'Ibadan – a model of historical facts': militarism and civic culture in a Yoruba city

RUTH WATSON*
St Antony's College, Oxford, OX2 6JF

ABSTRACT: The article focuses on an historical relationship between the political institution of chieftaincy and civic pride in Ibadan, a Yoruba city in south-western Nigeria. It examines this relationship against the scholarly model of 'Yoruba urbanism' and argues that this model is empirically and conceptually flawed. Drawing on oral and documentary historical sources, the article explores how a 'civic Ibadan' was made through practices of settlement, civil disorder and external warfare during the pre-colonial period. The analysis adds to recent debates about the concept of 'historical materialism' in the urban past.

'Ibadan – a model of historical facts'.[1] So proclaimed the editors of *Ibadan Mementoes* in January 1995, commemorating the first anniversary of Emmanuel Adegboyega Adeyemo's installation as *Olubadan*, the most senior chieftaincy title in the city. *Ibadan Mementoes* includes articles about the life and chieftaincy career of Adeyemo and seeks 'to demonstrate that Ibadanland . . . is a reservoir of creative minds in many human endeavours'.[2] Given this objective, most of the document chronicles the achievements of 'Ibadan's sons and daughters'. A glorified description of the city is included, in addition to an 'Ibadan City Anthem'.

   Ibadan Mementoes is a textual pageant of civic consciousness. It presents a puzzle. How should the claim that Ibadan is *a model of historical facts* be interpreted? Is the city an exemplar of empirical evidence? The mystery of this claim resonates with an academic exchange in the pages of *Urban History*. Reviewing Alan Mayne's book *The Imagined Slum*, David Englander suggested that Mayne's use of discourse theory as a tool of historical analysis marked a step backwards for interpretation of the urban past. As Englander saw it, with Mayne's approach, the bygone lived experience of inner-city residents sank under the condescension of critical theory; against this 'post-structuralist onslaught' he posited a

1 *Ibadan Mementoes: Oba Adeyemo's Noble Past, Glorious Present and Progressive Future X-Rayed. Historical Perspective on Ibadanland* (Ibara, 1995), 19.
2 *Ibid.*, 5.

reassertion of 'historical materialism' through a vigorous defence of the empirical basis of the profession.[3]

Mayne replied by challenging the basis of Englander's 'history-making credentials over the urban working classes'.[4] He argued that neither memory, empathy, nor the selective appropriation of a skewed historical record could give access to the material past of 'lived experience' which Englander sought.[5] For Mayne, the interpretive key was not in empirical evidence. It lay in an approach which systematically addressed the material context of past urban life and attempted a reading of the historical physical fabric of cities themselves.[6]

Amidst such controversy, perhaps the claim that Ibadan is 'a model of historical facts' should be ignored. This paper suggests not. The phrase brings to the fore a materialist perspective on the Ibadan past. Mayne contended that historians of the city 'urgently require a materialist historicism … in order to mesh analysis of urban society and culture with that of urban spatial form'.[7] Englander's main complaint against *The Imagined Slum* was that Mayne presented the slums he wrote about as 'real only in the words, signs and concepts they communicated rather than being rooted in the material conditions of everyday life'.[8] A study of Ibadan history offers a further dimension to their competing conceptualizations of 'historical materialism'.

This article is concerned with the historical and cultural origins of a 'civic Ibadan'. It resists the temptation to read urban political histories through imposing timeless, structural 'civic institutions' on antiquity. Instead, its starting point is an acknowledgement that past and present 'city-people' engage in political practices on the basis of particular social expectations. These expectations have specific meanings located in a cultural context. Taking these meanings seriously and exploring them historically gives insight into how they became associated with certain political outcomes.

'Ibadan – a model of historical facts'. What is the significance of this phrase? An edition of *Public Culture* on the theme of 'Cities and Citizenship' provides some insight. The editors, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, argue that a defining mark of modernity has been a particular concept of citizenship. This concept circumscribes the prerogatives and encumbrances of a particular type of social membership, whose scope has generally been established by the nation-state. They contend that, although dismantling the historic primacy of urban citizen-

[3] D. Englander, review of *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities 1870–1914* by Alan Mayne, *Urban History*, 21 (1994), 311.
[4] A. Mayne, 'A barefoot childhood: so what? Imagining slums and reading neighbourhoods', *Urban History*, 22 (1995), 380.
[5] *Ibid.*, 381.
[6] *Ibid.*, 385.
[7] *Ibid.*, 382–3.
[8] Englander, review of *The Imagined Slum*, 310.

ship was an essential project of nation-building, cities today are salient sites for reconstitutions and renegotiations of citizenship.[9] Their issue of *Public Culture* speaks for 'the urgent need to develop a framework of investigation which considers that cities are challenging, diverging from, and even replacing nations as the important space of citizenship – as the lived space not only of its uncertainties but also of its emergent forms'.[10] Holston and Appadurai assert that this space is theatrical; a stage constituted for the performance of 'dramas of citizenship'.[11]

As a textual pageant, *Ibadan Mementoes* joins the genre of 'citizenship performance'. It discursively produces a material stage for a civic Ibadan. Readers of the text are an audience of potential participants. 'Historical facts' perform a parochial urban citizenship – the largest section of the document is a collection of short biographical accounts on Ibadan citizens. This literary civic spectacle is based on a normative social expectation that 'chieftaincy pride' and 'civic pride' are connected. How and why this should be so is the central question of this article.

Ibadan in the nineteenth century

The genesis of a civic Ibadan is in the city's military origins as a war-camp. *Ibadan Mementoes* theatrically recites this paradox in the third verse of the 'Ibadan City Anthem':

Ibadan, ilu jagunjagun	Ibadan, city of warriors
Awon to so o d'ilu nla	They who made it into a great city
Awa omo re ko ni je	We its children will not allow
K'ola ti ogo won run[12]	That their honour and glory perish

From the 1820s onwards, the area that is today south-western Nigeria was beset with intense political turmoil. A combination of events – the collapse of the Oyo empire as a result of internal dissent; the expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate to the north; and the prohibition and consequent disruption of the Atlantic slave trade – produced a climate of near-continuous violent upheaval throughout most of the nineteenth century. Wars ensued between various rival polities and refugees flooded the area. About 1829, in the aftermath of one of these wars, a group of soldiers occupied the deserted village of Ibadan as their camp.[13]

Although population estimates range widely, it is indisputable that the war-camp grew rapidly. In 1851, the Anglican missionary David Hinderer suggested a figure between 60,000 and 100,000 people; six years

---

[9] J. Holston and A. Appadurai, 'Cities and citizenship', *Public Culture*, 8 (1996), 195.
[10] *Ibid*., 189.
[11] *Ibid*., 200.
[12] *Ibadan Mementoes*, 6. Thanks to Karin Barber for the translation.
[13] The Owu War ended *c*. 1829. Ibadan's establishment is generally assumed to be immediately after this event. Akin Mabogunje and J.D. Omer Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History* (Ibadan, 1971), 62.

later, his Baptist counterpart T.J. Bowen proposed 70,000.[14] During 1890, Assistant Colonial Secretary Alvan Millson was sent on a 'peace mission' to Ibadan, a visit that was part of a wider imperial project to end the regional wars. He later described the city:

The London of Negroland . . . Surrounded by its farming villages, 163 in number, Ibadan counts over 200,000 souls, while within the walls of the city itself at least 120,000 people are gathered. Its sea of brown roofs covers an area of nearly 16 square miles, and the ditches and walls of hardened clay, which surround it, are more than 18 miles in circumference.[15]

Evidently, Millson viewed Ibadan as an impressive urban centre. Apart from farming, he identified 'slave raiding' as the other occupation of city-residents. Emphasizing that raids were undertaken for domestic purposes, Millson made reference to Ibadan's bellicose society, where control over people was militarily and politically vital. This internal demand also related to Ibadan's agricultural base, since slaves were generally put to work on the farms surrounding the settlement.[16] It was an arrangement which enabled the city to feed itself, despite being constantly at war with neighbouring polities.

The Ibadan economy was not solely dependent on farming and 'warlike pursuits'. According to Hinderer, there was 'a good deal of industry to be seen in & about the town'. He referred to male-dominated crafts such as weaving, tanning and blacksmithing, as well as the manufacture of oil and soap (from palm produce) by women.[17] Furthermore, 'trade routes radiated from Ibadan in virtually all directions'.[18] The nodal position of the city enabled it to develop rapidly into a commercial hub where local textiles and agricultural goods such as yams, beans, corn, kola-nuts and palm oil were exchanged for imported commodities. From the south came firearms, European cloths and salt; while the north provided slaves, livestock, swords, ivory and onions.[19]

Ibadan was more than an urban centre – it was also a powerful military polity. In the decades after its establishment, Ibadan warrior-chiefs gained control over towns up to two hundred miles east of their base. Most conquests were achieved by a huge army marching on foot; very few soldiers used horses. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a bloc of these eastern towns formed a coalition to fight for their

[14] D. Hinderer, 'Journey and visit to Ibadan, a Yoruba town two days journey from Abeokuta', quarterly journal extract, 23 Oct. 1851, CA2/049/104. Church Missionary Society (CMS) Papers, Yoruba Mission. Special Collections, The University of Birmingham Library; T.J. Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in the Interior of Africa, 1849–1856* (London, 1857), 221.

[15] A.W Millson, 'The Yoruba country, West Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 13 (1891), 583.

[16] *Ibid.*, 578.

[17] Hinderer, journal extract, 23 Oct. 1851, CA2/049/104.

[18] Bolanle Awe, 'Militarism and economic development in nineteenth century Yoruba country: the Ibadan example', *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 71.

[19] *Ibid.*

independence. The addition of these battles to ongoing wars against the Egba and Ijebu to the south and Ilorin to the north meant that, from the late 1870s, Ibadan was forced to fight on five fronts. These battles dragged on until the imposition of British colonial rule in 1893.[20]

The nineteenth-century past is symbolically present in *Ibadan Mementoes*. An account of pre-colonial militarism is embodied by the 'Ibadan City Anthem', as well as by the term 'Ibadanland', which refers directly to the former military empire. This link between militarism and 'civicness' is of long standing in Ibadan history. Why is it important? How has it been established? Answering the first of these questions necessitates the recognition of an urban tradition in 'Yorubaland' – the region to which Ibadan belongs.

A model of urbanism

During the late colonial period, the 'Yoruba towns' of south-western Nigeria became a subject of interest for Western academic scholars.[21] Some of these communities, which were formerly bounded and fortified by walls, date back to at least the fourteenth century. An American anthropologist, William Bascom, pioneered their investigation as test cases for a Wirthian model of urbanism.[22] By proving that 'the Yoruba had cities even before European penetration' he sought to rank their urban development on a par with more industrialized societies.[23]

At the time it was carried out, this research was politically significant. Bascom explicitly stated that his intention was to 'broaden the concept of urbanization so that it is less dependent on the historical conditions of Western urbanization'.[24] To a degree, this was achieved. The extensive scholarship on Yoruba urbanism challenged narrow definitions of the term 'urban' by introducing a cross-cultural perspective.[25] Although the economic base of these towns was farming, most commentators,

---

[20] S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840–1893. Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (New York, 1971).

[21] The notion of pre-colonial Yoruba towns is strictly anachronistic; 'the Yoruba' only began to exist as an incorporative ethnic category during the late nineteenth century. See J.D.Y. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', in E. Tonkin, M. McDonald and M. Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London, 1989), 198–215. However, the literature on Yoruba urbanism is unreflective about its use of the Yoruba category and, to avoid confusion, I will use it.

[22] W.B. Bascom, 'Urbanization among the Yoruba', *American Journal of Sociology*, 60 (1955), 446–54.

[23] *Ibid*., 453.

[24] Bascom, 'Urbanization among the Yoruba', 453.

[25] P.C. Lloyd, 'The Yoruba: an urban people?', in A. Southall (ed.), *Urban Anthropology. Cross-Cultural Studies of Urbanization* (New York, 1973), 107–23; N.C. Mitchel, 'Yoruba towns', in K.M. Barbour and R.M. Prothero (eds), *Essays on African Population* (London, 1961), 279–301; G.J. Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture. A Geographical Analysis* (London, 1966); W.B. Schwab, 'Oshogbo – an urban community?', in H. Kuper (ed.), *Urbanization and Migration in West Africa* (Berkeley, 1965), 85–109; P. Wheatley, 'The significance of traditional Yoruba urbanism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12 (1970), 393–423.

excepting Gideon Sjoberg, did not question that they *were* towns.[26] Nonetheless, radical as it was in its conception, 'Yoruba urbanism' is a timeless ideal. It is a model of assumptions – *not* 'historical facts'.

According to Bascom, the Yoruba town was constituted by three levels of social/spatial structure. The 'primary group' was a corporate patri-lineage. He assumed 'the lineage is the residential unit'.[27] This kin-group inhabited a confined household space known as the compound: a physical structure which comprised a large, rectangular building of rooms facing inward on to a verandah that, in turn, surrounded a courtyard. The next social/spatial structure was the 'quarter' – a group of lineages and their compounds which, via the 'exercise of authority' by a chief, were integrated into an administrative unit.[28] Chieftaincy titles were claimed on the basis of lineage membership; particular titles belonged to specific lineages. For those lineages who had titles, succession was hereditary within the lineage.[29]

Finally, there was the town itself – all the residents, their quarters and their chiefs incorporated into a political community. Incorporation was taken as given, an automatic result of the appointment of each quarter-chief to a town council.[30] The rule of an *oba* over the other council chiefs further consolidated political community. Peter Lloyd, another highly influential exponent of the ideal, put it thus: 'The ruler is … in some respects a divine king, a personification of the whole town'.[31] Later scholars contended that the power of the *oba* was also expressed by the central position of his palace in town layout.[32]

An *oba* gained the right to his position by professing membership of the 'royal lineage' – a group who claimed descent from a 'town founder'. Usually, this figure was mythically associated with a past migration from Ile-Ife.[33] This ancient town maintains a long-standing role in ritual and ceremonial religious practices; some people profess that it is both the cradle of Yoruba urban culture and the 'navel' of humankind.[34] Interestingly, Bascom did most of his fieldwork in Ife.[35] It was he who initially took the view that these Yoruba settlements were urban because they had 'a formalized government which exercises authority over the primary groups and incorporates them into a political community'.[36]

[26] G. Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City* (New York, 1960), 33.
[27] Bascom, 'Urbanization among the Yoruba', 451.
[28] *Ibid*., 450.
[29] Bascom did not explain how chieftaincy titles were allocated. See P. Lloyd, 'The Yoruba lineage', *Africa*, 25 (1955), 249.
[30] Bascom, 'Urbanization among the Yoruba', 451.
[31] Lloyd, 'Yoruba lineage', 250.
[32] E. Krapf-Askari, *Yoruba Towns and Cities* (Oxford, 1969), 55.
[33] Lloyd, 'Yoruba lineage', 239.
[34] J.A. Ademakinwa, *Ife, Cradle of the Yoruba Part II* (Lagos, n.d.), 3.
[35] A file in the National Archives, Ibadan (Oyo Prof. 1/1302), contains numerous letters between William Bascom and various colonial officials, concerned with his fieldwork in Ile-Ife.
[36] Bascom, 'Urbanization among the Yoruba', 453.

This criterion of the city had a defining impact on future studies of towns in south-western Nigeria. It prompts three major questions: when, why and, most importantly, how was 'incorporation' achieved?

Apart from my own work, two close studies of particular towns have shown that this model of Yoruba urbanism is empirically and conceptually flawed. Karin Barber explored the past of Okuku town through the Yoruba language genre of *oriki*, a fragmentary, highly complex form of oral praise poetry. Her research undermined the assumption that the lineage was a unitary, clearly demarcated social unit. In doing so, she demonstrated that the descent group was rarely equivalent to the residential group. Lineages and compounds were thus not coterminous. At the same time, neither were the residents of any particular compound formed into an unchanging, homogenous entity. By contrast, social boundaries in the town were 'continually redefined according to the circumstances, giving rise to different ''groups'', differently recruited in different situations, so that no single definition of a primary social unit was in the end possible'.[37] Barber's work thereby discredited the model's conceptualization of lineages, compounds and quarters as static social/spatial structures. Relatedly, the assumption that all Yoruba towns were divided into permanent, territorial, administrative units now appeared unfounded.

J.D.Y. Peel posed a 'conceptual objection' to the model, focusing his criticism on its reductive understanding of political community. The primacy given to the lineage, he argued, served to obscure the forms and practices of urban politics.[38] It was not that kinship was unimportant in the politics of Ilesha (the town Peel studied). The problem arose from an unrealistic presentation of kinship as somehow before politics. In daily social life, these elements were not separated – they were mutually constitutive. That is, accounts of kinship were shaped by political needs and, simultaneously, political needs were influenced by competing accounts of kinship. In Ilesha, lineages were produced by the politics of the town, not just by norms of descent.[39] Unless one considered the numerous forms of this politics, one would not understand Ilesha history.

Thus, from an historian's perspective, Yoruba urbanism has limited explanatory power. It is not able to explain why these towns developed, how their political identities were constituted, or give any insight into their social, cultural or economic development over time. The model was devised for definitional reasons – to prove that Yoruba people were urban. Consequently, it necessarily imposes its own terms on the urban

---

[37] K. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow. Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh, 1991), 158.

[38] J.D.Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians. The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s–1970s* (Cambridge, 1983), 10.

[39] *Ibid.*, 54.

past. Scholars used it to ascribe a fixed social structure to the towns; a project which utterly neglected an analysis of what Yoruba urban life actually was. The lack of evidence for the model seriously undermines its interpretive use. Nevertheless, it continues to exert a pervasive grip on scholarship because researchers simply assume it as a 'model of historical facts'.

For example, in a generally useful analysis of Ibadan urban planning, Boyowa Chokor attempts to map the 'spatial extent of the traditional city under the Yoruba urban culture'.[40] He thus contradicts his earlier description of how Ibadan morphology differed from other towns in the region. More recently, Simon Heap's welcome insight into the colonial underclass of Ibadan pickpockets unquestioningly accepts Krapf-Askari's assertion that, because it did not have a crowned ruler, 'Ibadan was not a town at all, except of course in the eyes of its own citizens'.[41] Yet, only a few years after its founding, the city was well known to outsiders as a powerful urban centre because of the bellicose activities of its inhabitants.

The Yoruba language vocabularies for these settlements indicate that a rigid view of their social structure is unsustainable. For example, the term *ilu* can refer to 'town', 'community' or 'council'. Furthermore, since there is no distinct term to denote the polities of which they were the centres, *ilu* can also mean 'state' or 'society'.[42] A related term, *araalu*, means 'citizen'. In some social situations, this is distinguished from *ara oko*, which signifies contempt for a 'farm yokel'.[43] Importantly, these people (who live in smaller hamlets (*abule*) around the *ilu*) can also claim membership of urban-based lineages and compounds. However, on other occasions, or even at the same time, they can aspire to independence from the larger town.[44]

In everyday life, the ways in which Yoruba people identify their 'towns' and their own statuses as 'citizens' are not always the same. How the terms are defined depends on the context and on the interests at stake. This suggests that, having accepted the settlements as urban communities, attention must shift to revealing the social situations which made their terms have meaning. Rather than viewing urbanity through a lens of universal structure, analysis should focus on investigating the actual practices of town life at a local level.[45] This approach establishes the historical legitimacy of the towns as units of analysis.

[40] B.A. Chokor, 'External European influences and indigenous social values in urban development and planning in the third world: the case of Ibadan, Nigeria', *Planning Perspectives*, 8 (1993), 291.
[41] S. Heap, '"Jaguda boys": pickpocketing in Ibadan, 1930–60', *Urban History*, 24 (1997), 341.
[42] Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, 9.
[43] R.C. Abraham, *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba* (London, 1958), 305.
[44] C.E.F. Beer and G. Williams, 'The politics of the Ibadan peasantry', in G. Williams (ed.), *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London, 1976), 135–58.
[45] For a useful overview of the 'situational perspective' in urban anthropology see J. Clyde Mitchell, *Cities, Society, and Social Perception. A Central African Perspective* (Oxford, 1987).

A rejection of 'Yoruba urbanism' does not extend to the category of 'Yoruba towns'. They do occupy a geographical area that, during the twentieth century, came to be known as 'Yorubaland'. Even today, some of the towns share certain features: an agricultural economy, a crowned *oba*, a council of chiefs and a population of unstable 'lineage groups' living in unclearly demarcated compounds. Nonetheless, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe a uniform pattern to these similarities. The Yoruba urbanism model is notable mainly for the way it succeeds in obfuscating the numerous exceptions to its formulaic template. Some scholars admit these exceptions; they afterwards dismiss them as unimportant.[46] Amongst all the anomalies, one town stands out as the most anomalous of all – Ibadan.

Chieftaincy and settlement practices in pre-colonial Ibadan

Until the late 1950s, Ibadan was the most populous city in Nigeria.[47] Although it was the capital of a sizeable polity during the pre-colonial period, its occupation as a war-camp meant that it had no 'town founder', no 'royal lineage' and no crowned *oba*. Ibadan citizens explain this constitutional set-up by referring to an account of town origin which asserts that modern Ibadan is the third settlement on the site. The founding of the first two settlements is attributed to Lagelu, a warrior-chief from Ife, thus establishing the standard migration history for Yoruba towns. Ibadan's lack of a city crown is then explained by a tale of how Lagelu's daughter Yade, whose name means 'one who rips a crown', destroyed a crown she found in the vicinity of the first Ibadan settlement.[48] This is a mythical 'model of historical facts' – it asserts that, once upon a time, Ibadan had a crowned ruler. The city's claim for political status against other towns in the region is therefore legitimated. However, until recently, Ibadan had no palace.[49]

A geographer termed the original layout of the city as 'confused building', the outcome of a rapid occupation: 'Land was taken up in blocks by chiefs, and dependants simply built their compounds hastily anywhere within the block'.[50] Nineteenth-century sources generally support this summary, but Mabogunje's suggestion that those who initially appropriated land in Ibadan were 'chiefs' is misleading. In his

---

[46] Krapf-Askari, *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, 41.

[47] The (much-derided) 1963 census reported that the population of Lagos (665,246) had overtaken that of Ibadan (627,379) for the first time.

[48] Both oral and written histories refer to versions of this account of town origin. For example, Chief Ayorinde, *Asipa Olubadan*, interviewed 16 Sep. 1995, Ibadan; I.B. Akinyele, *Iwe Itan Ibadan* (Exeter, 1950; 1st pub. 1916); K. Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan (Part One)* (Ibadan, n.d.). It is conspicuously absent from Johnson's text (see note 51).

[49] Contrary to past practice, *Olubadan* Adebimpe took a beaded crown in 1976. An *Olubadan* palace was subsequently built opposite one of the main city markets at Oja'ba.

[50] A.L. Mabogunje, *Yoruba Towns* (Ibadan, 1962), 10.

History of the Yorubas, Samuel Johnson stresses that the original occupiers did not hold titles – they were 'a composite band of marauders'.[51] Through warfare, these men had gained notoriety and, relatedly, had acquired a large number of followers and slaves. They were able to control an area of the war-camp because they had people to settle with them, not because they held political office. Their households were essentially private armies, set up to ensure personal security.

After the Oyo group of settlers expelled certain other groups from Ibadan, they took up chieftaincy titles.[52] Those who assumed posts had already established their compounds – battle merit and 'having people' were again crucial. Subsequently, military achievement, *not* birth into a particular lineage, became the main requirement of men who sought political appointments in Ibadan. In Mabogunje's view, this practice was unfortunate: 'It created a body of unemployed people who interpreted their civic duties only in terms of a readiness to go to war for booty'.[53]

Powerful warriors sometimes chose their own titles. In time, the three most important chieftaincy lines became those of the *Baale*, *Balogun* and *Seriki*. Succession to titles was not hereditary. The leaders of each military household, known as *mogaji*, formed a pool of candidates; the senior chiefs selected from this pool when making appointments to junior posts. Having gained a title, a chief then sought promotion to a higher rank on his line or to another line altogether – there was no definite order. Promotion depended on a man's success in war, the size of his following, the available vacancies and the political interests of the senior chiefs. An influential woman in the town (usually a wealthy trader) could claim the post of *Iyalode*. Anna Hinderer, the wife of missionary David, called on *Iyalode* Subuola in 1854 and described her as 'a person of much influence and looked up to with respect'. Hinderer reported that the female chief was 'surrounded by her attendants and people, in great order, and some measure of state' during her visit.[54]

Ibadan chieftaincy developed within a military framework for pragmatic reasons. A similar practicality characterized the physical expansion of the town. This growth process is revealed in oral histories of Ibadan military households (*ile*). These accounts often contradict each other and their chronologies are not reliable. It is impossible to take their 'facts' for granted and determine conclusively which compounds were established 'first'. However, the accounts remain useful as historical sources because of the *way* they recount the past – clues to

[51] Rev. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (London, 1921), 224. The publication date is misleading – the work was actually written during the late nineteenth century and completed in 1897.
[52] *Ibid.*, 244.
[53] Mabogunje, *Yoruba Towns*, 10.
[54] A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country* (London, 1872), 110.

their interpretation are embedded in how they are constituted as texts.[55] With this approach, it becomes clear that all the accounts share a narrative framework based on past acts of 'settling people'.

Some histories claim that the founder of the compound was among the first group of soldiers to come to the war-camp; they recount how he occupied a place and then subsequently used it as a military base. Although these accounts imply that Ibadan was a named and pre-existing settlement, they do not refer to compounds being appropriated. Rather, the emphasis is on establishing an original land claim where the founder built his compound.[56] After this initial occupation, powerful warriors secured plots of land on the war-camp outskirts. They usually made such acquisitions when returning from a military raid with followers, slaves and booty; land was claimed by settling people, usually slaves, as cultivators.[57]

Once the first compounds and farms were inhabited, Ibadan grew rapidly. The history of this expansion is told by *ile* who acknowledge that their compound founder arrived once the war-camp was established.[58] These people were most often refugees fleeing the war-devastated areas or men who had judiciously managed to join in the rampage at the time of a military raid. Initially, oral accounts narrate, a 'new arrival' inhabited the compound of a powerful warrior as a 'war-boy'. In this role, he promised the warrior loyalty and joined his private army – in return, he gained a right of residence and a share of war-booty. Accounts then tell how the soldier was already, or later became, militarily successful. Success was measured by the number of people he had supporting him: his wives, slaves, 'war-boys' and their families.

When a soldier had established this independent support base, he approached his 'host' chief to allocate him a portion of the 'household farm'. Most accounts identified the motivation for a move as 'overcrowding'.[59] The land allocated was afterwards occupied by the group of men and women who 'followed' the departing soldier there. For example, consider this history of *ile* Olunloyo:

---

[55] K. Barber and P.F. de Moraes Farias, *Discourse and its Disguises. The Interpretation of African Oral Texts* (Birmingham, 1989), 2.

[56] *Ile* Oluyole, *ile* Oderinlo, *ile* Kure, *ile* Fadaya, *ile* Ibikunle and *ile* Fijabi narrated their settlement histories in this framework. (Unless otherwise stated, interviews were conducted by Ruth Watson, in Ibadan, during Sep. 1995–Feb. 1996 or Mar.–Apr. 1997. Transcripts are in her possession.)

[57] Hinderer, journal extract, 23 Oct. 1851, CA2/049/104.

[58] The vast majority of accounts fall into this category. For example, *ile* Delesolu, *ile* Ojuolape, *ile* Alli-Iwo, *ile* Kofo, *ile* Ogunmola, *ile* Opeagbe, *ile* Olugbode, *ile* Ogboriefon, *ile* Foko, *ile* Alesinloye. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

[59] Of the accounts listed above, seven gave overcrowding as the reason for leaving a host compound. Of the remaining three, one named fire, one claimed that compound residents quarrelled and the other said infant mortality necessitated departure. Obviously, these latter reasons were also related to high population densities.

My great-grandfather first pitched at a place that is now Molete [a suburb], he was there with his men. … They [Ibadan residents] were frightened to leave a dangerous man there, he might pounce on the town at any time. … Oluyole [a senior chief] invited him and his men … They hadn't been there long when their war-boys had a clash … so Olunloyo decided to move to the present compound. … It was *Iba* Oluyole and Olunloyo who built the entrance gate to the compound … to keep it safe.[60]

Although this account places emphasis on the independence of Olun-loyo, it nonetheless indicates the historical act of a land grant. The mention of Oluyole's assistance with the 'entrance gate' might initially seem contradictory, given the emphasis on rivalry. However, this 'assistance' encapsulates the memory that Oluyole allocated the land; it manifests a social and political relationship. It shows that, even at the very time they were defined, the boundaries between compounds (as residential groups and as demarcated spaces) were blurred.

From the perspective of the warrior-chief who made the land grant, the departing group were still, in some ways, 'his people' – he was simply expanding his spatial jurisdiction by 'settling them' elsewhere. As far as the departing group were concerned, they were now autonomous. However, at the time of a military campaign, they usually did not proceed to war independently. Instead, they rejoined the private army of their former 'host'. Many histories of Ibadan households and compounds openly draw attention to such ambiguous connections.

A history of 'settling people' in pre-colonial Ibadan reveals that Ibadan was not divided into permanent, territorial, administrative units. Scholars of Yoruba urbanism present this historical fact as *the* exceptional feature of Ibadan amongst other Yoruba towns.[61] As previously noted, Karin Barber's research undermines their generalized, static view of lineages, compounds and quarters. However, it is important to stress that social/spatial units in Ibadan were *particularly* volatile. All the same, the principle of demarcation was similar to most other Yoruba towns – 'quarters' were not distinguished by a fixed geographical pattern or by predetermined population quotas. They were defined by the material body of people who occupied them and the figure to whom they expressed allegiance – a person who was usually, but not always, a chief.

In part, the volatility of quarters in Ibadan was an outcome of the city's foundation in the midst of regional warfare. Militarism caused urban boundaries to be continually redrawn. Although the warrior-founder of a compound often lived with brothers and sons (as well as wives, sisters and daughters) his household was *not* a patrilineage – it comprised the families of 'war-boys' and slaves. This residential group was constantly changing. New refugees arrived, became soldiers, built

---

60 Chief Olunloyo, *Otun Balogun* (*Mogaji* Olunloyo), interviewed 26 Oct. 1995, Ibadan.
61 P. Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1971), 22.

up their military retinues and departed to set up their own household/compound, taking their own group of followers and their families with them. Sometimes these households expressed political allegiance to their former 'host' chief; at other times, they did not. Furthermore, they were usually geographically distant from their original household.

Chiefs, power and people

Apart from Ibadan practices of settlement, there was another factor which caused quarters to be socially and spatially mutable. As a phrase of *oriki* (praise-poetry) puts it: 'No-one comes to earth without some disease; civil disorder is the disease of Ibadan'.[62]

From their inception, political offices in Ibadan were not exclusive to particular *ile*. If a chief died, his household could not elect a successor. All of the town *mogaji* (household heads) and junior chiefs competed to gain the vacant post. Furthermore, once titles were gained, promotion was not guaranteed. The criterion for advancement was military merit, but this was judged by the size of a chief's following. Crucially, a group of 'war-boys' could shift their allegiance from one war chief to another at any time. This usually occurred when a chief did not satisfy their daily needs. According to David Hinderer, it was an expensive practice to do so: 'The Chiefs … have to feed every day their hundreds of soldiers … [who] when at home spend their time in feasting & parading about almost day and night'.[63] Another contemporary observer listed the goods demanded of one Lawoyin when he was installed *Seriki* in 1873: '800 bags of cowries, a horse, a sword, gowns etc'. Significantly, this was not the total cost, it was merely what the wealthy *Balogun* Ajobo gave Lawoyin to help him 'defray the expenses incidental to his taking office'.[64]

It was vital for a chief to maintain the allegiance of his followers. Should he lose it, he was no more able to assert a prominent social status in the town as he lacked a body of supporting people. When this happened, his claim to political authority was nullified and he was deposed. The response of the chief concerned was usually to leave Ibadan or commit suicide. His title then became available to junior chiefs and *mogaji* seeking higher ranks on the chieftaincy lines.

Throughout the nineteenth century, this potential for hasty political turnover fuelled an intense power struggle between Ibadan warrior-chiefs. As Hinderer reported in 1851: 'the jealousy of the principal men of the place seems not at present to admit of the election of a man invested with the power to rule'.[65] Ibadan chieftaincy never became a

---

[62] *Aki wa aiye ki a ma l'arun kan lara; ija igboro larun Ibadan*. This fragment of *oriki* is heard today as an epithet of Ibadan's nineteenth-century past.
[63] Hinderer, journal extract, 23 Oct. 1851, CA2/049/104.
[64] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 390.
[65] Hinderer, journal extract, 7 Jun. 1851, CA2/049/103.

centralized form of governing; in fact, chiefs actively worked *against* any centralizing tendencies. If a group of chiefs feared that a single chief was becoming too influential in the town, they undermined his power by recruiting 'his people' to their own battle companies. They recruited by offering material rewards; most commonly, control over people in towns that were part of the military empire. These people were required to pay tribute, generally in the form of agricultural produce, to their Ibadan 'protector'.

Foko Aijenku was the victim of one such 'civil murder' in 1877.[66] The Ibadan chiefs 'won over' his war-boys and followers; eventually, even his slaves saw 'the impossibility of their being able to resist the whole town opposed to him'. After a month of violence and intrigue, the drama ended with Aijenku 'blowing out his own brains'. By then, his quarter was politically non-existent. He was deprived of 'all his mainstays' and his slaves had 'sought each one his own safety by flight, some to one chief, some to another'. With no people, *Foko* Aijenku was a social and political nonentity; he completed his annihilation by suicide.

'Civil disorder' was a continuing feature of Ibadan politics well into the colonial period. Although not as violent, it still had the political outcome of dramatically shifting social and spatial boundaries within a relatively short period of time. As late as 1952, an exasperated colonial official reported: 'Not only are the quarters undefined; for the most part they are undefinable'.[67]

This paper has now shown that Ibadan cannot be considered 'civic' in terms defined by the rigid structure of Yoruba urbanism. Exponents of this model conceived 'political community' as the given production of a formalized government exercising authority over primary groups. As has been seen, the model's interpretive use is limited. However, the Ibadan past confounds it further. With social and spatial boundaries continually shifting in the city, it becomes impossible to define a 'primary group'. The incessant 'civil disorder' of Ibadan chieftaincy discounts the presumption of a 'formalized government which exercises authority'. How was Ibadan incorporated in a 'political community'?

Answering this question involves exploring the cultural project of Yoruba ethnicity. A century ago, the name 'Yoruba' referred only to the disintegrated political unit of one regional group, the Oyo. Today, it is a well-established means of self-categorization for a range of linguistically and culturally related populations, who live mostly in south-western Nigeria and in parts of the Benin Republic.

---

[66] Chapter XXII, part 4, 'The civil murder of Chief Aijenku the *Fohoko*': Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 407–10.
[67] J.F. Hayley, 'Ibadan divisional reforms. Final report', 5. Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan. Iba. Div. 1/1/2910.

The civic Ibadan and the Yoruba nation

About 1840, the Ibadan army defeated the rival military state of Ilorin in the battle of Osogbo. After this victory, according to Rev. Samuel Johnson, 'the history of the Yorubas centred largely at Ibadan . . . so that while the rest of the country was quiet, Ibadan was making history'.[68] With these words, Johnson assigns the militaristic Ibadan past a central role in his grand narrative of Yoruba citizenship, a book nearly 700 pages long: *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*.

Hailed as 'the indispensable foundation for all historical and anthropological work on the Yoruba', Johnson's book provides essential source material for historians of Ibadan.[69] Samuel Johnson was born in Sierra Leone, into the Yoruba-speaking diaspora that was a consequence of the abolition of the slave trade. He came to Ibadan in 1857 at the age of eleven and, despite some periods of absence, he spent most of his life there. Descriptions of pre-colonial Ibadan in *The History of the Yorubas* are generally written from the viewpoint of an observer-participant.

Johnson's text is the most successful book ever written on the Yoruba. Since its publication in 1921, the treatise has been reprinted nine times. It has been enormously influential for research on the Ibadan past – dependence on the tome can be seen in footnotes of this paper. Furthermore, there has been 'feedback' from *The History of the Yorubas* to oral historical narratives. This was apparent during interviews with Ibadan chiefs' households, where the book was frequently exhibited and accounts of forebears' heroic deeds were pointed out. Occasionally, the interview would begin with a member of the household asking whether or not I had read the text, implying that a familiarity with it was a prerequisite for an appointment.

Johnson maps his emergent nation with missionary enthusiasm. *The History of the Yorubas* is a providential tale of restoration that is plotted in three stages: as the growth, decline and recovery of a single polity. To make this more plausible, first, the regional hegemony of Old Oyo is greatly exaggerated and second, Christianity is firmly placed in the historical pattern.[70] The arrival of Christian missionaries was, as Johnson saw it, the fulfilment of 'an old tradition in the country of a prophecy that as ruin and desolation spread from the interior to the coast so light and restoration will be from the coast interiorwards'.[71] In Peel's view, this is Johnson's 'ideological coup': a persuasive alignment of Yoruba

---

[68] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 293.
[69] Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', 198.
[70] *Ibid*., 206.
[71] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 296.

and Christian destinies by means of a grand Romance of national redemption.[72]

Ibadan is central to this redemption; the city plays a key part in the recovery stage of Johnson's chronicle of citizenship. Indeed, for Peel, 'its chief glory as a history lies in how it treats the politics of Ibadan'.[73] After describing the first installation of chiefs, Johnson juxtaposes Ibadan militarism with Christianity in a divine theodicy for the 'Yoruba Country': 'Violence, oppression, robbery, man-stealing were the order of the day . . . Yet they [Ibadan people] were destined by God to play a most important part in the history of the Yorubas . . . to be a protector as well as a scourge in the land'.[74]

Having established God's providential plan, the remaining 398 pages of *The History of the Yorubas* document 'national redemption'. Johnson elaborates a dramatic tale of the expansionist development of Ibadan, its subsequent military stalemate in the face of battles on five fronts, the peace negotiations of the 1880s (in which Johnson was a participant); he ends with the establishment of the British Protectorate. The text is mainly concerned with the actions and passions of Ibadan chiefs.

It is within this narrative that we find evidence for a material practice of a 'civic Ibadan'. In bewildering detail Johnson repeatedly shows how, on the battlefield, Ibadan warrior-chiefs and their followers aligned their competing military households into a political collectivity of the 'Ibadan army'. For example, about 1854, some war-chiefs quarrelled over the site for their battle-camp. The dispute was serious enough that 'the expedition nearly collapsed before they came in sight of the enemy'. However, an ambitious chief, *Otun Balogun* Ogunmola, arranged for a false order of attack to be given. This resolved the problem: 'They marched out in order of battle . . . and opened fire upon an imaginary foe. . . . When therefore those rival chiefs heard the sound of musketry they left off fighting among themselves. The matter was amicably adjusted the next day'.[75] A civic Ibadan came into being through its combat with another political community; in this case, the 'imaginary' Ijesha. After the dispute within the ranks had been resolved, the army defeated a large number of *real* Ijesha towns.[76]

The basis of a pre-colonial civic Ibadan was 'prowess in the field for the public benefit'.[77] It was a material practice because it had a material value. War was an economic enterprise; one of the means by which chiefs met the needs of their followers. Political collectivity was a

[72] J.D.Y. Peel, 'Two pastors and their histories: Johnson and Reindorf', to appear in *Basler Afrikanische Bibliographie*. Thanks to John Peel for providing an advance copy of this paper.
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 245–6.
[75] *Ibid*., 310–11.
[76] Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics*, 44–5.
[77] Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 367.

pragmatic strategy to gain more war spoils – the Ibadan army was a stronger fighting force than numerous raiding bands. Describing a campaign against the Ekiti in 1874, Johnson wrote: 'The Ibadans made an easy conquest of the whole district. Men, women and children were captured without the slightest attempt at resistance. So many were the captives and so much the booty, that the campaign appeared more like a promenade'.[78] There were also more long-term benefits – the inhabitants of subject towns had to make tribute payments to Ibadan warrior-chiefs.

Warfare also generated an *idea* of political community. On the battlefield, warriors led their soldiers in the name of Ibadan. They centralized their authority into a formidable military force. For example, Johnson described the battle strategy of *Balogun* Ogboriefon as follows:

He was a brave leader and smooth tongued, knowing well how to encourage soldiers and to inspire courage into the faint hearted. . . . He used to remind them of home and all its pleasures, telling them that it is the bravest who will be honoured, who can break the laws with impunity. . . . With these words he often spurred them on to the fight.[79]

In this case, the *city* of Ibadan was the imagined community. Crucially, civil disorder was at the centre of its ideological mobilization. Ibadan soldiers must be willing to sacrifice themselves for their city so that, if they returned there, they could enjoy 'pleasures bordering on crime'. Through success in battle, they atoned for street violence – in order to engage in it once again.

When a successful military campaign was concluded, the Ibadan army carried their booty to return in triumph to their city. The contingent political community that had been mobilized on the battlefield began to fragment as war spoils were dispersed amongst the various military households. In his chronological narrative of 'Yoruba history', Johnson sets out this regular pattern: Ibadan chiefs embark on a military campaign; they return; they intrigue; they go to war again. Other scholars of nineteenth-century Ibadan have analysed this pattern as imperial expansion and as an economically motivated effort to open trade routes.[80] Their explanations are not inaccurate but, because they tend to ignore the repetitive phase of internal political intrigue, they are only partially satisfactory. What was at stake in Ibadan's continual 'civil disorder'?

Political office generated expenses rather than income – titles were not sought because they provided a 'salary'. Nonetheless, competition for

---

[78] *Ibid.*, 391.
[79] *Ibid.*, 380.
[80] Bolanle Awe, 'The *Ajele* system: a study of Ibadan imperialism in the nineteenth century', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 3 (1964), 47–71 and 'The end of an experiment: the collapse of Ibadan empire, 1877–1893', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 4 (1965), 221–30; Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-Colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830–1900* (Ife, 1984).

chieftaincy was intense and, on several occasions, political contest resulted in disgraced chiefs committing suicide. Titles were evidently desired. They still are, although the expenses associated with them continue to be high. Today, some Ibadan people reminisce that the nineteenth century was when posts were allocated to the 'big men' with *ola*. They contrast this state of affairs with the present, which they see as dominated by 'money politics'. *Ola*, they argue, is now 'bought' through the acquisition of a chieftaincy title; before, it was first achieved and then recognized.[81]

Yoruba speakers translate *ola* as 'honour'. Western-trained academics will find Weber's notion of 'social honour' a useful parallel concept.[82] Karin Barber provides a succinct definition, from her research into the *oriki* of 'big men' in early nineteenth-century Okuku: 'the capacity to attract and retain the gaze of other people'.[83] Crucially, *ola* was not intrinsic to a chieftaincy title in pre-colonial Ibadan – it was won on the battlefield. The 'honour' of certain Ibadan men and women was acknowledged by the award of political office. Those installed to titles or promoted to higher ranks were people who had effectively held 'the gaze of others' on the battlefield. In the context of fierce Ibadan warfare, this gaze mobilized civic power.

The association of political collectivity with *ola* and of *ola* with chieftaincy attributed a *symbolic value* to the pre-colonial civic Ibadan. As Johnson's tale of Ogboriefon implies, chiefs and their 'war-boys' brought an idea of civic power back to the city. They then sought to exert this power over each other in their contest for chieftaincy titles. These positions were sought after because they were made to symbolize a civic status. Ibadan's infamous 'civil disorder' was not just a reflection of political instability. It was an endeavour to control an imagined political community; a struggle which continually regenerated a civic Ibadan. For this reason, 'the whole town' opposed chiefs like *Foko* Aijenku: 'There was a latent fear that if this man was backed up and eventually placed at the head of the government he would rule with vigour and become oppressive'.[84]

The pre-colonial civic Ibadan is dominantly gendered as masculine militarism. Nonetheless, Ibadan women – as wives, followers, traders, manufacturers and chiefs – played a vital participatory role. A powerful warrior of the 1840s, *Iba* Oluyole, was often accompanied on military campaigns by his 'favourite wife' Oyainu. Johnson described her as 'a lady of masculine temperament and very popular' who offended the other war-chiefs by swearing she could capture Ibadan's military rival of

---

[81] This was a recurring theme in all interviews with former military households in Ibadan.
[82] M. Weber, 'Class, status, party', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds and trans.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London, 1991; 1st pub. 1948), 180–95.
[83] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 203.
[84] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 407–8.

Ijaye 'if the war was left to herself alone'.[85] A daughter of another chief, Omosa, also led her own contingent of soldiers into the field. During the 1880s, she organized caravans supplying the front with rifles, ammunition and food.[86] *Iyalode* Efunsetan, a chief in the early 1870s, owned 'some 2,000 slaves in her farms alone exclusive of those at home. She had also her own captains of war and warboys'. Johnson claims she was feared as a rival by the ambitious *Are* Latosisa. Ultimately, he arranged for her to be murdered.[87]

The History of the Yorubas has come to dominate perspectives on nineteenth-century Ibadan history. Nonetheless, there are primary sources outside of it, notably the daily diaries of his Yoruba missionary colleagues. For example, Robert Scott Oyebode was headmaster of an Ibadan mission school during the 1870s. On several occasions in his diary for 1877, he refers to the 'town's meeting day'. By his report, this event only occurred in two particular contexts. One was the day before 'the town' embarked on a military campaign. The other was the day that 'the town' deposed a chief.[88] Again, a civic Ibadan is shown as socially constituted by city-residents engaging in particular practices of militarism and civil disorder.

Ibadan Mementoes keeps this history present through its spectacle of 'civic pride' linked to 'chieftaincy pride'. A wide audience assumes the connection as normative because it is culturally embedded in current notions of Yoruba political identity. As Johnson proclaims – Ibadan *made* Yoruba history. No wonder, then, that today the city is 'a model of historical facts'.

Histories of civic power

Osi Olubadan Durosaro introduces a comparative view on this analysis. He proposed that the administrative set-up of nineteenth-century Ibadan was 'like what used to happen with Greek city-states'.[89] Given the usual association of classical Greece with notions of 'civic culture', this statement might be interpreted as an imposition. Nevertheless, adopting the 'militaristic view of Greek history' raises some intriguing similarities.[90]

'Ancient Greek man', Yvon Garlan declares, 'was not only accustomed to war, but was even quite bellicose.'[91] He notes that war was the subject deemed worthy of remembrance by the Greek historians – it offered a

---

[85] *Ibid*., 299.
[86] Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History (Part Two)*, 93–5.
[87] Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 393.
[88] 1877 Diary, R.S. Oyebode; I.B. Akinyele Papers, Maps and Manuscripts Collection, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan.
[89] Chief Durosaro, *Osi Olubadan*, interviewed 7 Nov. 1995, Ibadan.
[90] Y. Garlan, 'War and peace', in J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *The Greeks*, trans. C. Lambert and T.L. Fagan (Chicago, 1995), 55.
[91] *Ibid*., 53.

unifying theme for their works and it gave a rhythm to their accounts of past events. In this context, consider Michel Doortmont's case for reading *The History of the Yorubas* as a 'Greek history'. He argues that Samuel Johnson was much influenced by the writings of Xenophon, in particular *Hellenica*, which described the warring Greek city-states of the fourth century BC.[92]

Although *Hellenica* could have been part of Johnson's religious education, there is no evidence that he actually read the work. Peel strongly disputes Doortmont's contention and insists that the Bible was the most important external literary influence on Johnson's historical thought.[93] A *direct* link between Johnson and Xenophon thus seems implausible. Yet it remains striking that a contemporary Ibadan citizen assumes a similarity between his city's past and that of classical Greece. A focus on military practice provides further insight.

Garlan describes the motivations of Greek warriors as ruled by a 'materialistic notion of the fatherland' which was both substantive and emotive. Soldiers went to war for booty. However, Garlan insists, this 'did not mean that they were unable to rise above their personal interests to a higher level of abstraction'.[94] Such 'abstraction' was best achieved by a particular group of warriors – the hoplites. For them, Garlan contends, military courage 'was based upon a well-understood solidarity; it consisted of not abandoning one's comrades in arms and, therefore, of remaining steady in one's position. Consequently, an esprit de corps was systematically cultivated'.[95]

Having considered external warfare, Garlan turns his attention to insurrections in the Athens of Aristotle's *Politics*. He argues that the attention paid to these events suggests that they were not aberrant; rather, they were 'tendencies inherent in the life of a city'. Concluding, he writes: 'War remained the great midwife of political communities. It was therefore natural that those communities were constantly in military practice within their cities as they were threatened from without by armed force'.[96]

Similarities with pre-colonial Ibadan are explicit. According to Garlan's model, the tactics which *Balogun* Ogboriefon used to 'inspire courage into the faint hearted' can be compared with those of the hoplite warriors. Furthermore, the political contests of Athens resonate with civil disorder in Ibadan. Instead of dismissing this 'disease' as pathological chaos, a better approach is to ask what motivated people to rebel. Only then does civil disorder emerge as a midwife of political community.

[92] M.R. Doortmont, 'Recapturing the past: Samuel Johnson and the construction of Yoruba history' (unpublished Erasmus University Ph.D. thesis, 1994), 74.
[93] Peel, 'Two pastors and their histories'.
[94] Garlan, 'War and peace', 62.
[95] *Ibid.*, 67.
[96] *Ibid.*, 82–3.

A comparison between a civic Ibadan and a civic Athens resonates through a 'materialist perspective' on their histories of asserting power. In both cases, civic collectivity was directly related to the material practice of militarism. In this context, I share Mayne and Englander's contention that urban historians need a concept of 'historical materialism' to analyse city-pasts. However, it needs to be a broad concept. Englander's view that urban social history can only be conceived through an 'empirical epistemology' is too limited – a 'fact' which he ultimately concedes. Historical materialism need not be a tool reserved for 'sentimental Lefties' analysing the economic and social conditions which bygone city-residents lived under.[97] It is also vital for understanding the symbolic forms of political power.

Holston and Appadurai enter the debate on this platform. Their edition of *Public Culture* states a contemporary concern with the 'dematerialization of place' in global theorizations of national identity. A dichotomy between the national and the global, they assert, means that cities usually 'drop out of the analysis'.[98] Against this, they urge that cities are privileged material sites for analysing current renegotiations of citizenship: 'We need more images and narratives of urban economies so that we can better identify ... the variety of ways in which the economic lives of cities differentially put pressure on the idea of the national citizen'.[99] Some urban historians have pointed out that their discipline has a great deal to contribute to these wider theoretical and practical questions.[100]

This paper has shown how a civic Ibadan was made. It has emphasized the importance of actions taken by city-residents – their agency strategically generated, attributed and denied civic power. At the same time, it has also shown that this form of power embodied symbolic meanings that were historically specific.[101] The idea of a civic Ibadan was not pre-given. It was an outcome of people's material practices. In time, this repetitive attribution of a particular symbolic value to certain social actions became assumed as normative. In Ibadan, war became a 'civic duty'. Ibadan people sought chieftaincy titles so as to be recognized for having a 'civic status'. Eventually, this association of 'civic values' with chieftaincy titles appeared to be simultaneously capable of ordering the behaviour of city-residents and of organizing the relations between them. Thus today, a proud Ibadan citizen asserts:

[97] D. Englander, 'Urban history or urban historicism: which? A response to Alan Mayne', *Urban History*, 22 (1995), 390–1.

[98] Holston and Appadurai, 'Cities and citizenship', 188.

[99] *Ibid.*, 200.

[100] R. Rodger, '*Urban History:* prospect and retrospect', *Urban History*, 19 (1992), 1–22; L.H. Lees, 'The challenge of political change: urban history in the 1990s', *Urban History*, 21 (1994), 7–19; S.M. Blumin, 'Two decades of urban history', *Journal of Urban History*, 21 (1994), 7–30.

[101] See also R. Watson, 'The cloth of field of gold: material culture and civic power in colonial Ibadan', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 11 (1998), 461–91.

We set up a sort of republican system of government. And that is basically where we are different from all the others in Nigeria ... we don't care from where you come, if you come and distinguish yourself – you assimilate yourself with the interests of Ibadan, then you can rise up to any position. Secondly, if you are born in Ibadan here, you are entitled to become the head or the traditional ruler of Ibadan. In other words, just the system that is obtaining in most of the civilized countries of the world, we have been practicing it in Ibadan centuries ago.[102]

In Ibadan, historical accounts of militaristic chieftaincy are the material out of which city-residents model their civic politics. That is why historians of Ibadan political culture do well to begin with the statement: 'Ibadan – a model of historical facts'.

---

[102] Chief Adisa, interviewed 20 Jan. 1996, Ibadan. Chief Adisa is a solicitor who holds an honorary title; he is not a member of the *Olubadan*-in-Council.