

## Nine poems by D. A. Oḃasa

*With English translations by Akintunde Akinyemi*

### A brief note on the translation

Many words in Yoruba frustrate trans-lingual transportation by the sheer complexity of their polysemic range. Such words are so culture-bound that they do not translate easily to English, especially when their metaphysical polyvalence in Yoruba has no equivalent in English. Therefore, my translation of Oḃasa's poems in the appendices below yields place to mediation, as I am constrained to try out or devise a series of strategies of transposition and transference, which in the words of Oṣundare<sup>1</sup> leads to 'kiss and quarrel' between the concerned languages. According to him, when two languages meet, they achieve a tacit understanding on the common grounds of similarity and convergence, then negotiate, often through strident rivalry and self-preserving altercations, their areas of dissimilarity and divergence.

Translation, in the context of what I present below, means literally 'carrying across', and this implies all other forms that carry the prefix *trans-*. It also means not only transportation or transmission but also transformation and transmutation, for all these activities take place when translating literary material in an African language to the English language. My approach to the notion of translation should be seen first in the orthodox sense as the linguistic operation that consists in transporting meaning from one language to another. However, as Anuradha Dingwaney points out,<sup>2</sup> if translation is one of the primary means by which texts produced in one or another indigenous language of the various countries arbitrarily grouped together under the label 'Third', or non-Western, World are made available in Western, metropolitan languages, this is not restricted to such linguistic transfer alone. For Dingwaney, 'translation is also the vehicle' through which 'Third World cultures (are made to) travel – transported or "borne across" to and recuperated by audiences in the West'.<sup>3</sup> However, translators should be cautious when using Western-oriented, linguistic-based translation theories because some of them are not wholly applicable or relevant to texts in indigenous Yoruba because of the multiplicity of meanings usually attached to specific words in the language. The major weakness of some of these theories is that they do not take into consideration underlying socio-cultural factors in works produced by Africans. A consideration of these factors in African literature will produce what Kwame Appiah has called 'thick translation' and which he defines as 'a translation that seeks ... to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context ... A description

<sup>1</sup>See N. Oṣundare (2000) 'Yoruba thoughts, English words: a poet's journey through the tunnel of two languages' in S. Brown (ed.), *Kiss and Quarrel: Yoruba / English strategies of mediation*. Birmingham University African Studies Series 5. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>A. Dingwaney (1995) 'Introduction' in A. Dingwaney and C. Maier (eds), *Between Languages and Cultures: translation and cross cultural texts*. Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*: 4.

of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves ... to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, my translation below sets out to capture the spirit and depth of Ọbasa's poetry in English by striking a compromise between a literal and a literary translation. My intention was to produce an English text that will be enjoyable and accessible to a diverse audience, including but not limited to students and scholars of African linguistics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science, religion and folklore. Precedence was thus given to accuracy, clarity, simplicity, effectiveness and faithfulness in my translation.

To conclude, I would like to make one quick clarification: Ọbasa's original text are long continuous sequences of lines, but the division into stanzas (and also the spacing between the Yoruba lines) was not the literary/aesthetic choice of the poet – but rather my addition to present the Yoruba and English together and make them accessible to readers of both languages.

## A. Poems based on compilation of oral poetic genres

### 1. *Pèlèpèlè* [*Gently, with Care*]

<i>Pèlèpèlè, Pèlèpèlè!</i>	Gently, with care!	
<i>Pèlè l'arẹwà n rin,</i>	The beautiful one walks gently.	
<i>Jéjé l'omọ ọlọlá í yan,</i>	An honorable citizen walks in leisurely fashion.	
<i>Igbá onípèlè kì í fọ,</i>	The calabash that is handled with care does not break easily.	
<i>Awo onípèlè kì í fà ya!</i>	The dish that is handled with care does not crack easily.	5
<i>Ohun a f'èsò mú,</i>	Whatever we handle with great care,	
<i>Kì í bàjẹ;</i>	Ends well;	
<i>Ohun a f'agbára mú</i>	But whatever we mishandle	
<i>Koko-ko ní í le!</i>	Becomes a difficult task to achieve.	
<i>Pèlèpèlè, l'à n pa,</i>	It is with caution that one kills	10
<i>Àmúkùrù pèlè!</i>	The gnat that finds its way into one's genital fold <sup>5</sup>	
<i>Pèlèpèlè nì</i>	It is with great caution	
<i>Ejò fì í gòpẹ.</i>	That the snake climbs the palmtree.	
<i>Igbín kò l'òwọ́,</i>	The snail has neither arms	
<i>Igbín kò l'èsẹ́;</i>	Nor does the snail has legs	15
<i>Èsò, èsò, n'ìgbín</i>	It is with care, with extra care, that the snail	
<i>Í gbà gun'gi!</i>	Climbs the tree!	
<i>A b'ìrìn gbèrè</i>	The one who walks gently	
<i>Ni yó m'òyè dé'lé,</i>	Brings home a chieftaincy title,	
<i>Asúré-tete kò r'óyè jẹ;</i>	Those in a hurry will not attain to a title; <sup>6</sup>	20
<i>Gìdìgìdì kò m'òlà,</i>	There is no gain in being in a hurry,	
<i>E má sùré tete mò!</i>	Slow down, do not be in a hurry!	

<sup>4</sup>K. A. Appiah (1993) 'Thick translation', *Callaloo* 16 (4): 808–19; quote from pp. 817–18.

<sup>5</sup>The poet is implying that, just as particular caution is needed when this insect is harboured in people's genital folds, his readers should approach life cautiously.

<sup>6</sup>All seven proverbs in the poem are used collectively by the poet to support the theme of the poem, which is patience.

## 2. Elétò-Ètò [Doing the Right Thing]

<i>Gbédó-gbédó, wọn kò gb'ágogo,</i>	Mortar carvers do not carve the bell,	
<i>Alòlèkè, wọn kò lọ bàbà:</i>	Bead makers do not cast copper:	
<i>Alágbèdè, wọn kò rọ ojúgun.</i>	Blacksmiths cannot forge the shin.	
<i>Irò ñ purò fún 'rò</i>	Deception upon deception,	
<i>Ágbèdè kò rọ 'ké.</i>	No blacksmith can forge the hump-back.	5
<i>Enu ehorò kò gbà 'jánu</i>	No one restrains the rabbit with ease	
<i>Elémùù kò m'égún:</i>	No one arrests the Masquerader:	
<i>Gbè'ran-gbè'ran kò gb'èkùn,</i>	No one attempts to capture the leopard alive,	
<i>Olè kí í gbé Gbèdu!</i>	No thief would attempt to steal the <i>gbèdu</i> (royal drum!	
<i>Ájẹ kò le jò 'kú,</i>	No witch eats the corpse,	10
<i>Oníkòlà kí í k'áfin;</i>	No circumciser circumcises an albino; <sup>7</sup>	
<i>Kò s'álápata tí pa'gun.</i>	No butcher attempts to kill the vulture.	
<i>Ákùkò kí í pa'mọ!</i>	Roosters do not hatch chicks!	
<i>Ikán mu'lé, kò le m'òkúta.</i>	Termites devour the house, <sup>8</sup> they cannot devour a stone.	
<i>Òjòwú kò le jẹ 'kótí,</i>	No one will chew the iron pin because of jealousy,	15
<i>Òjòwú tilé àwa lè j'abẹ!!!</i>	But this jealous person in our house can chew a razor!!!	
<i>Áwọn àkókó inú igbó,</i>	The woodpecker bird in the deep forest,	
<i>Wọn l'áwọn lè gbé'dó.</i>	Claims to be carver of mortars.	
<i>Áwọn òpòlò ñkọ,</i>	The toad,	
<i>Wọn láwọn lè lẹ'lèkè,</i>	Claims to be a master bead maker,	20
<i>Áwùrèbe láwọn lè hunṣọ;</i>	The weaver ant claims to be a master weaver;	
<i>Ta ní jẹ fódó àkókó gúnyán?</i>	Would anybody use the woodpeckers' mortar to pound the yam?	
<i>Ta ní jẹ sò'lèkè òpòlò</i>	Would anybody use the toads' beads	
<i>Mọ omọ rẹ lórùn?</i>	As necklace for his/her child?	
<i>Ta ní jẹ faṣọ àwùrèbe bora?</i>	Would anybody use the weaver ants' product to cover him/herself?	25
<i>Iná kékeré kojá à-mú-dáni.</i>	No one can hold even a small live coal in the hand.	
<i>Ejò kékeré kojá à-mú-d'àmùrè.</i>	No one can make even a small snake into a belt.	
<i>Ìgbín ka ka ka, èbìtì ka ka ka;</i>	The boastful snail and the boastful trap;	
<i>Èbìtì tí kò gbójú,</i>	Except for the good ones,	
<i>Kò le pà'gbín!</i>	Not all traps can easily kill the snail!	30

<sup>7</sup>The albino (*áfin*), a dwarf (*aràrà*) and hunchback (*abuké*), etc., are all regarded by the Yoruba as *eni òrìṣà*, people sacred to the god of creation (Obatala) because of their physical defects, which are regarded either as Obatala's mistakes during creation or signs of punishment. Therefore, to circumcise an albino is to recreate what Obatala, god of creation, already created, which will be culturally unacceptable. However, a more logical reason why the Yoruba will not circumcise the albino may be because they think that the skin of an albino may not heal quickly from circumcision.

<sup>8</sup>The reference here is to a mud house. Termites can easily devour a mud house because, in pre-colonial times, mud houses were built with beaten earth or clay and roofed with grass thatch known as *èèkan* or *bẹrẹ*.

<i>Pátàkò efòn, Kaka-ka nń́ t'ajá lẹnu! Àtàtá-ń-kùrá, Ènu eyẹ̀ kò le ran òkùta. Ilẹ̀-san-mí kò lu Gbẹ̀du,</i>	The bushcow's hoof Cannot fit into the dog's mouth easily! Impossible, No bird can easily peck the stone. Ordinary citizens do not play the <i>gbẹ̀du</i> (royal) drum, 35
<i>Ènìyàn lásán kò ní ilàrí; Ọ̀ba nń́ la' rí ẹ̀nì.</i>	Ordinary citizens do not own royal messengers; Only kings have monopoly of the royal messengers.
<i>Ọ̀gbójú kò ẹ̀ra ẹ̀rẹ̀ n'Ífá, Ọ̀mọ̀ràn kò fí ara ẹ̀rẹ̀ joyẹ̀.</i>	No famous person can ordain him-/herself as the priest of Ifá, No knowledgeable person can install him-/ herself as a chief.
<i>Ọ̀bẹ̀ mímú yányán, Kò lẹ̀ pón àkò ara ẹ̀! Ọ̀nà gbọ̀ọ̀ọ̀ kò kákò, Aláṣọ kan kò l'òkẹ̀ẹ̀,</i>	No sharp knife, 40 Makes its own scabbard. No one can fold a straight path, The one who has just one piece of cloth does not need a storage bag,
<i>Oníḃon kan kò sígun; Olòbínrin kan kò pagbo ijó!</i>	The one with only one gun cannot wage a war; The one who has only one wife cannot fill the dancing arena! 45
<i>Igbá ńlá kò lẹ̀ pa méta, Ènìyàn méta kò dúró ní méjì-méjì Baálé dì méjì, Itan adíẹ̀ dì pípín! A kò l'óbinrin, Á ń dá ọ̀yọ̀ sí?</i>	The calabash plant cannot produce three pro- ducts at a time, Three people cannot stand in twos. When two elders sit down to eat The chicken thigh must be divided for them! A man who has no wife, 50
<i>Bí a bá da ọ̀yọ̀ sí: Ewúre ní fí í je! Ènì tí ó wọ̀ bàtá irin, T'ó wẹ̀wù irin,</i>	Why would he keep nurseries of ọ̀yọ̀ herbs (on his farm)? <sup>9</sup> If he does: The plant becomes food for the goat! The one who wears a metal shoe, And a metal dress, 55
<i>Kò nilẹ̀ jókòò, òdòró ní í gbé! Ìdúró kò sí, ìbẹ̀rẹ̀ kò sí – F'ẹ̀nì tó gb'ọ̀mọ̀rọ̀dó mì!</i>	Will not be able to sit down, but must remain standing! There's no standing up, there's no sitting down For the one who swallows the pestle! <sup>10</sup>

### 3. *Ìkà-Èké [Treachery and Wickedness]*

*Ọ̀lọrun kò dá kanyinkanyin,* God did not make the ant,

<sup>9</sup>The reason why a man who has no wife is not likely to keep nurseries of ọ̀yọ̀ herbs (*Corchorus olitorous* – Jew's Mallow [*Tiliaceae*]) is because he may not know how to cook them into stew, although the plant has a useful fibre. In indigenous Yoruba society, many men do not cook, and therefore they may not know the usefulness of ọ̀yọ̀ herbs. However, things are changing, with men more involved in cooking.

<sup>10</sup>This statement is used to describe restlessness or an uneasy state. One can visualize in the statement a person who has swallowed the pestle hopping about in grave discomfort.

*Kó ní-ńlá bí ešin;  
Atapa ní ibá ta'ni.*

To be as big as a horse;  
(Had He made it big), it would sting people to death.

*Atapa ní ibá t'aniyàn!*

(Had He made it big), it would have sent people to their grave early!

*Èniyàn tí ibá f'eni sẹ́sín,*

People who could ridicule the unfortunate 5

*Qlórun Oba kì í jẹ k'ó níláárí,  
Èniyàn tí ibá s'egbẹ̀ rẹ̀ n'íkà,  
Qlórun Oba kì í jẹ k'ó nípá,  
Adiẹ̀ ibá l'òkó  
Ibá f'ákítàn ẹ̀ nńkan!*

God did not let them prosper;  
People who could be wicked to their fellowmen,  
God did not empower them.  
Had the chicken got a hoe  
It would have turned the rubbish heap upside down! 10

*Ìkà kò pé:  
Bí a bá ñ yò 'lẹ̀ẹ̀ dà,  
Ohun wẹ̀rẹ̀-wẹ̀rẹ̀  
Wọ̀n a máa yò 'ni ẹ̀!  
Ìmàdò ibá ẹ̀ bí eḷẹ̀dẹ̀,*

No one gains anything through wickedness:  
There is no gain in being treacherous  
Whoever practises treachery in secret  
Secretly reaps the fruits!  
If the wart-hogs (bush pigs) were to live as pigs do, 15

*A bà 'lú jẹ;  
Erú ibá jọba,  
Èniyàn ibá tí kù kan soşo!  
Èké kò pe'ra wọ̀n l'órúko,  
Ìkà kò pe'ra rẹ̀ n'íkà;*

They would have destroyed the entire city.  
If slaves became kings,  
They would not spare the life of anyone.  
Liars do not easily agree that they lie.  
The wicked never take responsibility for their wickedness. 20

*B'ílẹ̀ ñ gb'òşikà;  
Bí kò gb'olódótó;  
B'ó bá pẹ̀ tíí,  
Oore a máa sù 'ni í ẹ̀!  
Bí abẹ̀rẹ̀, bí abẹ̀rẹ̀, l'á á şèké;*

(But) when the wicked are prosperous  
And the righteous are not (prosperous);  
If the situation continues for long,  
The righteous become frustrated!  
The wicked perpetrate their acts with care as if fabricating the needle, 25

*Ijọ t'ó bá t'òkọ̀ rọ̀ ní pa'ni.*

But whenever they act with the passion of someone fabricating a hoe, is when they can kill,

*Èké ilẹ̀ gbọ̀nwú r'òde,*

Liars plan their evil acts under their roof before implementation in public

*Èké ilẹ̀, èké òde;*

Thus, evil acts planned in secret are revealed in the open.

*Àwọ̀n l'àgádágodo,  
Wọ̀n kò f'inú han'ra wọ̀n.*

They (liars) are like locks  
Which do not reveal their interior parts to each other. 30

*Àdáká-ńdèké,  
Àwọ̀n àgàbà-ńgebẹ̀,  
Wọ̀n a gun ebẹ̀ lát'ákàbà.*

Deceitful people:  
They are the hypocrites.  
They pretend they need a ladder to plant yams on the farm ridges.

*Èmi l'a ñ ẹ̀ n'íkòkò,  
T'ójú Qlórun kò tó?*

What is it that we do in secret –  
That is hidden from God? 35

*Ègbè: Ní gbangba, ní gbangba,  
Ní kedere, ní kedere;*

Chorus: Publicly, in public;  
Very clearly, in the open;

<i>Òrò ikòkò ní gbangba ní ñ bọ</i>	All the secret talk shall be revealed openly	
<i>Ní gbangba.</i>	In public.	
<i>Emi l'á ñ ẹ l'òko,</i>	What work engages one's attention so much on the farm –	40
<i>T'á ñ d'òru 'gànjò;</i>	That one stays till the dark before returning home?	
<i>Àfèké àgbè,</i>	It is only the deceitful farmer,	
<i>Tí yòd jí'su wà lèhìn.</i>	Who intends to take advantage of other farmers' absence to steal their yam tubers.	
<i>Awọ tẹ́rẹ́ bo'nú</i>	The thin skin that covers the stomach,	
<i>Kò jẹ k'á ri'kùn aṣeni l'òhun:</i>	Prevents others from knowing the thinking of a treacherous person.	45
<i>Máa bá'nú sọ, má b'èniyàn sọ,</i>	Keep your secret to yourself; never share it with anyone.	
<i>Èniyàn kò sí mọ ayé ti d'èké!</i>	No one is honest; everyone is full of deceptions.	
<i>Eni a ní k'ó kún 'ni l'èhìn</i>	The person we asked to help rub our back,	
<i>Ó f''ègún s'òwó;</i>	Had thorns in his / her hand.	
<i>Eni a ní k'ó feni l'òjú,</i>	The person we asked to help us blow out the dust in our eyes,	50
<i>Ó f'ata s'ènu!</i>	Blew some fiery pepper into our eyes.	
<i>Eni à ní k'á f'èhìnti,</i>	The one on whose generosity	
<i>K'á mu didùn ọsàn;</i>	We wanted to rely on to obtain and enjoy ripe oranges,	
<i>Kikan ní ñ fun ni í mu.</i>	Gave us sour oranges to drink.	
<i>Eni à bá f'inú hàn,</i>	The one we wished to confide in	55
<i>L'ó j'álàròkiri;</i>	Turned out to be an unreliable person.	
<i>Bí wọn bá ñ bá ọ rìn,</i>	When people walk with you,	
<i>Tí wọn ñ bá ọ rìn girígiri</i>	When they walk with you as your close associates	
<i>Máa bá'nú rẹ rìn</i>	Be careful; confide only in yourself;	
<i>Ìwọ nìkan ọso.</i>	Only in yourself, and yourself alone.	60
<i>Ègbè: Enu wọn l'òfà,</i>	Chorus: They say six different things now,	
<i>Enu wọn l'òje;</i>	They say seven different things later,	
<i>Èké l'òmọ aráyé,</i>	People are deceitful.	
<i>Enu wọn l'òje</i>	They can say seven different things.	
<i>Èké kò j'áró ó mú:</i>	Treachery prevents the indigo dye from fixing in the cloth	65
<i>Àbikú s'olòògùn d'èké!</i>	The unexpected death of a newborn baby makes the physician a liar.	
<i>B'á ò bá p'èké l'èkèé,</i>	If we fail to tell liars that they are liars;	
<i>Bá ò bá p'è'kà n'íkà;</i>	And we fail to tell the wicked that they are wicked;	
<i>Wọn a ní, 'T'awọn t'oba</i>	They will say they are only cooperating with those in position of authority	
<i>L'ó jọ ñ tún ayé ẹ.</i>	To make life worth living for all.	70
<i>Ìkà ìbá là, a bà'lú jé,</i>	If the wicked were to be rich, they would destroy their communities.	
<i>Erú ìbá jọba,</i>	If slaves were to be king,	

<i>Èniyàn ibá tí kù'kan! Ìkà kò fẹ́ k'á rerù k'á sò,</i>	No one would remain alive The wicked person does not wish one to be relieved of one's burden.	
<i>Orí eni ní í sọ'ni.</i>	It is one's destiny that relieves one.	75
<i>Ìkà kò jẹ́ paramólẹ̀ ó dàgbà,</i>	The night-adder snake did not increase in size because of its cruelty	
<i>A n'ìkà ñ'nú bí ibaaka! Ìkà kì í k'oníkà,</i>	It is as cruel as the camel. Cruelty begets another cruelty.	
<i>Ta ní jẹ́ dárò aṣìkà kú? A-takóró wọ'nú àdó,</i>	Who mourns the passing of a cruel person? The one-who-is-small-in-size who takes shelter inside a medicine gourd <sup>11</sup>	80
<i>Omọ rẹ ñ kọ? Aya rẹ ñ kọ? Ágbà t'ó gbín èbù ikà, L'óri omọ rẹ ni yóó hù lé.</i>	Have you considered your children? Have you considered your wife? The elderly one who sows evil seeds It is on his or her children's head that the plant will germinate and grow <sup>12</sup>	
<i>Ìkà àt'adiẹ iràndà,</i>	Cruelty, like the chicken offered as a funeral rite, <sup>13</sup>	85
<i>Wọn kò mà í s'ohun àjẹgbé; B'òjọ bá pẹ tíí, A bá wọn jẹ diẹ nìbẹ!</i>	Is not something that has no repercussion. However late it is, The repercussion will definitely come at some point.	
<i>Eni tí ñ ẹ rere, K'ó múra sí rere í ẹ;</i>	The righteous Should continue their exemplary way of life	90
<i>Eni tí ñ ẹ'kà, K'ó máa ẹ'kà ñsọ; Átoore, àt'ìkà; Ọkan kì í gbé!</i>	Those perpetrating evil acts Should also continue their unethical way of life Both good and evil Neither is without its consequences.	

#### 4. Baba [Father, First Among Equals]

<i>Ìrókò baba igi, Emèrè baba ọbo, Ọlọmọṣìkàtà ni baba àgbàdò.</i>	The African Teak is a leader in the kingdom of trees, The ape is the leader in the kingdom of monkeys, Gap-grained corncob is more valued than other varieties of maize.
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<sup>11</sup>This term is often used in different oral genres as an epithet or nickname for a short person, but used here by the poet to suggest extraordinary magical power.

<sup>12</sup>This means that the evil acts perpetrated by one generation may be avenged on many generations thereafter.

<sup>13</sup>It is customary in traditional Yoruba society that, when a dead body is being transported to the city from the farmstead, the person who is leading the entourage is expected to hold a fowl in their hand while women will be singing the dirge to honour the dead. Later, the fowl will be killed as a form of sacrifice to ensure entry of the deceased into heaven, while the flesh of the fowl will be cooked and consumed by the people. The relevance of the proverb here is that, just as one participates in the eating of the fowl killed for the dead, others would do the same for one later after one's death. In other words, since what goes around comes around, any evil act or cruelty perpetrated will have repercussions.

<i>Òwónrin baba Ifá,</i>	The Òwónrin is the most important of all Ifá chapters, <sup>14</sup>	
<i>Ògòngò baba idin:</i>	The palm-weevil is the leader in the kingdom of maggots:	5
<i>Lágoogòdò baba àdému.</i>	The big bowl has more value than other kinds of bowl.	
<i>Òwàràrà ni baba òjò:</i>	Shower of rain is more intense than other forms of rain:	
<i>Ológbojò ni baba egúngún.</i>	The Ológbojò title holder is the leader of all the masqueraders.	
<i>Kinìún l'òba eranko,</i>	The lion is the king in the animal kingdom,	
<i>Ònì ní òlú odò,</i>	The crocodile rules the deepest part of the river,	10
<i>Òkun l'olóri omi</i>	The ocean is the largest body of water	
<i>Itú l'òkò ewùrè,</i>	The he-goat is the lord of the she-goat,	
<i>Àgbò l'òkò àgùntàn;</i>	The ram is the lord of the sheep;	
<i>Àkukò l'òkò adie;</i>	The rooster is the lord of the hen;	
<i>Òkúnrin l'òkò obinrin.</i>	A man is the lord of a woman.	15
<i>Ògìdán l'olólà ijù,</i>	The leopard is the circumciser, who dwells in the forest,	
<i>Àsá ní òkò eyè:</i>	The kite is the lord of all birds:	
<i>Baálè l'òkò ilú,</i>	A chief is the lord in his/her territory,	
<i>Baálè ni baba àlèjò,</i>	The head of a house has more rights than guests (in his house),	
<i>Èmí àbàtà ní mu odò sàñ,</i>	The stream relies on the surrounding wetlands for its survival,	20
<i>Qláa baba omò ní mu omò yan.</i>	Every child benefits from his/her father's reputation.	
<i>A rí baba gb'òjú ijà lé!</i>	A child may attempt impossibilities in the presence of his/her father!	
<i>Ó l'òun ó se bí Ìyá,</i>	No woman who attempts to be someone else's mother,	
<i>Kò le jò iyá:</i>	Can replace the actual biological mother of that person:	
<i>Ó l'òun ó se bí Baba,</i>	(Likewise) No man who attempts to be someone else's father,	25
<i>Kò le jò Baba eni:</i>	Can replace the actual biological father of that person:	
<i>Ìyá ni wùrà,</i>	Mothers are like gold, <sup>15</sup>	
<i>Baba ni Dínjí.</i>	Fathers are like mirror. <sup>16</sup>	

<sup>14</sup>Ifá is at the centre of Yorùbá tradition, and the *odù* narrative is the vehicle through which Ifá's message is communicated to clients. As part of the Ifá experience, stories are shared concerning a protagonist, the problems he or she faces, and how he or she resolves (or fails to resolve) these problems. As confirmed by Wande Abimbòla and William Bascom, there are sixteen major chapters of *odù Ifá*, Òwónrin Méji being one of them, and 240 minor chapters known as *àmúlù*- or *àpólà odù*, making a total of 256 (W. Abimbòla (1976) *Ifá: an exposition of Ifá literary corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press; W. Bascom (1969) *Ifá Divination: communication between gods and men in West Africa*. Bloomington IN and London: Indiana University Press).

<sup>15</sup>Mothers are described as 'gold' because they are precious. The saying in full is: '*iyá ni wùrà iyebiye tí a kò le fowò rà*' (mothers are precious gold that no one can purchase with money).

<sup>16</sup>Fathers are described as 'mirror' because every Yoruba child is seen as an exact replica of his or her father. This is probably because Yoruba is a patriarchal society.



## B. Obase's original composition mixed with strings of select oral materials

### 5. *Ìkìní* [*Homage/Greetings*]

<i>Àgò o! Àgò o!! Àgò o!!!</i>	Homage! Homage!! Homage!!!	
<i>Onilé mo kágò,</i>	I pay necessary homage to the homeowner	
<i>Kí n tó wọlẹ.</i>	Before I enter.	
<i>Ewúré wọlẹ kò kágò,</i>	A goat that enters the house without paying homage,	
<i>Ni wọn bá mú un so;</i>	Opens itself to entrapment [or leashing or tethering to the post];	5
<i>Àgùtàn wọlẹ kò kágò,</i>	A sheep that enters the house without paying homage,	
<i>Ni wọn bá mú un so,</i>	Opens itself to entrapment [or leashing or tethering to the post],	
<i>Àgbà t'ó wọlẹ tí kò kágò</i>	Any adult who enters the house without paying homage	
<i>Ó dì mímú so!</i>	Opens him- or herself to entrapment [or leashing or tethering to the post]!	
<i>Onilé ní: 'Wọ ta ha nù-un?'</i>	The homeowner says: 'Who is that?'	10
<i>Òìbò ní, 'Who is that?'</i>	The white man says, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Èkò ní, 'Ìwọ ta nì yẹn?'</i>	The Lagos-Yoruba speakers say in Lagos dialect, <sup>17</sup>	
	'Who is that?'	
<i>'Ìwọ ọmọ lèsí yẹn wà?'</i>	'Whose child is that?'	
<i>Ègbà ní, 'Lẹ é iyẹn?'</i>	The Ègbá-Yoruba speakers say in Ègbá dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ìjẹbù ní, 'Lès'óun wá?'</i>	The Ìjẹbù-Yoruba speakers say in Ìjẹbù dialect, 'Who is that?'	15
<i>Ìjẹsà ní, 'Ìwọ yèsí?'</i>	The Ìjẹsà-Yoruba speakers say in Ìjẹsà dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ifẹ ní, 'Ìwọ yèsí ré ní?'</i>	The Ifẹ-Yoruba speakers say in Ifẹ dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ọyọ ní, 'Ìwọ ta'a nì i nì?'</i>	The Ọyọ-Yoruba speakers say in Ọyọ dialect, 'Who is that?'	

<sup>17</sup>Yorùbá is a tonal language, which belongs to the Kwa family within the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages. The speakers occupy south-western Nigeria, and can be found elsewhere – in the Republic of Benin and Togo in West Africa and, as members of the African diaspora, in the Americas. Speakers of the language are divided into many sub-ethnic groups, each with its own peculiar dialect. According to Sope Oyelaran, the dialects of the Yoruba can be classified as follows: West Yoruba (Ọyọ, Ìbàdàn, Ègbà, Ọhòrí-Ìfòhìn, Ẹkí, Ìjìó, Kétu, Sàbẹ, Benin, Ifẹ (Togo), Ìdásà, Mánígi); South East Yorùbá (Onḍó, Ọwọ, Ìjẹbù, Ìkálẹ, Ìlájẹ); Central Yorùbá (Ìlẹ-Ìfẹ, Ìjẹsà, Èkítì); and Northern Eastern Yorùbá (Ìgbómìnà, Kàkàndá, Ìbòlò, Jùmú, Búnú, Ọwọ̀rò, Owé, Ègbẹ) (O. O. Oyelaran (1978) 'Linguistic speculations on Yoruba history' in O. O. Oyelaran (ed.), *Department of African Languages and Literatures Seminar Series I*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife). This classification, according to Lawrence Olufemi Adewole, is referred to as a 'dialect continuum' because the dialects are characterized by a high degree of mutual intelligibility which diminishes with territorial distance (L. O. Adewole (1987) *The Yorùbá Language: published works and doctoral dissertations 1843–1986*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, p. 11). As one moves from one end of the continuum to the other, some phonological, lexical and even grammatical differences can be found in the dialects. Thanks to the missionaries and a formal school system, a 'Standard Yorùbá' language that everyone can understand emerged as a written language during the second half of the nineteenth century.

<i>Ègùn ní, 'Ménùwè?'</i>	The Ègùn <sup>18</sup> speakers say in their language, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Hausa ní, 'Wò ní ní?'</i>	The Hausa <sup>19</sup> speakers say in their language, 'Who is that?'	20
<i>Ìbàdàn ní, 'Ìwò ta nù-un?'</i>	The Ìbàdàn-Yoruba speakers say in Ìbàdàn dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Òru kò m'òlòwò, Ló dá fún 'Wò ta ha nù-un?'</i>	Darkness is no respecter of anybody, Hence, we ask for the identity of people we meet in darkness.	
<i>Mo ní, 'Bí ẹ kò rí mí, E kò mò 'ní?'</i>	I ask, must you see people face to face To recognize them?	25
<i>Bí ẹ kò m'Òsà, E kò j'iyò lóbè? Ìgbà t'ẹ ẹ kò mò mí, E kò gbòhùn mí? Èmi l' Akòwé Akéwì,</i>	Even if you've not been to the sea, Have you not tasted salt? If you do not know me in person, Can't you recognize my voice? I am the (oral) poet's scribe,	30
<i>Èmi l' Akéwì Akòwé. Bí mo tí ñ ké kíké Bèè náà ní mo ñ kọ kíkọ! Èmi a sì máa tẹ l'ótítẹ. Ìkèwì mí kò jọ t'ará oko,</i>	I am the literate poet; As I chant what is to be chanted I also write what is to be written And I print what is to be printed My poetry is not like that of the poets domiciled in the countryside	35
<i>Ìkèwì mí kò jọ t'àgbè; Èkà tí mo bá kà tí kò bá pé, K'ègbè ó bó mí láşọ E sì gbà mí ní filà. Àt'asọ àti filà,</i>	My poetry is not like that of the farmer turned poet <sup>20</sup> If my rendition is incomplete Other poets should strip me naked in public And take away my cap. Both clothes and cap	40
<i>Bóyà wón a p'égbàá mérin, E ó r'ihun pín fún mọriwo. Mo júbà Baálé ilé, Mo júbà Àtèlè ilé. Ojú kí í r'arẹwà kó má kí í!</i>	May not fetch even two shillings To be shared by the initiates <sup>21</sup> I pay homage to all compound heads here present. I pay homage to their assistants. No one ignores a beautiful or handsome person!	45
<i>Gbogbo yín ní mo kí, 'Mí kò l'ólòdì kan!</i>	I greet you all, Without any exception!	

<sup>18</sup>Egun language is spoken in Porto Novo, the Republic of Benin. However, a number of speakers of the language live and work in Lagos State. So, the language is used in Nigeria regularly.

<sup>19</sup>Hausa language is spoken in Northern Nigeria and several other West African countries. Hausa speakers in Nigeria are itinerant traders found throughout the country.

<sup>20</sup>In lines 35 and 36, Qbasa creates an image of himself as a town-based, learned intellectual whose poetic creation (he assumes) is better and superior to those of the countryside-based indigenous oral poets. Here we can see the town-countryside polarity, where a city- or town-based person thinks the countryside bumpkin is an ignoramus.

<sup>21</sup>Lines 37-42 are a well-known saying common among oral poets of many genres to challenge members of their audience not to be afraid to expose their (the poet's) inadequacies during the performance, if they notice any. For more information, see Oludare Olayubu (1978), 'The Yorùbá oral artists and their work' in Oyelaran (*op. cit.*).

<i>B'èkòlò bá júbà, ilẹ̀ a la'nu;</i>	If the earthworm pays homage, the ground will split asunder;	
<i>Ìbà tí mo jú'un t'Ògáà mi ni:</i>	That homage is for my boss:	
<i>Ògbèni G. A. Williams onínúure!</i>	Mr. G. A. Williams, the good man!	50
<i>Editor àgbà n'Ílẹ̀-Èkó – Òun l'Ògáà mi.</i>	The renowned editor in Lagos – He is my boss.	
<i>Oore t'ó se fún mi, N kò ní í gbàgbé láéláé; Òun l'ó kò mi n'isẹ̀,</i>	His good intention towards me, I cannot forget, never; He taught me the art [of the printing press],	55
<i>Tí mo fi ñ jẹun:</i>	That I live on today.	
<i>Ni mo fi joyè Editor,</i>	In my present position as the Editor [of the <i>Yoruba News</i> ]	
<i>Ṣ'Ílẹ̀ Ìbàdàn Mesì Ògò. Ògáà mi d'erù, ó rọrun – Òrun Alákeji, Àrèmábò!</i>	In Ibadan, the great city. My boss has passed on – To heaven, never to return here again!	60
<i>Òrun rere, Òrun rere!! Òrun rere ni t'onínúure!!! È kò ì mò mi? Ojú mi jọ t'álejò ndan? Èni tí kò m'Òkun, m'Òsà,</i>	Rest in peace!! Peaceful rest is the reward of the good person!!! You still don't recognize me? Do I look like a visitor or a guest? Those who have not been to either the sea or the ocean	65
<i>K'ó bojú òrun wò. È se mí ní, Pèlẹ̀, A ti rí'ra kò tó jọ mètá? Àlàáfíà kí ẹ̀ wà bí? Ara yín kò le bí?</i>	Should look up into the sky. Say hello to me. It's been a long time. Hope you are doing well? Is everything alright?	70
<i>Àwọn iyàwó ñ kò? Àwọn omọdẹ̀ ñ kò? Èşin kò ñ j'oko bí? Kò s'òhun tó dùn l'Èyò, Bii k'á jí k'ára ó le!</i>	How about your wife? How about your children? Is the horse grazing? <sup>22</sup> The Èyò-Yoruba say, Health is wealth!	75
<i>À kí ijẹ m'Òrişà n'iyi, A kí'yàwó kò jẹ, A fún un lówó, ó gbowó lọ. Omọdẹ̀ tí kò k'áàrẹ̀, Sisinni ló ñ sinmi.</i>	The dignity of the deity is in its unresponsiveness to greetings. <sup>23</sup> The bride that refuses to acknowledge our greetings Takes our money and disappears. A child that is not lazy Will have enough rest later in life	80

<sup>22</sup>This is a form of greeting mostly used for the kings, chiefs and war leaders in precolonial Yoruba society. During that time, these individuals owned horses as a form of transportation. Every day, each patron's domestic staff would take the horse of the master out to graze, and to 'show' the generality of the people that the patron is well and healthy.

<sup>23</sup>This refers to the carved image of a deity, god or goddess (the *òrişà*) that has human features such as eyes and ears but is unable to use them as humans do.

<i>Eni ti kò kí'ni 'Kú àbò', Ó pàdàni, 'O kú ilé'.</i>	Whoever forgets to say, 'Welcome', Should not expect the person coming in to say 'I'm happy to be back home'	
<i>B'èniyàn kò kí'ni kú ijòkó,</i>	People may not exchange pleasantries with us while we are seated,	
<i>Kíkí Qlòrun ju t'igba èniyàn lò.</i>	Our contentment should be in God-given good health,	
<i>B'ilé lo bá wà o w'òde</i>	If you are home, look outside.	85
<i>Bí yàrà l'o bá wà, o w'òdèdè; B'èhinkùlé l'o bá wà, O w'òkánkán ilé. Á-pè-è-jé Njò bí òkú òrun!</i>	If you are in the room, look at the corridor or the passageway. If you are at the backyard, Look at the entrance to the house. To fail to respond to calls Is to pretend to be dead.	90
<i>È bá şe mí ní, 'Pèlè, Máa wolè, máa rora.' Mo dé o! Mo dé o!! Mo dé o !!! Mo dé wèrè bí eji alé, Mo dé kèsi bí eji àwúrò;</i>	Say 'Hello, welcome' to me. 'Watch your steps' Here I am! Here I am !! Here I am!!! I have come unexpectedly as the late night rain. I have come unannounced as the early morning rain.	95
<i>Mo dé páa-pàà-pá bí eji iyálèta! 'O kó 'şe re dé,' ènu ní í yò 'ni, Njé mo kí gbogbo yín, È kú àwúrò, è kú ojùmò; È kú ináwó àná,</i>	I have come speedily like the midday rain. 'Here you go again' indicates one's displeasure to another person. I offer my greetings to you all. Good morning; and, have a good day I appreciate your generous expenditure of the past day.	100
<i>A kì í kí'ni 'Kú ijèta'.</i>	You do not offer greetings past the second day. <sup>24</sup>	

## 6. *Ìkíni Akéwì II [The Poet's Greetings II]*

<i>Eni tódúró, è kú idúró! Eni jòkòò, è mà kú ikàlè Èrò òréré, è kú àgbò-dìdè! Gbogbo yín ní mo kí, Mì kò l'ólòdì kan!</i>	I greet those of you who are standing! I greet those of you who are seated I greet those of you who are far away! I extend my greetings to everyone, I am not holding anyone in contempt!	5
<i>Mo kí yín t'èşò-t'èşò, Mo kí yín t'ológun-t'ológun, T'àgbà-àgbà ibè mífèfà,</i>	I greet all warlords, I greet all warriors, I am not excluding the six elders that administer the community.	
<i>È kú láálálé, è kú àtìjò! A ti rí'ra kò tó'jò mètà?</i>	It has been a while! We've not seen each other for some time now, right?	10

<sup>24</sup>That is, we should know that everything has a limit, so we should know when to stop whatever we are doing or are involved in: i.e., learn to leave the stage when the ovation is loudest.

<i>B'áa bá ti rí'ni tó pé, "È kú àti," là à kí'ni! Mo dé o! Mo dé o!! Mo dé!!! Mo dé wẹ̀rẹ̀ bí eji alá, Mo dé kẹ̀sì bí eji iyálẹ̀ta</i>	Anytime you've not seen someone for a long time, That is when you say, 'It's been a while!' I have arrived! I have arrived!! I have arrived!!! I have come unexpectedly as the late night rain. I have come unannounced as the midday rain.	15
<i>Mo tún gbé kìnì yí dé – Mo gb'òyin mọ̀mọ̀ dé! À-rí-má-lè-lọ̀ ní Gbági À-kò-padà ní Dùgbẹ̀:</i>	I am here again with my product– My precious product! The product no one can ignore in Gbági market, The product you give a second look in Dùgbẹ̀ market:	
<i>À-rí-yọ̀ Sílè Méjì nínú "Kò ẹ̀!"</i>	The product that makes the buyers part with two shillings!	20
<i>Akéwì ní "Kòbò Méjọ" l'òun!</i>	The product 'The Book of Poetry' sells for eight pence only!	
<i>Àwé ní bí òun bá rà tán, Òun á ra t'ọ̀mọ̀ òun Òun á sì ra t' ọ̀rẹ̀ òun "Yàn sí i," "Yàn sí i" Nú p'alákàrà l'ẹ̀rìn-in:</i>	One buyer says, after buying for him/herself, He/She would buy a copy for his/her child And, also, buy a copy for his/her friend The desire of buyer to buy more Is a thing of joy to the bean cake seller:	25
<i>Nàà ní í pa oníwèè ìròhìn l'ẹ̀rìn-in.</i>	It is also a thing of joy to this journalist.	

### C. Obasa's composition not based on any forms of oral traditional material

#### 7. Àntí Onílà [The Lady with Facial Scarification]

<i>Èyin ọ̀mọ̀ge Yorùbá Onílà k'ílà l'ọ̀jú: Ta n n'ílà-k'ílà? O rí Pélé n'ílẹ̀ o ò kọ</i>	You Yorùbá ladies With useless facial scarification: Where did you get this scarification? You rejected the common Pélé facial scarifica- tion .	
<i>O r'Àbàjà ní ilẹ̀ o ò bụ:</i>	You despised the common Àbàjà facial scarifi- cation.	5
<i>Gònbò n bẹ n'ílẹ̀ o ò wọ?</i>	You put down the common Gònbò facial scarification.	
<i>O rí Kẹ̀kẹ̀ Olówu,</i>	You have the Kẹ̀kẹ̀ facial scarification of the Ówu people.	
<i>O ò pé won ó sá ọ S'Òbòrọ̀ b'onílàjẹ,</i>	You are not attracted to it You whose family preferred not to have any facial scarification,	
<i>A dú máa dán –</i>	You, dark-skinned-beautiful (ladies)	10
<i>A pón b'ẹ̀po rẹ. Kí l'ò wá dé'bí "Èsẹ̀ adìe" Ní kíkọ s'ọ̀jú ọ̀mọ?</i>	(Or) you, light-skinned-beautiful (ladies) Why did you make these useless facial marks that look like the scratch of chicken claws On your child's face?	

<i>Kéhbéri kò jẹ sá omọ rẹ ní Kéké!</i>	The Kenberi people <sup>25</sup> do not authorize the Kéké facial scarification for their children.	
<i>Àgànyìn kò jẹ bu omọ rẹ l'Ábàjà:</i>	The Aganyin people <sup>26</sup> do not authorize the Ábàjà facial scarification for their children.	15
<i>Ìdòko kò jẹ k'omọ rẹ ní Tùrè!</i>	The Idoko people <sup>27</sup> do not authorize the Tùrè facial scarification for their children.	
<i>Òyìnbó kò k'omọ rẹ lójú!</i>	No whiteman or whitewoman will authorize facial scarification for his or her child.	
<i>Nìbo l'o ti gbé'là wá?</i>	What is the origin of this facial scarification?	
<i>Ta ní n'ílà-k'ílà?</i>	Where did you get this useless facial scarification?	
<i>A kọmọ n'ílà mü</i>	You have only given to your child	20
<i>Ti kò sí l'ójúu baba rẹ.</i>	A facial scarification that is unknown to the child's father.	

## 8. *Ìlù Sọjà [The Rhythm of the Military Parade Band]*

<i>Ó torí obìnrin búsekún, Búsekún, búsekún; Ó torí obìnrin búsekún, Omọ obìnrin ní ó. Sá máa yan nişó,</i>	He cried because of a woman, Cried, cried, and cried; He cried because of a woman, You are also born by a woman. Keep marching on,	5
<i>Şe bí okùnrin B'óo bá jáfara, Owó òtá yó tẹ ó. O j'èbà, o jè ràisì, O tún jiyán, o j'àmàlà!</i>	Be like a man, If you slow down, The enemy will capture you. You ate èbà (cassava-flour pudding) and rice, You also ate pounded yam and àmàlà (yam-flour pudding)!	10
<i>O jẹ dódò, o j'èpà, Onijekúje n'ìwo. B'ó o bá n şe bèè jẹ é, O kò lè l'áşọ:</i>	You ate fried plantain and peanuts, You glutton, If you continue eating this way, You may not have any money left to change your wardrobe:	
<i>B'ó o á n şe bèè jẹ é, O kò lè ní sòkòtò.</i>	If you continue eating this way, You may not have any money left to buy your trousers.	15

<sup>25</sup>The Kanuri people live in present-day Borno State, Nigeria. They have facial marks similar to the Yoruba people, but the Yoruba referred to them as Kenberi.

<sup>26</sup>Ghanaians are referred to as the *àgànyìn* by the Yoruba people.

<sup>27</sup>The Idoko, better known as the *àgátú* by the Yoruba people, are found in present-day Benue State in north-central Nigeria. They work as farm labourers among the Yoruba. The poet is saying that, although people from different cultures or ethnic groups may live among the Yoruba, they retain the culture of their home country.

## D. Obasea's poem commenting on socio-political issues of his day

9. *Alásejù* [One Who Acts in Excess]

<i>Alásejù! Alásesá!</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-commands-no-respect!	
<i>Alásejù, Aláseté;</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-easily-gets-humiliated!	
<i>Alásejù, Alásebó</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-oversteps-his/her-bounds!	
<i>Alásejù, péré ní tẹ!</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-easily-gets-disgraced!	
<i>Èsúrú ṣ'àsejù,</i>	The yellow yam acted in excess,	5
<i>Ó tẹ lówò oniyán!</i>	It cannot be used to make pounded yam! <sup>28</sup>	
<i>'Un ó gbẹ ẹ rẹbété</i>	In the carver's good intention to perfect a carved object	
<i>Níí fi í kán pón-ún.</i>	The object may be broken when least expected, if care is not taken.	
<i>Aláwòṣe Ìmàlẹ, a b'ori kènkè!</i>	The passive Muslim (woman) leaves her head covered partially!	
<i>A-ṣe-kó-sú-ni, Ìmàlẹ Adòdò –</i>	The Muslim who wants to test other people's patience –	10
<i>Ó ní, 'Bí wọn kò dúnbú omi,</i>	Refuses to drink water	
<i>Óun kò níí mu!</i>	Until the Islamic confession of allegiance is said! <sup>29</sup>	
<i>Bí wọn kò dúnbú ẹja,</i>	(She) may also refuse to eat fish	
<i>Óun kò níí jẹ!</i>	Until the Islamic prayers are said!	
<i>A-ṣe-kó-sú-ni, omo,</i>	It is the child who wants to test one's patience	15
<i>Ó fọ kèngbè tán,</i>	That will smash the gourd,	
<i>Ó r'Ààfin rẹ í gb'óniṣẹ wá!</i>	And still come home with the king's palace sheriff!	
<i>Bẹẹ, egbèrin l'Emesẹ ñ gbà,</i>	Knowing well that the sheriff charges a thousand!	
<i>N'ijọ aláyé ti dáyé!</i>	That is the tradition!	
<i>Owó kèngbè ñkọ?</i>	Who then pays for the gourd itself?	20
<i>Kékeré wọn</i>	The smaller ones	
<i>Kò ju'gbiwó lọ;</i>	Cost about two hundred cowries;	
<i>Bó bá san diẹ,</i>	If it is a little bigger,	
<i>A d'òròòdúnrin;</i>	It costs three hundred;	
<i>Èyí t'ó tóbi h'nú wọn,</i>	The biggest gourd,	25
<i>Níí pé'rinwó:</i>	Costs four hundred:	
<i>Ágbéfẹyà, Gbèrùmí,</i>	The exceptionally big one, that requires other people's assistance to lift to one's head,	
<i>Àwọn níí tó ẹ̀ẹ̀dẹ̀gbeta;</i>	Costs as much as five hundred.	

<sup>28</sup>Pounded yam is made from cooked or boiled yam that is pounded in a mortar with a pestle to produce a smooth paste that is eaten with cooked stew. Only very few types of yam are useful for making good pounded yam, and the yellow yam is not one of them.

<sup>29</sup>This confession of allegiance, known in Islamic tenets as 'Shadahah', is usually said to Allah and Mohammad his messenger before initiating anything like eating, drinking, meeting, etc.

<i>Aláṣejù n r'oko ètẹ!</i> <i>Bòròkinní àṣejù,</i>	Those who act in excess can be easily disgraced! Noble persons who act in excess,	30
<i>Oko-olówó,</i> <i>Níi m'òmọ lo.</i>	Will not only ruin their wealth, But will also make their offspring look for loans to survive.	
<i>Olòrun Kòkò-yí-bìrì</i> <i>'Un nàà ní f'ojú aláṣejù</i> <i>B'omi gbígbóná!</i>	The-incontrollable-God, Is the only one who can control – Those who act in excess,	35
<i>Èní t'ó bá wu Kòkò-yí-bìrì,</i> <i>Òun ní f'orẹ</i> <i>Aláṣejù lé lówó.</i> <i>A ní k'ẹrú k'ó na ẹrú,</i> <i>K'òmọ k'ó n'òmọ;</i>	Whatever pleases the incontrollable-God – Is what He does With the one-who-acts-in-excess. He may use one slave to discipline another, He may use one freeborn to discipline another;	40
<i>Kí tálákà k'ó na tálákà,</i> <i>K'ólówó k'ó n'olówó,</i>	He may use one poor person to discipline another, He may use one wealthy person to discipline another,	
<i>K'oba k'ó na'ra wọn.</i> <i>Ṣé Kòkòyí nàà ló yan,</i> <i>Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì –</i>	He may use one king to discipline another. It is this incontrollable-God, Who chose the British king –	45
<i>Pé k'ó máa f'ojú àwọn</i> <i>Aláṣejù b'omi gbígbóná?</i> <i>Kí wọn bà jẹ k'àyé mí!</i> <i>Ọba Jámáńí –</i> <i>Òun l'aláṣejù, òun l'òyáyú!</i>	And empowered him To discipline those who act in excess. So that peace would reign globally! The German ruler – Acted in excess, and did not respect constituted authority.	50
<i>T'ó ní òun ó ṣe bí</i> <i>Ọba Nàpó, Nàgìrì Napoleon</i> <i>Ọba nà 'kòkò, nà 'ṣaasùn;</i> <i>Ọba n'awo-n'ẹgbèrì,</i> <i>Ọba n'ẹ̀ṣọ-n'ẹ̀ṣọ,</i>	He wanted to be like King Napoleon, <sup>30</sup> The king who brutalized old and young, He brutalized the wealthy and the poor, He brutalized military leaders,	55
<i>Ọba n'olóogun-n'olóogun,</i> <i>Odindí ọdún mífà sáú,</i> <i>'Un l'ó gbé l'ewón.</i> <i>Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì ní Sẹn-Tẹ̀lì</i> <i>St. Helina</i> <i>Sẹn Tẹ̀lì ewo nù-un?</i>	He brutalized warriors and soldiers, He spent six full years In prison. The British king at St Helena Which St Helena?	60

<sup>30</sup>The poetic ingenuity in his punning on the name of the Emperor Napoleon to create comic effect in lines 52–6 is more alive in the Yoruba original than in the English translation. In the original, *Ọba nàpó, nàgìrì Napoleon / ọba nà 'kòkò, nà 'ṣaasùn / ọba n'awo-n'ẹgbèrì / ọba n'ẹ̀ṣọ-n'ẹ̀ṣọ / ọba n'olóogun-n'olóogun*, Ọbasa manipulates two features of Yoruba oral literature, wordplay and euphemism. He is punning on the verb *nà* (to beat) in Yorubá and the first syllable of the name Napoleon to describe how Napoleon brutalized everybody – the rich, the poor, the old and the young – during his reign. This punning on the name Napoleon is a confirmation of Ruth Finnegan's observation that 'names contribute to the literary flavour of formal and informal conversation, adding a depth or succinctness through their meanings, overtones, or metaphors. They [names] can also play a direct literary role' (R. Finnegan (1970) *African Oral Literature*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, p. 427).



<i>Sen Tẹ̀lì tí ń bẹ</i> <i>L'óri omi òkun réré-ré!</i> <i>Ohun t'ójú Nàpó rí,</i> <i>Kò le rò ó tán láàláé.</i> <i>Ojú 'ẹ̀ rí dúdú, ojú 'ẹ̀ rí pupa,</i>	The St Helena Across the ocean! Napoleon may not be able to recount, All that he went through. He suffered until his eyes turned red, and turned black,	65
<i>Ojú 'ẹ̀ r'áyìnrin,</i> <i>Ojú 'ẹ̀ rí rākòrākò:</i> <i>Nàpó l'ó m'èsè re 'bẹ,</i>  <i>'Un l'ó m'óri re 'lé,</i>  <i>Oba Gẹ̀èsì, Oba tí f'oba jẹ.</i>	His eyes turned glossy light-blue, <sup>31</sup> And humiliated, Napoleon went there (the prison) as a powerful and strong man, But was thoroughly humiliated and cut down to size. The British king, king who installs other kings.	70
<i>Oba Gẹ̀èsì, Òun nàá ní f'ojú,</i> <i>Alásejù b'omi gbìgbóná.</i> <i>Èfúufù gb'ólògì lọ</i>  <i>T'oniyẹ̀fun d'ègbé yán-án-</i> <i>yán-án!</i> <i>Òjiji oba Gẹ̀èsì,</i>	This same British king, Subdued all those who acted in excess. If noble figures (like Napoleon) are being humiliated, The generality of the people in the society should take extra caution! The authority with which the British king,	75
<i>T'ó gbé Nàpó re Sen-Tẹ̀lì,</i> <i>'Un nàá ló gbé Oba Jámáni,</i> <i>Wúlẹ̀mù Kejì lọ yán-án-yán-</i> <i>án;</i> <i>Ni Wúlẹ̀mù lọ sápanó,</i> <i>Sábé iboòrùn oba</i> <i>Hólàndì –</i>	Sent Napoleon to St Helena; Is what he (the British king) also used, To subdue William II, the German leader.  And, William went into exile, He ran to the Queen in Holland for protection –	80
<i>Wilhemina Oba obinrin</i> <i>Ni Hólàndì: òwò re o!</i> <i>Wúlẹ̀mù Kejì, Oba</i> <i>Jámáni! –</i> <i>Sísá t'ó o sá un,</i> <i>O kò s'ayé ire!</i>	Queen Wilhelmina In Holland: I fear you! William II, German leader!  Your exile, Is a disgrace!	85
<i>O ta'fà n'itafà;</i> <i>O ta'fà sókè tán,</i> <i>O yí'dó b'ori!</i> <i>Sísá t'ó o sá un,</i> <i>O kò s'ayé ire!</i>	You misbehaved; And misruled, Only to go into exile! Your exile, Is a disgrace!	90
<i>O 'ò bá mò, o kò sá,</i> <i>K'ó o wá fojú rinjú</i> <i>Gbogbo omoríwò,</i> <i>Kò mà mà s'ibi t'ó gbà ó,</i>  <i>Àfi Sen-Tẹ̀lì.</i>	You need not have gone into exile, You should have faced The consequences of your actions; If you had stayed back to face the consequence of your actions,  You would not have had any safe haven, other than St Helena.	95

<sup>31</sup>The expression in lines 65–6 that Napoleon's eyes 'turned red ... black ... and glossy light-blue' means that he suffered greatly while in prison.

<i>Lábé àsiá nlá t'Ọba Gẹ̀sì, Tii f'ọ̀jù àwọn Aláṣejù b'omi gbígbóná.</i>	Under the control of the British monarchy The king who disciplines Those who act in excess	
<i>Ọba Kòkò-yi-biri K'ò b'ẹnikan ní 'sẹ ipá, T'inú kálukú ni wọn n sẹ. Áwọn Mààdì: Wọn kò d'òko èlòmii rí:  Wọn ni kò tún sí oko mó,  T'ò tó ti Baba àwọn! Àìmòkan, àìmòkan, Nii mú èkúté ilé P'ològbò n'ìjà; Aláṣejù l'ajá-kájá</i>	The uncontrollable-king, He did not compel others to do anything. Everyone is allowed to live as freeborn. The Mahdis Who have not been to other people's farmland Claimed no other farmland  Is bigger than their father's <sup>32</sup> Due to lack of knowledge and understanding, The house rat Provokes the cat to a fight; The useless dog acts in excess	100
<i>Ti n lépa èkùn. Ègbè: Ajá t'ò n lépa èkùn,     Ìyọnu, ní n wá;     Ìyọnu, Ìyọnu,     Ìyọnu, ní n wá.</i>	And, provokes the leopard to a fight. Chorus: The dog that provokes the leopard, Is looking for trouble; A lot of trouble, (The dog) looking for trouble.	110
<i>Aláṣejù l'eni t'ó jeun yó tán, Ti n wá wàhálà kiri. Iye tí yòd rí, yòd pò ju Iye tí ó n wá kiri lọ. Aláṣejù, Aláṣetẹ!</i>	The one who picks a quarrel Intentionally with others, May end up being beaten, Ridiculed, and humiliated. The one who acts in excess, is the one-who-easily- gets-humiliated.	115
<i>Ọun l'eni t'ó fẹ́ sísín kù, Ti n f'owò ra'mú. Lái l'ọ̀ta, láì l'ẹ̀tù, Lái l'Áwòdọ́dà (Machine gun) Mààdì pe Kíṣínà n'ìjà (Lord Kitchener)</i>	Is like the one who brings on a sneeze By tickling his or her own nose <sup>33</sup> Without arms and ammunition, Without the machine gun,  The Mahdis challenged Lord Kitchener to a fight;	120
<i>Kíṣínà, olórí-ogun Ọba Gẹ̀sì. Mààdì gbójú l'òògùn Ó s'omọ àjẹ n'ìkòò; Mààdì gbójú l'ẹ̀ṣin, Ràkunní, t'òun t'ìbaaka;</i>	Kitchener the British war commander.  The Mahdis trusted their ability, They trusted their war tactics, They trusted their chariots, They trusted their camels,	125
<i>Ọ̀pòlọ̀pọ̀ ofà t'òun t'òkò, Ta ní mọ gaári bí egbàà òkẹ</i>	Their many swords and spears, Who can saddle a horse perfectly to carry 2,000 sacks or bags of load? <sup>34</sup>	130

<sup>32</sup>Lines 104–7 are used as an analogy to describe the ignorance of the Mahdis.

<sup>33</sup>To refer to a person as someone bringing up a sneeze by tickling the nose means that the person is picking a needless quarrel.

<sup>34</sup>We are not unaware of the ambiguity in *egbàà òkẹ*, which could be translated as either '2,000 × 20,000' or '2,000 sacks or bags'. *Egbàà* in Yoruba numerals is the equivalent of 2,000, but *òkẹ*

<i>Òpòlopò ibon 'şakabùlà! Bí 'şakabùlà pégbàá-gbèje, Pòròpòrò òkà ní wòn</i>	Many shotguns! Even 1,000 shotguns in seven places, <sup>35</sup> Are no more than ordinary cornstalk
<i>Lójú àwòdàdà! Àtìdìkì ní baba ibon – K'á tò wòn 'ka méta ètù,</i>	When compared to the machine gun! 135 The machine gun is superior to the shotgun – By the time you add three measures of gunpowder to load a shotgun,
<i>K'á tò k'eyọ ọta elégèè! K'á tò fajẹ sí í,</i>	And add pieces of bullet, And add the tinder!
<i>K'á tò f'òpá yọ, K'á tò gún şùşù;</i>	And ensure that the measurement is correct 140 And press everything together with the measuring rod,
<i>K'á tò f'ójú ikú ibon, K'á tò bèrẹ şẹ-ẹ!</i>	And clean the firing spot of the gun, By the time you aim at the person to be shot,
<i>K'á tò na 'wọ yìn ín,</i>	And you take a shot,
<i>K'ó tò 'şáká', ení, K'ó tò 'şáká', èjì, K'ó tò 'şáká', èta, K'ó tò 'gbùlà-àà'!</i>	And, remember, we may misfire the first time, 145 Misfire the second time, Misfire the third time, Before it will fire up eventually, making a killing sound!
<i>B'ó bá kún rere, lálakúlákú</i>	If it (the shotgun) is well loaded,
<i>A rin egbèrin igbónwó,</i>	It may kill someone as far as 800 metres arms- lengths (away from the shooter), 150
<i>Àtìdìkì ñ rin ibùsò mèjì.</i>	Whereas the machine gun can kill a target as far away as 2 miles.
<i>Ìbon sọjà kòòkan, Ti fohùn n'ìgbà igba Kí şakabùlà tò lè</i>	The military gun, That sounds two hundred times, Before the shotgun
<i>Fohùn l'èèkanşoşo! Kí şakabùlà tò pa méfà, Àtìdìkì ti pa irinwó L'ápaşon yán-án-yán-án; Sọjà omọ-ogun òibó –</i>	Will sound just once. 155 Before a shotgun will kill six, The machine guns would have killed 400; I mean kill them, dead, gone forever. Soldiers, warriors of the Europeans –
<i>Kìkì atamátàsé. Ègbè: B'ó dúró, a yinbon B'ó bèrẹ, a yinbon, B'ó dọbálẹ, a yinbon,</i>	They are all good marksmen, sharpshooters. 160 Chorus: Even while standing, she/he is shooting, Even while stooping, she/he is shooting, Even while lying face down, she/he is shooting,
<i>Ìdàdòmì okúnrin, Ìdàdòmì ní, Ìdàdòmì okúnrin,</i>	Great Dahomean male-warriors, Are Dahomeans, 165 Great Dahomean male-warriors.

could refer to either the numeral 20,000 in Yoruba or a sack or bag of cowries. In precolonial times, when cowries were used as a form of currency or exchange for buying and selling, one sack or bag (*òké*) contained 20,000 pieces of cowry shells.

<sup>35</sup>According to Abraham, this is an imaginary numeral to express the idea of many (R. C. Abraham (1958), *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*. London: University of London Press, p. 178).

<i>Àsèhinwá, àsèhinbò, Kìṣinà, ògágun Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì, 'Un l'ó t'ojú oní-Mààdi</i>	At long last, Lord Kitchener, the British war commander, Humiliated the Mahdis,	
<i>Aláṣejù b'omi gbìgbóná Ọ̀un l'ó rán Ààfúà Mààdi! Lọ s'ọrun ọ̀sán gangan. Malam Sàidù Ibhùn Hàyátù – Ó l'oun ó ẹ bi Mààdi!</i>	The ones who act in excess. He sent the Mahdis To their early grave. Mallam Shaykh Sai'd Bin Hayyat – <sup>36</sup> Also wanted to replicate what the Mahdis did!	170
<i>Ààfúà Sàidù omo Hàyátù. Ó mà mà lè yájú? Ó l'áṣejù lówó jọjọ! Ó f'arugògò fà ohun Tí ọwọ rẹ kò tó?</i>	Alfa Sai'd the son of Hayyat.  Is this not waywardness? You are too wayward! You are trying something That is out of your reach.	175
<i>Ajá ñ sínwín kò mọ 'ná?  O gbójú gbòyà tán, O wá ñ digun dìtẹ N'Ìlẹ̀ Hausá? Lábẹ̀ àsià Nlá Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì –</i>	You do not seem to know the limits of your power and strength. You are so bold That you engage in civil disobedience, Among the Hausa (in the northern part of Nigeria), That is under the jurisdiction of the great ruler of Britain –	180
<i>Ọba tí f'ọba jẹ: Tíí fí ojú àwọn ọba Aláṣejù bomi gbìgbóná! Njẹ, s̀inkún, ọwọ tẹ ọ, Ọwọ tẹ ọ, ó d'Ìlẹ̀ Ídà!</i>	The great king who installs other kings, He is the one who can subdue other kings Who act irresponsibly, and in excess of their power. Now, you (Sai'd) have been arrested, Arrested, and exiled in Iddah! <sup>37</sup>	185
<i>O dé'lẹ̀ Ídà tán O kò lọ gbé jẹ? Ó tún di s̀inkún, ó di jùà N'ìlẹ̀ Kàmárù! Ègbè: Ọ̀gúlùtù bọ sín'omi – Tàlọ</i>	While in Iddah You refused to obey instructions and directives. You were transferred once again To Kamaruland! <sup>38</sup> Chorus: Fragment of an old mud wall drops in water, and dissolves	190
<i>Ará rọ ọ wòṣọ Ó bọ sínú omi – Tàlọ Ará rọ ọ wòṣọ. Èyin aláṣejù,</i>	You are subdued You have been overpowered You are subdued. Those who act in excess,	195

<sup>36</sup>Shaykh Sai'd Hayyat (1887–1978) was a Mahdiyya follower in Northern Nigeria. He fought a religious war during his lifetime, but was defeated by the government. For more information on Shaykh Sai'd Hayyat, see A. G. Saeed (1992) 'A biographical study of Shaykh Sai'd Hayyat (1887–1978) and the British policy towards the Mahdiyya in Northern Nigeria, 1900–1960', unpublished PhD thesis, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria.

<sup>37</sup>The city of Iddah is located in present-day Niger State, north-central Nigeria.

<sup>38</sup>'Kamaruland', where Shaykh Sai'd Hayyat was exiled by the colonial government, may be Kamaru town near Jos in present-day Plateau State, north-central Nigeria (Karin Barber, personal communication). A poem like this is further evidence of Ọba's interest in social, religious, political and economic events beyond Yorubaland.

*È mà mà ẹ pẹ̀lẹ̀:*

*Bọ̀wọ̀ Ọ̀ba bá tẹ̀ yín  
Ìpẹ̀ ẹ̀sẹ̀ kò mà mà sí;  
Ọ̀fín kò m'olówó,  
È mà mà ẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀.  
Nítórí ìjà ẹ̀sìn!*

You should be careful:

If you play into the king's hand  
There will be no room for clemency;  
The law will not exempt the wealthy/rich,  
Be careful,  
Avoid a religious war!

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