

IBADAN, SOUTIN AND THE PUZZLE OF BOWER'S TOWER¹

(for Taiwo 'Tarifomah' Fatoki, *in memoriam*)

Akin Adesokan

I

DECEMBER IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA is a thirsty, incandescent month, halfway through the dry season. The evening air is burnished to tinder-edged sharpness by the harmattan, cool, sandy wind blowing southward with imperceptible haste, eager to catch fire before it reaches the coast where humidity lies in wait like a spider to quell the happy-fly noise of the haughty breeze. These are the times of arson and brushfires, and you can sense it in the gaiety of public conduct, the upbeat display of enthusiasm that propels itself toward the disastrous with a little lack of care. It is not for nothing that the dying months of the year are called the 'ember-months'. Mix this atmosphere with soccer, 'good' nationalism (as opposed to the bad varieties in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda), home advantage, and faith too deep to need work as supplement, and you have the unforgettable encounter between the IICC Shooting Stars FC of Ibadan and Zamalek FC of Egypt, in the second leg of the finals of the 1984 African Champions Club Cup, played at the National Stadium in Lagos on Saturday, December 8. Everyone and everything in Nigeria, and especially in Ibadan, home base of Soutin, as the team was admirably called, depended on this match. For weeks, especially for the last two weeks since the home team had lost the away-match in Cairo by two slim goals, national interest had begun to rise in the media – passionate, effusive and complacent, driven by the dead certainty that the current Soutin line-up was the best in the team's long history. The excitement spilled into the streets, or rather spilled from the streets – it amounted to the same thing. Journalists were hard to tell apart from veterans of the supporters' club. The air was dry all the time, and as we counted down to that fateful Saturday, radio and television jingles, posters, newspaper cartoons, loudspeaker-bedecked supporters' vans prowling the streets, recorded-music stores partisan but businesslike, added to the sense of anticipation.

The most memorable, for me, was this jingle in Yoruba, a cross between wish, incantation and malediction, a gnomic *Ase* on the airwaves, periodically played by the culture-conscious official broadcast organ, Radio O-Y-O, based in Ibadan like the football team:

Egibiti o ri'ran osan o
Balubalu nt'afin o!

*(May the Egyptians be blind this day
Blurry-blurry does the albino glimpse)*

¹ First published in /Chimurenga /14, 2009

It was rumoured that the high-spirited supporters' club, headed by Mr Ganiyu Elekuru (a.k.a. Baba Eleran, because he was a professional butcher), had even paid witchdoctors for charms and fetishes. Probably an idle rumour, but Mr Elekuru would go to any length to demonstrate his support for the team, which was so total and frightening it attained the condition of fanaticism. Two years before, during a match in Tanzania, it had taken the personal intervention of the Nigerian High Commissioner in Dar es Salaam to rescue Elekuru from a mob which suspected him of being a witchdoctor and would have lynched the daylight out of him. Writing these reflections today, in the shadow of reports of ritual killings of albinos in Tanzania, one has an uncanny sense of the futile attractions of the occult, of beliefs which do not have to be true before they acquire immense material force, indeed acquire such force because they do not have to be true. The jingle would survive the event, as the poetry of a battle-cry outlives a war, but that eventuality belonged in the future. On the evidence of this unsurpassable enthusiasm in Ibadan, Soutin had won the match and carried the elusive Sékou Touré Cup. The game being a national event, however, it would not be played in Ibadan. On to the National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos; we'd reserve the partying afterwards for the legendary City of Seven Hills.

'A WAR ENCAMPMENT'

Founded in the mid-1820s as the base of bandits, soldiers, warlords and refugees fleeing the old cities in the aftermath of the fall of Oyo, the savannah empire which attained its peak in the eighteenth century, present-day Ibadan, capital of Oyo State, observed no architects even in its peripheral vision. Geographers and city planners have had many field days proclaiming the city's singular identity, the breathless manner in which it developed with few of the features of the traditional Yoruba city. In the classical model of this urbanism, the main road of the town leads directly to the market, which is adjacent to the palace of the king and where, on occasion, residential quarters (compounds) converge with the farms and the smaller towns for business and social interaction. Ibadan has these features, but only as an afterthought – as the consequence of the trial-and-error process through which the war encampment became a town. The most famous figure at the time of the town's second founding (the earlier Ibadan was first settled in the fifteenth century, according to history) was Oluyole, the Basorun or prime minister, who used the diminished power of the king of Oyo and the unfeasible old capital as a pretext to develop his own political base to the south. This soldier's pioneering ways and quirks have earned the city its main alias; Ibadan is also known as 'Oluyole's homestead'. He was one of those incredible figures from the age of upheaval, the mean time when only the mean survived: Kurunmi of Ijaye, Generalissimo of the Yoruba confederate army; Ogedengbe of Ilesa; Somoye of Abeokuta; Aduloju of Ekiti; Kosoko of Lagos; Latoosa of Ibadan; and female notables like Efunroye Tinubu of Lagos and Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan. They were coevals of Samory Touré, Tippu Tip and Lobengula, in much the same way that Mohammed Farah Aideed, Charles Taylor and Laurent Nkunda could be today. If the Yoruba generals didn't attain the global fame of their western and southern African peers, it was both because of the nature of the colonialism in Nigeria, and because the Yoruba wars were a resounding implosion: the warring brothers were spent from decades of attrition, and the British generals, aided by African missionaries, stepped in as providential mediators.

In the new military capital the civilian head would emerge with time to complement the soldierly echelons, but while the Basorun remained the embodiment of power, the market that developed, Ojaa'ba (Basorun's Market), quickly assumed the character of the traditional market. Until the 1980s, there was no central king's palace. The fortunes of the commercial structure mirroring those of the body politic, Ibadan's rise as the base of military commanders in an age when soldiers thrived best became identified with the ethics of a republic. The civilian head became less irrelevant, first as the Bale when the establishment of the colonial Protectorate of Southern Nigeria clipped the wings of the 19th-century warlords, then as the Olubadan when the Richards Constitution (1946) chipped away some of the pomp of the Indirect Rule system

under which the new Oyo empire had regained suzerainty. The ceremonial base of this civilian head shifted with the appointment of a new person, for the new Olubadan emerged not in the hereditary fashion of most Yoruba towns, but through a process of rising through the ranks in which a vacancy at the top created opportunity at the bottom. Thus, every male citizen of Ibadan (understood as belonging to any of families of military commanders and their civilian allies who had settled the town) can aspire to the highest traditional office in the city, the kingly position of the Olubadan – if he wants it enough to work for it!

Nearly three decades ago, the writer Paul Wheatley described the distinctive Yoruba living quarters, the *agboole* (or compound, but literally, 'a gathering of homes') as 'large permanent, compact aggregations' of landholding corporate groups descended along agnatic lines whereby the male members of a group live with their families. These compounds constituted the regular homes and held much of the population of a given city around the precinct of the palace. He was thinking about the generic urban setting, and he allowed that relatively recent settlements like Ibadan and Abeokuta, while retaining the main features of this genre, differed in some significant ways. The traditional urban form developed over a long period of time, probably from the 15th century through the major upheavals of the early 19th century. There was a religious rationale for this spatial organisation, because the king was the spiritual head of the town and maintained control of the cult groups and their associated rituals and festivals. In the post-1820 format, a military elite displaced the religious powers significantly, especially in Ibadan, where the *agboole* retained the physical attributes of the tradition: the long rectangular structure fronted with a courtyard, behind which the living quarters are organised into compartments each belonging to a nucleated unit in the agnatic family. Due to the manner in which the city unfolded, the compounds were homesteads of war commanders who governed through a hierarchical system in which military prowess and personal ambition were the primary yardstick for advancement. This republican ethic is elastic, and its elasticity is a source of great indignation among many indigenes who count themselves as meriting special consideration on the basis of birth, as the scholar Ruth Watson found out while researching her book, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan*. Yet this is what distinguishes Ibadan from any other Nigerian city – its corporate image as a traditional city-village with unimpeachable cosmopolitan credentials. The Yoruba compound, according to the architect David Aradeon, is a spatial distillation of the practice of tolerance, and Ibadan offers a fascinating example of this hypothesis. A distinct kind of nationalism, city-based and negotiable, is deep-seated in Ibadan. The rise and fame of the Shooting Stars FC between the 1970s and the 1990s reflect a successful, if sometimes irksome, management of this nationalism, and this is what differentiates it from the blood-spilling variety.

II

The Egyptians were no strangers to Soutin. Both teams had met at the semi-finals of the 1976 African Cup-Winners' Championship, and the Ibadan side had won, going on to defeat Cameroon's Tonnerre Kalara (of Yaoundé) in the finals, an encounter that has now become legend. (Fanatical supporters of Tonnerre Kalara attacked the Nigerian players with *werepe*, the powdery crusts of poison-bean which create painful, hours-long itches on contact with bare skin, and the team played throughout the inconvenience.) But there was no other meet in the next eight years. To get to the finals, Soutin had sailed past SEIB Diourbel of Senegal, overpowered their old Cameroonian antagonists, sunk the Maghrebi Fes of Morocco, and dispatched the little-known Semassi Sekode FC of Togo in the semis. Unlike their Nigerian opponents, Zamalek had never won a continental cup, although two Egyptian sides had won this particular championship three times before – Al-Ismaïli in 1969 and 1970, and Al-Ahli in 1982.

The first leg of the finals was scheduled for Friday, November 23. It was a rainy day in Cairo. There was a small group of Nigerians in the stadium, and two of Nigeria's famous sports commentators, Sebastian Offurum and Ernest Okonkwo, who had accompanied Soutin to Egypt, ran commentaries in drenched clothes. The match was broadcast on the radio in Ibadan, early in the afternoon. I huddled over a radio with a group of friends soon after the end of classes, with rapt interest and confidence in our side's prowess. (I had begun to lean toward the more cosmopolitan Leventis United, Soutin's arch-rival managed by John Mastoroudes, the Greek director of the department stores after which it was named. I went to school in Ibadan but spent more time reading the 'Africa and the World' columns of newspapers, and paid equal attention to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the election of Ronald Reagan and the International Trade Fair in Lagos. However, while among friends I retained some enthusiasm for the hometeam, and this pleased my Cousin T enormously. At any rate, Soutin were representing the whole country, and it made sense to leave personal preferences aside.)

Rain was not the only obstacle. For one, the Nigerian side was deficient on one particular point that day. Their star player, 'Mathematical' Segun Odegbami, arguably the best Nigerian footballer of all time, had suffered an injury during the semi-finals, and watched the match from the sidelines. Rashidi Yekini, later to be famous as the scorer of Nigeria's first goal at the 1994 World Cup in the US, filled in for him, and in spite of his best efforts, didn't net any goals. In a dramatic moment, twenty minutes into the game, the commentators' voices rose several octaves as the tall striker found himself deep inside Zamalek's box, but his wide shot quelled that enthusiasm. The other obstacle was the crowd, which awoke with the renewed vigour of the home team during the second half. A slight defensive error by the left fullback, and a pass sailed down to the goal area, where an Egyptian striker was waiting with a header. From this curtain-raiser on, the decibel level of the noise in the stadium would not wane; it merely reinforced Zamalek's aggression, which paid off with a bonus second goal – an undeserved penalty-kick awarded by the Gabonese referee in the 70th minute. Newspaper accounts of the match recorded that Soutin played well, with a superior command of the midfield and the left wing.

One afternoon in Albany, New York, I sat in a mid-scale restaurant near the Greyhound bus station and nodded to a casual conversation which had developed from a question I'd posed to jump-start some small-talk. It was a few days before the 2000 US general elections, and I had been intrigued by a Gore/Lieberman badge donned by an attendant. Then an African-American guy who fancied himself as possessing political opinion said with a gentle wave of the hand, 'Hillary [Clinton] will get the black votes.' No one had asked him, but he felt that as a sponge for mass-circulating views on an issue of great currency, he could weigh in on his own. The general public attitude in Nigeria toward the chances of Soutin before and after the first-leg match in Cairo was something of this nature. Not only did everyone have an opinion, he or she felt able to express it with a casualness which signified supreme confidence. In Ibadan in particular, it was

not unusual to hear that all the city's team needed was a draw in Cairo. Then they would return to Ibadan, and drown Zamalek in goals. Even after the loss, with two goals down, optimism endured with a few adjustments: all Soutin needed were two quick goals in the first half, and a resolve to play defence in the second, sending the match to a shoot-out. It would be a replay of the encounter of 1976, when Soutin had cancelled their goal deficit in the dying minutes, eventually triumphing during the penalty shoot-out. In this frame of mind did the Ibadan-based team return to Nigeria in late November to prepare for the final of finals.

'LIKE BROKEN CHINA IN THE SUN'

The map of Ibadan is difficult to visualise. You will have a hard time imagining it as a fearsome cat, the form in which Ireland appears to the anti-hero of Flann O'Brien's *The Poor Mouth*, or of Florida as a pistol in the thriller of the 2000 recount. This is in part because the precise reaches of the city, excluding its outlying districts collectively tagged 'Ibadan region' by city planners, are hard to determine. It is also in part because even as we write the city is still growing, the outlying districts continue to be turned into citified residential areas in the relentless sprawl of urbanisation. On a map, however, the metropolitan core of the city, what used to constitute the Ibadan Municipal Government area with headquarters at the Mapo Hall across from Ojaa'ba, looks like a soft-rot peach gently pulped at the top end. It is the region demarcated by urban planning experts to define the areas which once constituted the original clusters of *agboole*. These are the sections where industrial activities are nil, and commercial and residential purposes are integrated in such a way that their separation is impossible, even in theory. They might have been called the *musseques* and the *bidonvilles* if we lived in the 19th century; and though we didn't, their location at the city's core rather than at its periphery, integrated with the bases of political, religious and economic powers, and their preindustrial rationality, too, might suggest a new way of using the old grammar of relations of wealth and prestige. For we know, from Cheik Anta Diop's account in *Precolonial Black Africa*, that the exercise of caste privileges was inconceivable without the relational hierarchies of the preindustrial West African city, and considering the conservative alliances between kings and slaves, it was possible to have nobility without wealth. This style of urbanism, among other factors, precluded the formation of a revolutionary consciousness on the scale and character of the European city. Ibadan went without a master plan for a long time, until the dissolution of the Western Region in 1976 caused city planners to etch perspective into the fatty sprawl of the legendary godmother. With time, Ojaa'ba acquired the character of the classic Yoruba market, because at some point in the 1980s a permanent palace was constructed to retire the practice of the moveable palace. The result was a complex of traditional and westernised centres of governance mediated by the market. Modern residential arrangements in these parts of the city were closer in form to the *agboole* than to the rationalised built space of the so-called 'elite quarters', which formed the outer rings of a concentric circle.

The city is located approximately on longitude 3° 5' east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 7° 23' north of the Equator, at a distance of about 130 kilometres northeast of Lagos. In physical outlook, it is made up of ridges of laterite (rock-hills), the largest of which lie in the central part of the city, and with peaks at Mapo, Mokola, and Aremo. The remaining four of the seven hills celebrated in J.P. Bekederemo-Clark's classic poem, the five-line 'Ibadan' (1965), whose *enjambéd* last two lines supply the title of this section, are Oke-Ado, Oke-Are, Oke-Bola, and Oke'Badan, the rock-hill near Eleyele on the western outskirts. This last is never acknowledged as part of the poetic seven because it is not within the city, but as the legendary refuge of the founders of the first Ibadan it is revered and honoured annually as the goddess of fertility, during the licentious Oke'Badan Festival. The seventh hill is at Ojaa'gbo, a mile north of Mapo Hall, where Bower's Tower was erected in 1936 in honour of the city's first British Resident Officer, and from its height atop the natural elevation of around 275 metres above sea level, one can see the entire city by moving in a circumference. Situated right next to the

old Rediffusion House, the Tower is locally named 'Layipo' because of the winding staircase by which one gains ascent to the top for a bird's-eye view of Ibadan, and the naming embodies the city's puzzle of cultural insiderism (*à la* Paul Gilroy), its subtle retort to arch-rivals like Oyo, Ijebu, and Lagos.

For Ibadan, eternal enmity is the price of eminence. Oluyole the Basorun did empty Oyo of political gravitas in the several decades between the fall of Old Oyo (1825) and the end of the Kiriji War (1886). But with the appointment of Captain William Ross as its Resident Officer in 1911, Oyo became so serviceable in the execution of the Indirect Rule system (the deployment of native institutions as the basis of colonial governance fashioned by Lord Fredrick Lugard) that Ibadan lost its pre-eminence as a political-military centre. Thereafter, it took the combination of the good offices of Henry Ward-Price (or evil, if you were an Oyo partisan) in the late 1930s, and the Richards Constitution of 1946 to enable Ibadan to engage in muscle-flexing with its ever-resentful uncle to the north. Nonetheless, Ibadan's rivalry with Oyo was a sibling tiff, compared to what transpired between it and Ijebu. As one of the allies in the confederate army which founded the second Ibadan and decisively vanquished the Fulani jihadist aggression in 1840, Ijebu became integrated into indigenous Ibadan, sub-ethnic Ijebu settling in the southern part of the city, the Isale-Ijebu area. Renowned for their astuteness as entrepreneurs, a class of prejudice when you take a closer look at it, the Ijebu were not much loved in Ibadan. Worse still, they could point to another base of nativity, their twin-towns of Ijebu-Ode and Ijebu-Igbo (in present-day Ogun State), and this opened their claims of being indigenes in Ibadan to question. To Ibadan natives, the Ijebu were at best native strangers, at worst interlopers.

The rivalry with Lagos was more recent and without the kind of nationalist passion which characterised Ibadan-Ijebu enmity. Lagos – cosmopolitan, showy, shallow, culturally bastardised, elegant and ruthless – was a more fitting claimant to cultural sophistication than Ibadan in late-colonial Nigeria, when modernisation equalled opportunities for professional and social advancement. Ijebu was also geographically closer to Lagos, and positioned itself as a natural ally of the country's cultural and commercial capital, what with the inseparability of commerce and bureaucracy in the scheme of colonial ideology. For all its wildcat stance toward Oyo, Ibadan remains the bridgehead of Oyo-Yoruba (or 'Yoruba proper', as the Oyo historian Samuel Johnson would have it), the cultural template on which modern Yoruba was fashioned in terms of language, culture, and religion. It is the custodian of the 'deep structures' of Yoruba, closer to traditional values than the border-trading Ijebu and the coastal Lagosians, yet not as intermediate as the mid-level towns like Osogbo, Abeokuta, Ogbomosho, Ilesa, and so forth. The truth, of course, is that as in most matters relating to difference, all Yoruba sub-ethnic groups are variously branded according to what others determine as their distinctive social characteristics. The prejudices which define Ibadan for its cultural and geographical neighbours are shaped by these relationships, for which three factors are decisive in annealing into cultural certitudes.

The first is the ubiquity of facial scarifications, lineage-based marks of varying patterns etched on a person's cheeks at infancy, usually during circumcision. This West African practice began long ago, but probably became popular in the era of the slave trade, when it was necessary to identify those who could not be sold into slavery, at least in theory. That, at any rate, was Ousmane Sembène's point in the short story 'Voltaïque' (or 'Tribal Scars'). There are at least twelve types among the Yoruba, from the simple *pélé* (three vertical marks) to the elaborate *kéké* covering the width of the face up to the temples and usually reserved for the families of professional circumcisers. Again, given the heterogeneity of Ibadan's ethnic makeup from the 19th century, different lineages became indigenised with their marks, leading to what one may call the mass production of lineage-marks as a distinctive feature of a 'proper' Ibadan person. Like most features associated with social prestige, an absence of these marks used to signify a lack of authenticity. By contrast, the practice was not common in places like Lagos and Ijebu, and so it became a sign of too much authenticity – in contexts where an unscarred face was the norm.

Another factor in the normalisation of cultural bias is the problem with the stressed 'S'. The Yoruba alphabet of twenty-five letters has two consonant sounds for the letter 'S', differentiated in the pronunciation of 'shaw' and 'saw'. In everyday usage, however, the difference disappears when the speaker is of Ibadan stock. Thus it is not unusual to pronounce 'Adesokan' with the neutral 'S' or smuggle the stressed form into a word like 'soil', hence the expression 'shons of the shoil' which puts a derisive spin on claims of authenticity. In fact, the problem is not particular to Ibadan; outside of the southern and coastal settlements, the conflation of stressed and neutral 'S' is standard practice. The phonological differentiation is probably the result of the complex negotiations that produced modern Yoruba orthography, but again, Ibadan's position as an amalgam of cultural groups and the butt of intra-ethnic rivalries makes it the target of such prejudices. There is a rich trove of jokes whose punch-lines turn on this speech habit. One in particular is the elaborate Q-and-A-format joke:

Omo-Ibadan, kinni sow?
Sow suoh...

*(Denizen of Ibadan, what's the show
[i.e. what's happening]?
Show is sure...)*

When you add these two factors to the third, the process of benign stigmatisation is complete. Most censuses of Ibadan at the time these conceptions crystallised recorded that more than two-thirds of the city's indigenous population were Muslims. In the context of Western education modelled on Christian mission schools and instruction in Western classics, this was not an idle fact. Christianity arrived in the mid-19th century, but Islam was much older and more adaptable to many of the people's cultural practices. By the 1950s, when Ibadan's position as the administrative headquarters of the Western region brought about increased development in the industrial, commercial and social spheres, the population of indigenous Ibadan children attending primary school was 20%, compared to 70% in rival regions like Ekiti and Ijebu. Thus, they tended to be less entrenched in the professions. To put it crudely, as a former governor of Oyo State did to his eternal regret, Ibadan indigenes didn't go to school and couldn't sway the scales in the modern scheme of things. Of all Ibadan's rivals, the Ijebu were the most routinely singled out because they constituted a sizeable part of the population – unlike the distant Lagosians and the Oyo cousins. Not surprisingly, most of the satirical and abusive songs during the Oke'Badan carnival targeted the Ijebu, and also the police. Finding political focus in the figures of an Ijebu like Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909–1987) and the legendary Ibadan politician Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu (1915–1955) in the early 1950s, the mutual suspicion threatened to explode into a 'war'. Not only was Awolowo a Methodist and a successful lawyer, he also didn't have facial marks like Adelabu, a Muslim whose aspiration toward a British law degree never materialised.

Above all, his aversion to earthy populism was not the reason he didn't say 'Up Soutin!', in case you're wondering what happened to the 'h' in 'Shooting'.

III

The ICC in the full name of Shooting Stars FC stands for the Industrial Investment and Credit Corporation, a government-run limited liability company. The team used to be known as WNDP Sports Club (for Western Nigerian Development Corporation), with the alias 'Oluyole Warriors'. It was actually founded by the expatriate partners of the corporation in the 1950s, but when a flamboyant football enthusiast named Lekan Salami became a director of the WNDP in the 1960s, his interest in the Ibadan District Amateur Football Association found a natural outlet in promoting the football team. With the political realism of national unity necessitated by the harrowing civil war (1967–1970), the 1970s marked the golden decade of football in Nigeria, and the Shooting Stars did battles with other city-identified teams. Raccah Rovers of Kano. Mighty Jets of Jos. Enugu Rangers. Bendel Insurance of Benin City. Stationery Stores of Lagos. These teams dominated the national league for over a decade. Whenever Soutin qualified for the finals of the Challenge Cup, Nigeria's equivalent of the US Super Bowl, all footballing passions descended on either the Rangers or the Insurance. But the greatest rivals were the Stationery Stores, whom they rarely met at the finals. (Interestingly, Stores didn't fare that well during the glorious years of the ICC. In the 1985 league fixtures, when Soutin's chances of escaping relegation to the second division depended on the Stores beating the Flamingo Flamingos of Benin, the decisive match ended in a draw. At a newsstand in my Lagos neighbourhood the following morning, I listened with mild resentment as the supporters of Stores, also known as Lagos Flamingos, exchanged cavalier repartee over a game that was simply a case of two flamingos playing... anyway, I was no longer an ardent Soutin fan. The Ibadan team dropped to Division Two for the first time that week, and remained there for a couple of years.)

An answer to the perpetual Soutin-Stores rivalry came in the early 1980s, when Leventis United was established. Another team based in Ibadan?! Didn't Mr Mastoroudes get the memo about one-team domination, or was he looking for trouble? Taboo! Didn't they tell him what happened to the Water Corporation, which, like a young wife menaced by a fierce rival, embarked on serial marriages, settling first in Oyo, then in Osogbo, and finally in Ilesa where it found peace in oblivion? By my third year in high school, my support for Soutin was waning. The Leventis line-up was youthful and Pan-African – half of the regulars were Ghanaians or southeastern Nigerians – in a way Soutin never cared to be. They didn't rely on sheer brawn to win a match but had a style of cumulative passes organised around the control of the midfield which many would come to associate with Brazilian football. Whereas Soutin's generational rivals were the Rangers, the Stores, and the Insurance, Leventis ruled the league with young teams like the Abiola Babes of Abeokuta, BCC Lions of Gboko, Femo Scorpions of Eruwa, Sharks of Port Harcourt, and the Iwuanyanwu Nationale of Owerri. But my interlocutor was Cousin T, whose fanaticism would embarrass even Mr Elekuru, although I doubted that he attended any of the matches. He had only one response to any defence of Leventis:

'Koraa don't have a say in Ibadan!'

(Middle-easterners, from Syrians, Lebanese to Greeks, even Indians, were lumped under that generic term, *Koraa*, derived from the fact that the Lebanese used to trade in corals in Nigeria. Like the Ijebu, they were resented in Ibadan, but they didn't dabble in local politics.)

In the 1980s, before and after the historic clash with Zamalek of Egypt, Leventis United either lost a match against Soutin or faced reprisals from the fans. Soutin's home games were played at the Liberty Stadium, and there was an implicit understanding (sanctioned by the Nigerian Football Association) that the other stadium in Ibadan, at Adamasingba, belonged to Leventis. But the best the new team could hope for, even in this home territory, was a draw. *They had to allow their match to be forced into a draw.* In case the rivalry seemed bitter and coarse, let us note that Chief Lekan Salami, de facto owner of Soutin after whom the stadium at

Adamasingba was later named, was a very stylish man who dressed in flowing *agbada* or a safari suit for football matches, with a further distinction – he brought a talking-drum along! It was a practice he'd begun in the 1970s, when the great rivalries had racial or ethnic undertones. For example, in a match with the Raccah Rovers, a team based in Kano, the northern Nigerian city, Chief Salami said the following through his drumming:

Sabarumo soo loo gbon ni?
Waa sare!
Gambari soo loo gbon ni?
Waa sare!

(*Sabarumo, are you so audacious?
You'll soon flee!
Gambari, are you so audacious?
You'll soon flee!*)

Sabarumo is a Yoruba expression for Arabs – never mind that the Rovers were a Nigerian team – and the same tune applied when Sudanese, Tunisian or Egyptian teams were visiting. In Ibadan anyone living north of Oyo was a Gambari, though in fact the name belongs to the royal family in Ilorin. The drum was a complex instrument in this context, a dexterous rousing-tool-of-exclusion, since special training was required to decode its tunes. It reinforced a sense of identity among the supporters. When the drummer changed the tune to '*Ibadan lo mo, o o mo Layipo*' (You may know Ibadan, but Layipo is beyond your grasp), encouraging the audience to singalong, every Soutin supporter knew what having a home meant. The local name for Bower's Tower connotes discursive circuitousness and dissimulation: Ibadan the city may be transparent, but there's more to reality than appearances, and it is the lot of the outsider to be denied access to insider info. Addressing an insult to a stranger who was not expected to understand it – what a confident way to affirm your place in the familiar world! When Soutin returned from Cairo in late November 1984, diehard fans like Mr Elekuru and Cousin T had put the disastrous loss behind them – it was more uplifting to aim for the second leg. Cousin T always said, in exonerating his darling team's poor performance: 'It is not every time that Odegbami wears top form [plays well].' But the star player was missing in action in Egypt. This asymmetry between received wisdom and facts on the ground should have sent enough signals to the fans. After all, a bit of superstition wasn't unknown in matters of sports.

'SHONS OF THE SHOIL': THE TROIKA PLUS ONE

Basorun Oluyole – Here is how the Reverend Samuel Johnson described Basorun Oluyole in his magisterial *History of the Yorubas*:

As a ruler he was arbitrary and oppressive and that was the cause of several civil wars at Ibadan. As a commander he was almost always successful although he had many narrow escapes. As an excuse for him, his was an age of anarchy and lawlessness, and a ruler who showed himself weak would soon be compelled to give place to another. He could endure no rival and was exceedingly ambitious, hence the two inexcusable flaws in his life history, the perfidy to his faithful friend Eleepo, and the disloyalty to the Alaafin, his uncle and sovereign.

He cannot be properly spoken of as a bloodthirsty tyrant because although sometimes inexorable, yet he was frequently merciful and forbearing. We may note for instance his treatment of those caught in the insurrection against him. In this respect he contrasted most favorably with his contemporary Kurunmi of Ijaye...

Oluyole was fond of husbandry; he had extensive plantations of okra, beans, vegetables, corn and yams, a separate farm for each, and whenever he had to take any to the market, no farmer was allowed to sell that particular article that day as he had sufficient to supply all the traders in the town and could undersell any farmer...'

Adegoke Adelabu – By the time of this controversial politician a hundred years after Oluyole, literacy was already an achievement in Ibadan, and many ambitious people could pen their own subjectivities. Self-acclaimed stormy-petrel of Ibadan politics, Adelabu had a predilection for jingoism, not unusual for public figures of his time and social inclination. He authored an iconoclastic 'handbook of freedom for Nigerian nationalists' titled *African in Ebullition*. 'Lion of the West' was a stalwart of the nationalist party, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens, NCNC, of which Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was inspiration and leader.

Here is Adelabu describing his own book in 1951:

This book derives many illustrations from astronomy, physics, chemistry, geography, engineering, agronomy and mathematics. It employs copiously the language of art, civics, biology, sociology, music, literature and history. It is liberally spiced with Greek drama, Roman law, English idioms, American slangs, French logic, Indian mysticism and African folklore. It is an Ode to Liberty, a Guide to Nationalists, a Handbook of Freedom, a Grammar of Politics, a Revolutionary Manifesto, our Book of Revelation, an Encyclopaedia Nigeriana, the Voice of the People, a Challenge to Imperialism, an Indictment of Colonialism, an Abrogation of Gradualism, an Invitation to Youths, a Call to Arms, the Sacrament of Patriotism, a Psychoanalysis of the Nation, a Dissection of our Soul, an Answer to our Detractors, a Reaffirmation of Faith, a Plea for Unity, an Appeal for Understanding, a Rededication to the Struggle, a Bill of Rights, a Declaration of Independence...

Much of the book goes like that, and it is only a little over a hundred pages in length. Those who attended his political rallies in the 1950s claimed he spoke in similar vein. His rivalry with Awolowo, founder and leader of the Action Group, deepened the historical rivalry between Ibadan and Ijebu in the city, and days of violence in which Ijebu persons and property were singled out for attack followed his tragic death in a car accident in March 1958.

Lamidi Adedibu – A thuggish chief who could have become the Olubadan had he not died in June 2008, and who played an ignominious role in Nigerian politics during the second coming of General Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria's president (1999–2007), Adedibu combined the worst aspects of his two predecessors, with a further touch of perfidy. Between 2003 and 2008 all politics in Oyo State revolved around him; on his say-so the parliament impeached the governor who refused to turn the state coffers over to the so-called 'strongman of Ibadan politics'.

His memoir, a dictated narrative with the typically implacable title, *What I Saw: On the Politics and Governance of Ibadanland and the Issue of June 12, 1993*, was an exercise in self-mystification. June 12 is the metonym for the presidential elections of 1993, adjudged the fairest and freest in Nigeria's history, but annulled by the military president, General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993). It was typical of Adedibu's political myopia (he described himself *ad nauseam* as a 'realist') that he would establish a parallel between the politics of Ibadan and the historic elections of 1993. In *Adedibully*, a devastatingly witty profile published months before Adedibu died, the Nigerian poet Tade Ipadeola disclosed that the politician had taken that name early in his career as a declaration that he meant to best Adelabu's renown. Prior to June 12,

however, he had been put in gaol for flouting the national ban on politicking. Here is an excerpt from his uncanny account:

After interrogation, the security agents asked us to come back the second day. However, the day appointed by the police that we should report to them was the burial day of Chief Lekan Salami who had died a day before. Because I had to attend the burial ceremony of this illustrious son of Ibadan, I decided not to keep the appointment...

It was the only mention of the flamboyant drummer/supporter in the whole book. Two pages later, a full-page picture shows Chief Salami receiving a trophy from a match official. We are told that he does this on behalf of the WNDC. This mixture of sports, localised tragedies and national politics may appear unsystematic, but as a witness to the annual Oke'Badan carnival once observed, there was a method to the madness: the Islamic burial of a local champion provided an auspicious occasion to traduce the law. Chief Lekan Salami died in a car accident in March 1988. He was sixty at the time – a double tragedy: he died young, and African football lost a great supporter.

Plus One – Like most prejudices, those directed at Ibadan are constituted by blind spots. The Olubadan Isaac Akinyele (1955–1964) published a masterful Yoruba-language history of the city in 1911, when Johnson's masterpiece was still a misplaced manuscript. It has been translated into English by his niece, Kemi Morgan; Akinyele's own biography was in turn written, also in Yoruba, by Chief J.A. Ayorinde, who used to delight television viewers with his elegant quotations from Shakespeare. As an Episcopalian Ibadan indigene who belonged to the Action Group and embraced the city's martial heritage with a Christian touch, Olubadan Akinyele was the crucial factor in the equation between Awolowo and Adesokan. A city-village like no other, Ibadan is variously called 'Harlem of Africa', 'the London of Negroland' (a tinge of racial prejudice there), and the 'largest indigenous city in sub-Saharan Africa'. Attaining its modern prestige in the 1950s, the city has suffered a series of decapitations as new states emerged to chip away some of its pomp as regional capital: in 1963, when the Midwest region was carved out; in 1967 with the creation of Lagos State; in 1976 with the creation of three new states; and with the creation of Osun State in 1991. These serial and partial transfers of human and material resources have naturally affected the city's standing among its peers: Lagos, Kano and Port Harcourt now appear more important than Ibadan from the point of view of economic development. It is a state of affairs which reinforces the view of Ibadan as a large village, and turns fixations with facial marks and suchlike into markers of real 'identity'. Things are this way, the skewed reasoning goes, because, after all, the 'proper Ibadan' cannot hold their own in the fast-moving scheme of things.

But Ibadan is...

In the mid-1990s, at the peak of the state of emergency superintended by brutal soldiers and marked by an extreme form of destitution which turned self-respecting but hungry citizens into beggars by decoy, a visitor walking through the motor-park would encounter a woman wiry with want or age panning for coins. She conducted herself with a disarming blend of grace, intimacy and importunity, and one had to lack manners to behold that quietly charming demeanour, and refuse to give. Then a certain parvenu arrived, in the manner of parvenus, almost out of nowhere, styling himself 'The-Wealthy-One-Who-Uses-His-Money-To-Dispense-Kindness'. On Fridays, after the Muslim Jumaat service, the hungry folk thronged his sprawling house along Iwo Road and got treated, so the legend goes, to a meal of *amala-gbegiri-kundi*, a combo as 'national' to Ibadan as *thiembu-dien* is to Dakar. It followed that Adedibu too would be identified with this genre of kindness, and that his reactionary and anti-democratic *amala politics* attracted rather than repelled the Ibadan folk in a long season of hunger and

warped perspective. That partly explained the grovelling of virtually all politicians before this 'strongman', and the largely intellectual character of the opposition to his terror.

Besides Adedibu and the parvenu merchant of second-hand automobiles, there was yet another Ibadan indigene, a staunch supporter of General Sani Abacha in those days. He unabashedly used his emergency newspaper as a propaganda tool of that regime of repression, and so was highly resented by those who, though hungry, banked their integrity. Then, in November 1999, with the military back in the barracks, during the graduation ceremonies at the University of Ibadan, restless students ambushed this influential man's car, resolving to tear him into pieces for his bad politics. Security agents got wind of the plot and smuggled him out through the back roads, or bundled him into the trunk of his car, but it is significant that this happened at all, and that the setting was a university campus, the bastion of opposition to Adedibu's alimentary populism.

So, Ibadan ain't, either.

Its map may be tricky to the eye, but the aura, its brimming-over abundance of an aura, is far from ineffable or timeless. Ojaa'ba with its airy smell of *lafun*, the cassava flour, of *iru*, fermented locust seeds used as condiment, and of dried meat, called *kundi*; Gege with the whiff of butchered-animal entrails in its air; Bodija redolent of ground peppers, hen-coops and thawing mackerels; horny *danfo* drivers letting go of their libidinal frustrations on their horns, like 'Trane on tenor sax, from Mokola past Oniyanrin and Yeosa through Orita-Merin; the impertinent bus conductors more at home in the wiles of Gbagi-Ogunpa-Dugbe than wherever they called home; the once-famous Cocoa House at Dugbe, so high your cap fell off with the effort of glimpsing its peak. And the names, names so resonant with incantatory grace it would be common to call rose by an alias: Mapo, Beere, Yemetu-Igosun, Yemetu-Alaadorin, Yemetu-Adeoyo, Yemetu-Alawada, Alli-Iwo, Total Garden, Orita-Mefa, Agodi, Ikolaba, Idi-Ape, Monatan, Iwo-Road, Gate, Oje, Alafara-Oje, Alafara-Olubadan, Orita-Aperin, Adekile, Odo-Oye, Alakia, Agugu, Koloko, Ogbere-tio-ya, Odo-Ona-Elewe, Challenge, Ring-Road, Onireke, Iyaganku, Irefin, Itutaba, Beyerunka, Ori-Eeru, Foko, Agbeni, Alekuso, Gbenla, Oke-Seni, Oke-Ofa-Atipe, Oke-Ofa-Babaasale, Oke-Padre, Ayeye, Idi-Ikan, Inalende, Ode-Oolo, Labo, Elekuro, Eleta, Ile-Titun, Idi-Isin, Oke-Oluokun, Molete, Oranmijan, Imalefalafia, Oke-Ado, Kudeti...

The city has both an *oriki*, as befits any Yoruba entity worth its existence, and an anthem that speaks to its status as a modern city with national aspirations. Haunt of masters of the eloquent Verb, homestead of Oluyole, where the thief gets the better of the owner, the stranger prospers more than the native, and the bandit-ruler, forswearing strife, makes captives of an entire town, for no one exists without some blemish, and civil strife is Ibadan's eternal affliction. An affliction with its soothing moments, during the masquerade parades in June, when Alapala battles Paje in the street, their hardy followers tearing mutual skins with razor-sharp whips, Alapansanpa prowls the entire city in ungovernable fury until he arrives at the Olubadan's palace, ringleaders of Abidi-Elege and Alemojagba air their sponsoring families' *realpolitik* in public, and the most revered of them all, Oloolu, lord of Ode-Aje, revels in inscrutable self-regard, until an irreverent mullah dares to pull off the veil. It is still Nigeria's publishing capital, and the first television station and the first university in West Africa were established there. It boasts a number of important research institutes whose current fortunes may or may not reflect those of the country, like the world-famous centre for tropical agriculture. It is called 'Harlem of Africa' because between 1951 and 1966, some of the leading lights of contemporary arts and letters such as Ulli Beier, Es'kia Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka, Geoffrey Axworthy, Chinua Achebe, Dennis Williams, Gerd Meuer, Tchicaya U'Tamsi, Jacob Lawrence, Mabel Segun and Robert July coincided in Ibadan, drawn thither by the university and the Mbari Club in the vicinity of today's Lekan Salami Stadium. It is home to Nigeria's only surviving colonial-era newspaper, *Nigerian Tribune*, founded by Awolowo, and the IICC Shooting Stars FC, to whose story it is now time to return.

IV

Soutin left Ibadan for the second-leg match in Lagos ten days early, on a Thursday. December in southwestern Nigeria is a thirsty, incandescent month, and you could feel the excitement of the impending football match in the texture of the evening air, burnished to tinder-edged sharpness by the harmattan. While the players worked out at their training-camp inside the Trade Fair Complex west of Lagos, Ibadan remained agog with exhilaration. Jingles, hortatory public announcements, parades flavoured with evangelical drama, ruled the airwaves. Committee meetings aimed at ensuring success went apace with plans for post-victory parties. The military governor of Oyo State (the country's civilian government having been booted out of power the previous December) probably instructed the director of sports, the coach and individual players to bring the Sékou Touré Cup to Ibadan or else...! (This, by the way, was the year of the Guinean strongman's demise.) I distinctly remember a cartoon on the back page of *Daily Sketch*, another Ibadan daily, in which a meteor (or a star) crashed down on the head of a Zamalek player. The caption read: 'Hey! Something is Shooting me Down!'

All appeared set. Odegbami, Soutin's star player, had spent the last several weeks recuperating, and he looked fit enough to play. The coach, Adegboye Onigbinde, who later coached the Nigerian national team during the 2002 World Cup, hoped to bag a convincing win as a belated 40th-birthday present for his wife. The supporters' club moved home to Lagos. Fans from different parts of the country came too, and the stadium began to fill up as early as 10:00 a.m. Pool aficionados knew that only the English league fixtures were worth banking on, but they placed bets on the match in Lagos all the same – old habits died hard. Everything and everyone was ready.

In ninety minutes, it would be over, and Soutin would shut down Western Avenue, the road leading to the stadium, with a victory dance.

In reality, the team was not ready.

Odegbami was not quite fit, but that match would be unthinkable without him. So he strode onto the pitch and played.

Felix Owolabi, the team's irrepressible left-winger, could not play for technical reasons. He had bagged three yellow cards, and only on Wednesday, when a letter arrived from the headquarters of the African Football Confederation (CAF), did he realise this.

Much of the playing was concentrated on the right flank, largely because Owolabi's shoe was too big for the replacement's foot.

Buoyed by home support and convinced of technical superiority, Soutin went for broke and played like bravehearts.

Toward the end of the first half, a play-within-the-play unfolded. Zamalek's goalkeeper, Abdel Maamour, started relying on delay tactics by holding on to the ball for longer than necessary. Whereupon Odegbami attacked and retrieved the ball from him for a successful shot at goal.

The Malawian referee had his hands pointed toward the centre, but he changed his mind after a protest by Egyptian players.

Then the unthinkable happened: Ogbein Fawole, an otherwise reliable defender, headed the ball back to the goalkeeper to deflect the aggression of a Zamalek attacker. The keeper was

out-of-position. An own goal had occurred. The stadium went dead. It was 76 minutes into the game.

Moments later, another Zamalek player handled the ball inside the 18-yard box. Hope sprang eternal. But the striker couldn't find the net. Another penalty offered itself soon after that, but the result was the same.

Finally the 90 minutes were over. Fans trooped out of the stadium, mournful and dejected. Days of passionate postgame analysis would follow, none too useful. We read in the papers and heard on the television that Soutin had not prepared well for the game. The coach was wrong to trust tactics of brawn and overwhelming raw power. One analyst speculated that the pitch at the National Stadium was rough, unlike the grassy turf at the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan. Another wrote that 'the Stars were not tactically and strategically equipped to make the difference. They lacked the ammunition to shoot down their opponents.' The Daily Sketch cartoonist clearly saw matters differently, having seen them earlier.

Fans went home. The Soutin players were abandoned at the stadium that night. The following morning. The following night. Three days and counting.

The worst was yet to come – or had arrived prior to that sentence of abandonment. On Sunday morning, December 9, the military governor ordered the dissolution of the team. Insult upon injury. It is doubtful that ICC Shooting Stars ever recovered from that action.

POSTSCRIPTS

In the late 1980s, Soutin changed its name to the Shooting Stars Sports Club (or 3SC), with the general objective of functioning as a sports holding company catering to football, track-and-field sports, and so on. By 1991, the 3SC stabilised somewhat, and managed to emerge as Nigeria's representatives at the CAF Cup the following year. The opponents were the Nakivubo Villa of Uganda. The finals were played at the stadium named after Chief Salami, and the Nigerian team won. Many people had moved on. The 1984 captain, Taiwo Ogunjobi, had retired, as had Odegbami (who never played another game after the disaster of December 9). Leventis United reigned and fell, disbanded by its owners in 1988. The current manager of the team is another Ibadan indigene, Mutiu Adepoju (Headmaster), who headed home Nigeria's first goal against Spain in France '98. Mr Elekuru died in 2006, at the age of 78. Cousin T is also no more; he died in 1989.

Ojaa'ba thrives, but a more inscrutable market has risen at Bodija, near the University of Ibadan. Military governors/administrators follow in quick succession, mirroring the rapidity of the baton passing from General Babangida to General Abacha. A certain Colonel Ike Nwosu comes to call the shots in Oyo State. He brings out an edict that prohibits the use of malleable measures for retailing grains and other dry goods, because it is believed that retailers cheat that way. To enforce the new rule, he orders the mass production of plastic containers, imprinted with Nigeria's coat of arms as proof of authenticity. The market, the zone of occult instability where the people spin their spidery webs in Frantz Fanon's enigmatic postulation, is both rational and warm. 'Ike' is the Yoruba word for plastic, lacking the fragility of a plate, so the military strongman seems to have hit on an elastic idea of buttonholing the folk consciousness to the import of his innovations. But the denizens of the market, the same folks who partake of free meals of *amala-gbegiri-kundi* on Friday afternoons, have a different idea. When left for minutes in hot water, the official plastic measurement shrinks in size.

The soldier ruled Ibadan, but could he grasp Layipo?