

Aare-Ona-Kakanfo Afonja, c.1796-c.1824: An Interrogation of the Historiography of a Critical Chapter of Ilorin History

© *Ismail Otukoko Salihu*

Department of Religions, History and Heritage Studies,
Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria



Abstract

Various studies have examined the transformation of Ilorin from an insignificant settlement in the 1790s to an emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate by the mid-1820s. The role played by key actors like Afonja, a Yoruba Generalissimo, Solagberu, a Kanuri scholar-warrior-chief, and Alimi, a Fulani cleric, among others, has also received scholarly attention. In spite of the centrality of Afonja to the unfolding of the events that characterized the transformation, certain aspects of his era and career have remained inadequately interrogated and analyzed in extant literature. This paper interrogates some themes related to Afonja's era in the history of Ilorin. The paper adopts the interpretive approach of historical methodology, which relies on the use and interpretation of qualitative data from primary and secondary sources. The data used for the study include archival materials such as petitions, memoranda, gazetteers, unpublished manuscripts, newspapers, autobiography, books, journal articles, and theses. The paper further adopted a thematic analytical framework to subject the information from various sources to historical analysis and interpretation. It argues that, as a major catalyst for the events that culminated in the rise of the Ilorin emirate by c.1825, and final collapse of the Old Oyo Empire by c.1835, Afonja's era in Ilorin lasted longer than often suggested in several works and requires a proper chronology and analysis of the events associated with it and rationale for his actions and inactions. The paper also highlights the need for adequate incorporation of local and other neglected sources in examination of Afonja's era.

Keywords: Ilorin, History, Transformation, Historiography, Chronology

Introduction

As the two foremost personalities whose activities greatly shaped the course of its history, Ilorin is often spoken of as *Ilorin Afonja* ("Afonja's Ilorin") or *Ilorin Garin Alimi* ("Ilorin, Alimi's town"). Other individuals that also belonged to that era of Ilorin's transformation from what has been variously described as an uninhabited bush," "a small hamlet," "an insignificant village," or "a small town" (Mockler-Ferryman, 1892; Gbadamosi, 1968; Danmole, 1980; Reichmuth, 1993; Afolayan, 1998; Ikokoro, 1912; NAK Ilorprof 4,

900/1912) to an emirate included Solagberu of Oke-Suna, Ibrahim Bako, the first Sarkin Gambari, Abdul-Salami and Shitta (Alimi's sons). The place of Afonja, the sixth Aare-Ona-Kakanfo of the Old Oyo Empire, and Alimi, a Fulani scholar, has continued to attract much scholarly attention. Nonetheless, several attempts at historical reconstruction and interpretation of Afonja's era and career, considered as "the axis around which many of the main events unfolded" (Danmole, 1980), have not taken into consideration the need for proper dating, chronology, and analysis of important events and issues that shaped the history of Ilorin during the period. There has also been the tendency not only to rely heavily on the pioneering work of Samuel Johnson (1976) on Yoruba history but also to neglect a number of local sources, and to date some key events that characterized Afonja's rebellion and era in Ilorin to a particular year, namely 1817.

Indeed, the use of Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* (1976) as the basic and most authoritative text by some writers and commentators on developments in Ilorin of Afonja's era has contributed to a number of submissions in several works regarding Afonja's era and career. Although such submissions have become established, oft-repeated narratives, not all of them were based on adequate interrogation and analysis of other historical sources, especially local and other accounts, available on Afonja's era in Ilorin. As Akinjogbin rightly observes, "Afonja is one of those unlikely characters in Yoruba history about whom people know little and are prepared to believe the worst... his name has continued to suffer irreparable damage ever since he declared for the Fulani..." (1965, 4)

Until recently, not much has changed about what informed Akinjogbin's submission in 1965. In a recent attempt at an ethnographic reconstruction of the personality of Afonja, Ajetunmobi and Omotere (2020) note that he was "the most misunderstood Generalissimo whose personality was badly interpreted by early writers of Yoruba history." Rather than being analyzed as a villain, the duo present Afonja more as "a challenger" and "lover of freedom." In his assessment of Afonja, Jimoh (1994) challenges what he calls "the uncharitable presentation of Afonja as an inordinately ambitious warlord" and contends that he was rather "a faithful and devoted Kakanfo who wanted to protect and preserve the tradition and cultural heritage of Oyo." This positive perspective on Afonja is also shared by the authors of two historical plays in which the Kakanfo is presented as "very postmodern in thinking," "a kind-hearted, flexible, change-loving, very brave, courageous and tolerant leader" (see Fasina in Abiodun, 2012), and "a warrior who attempts to defend the constitution of Old Oyo Empire" (Jojo, 2018).

In spite of the latter submissions, however, the dominant perspectives on Afonja, especially in historical and political analyses and commentaries, present him variously as an "over-ambitious prince impelled by large ambitions and blinded by power; a Yoruba general who allied with the Hausa-Fulani to betray his own people and brought upon them a calamity of generational proportions" (*The Cable*, 2015, 1); and "the leader of over-ambitious persons whose activities led to the destruction of the Old Oyo Empire" (Atanda, 1980; *The Punch*, 2016, 1). Thus, in contemporary Nigerian partisan politics, any Yoruba who attempts to form an alliance with the Hausa or Fulani is not only reminded of the "Afonja Syndrome" but is also 'immediately branded another Afonja' and warned of venturing into what would end up in similar betrayal and calamity for the Yoruba (*The Cable*, 2015; *The Punch*, 2015 & 2016). Thus, when the then national leader of the All Progressive Congress, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, decided to join forces with Muhammadu Buhari, the former President of Nigeria, to wrestle power from the People's Democratic Party-led government in 2015, his case was not only likened to that of Afonja in 1817, but his chapter in Ilorin's history was also repeatedly used to remind and warn Bola Tinubu of the consequences (*The Punch*, 2015). This paper, therefore, interrogates the historiography of Ilorin with a view to reexamining a particular chapter of its history associated with Afonja.

The main purpose of the paper is therefore to reexamine issues and developments in the history of Ilorin during the era of Afonja, i.e. c.1796 to c.1824, through a critical historiographical review of extant sources and interpretations of his era and activities in Ilorin. This is important because of the alternative interpretations of available sources it offers; and, the more light it sheds on the matter, the deeper understanding it provides of a critical chapter of Ilorin history that Afonja represented. One of the major objectives of the study is to draw attention to the contradictory nature of available historical data on Afonja and Ilorin of his era, and to some neglected sources that have not been adequately considered in historical discourses. It is also to address the lopsidedness noticeable in the utilization of available sources for the reconstruction of the history of Ilorin during the period covered. The paper also attempts to place the processes and important events associated with Afonja's era in Ilorin in a proper chronological and historical perspective. The overall essence of the paper lies in the attention it draws to the nature of available sources, including some neglected accounts, and its attempt to interrogate, interpret and integrate information from both categories of sources in a reinterpretation and reconstruction of the era and career of Afonja in Ilorin.

The pertinent questions this paper attempts to answer include the following: What was the nature of Afonja's initial connection(s) with Ilorin? When was the Kakanfo's advent in Ilorin and what were the circumstances surrounding it? When did Afonja break away from Oyo-Ile? When and why did he establish alliance with and, therefore, involve non-Yoruba groups, especially the Hausa and Fulani, in his rebellion and state-building venture? What political arrangement sustained Afonja's Ilorin or how did Afonja "rule" or administer the independent Ilorin? What were the circumstances that led to the contest for Ilorin between the Kakanfo and his non-Yoruba Muslim allies, and his death? What were the dates and sequence of the major events associated with Afonja's era in Ilorin? The general thesis of the study is that Afonja's era in Ilorin lasted longer than often suggested in several extant works; that his actions and inactions were informed by other reasons than those usually advanced or presented in various studies; and, therefore, that the causes, course and consequences of events associated with his era can only be placed in proper historical and chronological perspective by an adequate interrogation, analysis, and incorporation of historical data from a wide range of sources, including those usually neglected in extant discourses.

Research Methodology and Structure of the Paper

Utilizing a historical research, the study relies primarily on documentary materials. These include primary and secondary sources on Ilorin history, particularly the era of Afonja. Such materials included archival materials, unpublished manuscripts, published accounts by European visitors, colonial gazetteers, petitions, memoranda, an autobiography, published books, book chapters, journal articles, and unpublished theses on Ilorin and the Old Oyo Empire.

A synchronic thematic analytical framework, narrative and interpretive approaches are adopted. This involves the identification, analysis and reinterpretation of information gathered from sources on select themes on the era of Afonja in Ilorin. The selected themes include the questions of Afonja's connections with, and advent in, Ilorin; his declaration of independence and final break with Oyo-Ile; his alliance with the Fulani and Hausa; his rule of pre-emirate Ilorin as well as his fall. The analysis and interpretation of the information gathered involve a brief presentation and examination of dominant extant narratives and perceptions pertinent to Afonja and each theme. Where and when available, some accounts or sources that have been neglected or inadequately considered in extant reconstruction of Afonja's era but germane to the themes being examined are introduced and analyzed.

Particular attention is also paid to proper dating and chronology of events that characterized the chapter of Ilorin history under reexamination.

The paper is divided into six sections: section one gives an introduction to the paper while section two explains the research methodology adopted. In each of sections three, four and five, one or two major themes and related issues on the era of Afonja in Ilorin are critically reexamined and interpreted based on the analysis of various extant literature covering the history of Ilorin between c.1796 and c.1824. The conclusion is drawn in section six.

The Question of Afonja's Oyo-Ile Connections and Advent in Ilorin

In this section, three issues related to Afonja's connections with Ilorin are reexamined. These include the issues of his ancestral (nativity/birthplace) and official connections with Ilorin as Aare-Ona-Kakanfo, and his advent in Ilorin as the bastion of his revolt against Oyo-Ile and an empire-building venture. Ilorin is an ancient settlement located in the thickly wooded savanna in Nigeria's northcentral geopolitical zone. Its establishment is variously suggested to have been centuries before 1800 or during the 1600s to 1700s (Danmole, 2012; Aribidesi, et al., 2009; Ikokoro, 1912; NAK Ilorprof 4 1900/1912). Although its geographical location, ecological features and potentials for various economic activities seem to have attracted the influx of individuals before the late 18th Century, not much information has survived about historical developments there before the 1790s.

Furthermore, there is no adequate information on the early years and activities of Afonja either in Old Oyo or at Ilorin before his conflict with Alaafin Aole (reigned c.1789-c.1796). First, very little or nothing has been documented or reported on the early years of his life. Second, available accounts on the nature of his connections with Oyo-Ile and Ilorin before his appointment as Aare-Ona-Kakanfo of Oyo Empire and the army mutiny he led at Iwere are quite conflicting. Some accounts summarily claim that Afonja was connected to the royal house at Oyo-Ile through a female line; others present his mother as a daughter of an Alaafin (hence, the reference to him as "an Oyo prince") variously reportedly married to "a household slave" or Alugbin (Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Ajetonmobi and Omotere, 2020; Alaga, 2013; Abiodun, 2012).

According to Crowther (1852), Afonja was born at Ilorin to a brave warrior and was also Alaafin Aole's nephew. In his *History*, Johnson (1976) gives different contradictory accounts on Afonja's family background. In agreement with Crowther's, he says that Afonja was a native of Ilorin and a great grandson of Laderin; that he was "a prince through the mother" and that Alaafin Aole once described him as his "kith and kin." Eventually, however, Johnson (1976) observes that Afonja was not actually of the royal family, that his mother was reportedly "a home-born slave of the palace" and that he was brought up among the children of the Alaafin in the palace at Oyo-Ile. Although Law (1977) attributes the latter remark to the propaganda of the anti-Afonja's camp in Oyo, the preceding suggestion by Johnson (1976) and some other accounts suggest that while the Kakanfo was probably not born or brought up at Ilorin, he was not unfamiliar with the settlement, at least as an adult (Hithersett, 1911; Ikokoro, 1912; Reichmuth, 1993; Saliu and Belo, 1936; Akinjogbin, 1965; Balogun, 1970; Law, 1977; Balogun, 1978). Since a number of sources locate Afonja's presence in Ilorin sequel to his appointment as Aare-Ona-Kakanfo and his eventual conflict with Alaafin Aole, an analysis of his appointment as Generalissimo of the Old Oyo empire becomes imperative.

The year of his appointment as the Aare-Ona-Kakanfo (Commander-in-Chief) of the Old Oyo cavalry force has been a subject of controversy. Some sources trace his appointment to Alaafin Abiodun (reigned c.1774-c.1789) while others claim he was appointed by Aole

who reigned from c.1789 to c.1796 (Law, 1977; Crowther, 1852; Johnson, 1976). A close examination of various sources of Oyo history indicates that Afonja could not have succeeded Kakanfo Oyabi (died c.1776) as Johnson (1976) narrates. He could not also have been appointed by Alaafin Abiodun, as that would imply that the Oyo cavalry force had no Aare-Ona-Kakanfo for nearly one and a half decades (i.e. c.1776-1789). Available information on Old Oyo during the late 18th Century indicates that such was not likely to have been the situation.

First, between Oyabi and Afonja, two other appointees, namely Adeta and Oku, are listed by Johnson (1976), although there is no account of their tenures or activities as Kakanfo. Second, from c.1774 to c.1791, the Oyo army was involved in several military campaigns and lost all the major imperial wars fought during the period. It also lost several of its generals in the defeats by the Baruba in c.1783 and Nupe in c. 1791 (Akinjogbin, 1965). Johnson (1976) is silent on these encounters, although he refers to the loss of the Tapa, Bariba and Dahomey provinces after Abiodun's reign. It was after these developments that Aole was confronted with the challenge of how to revive the army and economy, the two main pillars of Oyo's greatness (Akinjogbin, 1965). Given these developments and the explanation that Afonja went for the Kakanfo title after losing in his bid for the throne in c.1789 (Ajayi, 1974; Law, 1977), it was probably around 1791 that he was appointed as Kakanfo by Alaafin Aole.

In appointing Afonja, Aole is noted to have broken the tradition concerning the appointment of Aare-Ona-Kakanfo. Usually, the Kakanfo, like the Eso (a class of seventy war captains), were reportedly appointed from warriors of servile origins. By the 18th Century, however, the servile origin of the Eso had become so obscured that the "Kakanfo became an office to which an ambitious prince like Afonja, who lost the contest for the throne, chose to be appointed" (Ajayi, 1974, 140). Thus, having had his ambition to the Oyo throne thwarted, Afonja reportedly obtained the Kakanfo title "almost by force" (Johnson, 1976). Nevertheless, Crowther (1852) suggests that the appointment was meant to placate and dissuade him from insubordination.

Sequel to his appointment, Afonja was reportedly placed at Ilorin (Crowther, 1852). In addition to insulating him from the politics of the capital, one other explanation usually given for such posting was "to check the spread of the Fulani Jihad" into the Oyo Empire (Ajayi, 1974). This submission was apparently based on information suggesting that Aole reigned from c.1800-1807 (Crowther, 1852; Hogben and Kirk-Green, 1966). This requires reconsideration. Aole's reign is established to have lasted from c.1789 to c.1796 (Law, 1970; Law, 1977; Atanda, 1971; Akinjogbin, 1965; Ajayi, 1965). Thus, any posting of Afonja during Aole's reign could not have been to stop the spread of the Sokoto Jihad, the military phase of which did not start in Hausaland until 1804.

Afonja's initial connection with the Ilorin region, if any, between c.1791 and c.1796 must have been as part of the efforts to curtail Nupe incursions into the Igbomina areas of Oyo Empire, which had become frequent and severe during the 1780s (Law, 1977). Nevertheless, rather than curtail Nupe raids, Afonja exploited the opportunity to advance his personal political ambition and to get involved in anti-Oyo activities. These included building up private armies, conniving with Nupe raiders and sharing in their booty, and conspiring with some disgruntled Oyo chiefs for Aole's removal. The Alaafin's plot to eliminate Afonja derived from his reported ambition and treacherous activities before 1796 (Crowther, 1852; Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966; Johnson, 1976; Law, 1970; Law, 1971; Law, 1977; Atanda, 1971; Akinjogbin, 1965).

Unlike the reports of Nupe raids and Afonja's activities in Igbomina, there are no records of such raid or threats of Nupe incursions into Ilorin during the period. That the Kakanfo was engaged in Igbomina may explain why local sources, including those written by

members of his family, have no information on his activities in Ilorin before his revolt against Aole. Therefore, it is difficult to reconcile claims of his presence at Ilorin prior to c.1791 and between that date and c.1796, including reports that he had traded at Ilorin and had punished Aole for some misbehavior prior to the latter's ascension to the throne in c.1789 (Hithersett, 1911; Johnson, 1976; Law, 1977; Akinjogbin, 1965) with local accounts that have no reference to such prior to his advent in c.1796.

The exact date of Afonja's advent in Ilorin is not clearly or directly stated in earlier sources. The tendency in several secondary sources is to suggest the year 1817. Johnson (1976) reports that Afonja had succeeded his father, Alugbin, as the ruler of Ilorin and further indicates that he was already at Ilorin as Kakanfo before the mutiny of the Oyo army at Iwere. Nonetheless, local sources written during the first half of the 20th Century have no record of Afonja's presence in Ilorin at any time before the Iwere expedition. Rather, the sources claim that Afonja "migrated" from Oyo-Ile and "settled" at Ilorin either immediately after the mutiny at Iwere or after Aole's overthrow, which experts have dated to c.1796 (Law, 1977; Akinjogbin, 1998a; Ajayi, 1974). Some sources, which clearly place Afonja's first presence and, therefore, advent in Ilorin, in c.1796 include an account of Ilorin history by Imam Umaru compiled around 1901 (Reichmuth, 1993) and Ikokoro's *Ta'lif* (1912) and a 1936 petition by Magaji Aare Saliu and Baba Isale Belo, scions of Afonja and his brother.

In Umaru's account (Reichmuth, 1993), Afonja's arrival in Ilorin is placed after he lost out in a contest for the Oyo throne following the death of an unnamed Alaafin. Afonja had left Oyo-Ile in anger and went to settle in "an uninhabited bush" that eventually became a town and called "Afonja the Great City" or "Ilorin." This account has two possible interpretations concerning Afonja's advent in Ilorin. First, if the "dispute over kingship" refers to was the initial contest for the throne after Abiodun's death, Afonja's departure from Oyo-Ile, it would be around 1789. This would imply that he was already at Ilorin before his appointment as Kakanfo around 1790-1791 and before c.1796.

The second interpretation would be that, after conspiring with the Oyomesi to remove Abiodun's successor, Aole, in c.1796 to pave way for his own ascension (Law, 1977), Afonja became angered when he was not elected and left Oyo-Ile. This would be immediately after Adebo's appointment as Aole's successor. While Crowther (1852) reports that Adebo was preferred by the Oyomesi who denied Afonja the throne because of his treachery, Law (1977) opines that the kingmakers did not want to have such a strong character as Afonja on the Oyo throne. Again, while Law (1977) submits that Afonja's immediate reaction to Adebo's appointment was the repudiation of his allegiance to Oyo-Ile and beginning of activities to establish an independent state, Umaru (Reichmuth, 1993) reports that he left the capital for an uninhabited settlement that became known as Ilorin. This would agree with those accounts indicating that Afonja was already at Ilorin when Maku, Adebo's successor, was appointed in c.1797 (Johnson, 1976; Sulu, 1953) and local accounts that place his advent there around 1796.

In his *Ta'lif* (1912), Ikokoro situates Afonja's advent in Ilorin "after a war at Iwere" during which his soldiers were almost annihilated before he became victorious. The Iwere campaign had been a trap set by Aole and his counselors to end Afonja's life and the threat that his ambition and treasonable activities constituted to the Alaafin's reign. The Kakanfo was expected to fail in the mission against the impregnable settlement and, as a consequence, to commit suicide (Crowther, 1852; Johnson, 1976). The war against Iwere did not take place as planned because the palace plot was divulged to Afonja beforehand. Nevertheless, an armed clash took place in which a pro-Aole party was reportedly massacred by Afonja's party of rebellious chiefs who thereafter besieged Oyo-Ile, forced the Alaafin to commit suicide, and dispersed (Johnson, 1976). The reference to "a war at Iwere" by Ikokoro (1912) is a clear allusion to what Johnson (1976) simply refers to as the "massacre of the loyal royal

party.” The former account partially agrees with the latter on the incident at Iwere, although it suggests that the clash was not as simple for Afonja and his party as Johnson (1976) presents it. Also, while Johnson (1976) has Afonja “returning” to Ilorin after the dispersal of the rebel chiefs from Oyo-Ile, Ikokoro (1912) places his “first” migration to Ilorin immediately after the Iwere incident. Both events are dated to c.1796 (Smith, 1983; Law, 1970; Law, 1977; Akinjogbin, 1965).

Furthermore, in 1936, the Magaji Aare and Baba Isale narrated that Afonja and his brother, Agbonrin, “migrated from Oyo-Ile and settled in Ilorin, 140 years ago” (Saliu and Belo, 1936). It should be noted that, contrary to Johnson’s account, the two chiefs made no reference or allusion to Laderin’s or any other ruling dynasty predating Afonja in Ilorin, or that Afonja was paternally connected with it. It is significant to also note that both Afonja and Agbonrin were claimed to be the “original owners” and, by implication, “founders” of Ilorin. With their arrival there being claimed to be about 140 years as at 1936, the petition clearly gives c.1796, the year of Iwere expedition and the overthrow of Aole, for Afonja’s advent in Ilorin.

The advent of Afonja in Ilorin took place when the Old Oyo was facing serious political crisis at the center. One of the features of the crisis was population movement from the capital and areas in the northern districts of the empire to more secure areas in the south (Johnson, 1976). The revolts by military chiefs such as the Onikoyi, Baale of Gbogun, and Kakanfo Afonja, just after Aole’s overthrow, further accelerated the exodus. The reasons for Afonja’s choice of Ilorin as a military base for the prosecution of his revolt and ambitions are difficult to identify. This is because of the contradictory nature of the accounts of his connections with Ilorin prior to the revolt. It is possible that, among other reasons, such considerations as the strategic location of Ilorin, the presence of such a powerful chief and friend of Afonja as Solagberu at Oke-Suna, a Muslim settlement on the outskirts of Ilorin, and other Yoruba settlers in the region might have influenced the establishment of his military camp in Ilorin.

Although available local sources do not provide much information on the number and identity of the Yoruba inhabitants, some accounts show that on arrival, Afonja was hosted by a great hunter named Eyinla or Ayinla, who is also identified as the “founder” of Ilorin. Eventually, Eyinla/Ayinla left his house for Afonja to stay therein while he moved elsewhere to hunt wild animals (NAK Ilorprof, 900\1912; Ikokoro, 1912; Al-Ilory, 1981). Soon after his advent and the victory over Ojo, Afonja’s Ilorin war camp began to attract new immigrants, especially non-Muslim Yoruba and discontented Hausa slaves, just as Muslims were drawn to Solagberu’s Oke-Suna. While some sources treat the two clusters of settlements simply as Afonja’s and Solagberu’s “sides” or “quarters” of Ilorin, others indicate that both were separate settlements located in close proximity to each other (*cf.* Johnson, 1976; Lloyd, 1971; Onikoko, 1992; Jimoh, 1994; Akinjogbin, 1998a).

Closely related to the advent of Afonja in Ilorin is the issue of his final break with Oyo-Ile, which is synonymous with the declaration of his independence and rise of “Ilorin Afonja.” It is common to see this aspect of Afonja’s revolt and a Muslim rebellion in the Oyo kingdom being dated to c.1817 in various works. Usually, the Muslim revolt is often associated with Afonja’s invitation of Alimi with additional submission that it was instigated either by Afonja alone, or with Alimi’s support, or by the duo (Law, 1977; Danmole, 1980). Law’s studies on the Oyo Empire, however, suggest that there was a 20-year interval (c.1797 to c.1817) between Afonja’s original revolt and the Muslim rebellion while the situation between Afonja’s Ilorin and Oyo-Ile during that interval is described as “a stalemate” (Law, 1970; Law, 1977). Accordingly, during the period, nobody was in effective control at Oyo-Ile and no effort made to checkmate Afonja’s revolt after Agunbambaru’s failed attempt in c.1797. Then, Afonja’s revolt had been characterized by a declaration of his independence

and subjugation of various parts of the metropolitan provinces of the empire as part of his ambition to establish an independent state, as well as expansion and consolidation of the emergent state (Law, 1977; cf. Johnson, 1976; Smith, 1983; Smith, 1988; Ajayi, 1974).

After his settlement at Ilorin, therefore, Afonja had refused to recognize the appointment of Adebo (c.1796) and Maku (c.1796/7) as Alaafin. Indeed, Johnson (1976) reports that Afonja and Opele of Gbogun, another rebel chief, were the first to declare their independence immediately after Aole's reign, and that it was during his successor's reign that Agunbambaru's invasion of Ilorin took place. He also indicates that, after Maku's appointment, Afonja no longer aspired for the Oyo throne, having realized that such was "impossible of attainment." Thus, from c.1797, when the abortive Agunbambaru-led campaigns took place, through 1817, when the Kakanfo invited Alimi to settle at Ilorin, to c.1824, when he was killed, there is no record of Afonja's acknowledgement of, or submission to, the authority of any Alaafin or of rendering any military service to Oyo-Ile as the Aare-Ona-Kakanfo. His repudiation of allegiance to, and, therefore, final break with Oyo-Ile, would have taken place in c.1797, the year he openly declined to recognize Maku's election (Johnson, 1976), rather than in c.1817, when his revolt was already 20 years old.

Some important developments which must have encouraged such an early break with Oyo-Ile and the sustenance of his independence between c.1797 and c.1817 included the victory over Agunbambaru; the breakdown of the central administration at Oyo-Ile, especially during an interregnum that followed Maku's death; and the influx into Ilorin of various individuals/groups, including the non-Yoruba. The influx helped to boost Ilorin's population and Afonja's military efforts to sustain his independence and also to pursue his ambition before a new Alaafin was appointed after the interregnum. While Johnson (1976) notes that the duration of the interregnum was unknown, Crowther (1852) says that it lasted five years. Some experts have variously suggested that its duration ranged from five years, i.e. c.1797-c.1802, to 20 years, i.e. c.1797 to c.1817 (Ajayi, 1974; Ajayi, 1997; Law, 1977; Akinjogbin, 1998a).

Between the late 18th Century and early 1800s, the non-Yoruba elements in the Ilorin region that played one role or another in Afonja's rebellion and the survival of Ilorin during the 20-year stalemate included various Hausa and Hausa-speaking Muslims, many of whom had been in servitude in the Oyo kingdom but fled to freedom in Ilorin, and formed the nucleus of Afonja's *Jama'a* or militia; the Kanuri and other non-Yoruba inhabitants of Oke-Suna under Solagberu; local pastoral Fulani under the leadership of Olufadi and Jagbara, Hausa/northern traders and artisans led by a Sarkin Gambari, and Alimi, an itinerant Fulani cleric, and his initial followers. Their influx into the Ilorin region lasted from the late 18th to the early 19th Century; they contributed to the rise and survival of Afonja's Ilorin, and the eventual fall of the Kakanfo in c.1824 (Law, 1970; Law, 1977; Smith, 1988; Smith, 1983; Jimba, 1990; Jimoh, 1994; Omoiya, 2005; Omoiya, 2009; Clapperton, 1829; Lander, 1830; Lander and Lander, 1832; Mahdi, 1976; Mahdi, 1978; Salihu, 2019/2022).

Afonja's Alliance with the Non-Yoruba and the Controversy over His Rule of Ilorin

Some of the crucial aspects of Afonja's era and career in Ilorin was his alliance with the non-Yoruba groups, their involvement in his rebellion, and his rule of Ilorin. The most prominent of the non-Yoruba groups involved in Afonja's Ilorin era and career were the Fulani, of whom Alimi is usually made to represent, and the Hausa recruits or *Jamaa*, although there are evidences of the involvement of other groups such as Kanuri and Nupe. Most sources associate Afonja-Alimi/Fulani alliance with Agunbambaru's invasion. Nonetheless, there is always the tendency to date the cultivation of such alliance to c.1817 and other developments

usually associated with it such as the Hausa slaves revolt and a Muslim rebellion in the Oyo Kingdom. Given this dating, the Afonja-Alimi alliance was initially interpreted as “a defection to the Fulani” and “a declaration for the Sokoto Jihadists” (Ajayi, 1997; Akinjogbin, 1965). This interpretation has, however, been recanted by one of its initial proponents (Akinjogbin, 1998b). A critical analysis of the sources indicates that Afonja recruited the support of non-Yoruba allies quite earlier in his revolts and military activities.

Gbadamosi explains that “an important development of [Afonja’s] revolt was the way [he] cast about for support to strengthen his [tiny] forces” (1968, 21-22) and that it was with Alimi’s help that he succeeded in forging an alliance with Hausa and other Muslims in the Oyo Empire. The importance of an analysis of the situation, especially at Ilorin, in explaining the possible rationale for an early alliance with the non-Yoruba has often been ignored in several extant studies. By the late 1790s when Afonja settled at Ilorin with his “tiny forces” (Gbadamosi, 1968), the settlement is variously described as “an uninhabited forest” (Reichmuth, 1993), “hamlet” or “a small village” (Ikokoro, 1912; Gbadamosi, 1968; cf. Sulu, 1953). Such a situation implies that the population of Ilorin was insignificant and inadequate for Afonja to recruit new soldiers, especially to face the invasion by the immense army of Agunbambaru.

Furthermore, with some other provincial military chiefs having declared their independence in revolt too, Afonja was no longer in command of the entire Oyo army and, therefore, had no formidable force to sustain his rebellion or to confront Agunbambaru’s army. Like other rebel chiefs who had to mobilize recruits from their domains and other sources to pursue their ambitions, Afonja needed to mobilize new recruits. The implication of this situation for Afonja may be inferred from the report that his troops were defeated and completely routed in three different encounters by Agunbambaru’s army, which was on a mission against the Kakanfo (Johnson, 1976). After those initial defeats, Afonja was faced by an imminent invasion of his military stronghold by an immense army recruited from Barubaland and all over Yorubaland. The major sources for recruits left for him would have included those non-Yoruba elements in the region such as those collectively referred to as “Hausa” or northern slaves whose services had been crucial to the Oyo cavalry force; the local pastoral Fulani in the northern districts of Old Oyo, and the Muslims at Oke-Suna.

Being in an independent Muslim community, Afonja formed an alliance with Oke-Suna through its leader, Solagberu, who is also described as his friend. Based on the account of Johnson (1976), it is common to see Solagberu and his Oke-Suna people being presented as Yoruba or Oyo Muslims (Ajayi, 1997; Danmole, 1980). Various local sources, however, identified Solagberu and some of his people at Oke-Suna as Kanuri while other inhabitants included Baruba, Hausa, Yoruba, among others (Jimba, 1990; Onikoko, 1992; Jimoh, 1994; Reichmuth, 2010). According to Ajayi (1997), Afonja “received valuable support from Solagberu” who made it possible for him to appeal to discontented Hausa slaves, and probably instrumental in inviting Alimi to Ilorin. Danmole (1980) has suggested that Afonja’s alliance with the Muslims may have been informed by the fact that Muslim traders were the source of horses used in the cavalry, and that his alliance with Solagberu might have been connected with the southward sale of slaves obtained from warfare and military raids.

In addition to Solagberu, Afonja also recruited those “Hausa” elements that had exploited the situation in the Oyo kingdom to revolt against their masters and to flee to freedom (Johnson, 1976; Smith, 1983). Many of these slaves and other individuals found Ilorin suitable for refuge and the pursuit of new opportunities, especially in Afonja’s army. Although their involvement in Afonja’s rebellion is usually dated to c.1817, the flight of many of those freed Hausa slaves to Ilorin, and, therefore, their recruitment into Afonja’s Ilorin army, began around the 1790s (Lander and Lander, 1832; Johnson, 1976). Being highly skilled cavalymen and grooms who had served in the Old Oyo military (Danmole, 1980;

Law, 1977), the Hausa and other northern freed slaves recruited by Afonja (the *Jamaa* according to Johnson), were instrumental to the Kakanfo's victories and the survival of his Ilorin military stronghold right after his victory over Agunbambaru (Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966; Mahdi, 1976; Mahdi, 1978; Johnson, 1976). Afonja encouraged further flight of more slaves and the discontented from the Oyo Kingdom by guaranteeing their freedom, employment in his cavalry, and liberty to engage in brigandage, and to enjoy the spoils of their military campaigns and plunder (Crowther, 1852; Johnson, 1976).

Lander and Lander (1832) report that "a party of *Falatahs* [Fulani]" was involved in encouraging the flight of slaves from their masters to Ilorin. Alimi's involvement in securing Afonja's initial recruitment of Hausa Muslim slaves cannot be clearly established. Available evidence, however, supports the dating of Afonja's initial request for Alimi's help to between c.1797 and c.1800. This can be corroborated with indications in various sources that the request was made after Afonja's troops had been defeated thrice by Agunbambaru, and that his eventual victory was won with Alimi's spiritual assistance and possibly military support by his followers or Muslims in the region (Jimba, 1990; Onikoko, 1992; Jimoh, 1994; Aliyu, 2003; Hasan and Jawondo, 2006). Although Johnson places the invitation before Agunbambaru's invasion, his account is silent on any role played by Alimi, his Fulani kinsmen or followers in the Kakanfo's final victory. Contrary to Johnson (1976) who identifies the Onikoyi's betrayal of Agunbambaru and his defection to Afonja's side as being crucial to the victory, local accounts emphasize Alimi's spiritual help and the military support of his followers.

Furthermore, since Lander and Lander (1832) describe those Fulani who "encouraged the flight of all slaves" as those "which first resorted to *Alorie* [Ilorin]," they may be interpreted to be among the local pastoral Fulani already resident in northern Yorubaland at least since Alaafin Abiodun's reign (c.1774-c.1789) (Crowther, 1852). Such Fulani groups led by Olufadi and Jagbara are known to have been in Ilorin before others arrived from Sokoto and Nupeland. Although there is no direct evidence to conclude that Alimi was known to such Fulani groups, it is known that he had started his religious activities in the region around the late 18th Century and was possibly involved in ransoming enslaved Muslims from servitude (Jimoh, 1994; Aliyu, 2003; Sulu, 1953). While the local Fulani elements led by Olufadi stayed in Ilorin and continued their activities, Alimi, as an itinerant preacher, did not settle permanently until c.1817.

Unlike Johnson's account, some local sources provide evidence for a consideration of the possibility of at least two contacts between Afonja and Alimi. This implies more than one instance of his involvement in developments in Ilorin between the late 1790s and 1817. The first contact, which was connected with Agunbambaru's invasion, was established through Teyeje, the Baale of Ogbomoso who was then hosting Alimi in his town. Alimi reportedly arrived at Ilorin at the beginning of the 19th Century to honor Afonja's appeal for help against Agunbambaru (Jimoh, 1994). After staying briefly with Olufadi, the local Fulani chief, in Afonja's quarters, and also with the Muslims at Oke-Suna, Alimi left Ilorin to continue his missionary tours of northern Yorubaland after Afonja's victory (Onikoko, 1992; cf. Jimoh, 1994; Jimba, 1990).

Afonja's second contact with Alimi was through Solagberu. This was when he invited the cleric to Ilorin from Kuho, a village where Solagberu had been a chief before moving to Oke-Suna (Danmole, 1980). The outcome of this contact led to Alimi's permanent settlement at Ilorin, widely dated in most sources to c. 1817 (Johnson, 1976; Danmole, 1980; Jimba, 1990; Onikoko, 1992; Aliyu, 2003). The contention by Jimoh (1994) that Alimi was already in Ilorin by 1808 is not supported by evidence from various sources. The exact reason for this invitation, according to Johnson (1976), was for Alimi to serve as a priest in order "to strengthen Afonja's hand in the enterprise he was about to undertake." The placement of this

contact before Agunbambaru's invasion and Alimi consequently "made Ilorin his home" have led several scholars to conclude that these developments were connected with the Kakanfo's desperate need for "extra" powers to ensure his victory. Nevertheless, there are no records of any war between Afonja and Agunbambaru in c.1817 or of Alimi helping him to mobilize local Hausa slaves and/or mercenaries from Hausaland or elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is a report that Afonja recruited into his army those Hausa elements he found useful as soldiers among Alimi's followers when they arrived at Ilorin (Johnson, 1976).

There is, therefore, no conclusive evidence that Afonja had invited Alimi in c.1817 to play any major military role or that he was actively involved in the Kakanfo's military activities between c.1817 and c.1823 when he died. Perhaps, as a cleric, his role was confined to the spiritual: i.e. providing the widely believed efficacious Islamic/Muslim victory and good luck prayers, charms and amulets to the Hausa and other Muslim (and non-Muslim) warriors in Afonja's army. Also, in the post-1817 period, Alimi tried to restrain Afonja and his *Jama'a* from their military recklessness and ravages rather than to support such; he reportedly tried to leave Ilorin when his efforts seem unfruitful in curtailing their excesses (Johnson, 1976).

In line with the argument of Akinjogbin (1998a) that the interregnum after Maku's death lasted 20 years (c.1797-c.1817), what probably prompted Afonja to decide on embarking on a new enterprise that required a resident Muslim priest at Ilorin would be the appointment of a new Alaafin in c.1817. Afonja must have been concerned that the ascension of the new Alaafin would occasion renewed efforts to end his revolt and ambition; he had probably anticipated that such efforts would include new attempts to invade his Ilorin military stronghold. As Akinjogbin (1998a) suggests, and he had apparently decided to "convert his revolt into a revolution" by transforming it into an empire-building venture (Ajetunmobi and Omotere, 2020). Since Afonja and his Hausa Muslim-dominated *Jama'a* and other Yoruba warriors placed high premium on Islamic spiritual powers, the need for the "highly prized Muslim charms" produced by respected clerics like Alimi must have become imperative (Law, 1970; Law, 1977; Omoiya, 2009; Danmole, 1980). Unlike Alimi's first contact and brief presence in Ilorin in c.1800, his settlement in c.1817 became a catalyst for further transformation of the settlement, including the assumption of its rule by his eldest son and its conversion into a full-fledged emirate. This brings us to the question of whether Afonja had personally ruled Ilorin before what is often referred to as "the Fulani overthrow" or "take-over."

Not much is recorded about political development in Ilorin before the rise of Afonja. Perhaps, the earliest written account that alludes to such is Johnson's *History* according to which three rulers had ruled Ilorin and that the third, Alugbin, "handed the government" to Afonja, his son (Johnson, 1976). No clear information is given on the nature of their "government" or the title of the rulers, although some sources have suggested the title to be Baale or Ajele (Danmole, 1980; Omoiya, 2005; Ajetunmobi and Omotere, 2020). The earliest documented local accounts, however, have no information on such rulers, including Afonja, or succession to rule. Thus, his rule of Ilorin, especially in Laderin's posterity, as claimed by Johnson, has become a matter of contradictory speculations and contestations. While an account claims that Alugbin was removed for ineffectiveness and replaced with Afonja (Law, 1977, citing Ojo, n.d.), Lloyd (1971) submits that the immediate pre-Afonja ruler of Ilorin was his brother's ancestor.

As aforementioned, there are local accounts that identify the "leader" of the settlers in pre-Afonja Ilorin as Eyinla/Ayinla who hosted the Kakanfo when he arrived (Ikokoro, 1912; Al-Ilory, 1981). In such accounts, the takeover of political power or assumption of leadership position by Afonja is not clearly indicated or implied. Again, such accounts and others, including those by Afonja's family, do not infer or establish any clear links between the

Kakanfo and those three individuals said to have ruled Ilorin. In addition to their contradictions, the various accounts do not provide adequate information on the said “rulers” or “leaders” of Ilorin prior to Afonja’s advent. Available evidence tends to suggest that Afonja did not assume the rule of Ilorin at his advent or at any time before c.1823. Nevertheless, since he reportedly expelled Alaafin’s agents (*Ajele*) in various parts of Oyo Kingdom and replaced them with his own appointees (Law, 1977), it is not impossible that he had removed whoever had held sway in Ilorin and then left its administration to his brother, Agbonrin, who eventually came to be addressed as Baba Isale.

Various accounts on the emergence of the Baba Isale title in Ilorin (Aleshinloye, 2003; Omoiya, 2009; Jimoh, 1994) indicate that during the two phases of his era and career (c.1796-1817 and c.1817 to 1824), Afonja did not assume ruling Ilorin or his “own side” of it. This was because he was almost permanently absent from the settlement. According to Aleshinloye, a descendant of Agbonrin and a former Baba Isale of Ilorin:

As a warrior and itinerant hunter, he [Afonja] was not always present in Ilorin for long stretches of time, and therefore, whenever any matter which required serious attention was brought to him, he always directed that the matter be taken to “Baba to wa ni Isale” that is the Baba who is living down there...The permanent stay of the Baba Isale in Ilorin in those days bestowed on the family a larger land area of Idiape...(Aleshinloye, 2003, 8-9; see also Omoiya, 2009, 73).

The preceding and similar accounts have some implications for analysis and interpretation of some of the developments during Afonja’s revolt, especially his military activities after c.1797 and their import on the administration of Ilorin. Aleshinloye’s account suggests that from his advent in c.1796 to c.1824, Afonja was more concerned with and, therefore, more involved in military campaigns outside Ilorin than in assuming any political office or organizing the administration of the town. This probably explains why he, as reported, left his brother to attend to whatever serious matters arose during his absence.

There are other points that can be inferred from the accounts by leaders of Afonja’s family on aspects of Ilorin history. First, the description of Afonja and Agbonrin as “progenitors” of their families and “original owners of Ilorin” indicates that there was probably no ancestral connection between the Kakanfo and those described as “rulers” of Ilorin before his advent. It also implies that Afonja did not inherit or succeed to any throne or title. Second, since the pre-Afonja rulers are sometimes described as Old Oyo Ajele in Ilorin (the Ajele system being part of Old Oyo’s imperial rule), such an office probably ended with Alugbin either shortly before Afonja’s advent or as a consequence of his revolt and rise as a powerful force to reckon with in the region. Third, being apparently less concerned with the administration of his own quarters or even the entire Ilorin, Afonja never assumed any other title than the Aare-Ona-Kakanfo. As a Generalissimo, whatever power or authority he must have wielded derived from his position and military exploits as Aare-Ona-Kakanfo.

Furthermore, Afonja’s brother who was to take charge of “serious matters arising” was not known to have assumed any title. That serious matters arising were to be referred to *Baba to wa ni Isale* (later reduced to Baba Isale) strongly indicates that there was no overall political, civil, or administrative head with any recognized title to whom such matters could have been referred. Again, the titles of some “principal chieftains” who are associated with Afonja’s era in Ilorin, namely, *Lapini*, *Ikolaba*, *Ona Isokun*, *Are Ago* and *Otun Ago*, are noted to have been merely “occupational” or “cultist” with no specific political or administrative functions (Jimba, 1990; Onikoko, 1992). The functions of similar titleholders elsewhere (Johnson, 1976; Falola and Oguntomisin, 1984) indicate that their roles were restricted to

military and religious matters affecting the non-Muslim Yoruba inhabitants.

Moreover, the lack of evidence of the existence and use of such titles as Ajele, Baale or Oba during Afonja's era suggests that rather than a centralized political structure, what was in existence at Ilorin then was a decentralized political/administrative structure. Thus, while the town had no overall titled ruler, the communities located within Ilorin such as Idi-Ape, Gambari, Gaa Olufadi, and Oke-Suna on the outskirts had their recognized leaders. Respectively, those included Agbonrin (Yoruba), Ibrahim Bako (Hausa), Olufadi (Fulani), and At-Tahir Solagberu (Kanuri). This situation may explain why, after Alimi's settlement in c.1817, Muslims in those communities reportedly appealed to him to be their "king" or to assume leadership of the emergent Muslim community (Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Sulu, 1953; Jimoh, 1994). Apart from the Muslims at Ilorin, Afonja is also reported to have made a similar offer to Alimi, which he declined (Danmole, 1980). In addition to the fact that Afonja and Agbonrin were non-Muslims, the presence and growing influence of Alimi at Ilorin during the Kakanfo's absence "for long stretches of time," as Aleshinloye (2003) claims, must have encouraged such a request by the Muslims.

Some evidence supporting the possibility of Afonja's prolonged or frequent absences from Ilorin can be drawn from some developments in Yorubaland from the late 1790s to the early 1820s. Sequel to his victory over Agunbambaru, Afonja was engaged in military campaigns in various parts of Old Oyo to capture or subjugate several towns and villages. In addition to settlements in the vicinity of Ilorin, other areas included Igbomina, Ibolu, Igbon, Iresa, Ede, Osogbo, Ilobu, and Ejigbo (Johnson, 1976; Akinjogbin, 1998a; Akinjogbin, 1998b; Oyeweso, 1998; Law, 1977). Lasting till c.1817, the campaigns included wars of rebellion, those to subjugate territories, and those campaigns launched to crush rival rebellious movements (Johnson, 1976; Akinjogbin, 1998a). Afonja's involvement in the campaigns meant that he hardly had the time to assume any political title or to be directly involved in the administration of Ilorin. This assertion agrees with the explanation that from c.1793 to 1817, "the military refused to obey orders from the political authority but did not itself immediately take over political governance" (Akinjogbin, 1998a, 37).

Also, in c.1817, the crisis in Yorubaland entered what Akinjogbin (1998a) refers to as a "revolutionary phase characterised by attempts to create a permanent change." In Ilorin, it was to involve a move "from an old to a new order" and Afonja's attempt to embark on an enterprise that required Alimi's presence and spiritual support for the second time. Rather than assume full political control of Ilorin, Afonja continued his military campaigns and raids. The campaigns, especially in the western provinces of the Oyo Empire (Law, 1977), were prosecuted with his army that included new Hausa recruits who were vengeful against their erstwhile masters, and were more reckless and rapacious due to no restraints to their activities by Afonja (Crowther, 1852; Johnson, 1976). Perhaps, Afonja's decision to take political/administrative control of Ilorin was informed by developments associated with the arrival and activities of Alimi's children and their supporters from Sokoto and other Fulani from the Nupe kingdom in c.1820-1.

While Alimi's sons, Abdul-Salami and Shitta, had been called to join their father at Ilorin, the Fulani from Nupeland included several groups that sought asylum under Alimi. This was sequel to their expulsion from Nupeland following their involvement in the civil war that broke out there in c.1819. The two groups arrived at Ilorin around 1820-1821 or 1822 (Dupigny, 1920; Elphinstone, 1921; Law, 1970; Reichmuth and Abubakre, 1995; Ajayi, 1997; Idris, 1998; Mohammed, 2011). Having been respectively involved in the Sokoto *Jihad* and Nupe civil war, the orientation of the new Fulani arrivals was quite different from those already at Ilorin. They were bent on launching a *Jihad* but initially restrained by Alimi (Balogun, 1970; Law, 1983; Smith, 1988; Sulu, 1953). The extent to which these groups exerted ideological influence on Afonja's Hausa recruits and other Muslim elements in his

army prior to 1823 is difficult to assess. There are, however, indications that at a point members of Afonja's *Jama'a* were getting out of control, thereby causing serious concerns for the non-Muslim Yoruba within and outside Ilorin. Initial attempts to draw Afonja's attention to the dangers inherent in their unrestrained lawlessness were rebuffed by the Kakanfo (Johnson, 1976).

Although Alimi had not consented to the request that he should become the leader (*Amir*) of the Muslim community or head of the town, his following, religious influence and authority had grown beyond that of an Imam for the Muslim daily/weekly congregational religious activities. He had become, however informal, the *Amir al-Mu'minin* ("Leader of the Faithful") of the emergent unified Ilorin Muslim community, which comprised the Fulani, Oke-Suna, and Hausa/Gambari communities as well as his own multiethnic following. The fact that his religious leadership position was widely acknowledged across these communities was demonstrated when Ibrahim Bako, the Sarkin Gambari, contested with Abdul-Salami for the position of *Amir* after Alimi's death in c.1823.

The resultant formal election of Abdul-Salami, who "had been anxious to fight [a Jihad]" against the "pagans" (Balogun, 1970) as the Emir of Ilorin, must have been quite instructive to Afonja in particular. He must have come to the sudden realization that the Fulani-led *Jihad*-conscious party at Ilorin was on the verge of taking over the political control of the town. Around this period, as Crowther (1852) notes, the "people of Ilorin were mostly Muslims" and "some principal headmen had begun to be too strong for Afonja." The town had definitely been clearly polarized into two distinct groups: (1) the Muslims and (2) the "pagans" (Gbadamosi, 1968; Al-Ilory, 1981). The growth of the Abdul-Salami-led Muslim community and his influence was a major source of concern and annoyance for Afonja who reportedly "began to speak words of hatred against the Emir" (Ikokoro, 1912). The immediate events following Alimi's death have been suggested to have indicated to Afonja that he had to "either reassert his authority or accept his demotion to a position of inferiority" (Danmole, 1980). The situation probably informed his attempt to take over political control of Ilorin, especially following Agbonrin's death around this time (Johnson 1976; Ikokoro, 1912). Ikokoro (1912) and Saliu and Belo (1936) suggest that, after Abdul-Salami's appointment, Afonja began to remain in Ilorin while his soldiers continued their military expeditions outside.

In view of the situation, Afonja made attempts to confront the Muslim challenge and to dislodge the non-Yoruba, who were mainly Muslims, from Ilorin. These included warnings and threats to disband, suppress and annihilate his *Jama'a*, and a suggestion that the Muslims should evacuate Ilorin and settle outside the town (Elphinstone, 1917; Johnson, 1976; Law, 1977). Afonja's non-Yoruba Muslim allies expressed disapproval of the latter idea while other threats only increased the *Jama'a*'s disaffection, disloyalty and insubordination (Johnson, 1976). Sequel to the disregard of his threats and warnings, Afonja decided to rally Yoruba military chiefs outside Ilorin to help decimate the *Jama'a* and possibly dislodge the Muslims (Johnson, 1976). The growing tension in Ilorin and the leakage of Afonja's secret plot for an external intervention against the *Jama'a*/Muslims led to a series of actions that culminated in his death.

The Fall of Afonja: Murder, Assassination, Suicide or Execution?

The accounts of the circumstances of Afonja's death in various sources are quite contradictory. While some simply submit that he was "assassinated" or "murdered" variously by the Fulani, the *Jama'a* or his Muslim allies shortly after the alliance with Alimi (Atanda, 1980; The Punch, 2015), some accounts written in the 19th and early 20th Centuries do not suggest murder or assassination. Rather, they indicate that the final clash between Afonja and

the *Jama'a*/Muslims was precipitated by the uncovering of his treacherous plans—namely, his invitation of certain Yoruba chiefs outside Ilorin to help annihilate the *Jama'a*/Muslims. Johnson (1976) who associates Afonja's death with the *Jama'a*, allegedly led by Alimi, shows that it was during an armed clash that ensued between the two sides and that Afonja was shot with several arrows until he died and his body burnt to ashes. In his account, Crowther (1852) reports that it was the people of Ilorin who caught the Kakanfo and burnt him publicly for his treachery. Unlike Johnson, Crowther suggests that the killing of Afonja was a public execution as a punishment for his treachery rather than resulting from a civil war or the fighting that followed an invasion of Afonja's quarters, as Johnson (1976) and Ikokoro (1912), among others, report.

Apart from Afonja's alleged treachery, two other accounts associate his death with Islam. While Umaru (Reichmuth, 1993) claims that Afonja was ambushed on his way to a mosque and killed by the Fulani, Sulu (1953) reports that he was killed during an invasion of his premises ordered by Emir Abdul-Salami after his refusal to convert to Islam. This contrasts sharply with an explanation that the immediate causes of the clash were an invasion of Alimi's residence by an *egungun* ("masquerade") follower of Afonja, Muslims' reactions that led to a riot, and Afonja's secret plan for an external intervention in his support (Jimoh, 1994). It does not also agree with the explanation that Afonja's death resulted from the mutiny of his Hausa recruits (Omoiya, 2012).

The contradictions in the narratives about Afonja's death are further compounded by two other local accounts, which report that Afonja committed suicide during a civil strife involving him and the new emir and their respective supporters. According to Saliu and Belo (1936), Afonja and his brother committed suicide by "opening the traditional calabash" during a surprise attack led by Solagberu and Alimi's sons who overpowered him and his supporters. His suicide was specifically associated with sorrow over the death of his eldest son during the attack. Contrary to other accounts, the duo claimed that it was Solagberu, rather than Afonja, whose body was publicly burnt to ashes. According to the Ikokoro (1912), after the Emir's forces had routed his forces and burnt their houses, "Afonja flung himself into the fire in a fit of rage and burned to death..."

It should be noted that, in both accounts, Alimi is not clearly stated to have been involved in the immediate events leading to Afonja's death. Ikokoro's account in particular clearly shows that Alimi had died before the clash; his information on the reigns of the emirs up to 1912 and pieces of evidence from other sources have also been used to suggest that Alimi died in c. 1823 while Afonja died in c. 1824-1825 (Danmole, 1980; Smith, 1983). Central to the fall of Afonja was a contest for the control of Ilorin between his party and the Muslim party led by Alimi's sons, the latter being more numerous than Afonja's supporters. Inferences from various sources shed some light on the numerical inferiority of Afonja's party, which contributed to his defeat by the Muslims.

While Saliu and Belo (1936) claim that the attack on his quarters was carried out during the absence of his soldiers who were out of the town on a military campaign, Johnson (1976) states that Afonja was left with few faithful followers having been deserted by the *Jama'a* and having lost the friendship and support of prominent leaders like Solagberu. The numerical inferiority of Afonja's party can also be attributed to the presence of the fugitive Fulani groups from Nupe who had sought asylum in Ilorin since c.1820-1 and had not left the town by the time of the conflict.

The weight of available evidence, therefore, tends to show that Afonja fell into what was more like a battlefield during a civil strife, and that his death was neither a murder nor an assassination. The claim that he committed suicide given in two local sources, one by a Fulani author and the other by scions of the Afonja family, seems to have emanated from the consideration of suicide as "an act of bravery" and as a sort of "honorable death" among the

pre-colonial Yoruba (Crowther, 1852; Johnson, 1976). Such a death was preferred to being captured, humiliated and killed by adversaries; and, for an Aare-Ona-Kakanfo who was expected to win a war or die at the battlefield, death by suicide seems more glorifying and honorable to members of his family who authored the 1936 narrative. It was not impossible that Ikokoro (1912) obtained his information from sources close to the Afonja family.

Conclusions

To begin with, this paper has shown why the advent, era and career of Afonja remain important reference points in the historiography of political developments in pre-colonial Ilorin. As the interrogation and analysis of various sources show, several aspects of the era and career of Aare-Ona-Kakanfo Afonja in Ilorin have not been adequately explored and analyzed. In view of the paucity of historical information and the contradictory nature of available accounts on Afonja and his rebellion against Old Oyo, there still remain certain issues about which final conclusions might not be arrived at presently on the one hand. On the other hand, evidence and inferences drawn from the analytical interrogation of various sources can be used to draw certain conclusions.

Given the lack of consensus in the sources concerning Afonja's early life and activities, his connections with Ilorin in terms of nativity are not too clear. Such require further interrogation and analysis. What is quite clear from the sources is that his connections with Ilorin could have been related, to some extent, with his appointment as Aare-Ona-Kakanfo of the Oyo army and his possible posting to the Igbomina-Ilorin region to ward off Nupe aggression in the former areas. Nonetheless, to a larger extent, Afonja's connections with Ilorin can be conveniently located within the contexts of his widely reported frustrated ambition to the Oyo throne, his revolt against Alaafin Aole, and efforts to build a state that was independent of Oyo-Ile. As the sources analyzed show, the weight of evidence supports the dating of his advent in Ilorin to c.1796, although it is not impossible that he had had one contact and connection or the other with the settlement prior to that date.

As at the time of his advent in Ilorin, the prevalent situation within the Oyo Empire and Ilorin region must have impressed it on him that the successful pursuit of his revolt and ambition, either to the Oyo throne, which Johnson claims Afonja had realized was impossible of attainment, or to establish an empire, as emphasized in several sources, required the services and support of non-Yoruba elements. Thus, contrary to submissions in several works, Afonja formed alliances with and, therefore, recruited the support of non-Yoruba Muslim groups, including the Hausa, Kanuri, and Fulani, quite earlier in his era and career in Ilorin than often reckoned. It was also not "soon after" the formation of such alliances that he was killed by his allies.

With particular reference to Shaikh Alimi, analysis of local accounts strongly supports no less than two periods and instances of the involvement of the Fulani cleric in Afonja's career and activities. Clearly situated in connection with an invasion of Afonja's Ilorin military base by Ojo Agunbambaru, the only recorded attempt to punish him or crush his rebellion, the first contact and involvement is dated to between the late 18th and early years of the 19th Century. The second contact which resulted in the settlement of Alimi at Ilorin was in 1817; and, in connection with a major step, Afonja apparently decided to take to forestall a repeat of the Agunbambaru invasion and initial defeats of c.1797-c.1800. Each of the contacts had far-reaching consequences for Afonja and Ilorin. The first, based on local sources, contributed to Afonja's first major military victory after his advent in Ilorin; the second contact became a catalyst to a series of events that culminated in the fall of Afonja and rise of the Ilorin emirate in c.1823-24.

From his victory over Agunbambaru in c.1800 to c.1823, the era of Afonja in Ilorin

witnessed his involvement in continuous military engagements, which also meant his continuous absence from the settlement and his non-involvement in its administration. The analysis shows that rather than a centralized political or administrative structure with a single titled head or ruler, the changes in the demographic and ethnic composition of Ilorin resulted in a decentralized political structure with four different leaders. In other words, the advent and activities of Afonja did not result in any major immediate restructuring of the administration of Ilorin. The catalysts and impetus for such a major transformation came with developments associated the settlement of Alimi at Ilorin in c.1817 including the subsequent arrival of Jihad-conscious Fulani in the early 1820s and the appointment of an emir in c.1823.

The paper also concludes that as a critical juncture in the history of Ilorin, the era of Aare-Ona-Kakanfo Afonja, which lasted from c.1796 to c.1824-5, witnessed the involvement of non-Yoruba groups in his rebellion and military activities quite earlier than often reckoned in the historiography of Ilorin. Similarly, as a major element of his rebellion against Oyo-Ile, Afonja's final break with the Old Oyo Empire took place earlier in his revolts rather than in c.1817 as presented in several sources. As a commander of an army that was made to engage in constant military campaigns during the period of his revolt and empire-building career, the prolonged absence of Afonja in the town did not facilitate the development of a centralized administrative structure for Ilorin as his military base. Rather, such a situation, on the one hand, established room for a decentralized political structure with each dominant group having its own leader. On the other hand, the steady influx of population, especially of Muslims, and the presence, influence and activities of Alimi gave birth to an opportunity for the unification of the Muslim groups under his religious leadership. The contest for the control of Ilorin that ensued between Afonja's and his supporters, on the one hand, and the unified Muslim community, led by Abdul-Salami, Alimi's eldest son, on the other hand, ended up in the death of the Kakanfo during a civil strife in c.1824. Based on the analysis of available evidence, it can be concluded that while the rise and fall of Afonja owed much to the involvement of his non-Yoruba allies, including the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, etc., the Kakanfo's death in c.1824 was neither a case of assassination or murder nor suicide or execution.

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