words in such a way that it proffers entertainment, enlightenment, and relaxation. It attempts to develop, elevate, expand, and transform the experience of its audience” (19). Our main argument is that sociology of literature proves that there is nothing in a particular work of art that is outside the society.

Likewise, it is the contention of diffusion theorists that history, migration, and culture are products of society and that probably, cultures have a particular origin before dispersal to various societies. The argument is that culture is a product of society and that it lends itself to diffusion, adaptation, and variation.

Identity and Creation of History

Ilorin is the capital of Kwara State in Nigeria. It is about 300 kilometers to Lagos, the economic capital of Nigeria and about 500 kilometers to Abújá, the political capital. Ilorin was founded in the 17th century (Salihu & Jawondo, 2006:1). Though there are multifarious themes embedded in different kinds of Ilorin songs, the main focus of this paper is how the artists make use of their songs in the creation of social history and identity.

Music plays prominent roles for some family members to know and trace their ancestry despite some diffusions of languages and cultures. For example, Jimoh (1994) argues that,

...the core families in Ògbajì namely Ilé Sáúrà, Ilé Àbúró, Ilé Bàbá Sàáré, Ilé Àgòrò and Ilé Imam Ògbajì were originally Sudanese Arabs from a town called Ar-Baji on the Blue Nile...Members of Ibrahim Bátúrà family at Ôkè Apòmù are Arabs by origin. They migrated to Ilorin from Agades in Niger Republic. The Ôjíbárá family in the same area are of Fúláni descent... The Şolágbérù family at Ògbajì, the Ônágun family of Òta-Ègbá, the
members of Ilé-Olóyin (formerly called Ilé-Igbón) at Ìtà-Elépà, the Gíwá family of Pópó Gíwá, and the Mèkábara family of Ìtì-Ògúǹbò are Kànúrí migrants. Șólágbèrú migrated from Bama in Bornu and was founder of ancient Òkèṣúnà...The family of Magaji Kúntú are Boko-Barubas paternally but Fulani maternally while members of Ilé Eléran, Àdángbá are Barubas... Members of the following families are Hausa by ancestry: Ilé Alálikínlá at Ìtì-Ògúǹbò, Ilé Shírù at Òde Alfa Nda, Ilé Saba’ani at Òde Aláúsá and Ilé Saba’ani at Êdá-Ìbágbà, Ilé Jâwòndó at Ìtì-Ògúǹbò and Ilé Alfa Ajóngóólò which was formerly called Ilé Alápatà... (10-11).

The above excerpt reveals that many families in Ìlórìn are confined and interwoven. But despite their different background, songs are used as the tool for self-identity and remembrance of the past and update of memory. For instance, the excerpt of agbè song (gourd rattle) of Káríkáná and Núúrù Àjàdí Kúrè of Ìlórìn below, recorded on 15 February, 2015, reveals that eleven Emirs have been enthroned in Ìlórìn.

Àwọn bába nílù wa ló mórin agbè,
Délùú Ìlórìn, lójọ tó ti pé ni.
Ipele ìlèèkeje láwà jẹ
Nínú olórìn agbè nílùú Ìlórìn.
Láti Òyọ Ìlẹ,
Wón ti n jòba nílùú Ìlórìn ojó pé.
Ọba bii mókànlá ló ti jẹ.
Eléèkinní jẹ, ikejí jẹ,
Eléèketa jẹ, ikerin jẹ.
Títí tó wée dèrìí mókànlá tó kan Súlú.
Súlú Káríkánááni Gàmbárà lóba kesàn-án ní Ìlórìn.
Ọkùnrin méèèdógbon.
Ọba tíí pòba rànnsé ní Súlú óba wa.
Ọba Aláríṣikí tó lòwó lòwó, ó láyà;
Ó ní tirà, ó lòógùn.
Ìgbà tó délèèkewáà lóba kan Àlíù Baba Ògbà.
Ìbùrùìmọ omo Súlú Gàmbárà
N lóba kòkàn lá n’Ìlórìn wa,
Ti n bẹ̀ lèrí óba

(Our forefathers brought agbè music
Into Ìlórìn long time ago.
We are the seventh generation
Among agbè artistes in Ìlórìn
That came from Òyó-Ilé.
There have been kings in Ìlọrin long time ago.
Eleven kings has been installed so far.
First king, second king.
Third king, fourth king installed.
Until Súlú the eleventh king.
Súlú Gàmbàrí was the ninth Emir of Ìlọrin.
A very powerful man.
A king that send other kings on an errand.
Rich king, brave king.
He had different metaphysical powers.
Bábá-Àgbà was the tenth Emir;
Èbùràímọ̀, the son of Gàmbàrí.
The eleventh Emir
Is the one on the throne).

The excerpt reveals that the singers are the seventh generation of agbè singers/performers in Ìlọrin, and that their forefathers migrated to Ìlọrin from Òyó-Ilé. The singers claims further that the ninth emir, who is the father of the incumbent Emir of Ìlọrin, was very powerful metaphysically, brave, and rich. Mention was also made of Àlìù Bábá Àgbà who was the 10th Emir of Ìlọrin.

In another excerpt from the bènbé/àlugétà song of Àlááji Ismaila Àtàndá, the prowess and characteristics of one of the prominent tribes in Ìlọrin is revealed. Their forefathers were known to be brave in war front because they don’t condone unnecessary rivalry. They resemble themselves in character and they also have significant tribal mark of identification wherever you see them. These are encapsulated in the song below:

\[
\begin{align*}
Gòbírí rorò, éé ijà roro \\
Gòbírí rorò, éé ijà rorò \\
Gògòbírí o níí jògò \\
Taa lò ní ø fè wọn? \\
Gògòbírí o níí jògò \\
Taa lò ní ø fè wọn? \\

Ägékù ejò \\
Gògòbírí, oro lè é șe \\
Tò bá dijà tán \\
Gòbírí ni ø pè sì wọn \\
Gòbírí joraa wọn
\end{align*}
\]
Hakeem Olawale

Wón tún fiwà jòraa wón
Gòbírì jòraa wón
Wón tún fiwà jòraa wón

(Gògòbírì are wicked, wicked fighters
Gògòbírì are wicked, wicked fighters
Gògòbírì dont take nonsense
Who asked you to marry them?
Gògòbírì dont take nonsense
Who asked you to marry them?

................................................
You are like a wounded snake
Gògòbírì you are so wicked
When it comes to fighting
Invite Gògòbírì to tackle them
Gògòbírì resembles themselves
They resemble one another in character
Gògòbírì resembles one another
They resemble one another in character)

In the excerpt of Àrẹmú Ôṣé dádákúàdà song from his record tagged “Àrẹmú Gbàwọọdù”, the historical identity and the relationship of the present Emir of Ìlọrin with the past emirs were revealed as seen in the song below.

Ilé iyá rè, ilé ọba Ìlọrin ni
Ilé baba rè, ilé ọba Ìlọrin ni
Àlíù Baba Àgbà,
Ègbón mòmò rè ni,
Ọ joba Ìlọrin.
Àbùdùkáádírì,
Baba mòmò rè ni,
Ọ joba Ìlọrin.
Bàwà tó bì Káádì,
Baba-baba mòmò rè ni,
Ọ joba Ìlọrin.
Súlú baba rè,
Ọ joba Ìlọrin.
Bàwà tó bì Láòfẹ,
Baba-baba rè ni,
Ọ joba Ìlọrin,
Ọ wáá terí i Lóóyà,
Traditional Songs of Ìlọrin

Q bó sèrí Adájó.
Q torí Adájó,
Q bó sèrí ọba.
Asèjọyè ọmọ Súlú, ọmọ Bólántà.

(Your mother is from the royal family
Your father is also from the royal family
Àlùù Baba Àgbà
Is your mother’s uncle
He became the king in Ìlọrin
Àbùdùkáádírì
Is your grandfather
He became the king in Ìlọrin
Báwà, the father of Káádì
Is your maternal great grand-father
He became the king in Ìlọrin
Súlú, your father
He was an Emir of Ìlọrin
Báwà, the father of Láòfẹ
Is your grandfather
He became the king in Ìlọrin
You graduated as a Lawyer
To a Chief Judge
From Chief Judge
You become the king in Ìlọrin
Asèjọyè, son of Súlú, son of Bólántà)

The above song excerpt of Àrèmú Ôsé explains a lot about the detailed relationship of the Emir of Ìlọrin and his progenitors. It was pointed out in the song that he, the incumbent king is a bonafide royal family member and would be successful on the throne. According to the opening lines of the song, both his paternal and maternal families are entitled to the throne of Ìlọrin emirship. Furthermore, his mother’s uncle, his grandfather, his great grandfather and his biological father who were past Emirs of Ìlọrin were mentioned as authentic members of the royal house who had access to the throne of Ìlọrin when they were alive. With all these multifarious facts that are embedded in the traditional music, it can be clearly seen that in any society, oral literature can never be over-emphasized because it mirrors the society and it is very useful in identity creation and reconstruction of social history.

From the above excerpt, element of cultural and linguistic diffusion are discernible. The title of community leader among the Yorùbá people is ọba
while the Fúlàní equivalent title is the emir. Although the king is a Fúlàní man but the title used by the musician is that of Yorùbá, in the Yorùbá language. The singer did not use emir because of the Fulani’s language that has diffused into the Yorùbá language. Therefore, the Yorùbá perception of king is used.

In a similar vein, the chronological ascension of the past Emirs of Ìlọrin is mentioned in one song of Jólómiró Àlàbí specifically tagged “Itàn Qba Ìlọrin” in which he highlights the period of individual emirs on the throne. It is very informative. The song goes thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ẹ sún mó yín-in} & \\
\text{Ẹ gbótàn àwọn Ọba Ìlọrin tí wón ti jè} & \\
\text{Abùdùsùlámí ló kó joyè n’Ìlọrin} & \\
Nínú Ọba tó tì jè & \\
1831 ló joyè n’Ìlọrin & \\
1842 ló ọdà ló wàjá & \\
Ọdún mókànálá lọba yen lò & \\
Tèe jáde làyé. & \\
Télèbó n’è ni Ilébín yìàsi & \\
Sìtà lò tún tèlé e & \\
Nínú Ọba tó tún jè & \\
1842 ló joyè n’Ìlọrin & \\
1860 ló ọdà ló wàjá & \\
Ọdún méjidínógún lọba yen lò & \\
Télèbó n’è ni eetín yìàsi & \\
Igbà tì Sìtà wá kú tán, & \\
Ọdún ọhún ló wá kan Ọba Sùbáirù & \\
1860 ló joyè n’Ìlọrin. & \\
1868 ló ọdà ló wàjá & \\
Ọdún mèjọ pére lọba yen lò. & \\
Télèbó n’è ni éeti yìàsi & \\
Ẹ mà jè o bájé o o & \\
Kò bájé télétélè o o & \\
Àlíù ló tún tèlé e & \\
Nínú Ọba tó tún jè & \\
1868 ló joyè n’Ìlọrin & \\
1891 ló ọdà, ló wàjá & \\
Ọdún mètálélógún lọba yen lò & \\
Télèbó n’è ni tuênti-tírì yìàsi & \\
Ọdún tò kú ni Mómọ wá joba & \\
1891 ni Mómọ joyè n’Ìlọrin & \\
\end{align*}
\]
1896 ló padà ló wàjà
Qdùn márùn-ùn péré lòba yen lò
Téléèbò n'è ní fáisù yìási
Ọ wá ku Sùlè òmọ ọba Ìlorin tá lọ
Kàú Àlàbí tí n bè lójà tí n táwo wa
Kàú Àlàbí ‘mọ Sùlè, ’mọ Wórù.
1896 ló joyè n’Ìlorin
1915 ló padà ló wàjà
Qdùn mókàndinlógún lòba yen lò
Téléèbò n'è ní naintín yìási
Sàíbù ló tún télè e
Nínú òba tó tún jẹ
1915 ló joyè n’Ìlorin
1919 ló padà ló wàjà
Qdùn mérìn péré lòba yen lò.
Téléèbò n’è ní fóó yìási
Sàíbù wá kú tán
Ló kan Káádì òba Ìlorin
Agemọ Adáké-má-fohùn òmọ Labówó.
Átàndá Òpó baba Dáódù Bààlá.
1919 n ló joyè n’Ìlorin
1959 n ló padà ló wàjà
Ogóji qdùn lòba yan lò.
Téléèbò n’è ní fóóti yìási
È má jẹ’ o bàjé o o
Kò bàjé télélélè o o
Qdùn tí Káàdì kú
Ni Sùlú jọba...

(Come over here
Listen to the history of the past kings of Ìlọrin
Abdulsalam was the first emir
Among the past kings of Ìlọrin
He was installed in 1831
He died in 1842
He spent eleven years on the throne
Before his death
Which means eleven years in English
Sità was installed after him
Among the past kings of Ìlọrin
He was installed in 1842
He eventually died in 1860
This king spent eighteen years on the throne
Which means eighteen years in English
After the demise of Ṣìtà
It was the turn of king Sùbáírù that same year
He was installed in 1860
He eventually died in 1868
He spent only eight years
Which means eight years in English
Don’t destroy the tradition
Tradition should be protected
Àlìù followed him
Among the past kings of Ìlòrin
He was installed in 1868
He eventually died in 1891
He spent twenty-three years on the throne
Which means twenty-three years in English
The year he died, Mòmò was installed
Mòmò was installed in 1891
And he died in 1896
He spent five years
Which means five years in English
Then came Súlè, the prince of the departed Ìlòrin king
The father of Àlàbí who sells our musical record at the market
The father of Àlàbí, offspring of Súlè and Wòrú
He was installed in 1896
He eventually died in 1915
He spent nineteen years on the throne
Which means nineteen years in English
Ṣàíbù followed him
Among the past kings
He was installed in 1915
He eventually died in 1919
He spent only four years
Which means four years in English
After the death of Sàíbù
Then was Káádì, the Ìlòrin king
Agemó the cool-headed one, son of Labówó
Àtàndá of the Òpó lineage, father of Dáódù Bàálà
He was installed in 1919 in Ìlòrin
He eventually died in 1959
That king spent forty years
Which means forty years
Don’t destroy the tradition
Tradition should be protected
The year Káádì died
Then Súlú was installed)

This long Pàkenke song of Jólómiró Àlàbí cited nine kings of Òlọrin in chronological order. As at the time he released his music album, Emir Súlú Gàmbàrí, the father of the incumbent eleventh emir was on the throne. The song is also informative as the singer mentioned the years of installation, years spent on the throne, and the year of death of each emir. The information provided by the artist is highly useful in the construction of the social history of Òlọrin emirship. This shows that traditional songs can surely be regarded as one of the authentic sources of information and archive of the society. The musicians are part of the society, and they compose their life experiences and observations into songs for the benefit of the populace.

Like his colleague, Arèmú Òṣé, the singer of the above long excerpt did not refer to the king as emirs but he referred to them as oba. Besides, he portrayed element of linguistic diffusion beyond Fùlânì/Yorùbá divides, he also manifested element of understanding of English as the language of the colonial masters and the lingua franca for Nigeria. In the conclusion of Jólómiró Àlàbí’s song, he added to the historiography of the kings of Òlọrin that the incumbent king/emir should endeavor to emulate the identities and personalities of the past kings in maintaining peace and stability of the community. He used the theme of identity consciously to create a visual self-examination of the past, present, and the future to project anticipated expectations of the masses.

As said earlier that the Òlọrin folksingers use their songs to reveal the identity of people, especially the kings/emirs. An example of such is seen in àlùgétà/bejibe songs by Alhaji Ismaila Àtàndá in which Sulu Gambari, a past Emir of Òlọrin is praised.

_Húkùhúkù dé o_Gàmbàrí dé o_Húkùhúkù dé o_Gàmbàrí dé o_Arógünmasàá dé o_Gàmbàrí dé o_Arógünmasàá dé o_Gàmbàrí dé o_
In the above example, we can see how the artist metaphorically represents his thought and emotion expressively to create a conceptual visual representation of the king/emir. He presents him as the one “one-who-never-run-away-from-war”. This shows that the king was a dexterous warrior; who was capable of leading the community successfully.

In another example below drawn from Àrèmú Òsé đàdàkúàdà traditional song of Ìlọrin, both past and present emirs are listed. The singer referred to the kings as *ọba* instead of emir and made mention of their ancestral origin which is Sókótó. This is also an indication that traditional singers of any society are like archive of knowledge with multifarious historical facts.

Àbùdùsàláámi, Șítà,
Sùbéérù, Àliyù
Mómó, Sútè
Báwà, Àbùdùkáádírí,
Sútú, Áliù Baba Àgbà
Bùréémò Kólápò
Qba di mòkànlá n’Ílòrin tó jẹ
Bùràimò qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Bàágbà qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Sútú qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Àbùdùkáádírí qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Báwà, qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Qba Sútè, qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Qba Mómó, qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Qba Àliù, qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Qba Sùbéérù qba ọ
Qba ọ, qba o ọ
Qba Ọítà, qba ọ
Qba o, qba o ọ
Àbùdù Sáláámi, qba ọ
Qba o, qba o ọ
Ìṣòlá ‘Mò Álími
Fúlání Sóókótó
Ìṣòlá ‘mo Álími
Fúlání Sóókótó ọ ọ ọ.

(Abdul-Salaam, Ọítà
Zubair, Aliyù
Mómà, Sútè,
Bawa, Abdul-Kadri
Zulu, Alíù Baba Àgbà
Ibraheem Kólápò)
Eleven kings have been installed in Ìlòrin
Íbraheem, the King
The king, the king
Bàágbà, the king
The king, the king
Súlú, the king
The king, the king
Abdul-Kadri, the king
The king, the king
Báwà, the king
The king, the king
King Súlè, the king
The king, the king
King Mómọ, the king
The king, the king
King Àlíù, the king
The king, the king
King Zubair, the king
The king, the king
King Ṣítà, the king
The king, the king
Abdul-Salaam, the king
The king, the king
Ìṣọ́lá offspring of Álímì
Fúlàní of Sókótó origin
Ìṣọ́lá offspring of Álímì
Fúlàní of Sókótó origin)

People’s identity can be determined by their self-conception as well as their social presentation; and how they behave within civilization. In the below example of song from Jáígbadé Àláó, we see how the singer situates Súlú Adébímpé within the matter of national concern, the demise of the then President of Nigeria who was murdered. He presented Emir Súlú Adébímpé as the one who mourned the president. Let us examine what the artist said about the emir’s reaction to the murdered president of Nigeria in his song.

Ó dodò oooooo
Ekún Múrítalá dodò láyàà mí
Ọkọ àwa lọ
Múrítalá tọ̀ lọ́ túa rí kó dé mó
Ọlọ́hun ò fọ́rùn kẹ́ è
Níjó Múrítalá kú
N ó rí omi rí lọ́jú Ṣ̣bá ilú Ìlọ́rin wa.
Mo rómi lójú Súlú Adébímpé Qba wa tuntun tò jẹ.  
Lójú Èmìà wa t’Ilòrin  
Èmìà sunkún tití d’Ógbómọsọ

(It has turned into river  
Muritala’s mourning turned into river on my chest  
Our benefactor has gone  
Múrítalá who left and we didn’t see his return  
May God forgive him  
The day Múrítalá died  
I have never seen the king of Ìlòrin wept before  
I saw tear on the face of Súlú Adébímpé, our newly installed king  
On the face of our emir in Ilorin  
The emir wept untill he arrived in Ógbómọsọ)

Constructing identity figuratively involves metaphor and hyperbole or exaggeration. The artist above figuratively exaggerated the reaction of Emir Súlú Adébímpé to the death of Múrítalá by saying that he wept profusely from Ìlòrin until he got to Ógbómọsọ, (a town that is about fifty miles from Ìlòrin). This he did in order to present that the emir as humane and a considerate person. In the first two lines, the artist creates and constructs his personal identity as a concerned citizen of the society, especially in regards to the demise of the then Nigeria president.

Beside identity creation and historicity, the indigenous oral artists in Ilorin use their songs to reveal religious diffusion. As at today, the predominant religion in Ilorin is Islam. However, it is discernible from the song of Àrẹmú Òsé that majority of the original inhabitants of the community before the advent of Islam were predominantly worshippers of the Yoruba traditional religion. In fact, up till today certain areas and neighborhoods in the city still bear names related to Yoruba deities, such as, Òbátálá, Ọ̀gá, Mọlẹ, Yemoja, Iṣẹ, Òṣu, and Òṣún, among others:

Èrò tí n bá n lọlẹ Ọlójẹ́ ‘Lorin  
Èrò tí n bá n l’Ọlójẹ́ Ilòrin  
Ẹ́ bá mì kí Aníbaba-léri-odó  
Ará Oníkasan  
Àdisá Ògbín ọmọ Jàálà  
Ọmọ Abínbólúgbón

(Those going to Ọlójẹ́ in Ilorin  
Anyone going to Ọlójẹ́ in Ilorin)
I send my greetings to Aníbaba-léří-odó
A native of Oníkasàn
Ádisá Ögbín, the offspring of Jáálá
The offspring of Abínbólúgbón)

The Ólójé́̀ neighborhood is where the worship of Egúngún (Masquerade) was prominent before Alfa Alimi and his warriors defeated Áfonjá and captured Ìlórin as part of Sókótó caliphate till today. The history of Ìlórin presents it as a Yorùbá town which was originally used as a military outpost by the Aláàfin, paramount ruler of the Old Òyó Empire (Òyó-Ilé). At the period of its creation, Ìlórin was administered by Àfọnjá, the sixth Ààrę-Ọnà-Kaкра́̀fo (generalissimo) of the Òyó army and successor of Ààrę-Ọnà Oku of Jàbàtá. It was from this outpost that Àfọnjá carried out military functions for the then Aláàfin named Aółé, the son of Aláàfin Abiódún. Aółé reigned between 1789 and 1796. It was during this period that Shehu Alimi, a Fúlàní cleric, arrived Ìlórin with some of his tribesmen and were all welcomed and hosted by Àfọnjá.

After a while, conflict broke out between Aláàfin Aółé and Ààrę-Ọnà-Kakańfọ Áfọnjá. This made Áfọnjá sought the support of Shehu Alimi also known as Salih Janta who had both spiritual and military power. After defeating Aółé, Áfọnjá and Alimi’s relationship strengthened to the extent that Áfọnjá enlisted Alimi’s men into his army and disbanded many of his men whom history claimed he didn’t fully trust. After Sheu Alimi’s death, his son, Abdulsalam, earnestly yearned to rule Ìlórin, and clandestinely plotted against Áfọnjá. After Áfọnjá’s death, Abdulsalam declared himself the Emir of Ìlórin and pledge allegiance to Sokoto Caliphate. This was how the monarch of Ìlórin holds the title of emir till today instead of the Yoruba title ọba.

Afterward, the Yorùbá attempted to regain control of Ìlórin from the Fúlàní but failed. Tóyèjè, the successor of Áfọnjá, led the first and second attempts to drive the Fúlàní people out of Ìlórin. The second attempt is known in history as Mùgbámùgbá War in which Yorùbá people suffered untold defeat in the attempt to regain the throne of Ìlórin (Danmole et al, 1993, Johnson, S. 1921, Jamiu, 2014). This aspect of Ilorin history is aptly captured by Àrèmú-Ôsè, showing that the forefathers of Sééhù Álímì migrated from Sokoto.

Wòlíì Dan Báwà
Ààfàà Sééhù
Ìṣòlá Opó ọmọ Ṣùbéèrù ní Sókótó
Àá tí n ọ́ba nílùú ‘Lórin
Ọjó tó pé ní
Irú Búráímò Ìṣọlà
Irú rè è tìì je
Ịsọlá ọmọ Bùrẹmọ aráa Śókótó
Ịsọlá Òpó
Ọmọ Ọkàádí aráa Śókótó
Ọmọ-ọmọ Ayélabówó
Ọmọ ọmọ Sàídù Álàó
Ọmọ Gógó Álùkò

(Dan Báwà
Alfa Šééhù
Ịsọlá Òpó child of Sùbéérù in Sókótó
The institution of kingship in Ìlọrin town
Has been in existence for a long period
Somebody like Bùràímọ Ịsọlá
Somebody like him has not been made king
Ịsọlá Òpó child of Sùbéérù in Sókótó
Ịsọlá Òpó
Child of Òkàádí native of Sókótó
Grandchild of Ayélabówó
Grandchild of Sàídù Álàó
Child of Gógó Álùkò)

It is really amazing the kind of identity that diffusion of culture created in Ìlọrin as seen in the example of the song above. There is a combination of Yorùbá and Fúlání names. For example, we have a combination of Ịsọlá and Bùrẹmọ from Sókótó. Also, Ịsọlá, the child of Bùrẹmọ, bearing one of the totemic appellations of Yorùbá lineages, ‘Ọpó’. Social interaction and cultural diffusion have given room for the above kind of representation in the artist’s song. Also, the king is referred to as the offspring of Bùrẹmọ, Ækáádí, Ayélabówó, Sàídù Álàó, and Gógó Álùkò. There is a diffusion of Yorùbá and Islamic names. Another example of this is seen in the kèngbè song performed during a wedding ceremony of a princess thus:

Ọlóhun kò ferí jòkú wa
Súlú n bẹ́ lórún, bá́báá Kèslapò
Ọlóhun kò ferí jòkú wa
Àlábí n bẹ́ lórún, baba Làwepò
Ọlóhun kò ferí jòkú wa

(May God forgive the dead in heaven
Súlú, Kősrapò’s father is in heaven
May God forgive the dead in heaven
Àlàbí, Làwépò's father is in heaven
May God forgive the dead in heaven)

The above excerpt refers to Súlú as the father of Kólápò. The singer also mentioned Àlàbí as the father of Láwépò. Súlú is not a Yorùbá name, but through diffusion of culture and languages, the Fúlàní also bear names like Kólápò, Àlàbí Òpó, Ìṣòlá, and many others that are Yorùbá names.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, attempt has been made to study the contributions of indigenous singers in Ìlọrin to the construction of social history and identity of the people in their locality. Identity construction is an integral part of human beings. In Yorùbá society, oral artists use the medium of oral performance to construct identity and social history of the society they are performing for. As we’ve shown in the essay, a substantial part of Ìlọrin songs, chants, and recitals is devoted to eulogy because, according to Abubakre (2006:103), praise singing is part of the rich oral culture of the Yorùbá, who are the majority of the inhabitants of Ìlọrin. This culture of praise forms a basic element of their public life. In addition to this, Islam, the religion professed by the people of Ìlọrin, teaches that good deed should be acknowledged and appreciated.

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