

# The Yorùbá Social Values in Ọbasá's Poetry

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## Abstract

Among the social values which equip the Yorùbá person are honesty, transparency, accountability, integrity, justice, fair-play, family sense, hard work, and truthfulness. The basic values of the people determine their behavior and what they direct their energy toward. Yorùbá social values have received serious attention from scholars. However, the ideology that inform the social values have not been given a deserved attention. The main aim of this essay is to investigate the Yorùbá social values in Ọbasá's poetry texts – Àwọn Akéwì I-III (1924, 1934, and 1945). The objective of the study is to examine the ideology which inform the social values, and which construct power. The paper also analyzes the extent to which the poet engages the ideology as exemplified in his poetry texts. In addition, the essay highlights the relevance of Ọbasá's works to the contemporary Yorùbá society, and the literary devices employed by the poet to put across his message. The study employs descriptive and analytical methods using a New Historicism theory, which calls for a recovery of the ideology that gave birth to a text. The findings of this study reveal the Yorùbá philosophical thoughts on social values, and Ọbasá's interrogation of the philosophical thoughts, which revere physical strength, wealth, position, children,

and knowledge as power. The study concludes that Ọbasá was a versatile and a thorough-bred poet whose poems call attention to the Yorùbá social values, to deconstruct and redefine power in a way that promote development. The study suggests that Ọbasá's poems be studied holistically, and recommends that the poems should be reprinted and made available for scholarly work in institutions of learning.

### Introduction

Society is a total complex of human relationship. Thomas & Anderson (1977) posit that "the rules of the society are developed from the cultural values. The Cultural values are shared assumptions of what is right, good, or important" (53). These values come from the culture of the society. Thus, cultural values are different from one society to the other. The Yorùbá social values are entrenched in the concept of *ọmọ́lúàbí* (a person of a good character). *Ọmọ́lúàbí* connotes a man or woman who has been trained to *behave properly*, observing and putting into consideration the various shortcomings of others. The social values are used to guide their interrelationship.

The role of literature in analyzing the interrelationship between members of a society cannot be overemphasized. Literature is an imaginative and artistic representation of social and political experience in a given society. It is a fictional portrayal and an interpretation of the views widely held by the people. Whether oral or written, literature deals with all aspects of human activities in the society. All forms of literature have common intrinsic values of instruction, pleasure, and culture preservation. According to Ògúnşínà (2006), both oral and written literature function as a country's symbolic criticism of social values (42). Therefore, through literary works, power use and actions arising therein can be studied.

In the whole phase of literary development in Yorùbá scholarship, Ọbasá is acclaimed an early pioneer in the area of written poetry. He was among the early poets who Fálétí (2009) describes as poem recorders who wrote the Yorùbá traditional poetry in book form (3). Obasa achieved fame with his first collection of poems titled *Ìwé Kínní Àwọ̀n Akéwì* published in 1927. This book was published at a time when the reading public wanted a diversion from *oríkì*. Consequently, Ọbasá's *Ìwé Kínní Àwọ̀n Akéwì* readily became a best-seller. Its success was probably due to the fact that it had no irrelevances and so was produced cheaply (Fálétí 2009: 5). The success of the first book led to the second *Ìwé Keji Àwọ̀n Akéwì* in 1934. Ọbasá's *Ìwé Kẹ̀ta Àwọ̀n Akéwì* and *Oríkì Oríle Àwọ̀n Yorùbá* were published posthumously in 1945.

Among the critical works on Ọbasá is that of Ọlábímtán (1975) which examines language and style in Ọbasá's poetry. Ọlábímtán (1975) asserts that

Ọbasá was a great Yorùbá poet in his own right, saying that “the three volumes of Yorùbá poetry produced by him between 1927 and 1945 had a great impact on the adults who were impressed by the wealth of traditional sayings (including chants and songs) in his poems, and also on the school children who were made to learn some of the poems by heart” (1031).

Even though Akínyelé had published in 1911 his own valuable book, *Ìwé Ìtàn Ìbàdàn, Ìwó, Ìkírùn àti Òṣogbo* which contained a lot of *oríkì*, Lijadu had collected and published Ifá verses, and had helped to publish the poems of such poets as Aríbilòṣòó and Ṣóbo Aróbíodu in 1920, before Ọbasá, none of the earlier writers had made use of as many types of Yorùbá oral poetry in their works as Ọbasá. As rightly declared by Ọbasá himself in the “Ìjúbà” (prologue) to *Ìwé Kínní Àwọn Akéwì*:

Ó di ọdún mọkànlélogbọn nísisiyí (AD 1896) tí mo ti bẹrẹ sí șaáyan kíkójo àwọn ọrọ ọgbọn àtaiyébáiyé ti àwọn baba nlá wa, tí i máa hàn jáde nínú orin, ègè, rárà, ijálá, ipèsà, àròfọ, oríkì, ilù, fèrè àti àgbékà ọrọ wọn...

For the past thirty-one years (1896-1927) I have been assembling Yorùbá traditional sayings which embody the wisdom of our fore-fathers. These sayings are found in songs and in various forms of Yorùbá poetry; ègè, rárà, ijálá, ipèsà, àròfọ, oríkì, and in the language of the drum and the flute. (Translation from Ọlábímtán, 1974b:1032).

Following this assertion, Ọlábímtán (1975) identifies Ọbasá's greatness as a poet. He notes that “his poems are not mere assemblage of Yorùbá sayings, but a unique creation in his use of Yorùbá oral poetic language and style. He employed expertise to ‘produce’ written poetry at a time when many writers of Yorùbá poetry were much influenced by English poetic style” (1034). Ọbasá himself declares that he conveniently mediates between oral and written in *Ìwé Kínní ti Àwọn Akéwì* in his poem entitled “Ìkínní”:

*Èmi l'Àkòwé Akéwì,  
Èmi l'Àkéwì Akòwé.  
Bí mo tí nké kíké;  
Bẹ na ni mo nkọ kíkọ,  
Èmi a sì máa tẹ l'ótítẹ (Ọbasá1927: 2).*

I am the poet's scribe,  
I am the literate poet;  
On the one hand, I write my own poems,  
On the other hand, I help to reduce others' to writing.

Furthermore, I am a printer. (Translation from Oǵábímtán, 1974b: 1033).

Oǵábímtán (1975) categorizes Oǵasá's poems in to three. They are; 1) those which are strings of traditional sayings with little or no addition from Oǵasá; 2) those which have Oǵasá's original composition joined to strings of traditional sayings; and 3) those which are Oǵasá's original composition on selected, traditional sayings (1033). The study analyzes the poems as entity in which various forms of Yorùbá oral poetry; ègè, rárà, ijálá, ipẹ̀sà, àròfò, oríkì, and in the language of the drum and the flute intertwine.

Akínyẹ́mí (1987, 1989, and 2017) is another scholar who has worked extensively on Oǵasá's poetry. Akínyẹ́mí's 1987 unpublished M.A. degree thesis is established on two literary theories which are hermeneutics and structuralism. The study highlights the extent to which Oǵasá draws from the Yorùbá oral poetic materials in composing his poems, it suggests that when assessing Oǵasá as a poet, more emphasis should be placed not only on his use of Yorùbá oral poetic materials but also on his effective choice and combination of the selected oral poetic materials, the message, and the aesthetics of such composition. The study affirms that Oǵasá is very much concerned with the Yorùbá worldview. In his most recent work, Akínyẹ́mí (2017) discusses the social values, the Yorùbá worldview and philosophical thought enshrined in the folkloric material that formed the basis of Oǵasá's poetry. According to him, one major issue given prominence in Oǵasá's poetry is the value that the Yorùbá attach to children: "The child is presented in a number of Oǵasá's poems as the axis around which the entire life of the Yorùbá rotates" (10).

Akínyẹ́mí (2017:10) also identifies the factors that shape Oǵasá as a poet and local intellectual. These factors are: (1) his membership of the socio-cultural group Eǵbẹ̀-Àgbà-ò-tán (Elders Still Exist Society) formed in Ibàdàn in 1909; (2) the establishment of Ìlarẹ́ Printing Press; and (3) the publication of the weekly Yorùbá newspaper, *The Yorùbá News*. However, Akinyemi's work did not focus on how Oǵasá's exposure aids his interrogation of the cultural/institutional practices and ideology that informed the Yorùbá social values in his poems. Also, Akínyẹ́mí's work did not identify Oǵasá's style in interrogating the ideology that attach power to children, wealth, religion, etc., as the factors that inform the social values. Thus, this study analyzes the ideology that informs Yorùbá social values and Oǵasá's commitment to cultural and ideological interrogation on which Yorùbá value system is based. The study is conducted within the ambit of New Historicism Theory.

### **New Historicism Theory**

The proponents of New Historicism Theory include Foucault (1974, 1978, 1979, and 1980), Greenblatt (1980, 1985), Montrose (1989) and Althusser (2012) among others. New Historicism is particularly influenced by Foucault's investigation of the workings of institutions and discursive practices. Adéyemí & Hamzat (2014) and Hamzat (2016) advanced on these scholars' works. The New Historicism Theory holds that all interactions, whether in the public/political domain, or private/social arena, involve the use of power. Power is the ability to control others and particularly to control their thoughts. Individuals and groups who are privileged by virtue of their birth, knowledge, wealth, and strength exercise rights, privileges, and responsibilities. They control, dominate, and oppress others. This creates fear and enmity between groups and individuals. This is made possible through ideology. Ideology is the set of established values held by a social group.

Beliefs and institutional practices that are prevalent in an environment raise the consciousness of the people and are developed into ideology. It could be in form of political programs or manifesto, philosophical orientations, or religious codification. The control may be as minor as constructions or discourse that is used to control, manipulate, or influence the ways people think or see issues. To the New Historicism Theory, religion is an apparatus of power, which constructs, legitimizes and circulates beliefs about received and acquired knowledge. It legitimizes and circulates beliefs about other powers.

The New Historicism Theory sees ideology as a self-regulatory system of thought that sustains other forms of powers such as religious beliefs, and all forms of power. New Historicism favors interrogation of ideologies to redirect society's attention to the powers we submit to. It calls for the society to have a rethink about powers we submit to in the society, be it in physical, political, economic or spiritual forms.

Literature serves as a pedestal for the study of how ideology and institutional practices are constructed and, how power is generated and exercised. How Ọbasá engages in cultural and ideological interrogation in the poems under examination and redirect society's attention to the powers attached to physical strength, knowledge, children and wealth is our concern in this study. The study redirects society's attention to the powers attached to physical strength, knowledge, children, and wealth through Ọbasá's poetry.

### **Analysis**

To Ọbasá, knowledge is power. Adéyemí & Hamzat (2014) as well as Hamzat (2016) identify the role of religion in instituting all kinds of power. The religious leaders are supposed to offer guidance and direction to the people,

but they misuse the power at times. Oḃasá gives his impression of the Islamic priest in the poem, “Onímòlẹ̀” that feeds fat on his followers:

*Bisimilai, Lau; Lau*  
*Ló dífá fun Mòlẹ̀*  
*Abẹ̀wú gẹ̀rẹ̀*  
*To faye gbogbo sefe*  
*Bisi kì ilà lasán,*  
*Bí kò bá layán*  
*A la'ká, a là 'ko*  
*A la 'bi, a là`mòlẹ̀ (Obasa 1934: 9).*

*Bisimilai, Lau, Lau*  
 Divined for an Islamist  
 Who is dressed in a loin-cloth  
 Who feeds on others  
 He does not recite the Quranic verse for free  
 If he does not take pounded yam  
 He takes cooked yam flour paste, he takes pap  
 He takes kolanut, he takes cooked yam flour paste.

In the above excerpt, Oḃasá plays on the syllable *la* to depict the array of food sharing that the privileged leader enjoys. Oḃasá redirects attention to how religious providence gives the religious leaders power to hoodwink their ignorant and innocent followers.

In “Ògbifò, Kéwú Ìbàdàn,” Oḃasá portrays how the Islamic priest uses his knowledge of the Arabic language to subjugate and oppress those who do not understand the language of the Quran. The Quran verse used to open the poem is:

*A-la-mu-, tàrà-kéfa`*  
*Fa-a- la rà bukà`*  
*Ó ní;*  
*Oḷòrun yóò mu' kà sùgbón*  
*Kò ní sò jú taláka`*  
*Àlefí, Ba Sin, Lamu*  
*Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja,*  
*Ó ní;*  
*Eṅi t'á bá julo lai ireje*  
*Mo ju o lo, mo ré o je (Obasa 1945: 32).*

*A-la-mu-tàrà-kéfa*

*Fa-a- la rà búka*

He says;

God will arrest the wicked but

It will not be in the presence of the poor

*Àlefí, Ba Sin, Lamu*

*Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja,*

He says;

It is one we have power over that we oppress

I am your superior, I oppress you.

Ọbasá uses wordplay to give his own interpretation of the verse. He laments that God will catch up with the wicked but it may not be in the presence of the ignorant masses. He coins *íkà* (the wicked) from the syllable *kà*.

In the same vein, Ọbasá refers to the *Ifá* priest who demands sacrifice from clients as oppressors. He satirizes the religious leaders who are forbidden to demand for big animals, they are restricted to goat and chickens. The restriction to pet animals put a limitation on their power.

*Ewùré inú ilé*

*Un Lòrúnmilà íṣe gbá-keke-gbá-keke mó*

*Àgbébo adie toun teyin*

*Un Lòpèlè ile bò mólè*

*Lòrúnmilà le bò mólè*

*Ètu, àgbọnrín, Èsúro,...*

*Nown rékojá ẹran Ifá* (Obasa 1945: 33).

A goat residing in the house

Is the one Orunmila has a domineering power over

A chicken with its eggs

Are materials divining cord is capable of over-powering

That can also be over-powered by Orunmila

Antelope, deer, roe-buck

Cannot be used as sacrifice for Ifa

The Ifa (Orunmila) priest is not likely to sacrifice wild animals like lion, tiger, and hyena. *Sàngó's* power over all trees in the forest does not extend to timber. The Yorùbá proverb *bí sàngó n pàràbà, tí n fàrókò ya, bíi tigi nlá kó* (Even if *Sàngó* has the capability to destroy the *irókò* tree, he does not have power over the big tree) supports this line of thinking.

*Onísàngó mogi eṅ*  
*Óun ó gbọṅ dà sí* (Obasa 1945: 33).

Sàngó priest knows the tree  
 He can sharpen his cutlass for

The Yorùbá people put value on wisdom, knowledge, and smartness but frowns at using one's knowledge or expertise to cheat others. Some people think they are intelligent, and thus cheat in business dealings. The ideology about wisdom is expressed in two poems: "Ogbón" (Obasa 1927: 60) and "Àìgbón" (Obasa 1934: 14). The ploy of deceit is exemplified in the pap-seller whose pap is too small. The buyer who measures the sizes of the pap and drops it without buying is smarter: *adáko, kéré kò gbón bí asówò má rà* (the pap seller who reduces the size of the pap is not as smart as the one who measures the sizes of the pap and ends up not buying [41]).

The Yorubá value and appreciate beauty and elegance as factors that give those who are blessed to have them, power. They paint the picture of the peacock as the king of birds. They see women as symbol of beauty and elegance. However, women who are too conscious of their beauty, and allow themselves to be intoxicated by their beauty are warned in the metaphor of a peacock in the poem "Agánnigàn II" where Òkín, the bird of beauty and elegance is used to represent women who allow themselves to be intoxicated by their beauty.

*Agónnigòṅ obinrin*  
*Ti i gbòko lowo oloko*  
*Singin nibi...*  
*Amo-o-din-mo-o-se iya Olobe*  
*sepon kanrin;*  
*O fobe gboko lowo oloko*

*O gbode tan.....*  
*O se bi ire, bi ire*  
*O gba'le lowo oloko*  
*Agónnigòṅ obinrin*  
*Ni i fi kerewu bapa*  
*Apapa toro-pa,*  
*Inu re ko duro gbomo*  
*Ki igbomo re ipon*  
*Bikose lagidigba;*  
*Omo su si Jojo*  
*Inu okin baje*



*Ọmọ su si Jamọ inu mb'oge*  
*Eleyinju ege*

.....

*A ri ma le lo, a kò pada sehin*  
*A ko pada sehin;*  
*Rora, Agonnigòn, rora...*  
*Bà ti jaye to,*  
*Beẹ layese e je ni (Obasa 1934: 7-8).*

A wild/nagging woman  
 Who snatches another woman's husband  
*Sìngìn níbi...*  
 Who specializes in preparing delicious food  
 Cooks to the extreme  
 Who snatches another woman's husband  
 Having taken over the lobby/hall/anteroom  
 Gradually  
 She takes over another woman's home  
 A wild/nagging woman  
 With unique beatification  
 Physique that is unique  
 Her womb cannot contain a child  
 She does not back a real child  
 But waist beads  
 Baby messes up her clothe  
 The peacock becomes sad  
 Baby messes up her clothe, beauty is angered  
 Elegant lady

.....

Who no man sees and resists  
 Who catches every man's interest  
 Be careful, the wild one, be careful...  
 As one revels or enjoys life  
 So does life entrap one

Ọbasá cautions that beauty intoxicates, and warns women who are too conscious of their beauty to be cautious, as the society that admires them will turn around to vilify them. The society, for no just cause, associates bareness of women to the loose life they lived during their youth. Ọbasá puts this across by using derogatory adjectives like *agonnigòn* for such an elegant lady.

Hamzat (2016) has argued that children are symbol of power among the Yorùbá. This informs their quest for children, and the lack of it is the reason for anxiety in the life of any Yorùbá man. The importance attached to child-bearing is expressed in the following Yorùbá popular sayings *omọ̀ lèrè ọ̀jà/ayé* (The reward of coming to the world/existence is child bearing), *omọ̀ lèrè ìgbeyàwó* (The reward of marriage is child bearing), *orí jómọ̀ ó sin wa* (may our inner head make it possible for our children to survive us after our death). Another Yoruba poet, J.F. Odúnjọ also underscores the importance of children in one of his poems. The lines go thus:

*Ọ̀mọ̀nìgbèyìn olà*  
*Ọ̀mọ̀ lará, Ọ̀mọ̀lẹ̀yẹ ...*  
*Ọ̀mọ̀ ni yòò jogún ewà léyìn wa* (Odunjo 1960: 5).

Children are end product of wealth  
 Children are relations, Children are joy  
 Children will inherit our beauty

The Yorùbá equate children with priceless gems in the following sayings *omọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀ ọ̀sìn*, *omọ̀ niyùn*, *omọ̀ nide*, *kò si láte*, *olówó kò rì í ra*, *olómo, ló layé*, *omọ̀ borí owó* (O child, a gift of the *ọ̀sìn*, the valuable coral bead, the bronze, not a commodity displayed for sale that the rich can purchase. He who has children owns the world, a child is superior to wealth). As a result of this, the quest for children to sustain one's lineage becomes serious. In this type of setting, childlessness is seen as a curse. To have children is to have power. This belief makes children a form of power to those who have them. The idea is to replicate oneself for the continuity of one's lineage. Obasá engages in interrogation of this quest. He stresses that although children are source of power in the society, they may not have such power when they are ill-equipped.

Obasá commits his poem to proper upbringing of the children in "Àkẹ̀jù" when he says *omọ̀ taa kó, ni ó gbélé taa kó, tà* (a child not well trained will put up the house we built for sale). Also, in "Àìgbón", the poet begs for nurturing of children:

*Dìndìnrìn kì i bá wọ̀n lágba*  
*Ọ̀mọ̀ tí ò gbón nílẹ̀ kì í mọ̀ran lóde* (Obasa 1934: 14).

Stupidity does not manifest at old age  
 A child who lacks wisdom from home will not be knowledgeable outside

The Yorùbá moral ideology design to warn the society on proper upbringing of children into proper *omolúábí* (a person of a good character) is exemplified in "Aláìgbòràn" (Obasa 1927: 15-16).

The quest for children is the reason for anxiety in the life of every Yorùbá man, worst still is the quest for wealth that one will bequeath to one's unborn generation. The manner in which some highly placed people in the current political setup amass wealth for their children with no sense of decorum is alarming, and could be counterproductive. People amass wealth for their future generation without knowledge of who will outlive them (Ọbasá 1927: 11). In Ọbasá's view, preference should be on the child upbringing rather than on wealth accumulation for inheritance.

Wealth defines status in human society, and wealth is defined in terms of money. Thus, Ọbasá (1945) demonstrates the power attached to wealth in his poems, "Olówó" and "Owó-Ajé" (9). He eulogizes the power of wealth, by alluding to different names given to money (*ajé, oşin*) in Yorùbá society. These names reiterate the importance of money in:

*Ajé ògúngúnísò*  
*Oşin, omọ a'şębi-d-àre...*  
*Ajé náà ní í sọ ọşán dòru* (Obasa 45: 9).

Money, the mighty  
 Oşin, offspring that turns guilty into acquitted  
 Money indeed turns daylight into midnight

He also emphasizes the evil attached to money through naming, he calls it *oówo*, (the boil) and *òtẹ̀*, (conspiracy) in:

*Oówo tó sọmọràn lónà òfun*  
*Owó ní í jẹ baun...*  
*Òtẹ̀ ní í sojú omolúábí di tẹranko* (Obasa 1945: 9-10).

The boil that afflicts the knowledgeable man in the throat  
 Those are the names that money bears...  
 Conspiracy that turns a humane person to behave like an animal

The power of wealth is put across in naming, personification, and praise poetry. Obasa paints the evil picture of money thus:

*Kò sí òhun tolowó kò le rò*  
*Olówó ní í somi iwẹ̀*  
*Domi àmalà*

*Ohun tówó bá pa tí kò kú*  
*‘Un lẹ pé ká lu lógo?...*  
*Olówó n sòrò ẹnu rẹ n láná;...*  
*Ibi tó bá wẹfúfùlẹlẹ ní í dari*  
*Ní í dari ìgbé sí;*  
*Ibi tó bá wolówó ẹni ní í rán ni lọ (Obasa 1945: 11).*

There is hardly anything a rich person can't think of  
 The rich turns the bathe water  
 In to water for preparing cooked yam flour paste  
 Whatever money kills and does not die  
 Is what is asked to be hit by rod  
 The rich is talking with fire coming out from his mouth  
 Wherever pleases the wind  
 It directs the bush leaves  
 Wherever pleases one's lord he sends one

The power the Yorùbá attached with money is intoxicating as the language of the poem reveals. Money turns guilty into acquit, turns daylight into midnight, and it is the boil that muffles the knowledgeable man in the throat, as he will tell lies when tempted with money. In Nigeria society, learned men and women have been so disgraced. The situation is so bad that the society dis-countenances the opinion of elders with wisdom and experience if s/he has no money. The Yorùbá believe that money is the source of all evils.

The poet reveals that there is the likelihood for the rich to be arrogant, boastful, corrupt, and therefore oppress the less privileged members of the society, who with envy and betrayal, agitation and conflict may accompany these traits. He therefore begs for caution on the part of the rich, and warns anybody exhorting on account of wealth that destruction will follow arrogance:

*Èmi mo lowó mi ni,*  
*Ní í bowó ọmọdé jẹ (Obasa 1945: 9).*

I'm the owner of my money  
 destroys the wealth of a younger one.

Oḷásá demythologizes the power of wealth by revealing that there is a limitation on power wielding a rich person with an illustration of the Yorùbá pawning system in which the rich is forbidden from oppressing his pawn - *ìwofà*. A pawned individual stays indoors and reclines in bed like his master during an early morning rain downpour: *b'ólówó geḷẹṭe, ìwòfà náà a sì geḷẹṭe,*

- a wealthy man cannot send out his serfs in to the rain as he will send a slave  
 - (Obasa 1945: 10).

Ọbasá, in “Ìfẹ́ Ètẹ̀” and “Ìfẹ̀ràn”, queries why people scramble for power and wealth as the two can be counterproductive. If one is wealthy, friends and family will flock around him or her, and they flock away if there is a turn down in that person's fortune.

*Ìgbà tí mo tòṣì  
 Kò sẹ̀ni tó mò mí  
 Mo dolówó tan  
 Gbogbo wọ̀n n' kí mi ní baba  
 Àwọ̀n a-rí-ire-báni-jẹ  
 Àgbọ̀n isalẹ̀  
 Bá a bá kú lówúró  
 A yà lalẹ̀ (Obasa 1934: 4).*

When I was poor  
 Nobody knew me  
 As I'm now rich  
 Everyone is hailing me  
 The fair weather people  
 If one's dies in the morning  
 He departs in the evening

To Ọbasá, human beings exercise power over each other. Individuals and groups that are blessed with physical and martial power are supposed to profit others. Animals that possess physical strength or might are used to illustrate oppressive power as it obtains in the folktale tradition. The size of the elephant, as well as the strength of the tiger and the lion are metaphorically used to depict human power over each other. Ọbasá in the poem “Ètẹ̀,” illustrates the physical power that hawks have over chicks – It smartly hunts down the chicks on the dung hill:

*Aṣá n' kẹ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀, kẹ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀  
 Bí àgbẹ̀bọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀ adìẹ̀ l'ákítàn  
 Nítorí ọ̀sìọ̀ ọ̀mọ̀ adìẹ̀  
 Ó di fì-rì-rì-gbàjà!  
 Ó di fì-rì-rì-ṣà kà!  
 Ó di, sío! Sío! Sío!  
 'Un lọ̀mọ̀ adìẹ̀ í pẹ̀yá rẹ̀  
 Ìyá o! Ìyá o! Babá o!*

*Ó di, kù-rú-ùù...!  
Awó ti lọ!!! (Oḅasá 1927: 15-16).*

Hawk is walking slowly  
Like the chick on the dung hill  
Because of the chick  
Suddenly  
Unexpectedly!  
The chick cries for help  
That the chick beckons at its mother  
Mother! Mother! Mother!  
Before the mother knew what was happening  
The hawk has flown away!!!

Man, represented by butcher has power over the goat, termites have power over anything, be it wood, clothes or paper. The rat is strong and agile in hunting and feeding spree all over the house. In the same vein, man and animals dread the power of the snake's venom.

Strong animals devour weaker animals for survival. However, some weak animals defy the destructive or oppressive power of the strong animals. At that time, their power is useless. So, they should exult less on account of their might. The hawk that hunts down the fast chicken cannot use this power over snail, even though the snail is slower: *àwòdì wògbín kòrò*, (42) - Falcon glares at the snail. Termites' destructive power cannot be exercised on stones and rocks. The poem expresses this with the proverb:

*Àbá lásán ni ikán ní dá, kò le mòkúta  
À-tà-tà-n-kúrá!  
Ènu eyẹ kò le ran òkúta  
Apá èkúté le kò káwùsá, Níbi yíyí kiri ló mọ (Oḅasá 1927: 43).*

It's only a wish, termites have no power to devour the rock.  
It's an effort in futility!  
Birds cannot devour the stone  
The rat cannot over power the walnut,  
it can only roll/toss the wall nut around on  
the ground

The wall nut that stays in a spot defies the rat's power. In the same vein, human being cannot kill toad/frog to prepare the melon soup:

*Ọ̀pòlò rìn fanda,  
Lọ́jú elégusí,  
Elégusí kò gbọdọ yí i l'áta. (Ọbasá 1927: 44).*

The toad walks freely  
In the presence of one skilled in the act of cooking melon  
The melon soup expert cannot use it to prepare a stew

Representation of the physical, economic, and political power of man is done in animal metaphor in Yorùbá folktale. The size of the elephant, speed and strength of the lion are used negatively to depict oppression of the weak masses by the rich, and powerful rulers.

Knowledge and skill are associated with other animals like the tortoise, birds and ants. This often makes up for the smallness and weakness of such animals. In Ọbasá's opinion, powerful men may fall prey to weaker beings just as the weak powerless tortoise often outsmarts the powerful elephant. Ọbasá makes an allusion to the power relation between the lion and the dog in the poem "Tanímẹhìn." The lion is cautioned not to be too confident as the dog can turn around to outlive the powerful lion, and even use the lion skin as his sleeping material.

*Òni la rí  
Ojọ ọ̀lẹ́ kò yé ni....  
Ìgbeyìn ayé kò ju mọ  
Awo ẹ̀ni tí kò tí i kú  
Èyìn kò sẹ, Èyìn kò sunwọ  
Ajá mawọ ẹ̀kùn tẹ̀sùn (Obasa 1934: 3).*

We only witness today  
One is not sure of tomorrow  
No one knows the end of the world  
One who is yet to die  
The end is unpleasant  
The dog sleeps on the lion's skin

To Ọbasá, power has its limitations. He successfully puts the message across by exposing the limitations of power associated with some animals. For example, man cannot devour toad, termite cannot devour stone, and the hawk cannot devour the weak sluggish snail. The tortoise is also useless to the snake in the face of hunger (*ebi n pejò ahun n yan* - the tortoise moves in majestic

strides in the presence of a hungry snake). This is so because its poisonous venom is useless to the weak and sluggish tortoise protected by its scale.

Hunger, as presented in the poem “Ebi”, has control over all powers. However strong anyone may be, no one has control over hunger. The poem reveals that no matter how knowledgeable one may be, one is powerless in the face of hunger. Oḅasá compares hunger with death, and concludes thus:

*Eṅi ebi n' pa ki i kèèwò`  
Eṅi ebi n' pa kò koḱú`  
B'íkú bá tikun,  
Ebi ni i sí i  
Eṅi ikú n' pa kò tó nnkan,  
Gbogbo ayé lebi n' pa. (Obasa 1927: 73).*

One who is hungry does not respect taboos  
One who is hungry fears no death  
If the death closes the door  
It is hunger that opens it  
Limited number of people are being killed by death  
All people over the world feel the pang of hunger

The poem shows that any hungry person will break rules and laws guiding social values in the society. Aberration will happen in the face of hunger. Hunger and death are no respecters of people, no matter their power. There is no medicine or ritual against death (Oḅasá 1927:76).

Political power is another form of power that is used to oppress. People in quest of political power are called to order in the poem “Onijongbòṅ” (Obasa 1945: 11-13). In Oḅasá’s view, everybody desires power without considering the hardship that accompanies it. He uses the parable of the mortar and pestle to explain the problem associated with power. The Mortar struggles to the throne of the imaginary city of Ìgúnýán despite warnings that he should not aspire to such a position. The result is the busy and strenuous exercise that the mortar is subjected to. It is constantly moved about by women, old and young to pound fresh and dried yam, pepper, herbs, and corn.

*Kitikiti- kitikiti  
Ò dòde Ìgódó  
Odó lóun ó jòba  
Nílu Ìgúnýán...  
Odó jòba jòba tán  
Odó kò rayè sinmi mo,*



*Bá ò ródó*  
*A kòlè gúnnyán*  
*Bá ò ródó*  
*Obínrin kò gògì...*  
*Yídó wá, yídó wa*  
*Aata n' todó lójú*  
*Aata n' todó n'ímú*  
*Aata n' todó l'ènu...*  
*Nwon gódó tí-tí*  
*Odó san létí*  
*Odódalu, Odó ya... (Obasa 1945: 11).*

Struggling upward-downward  
 It lands in Igodo's compound  
 The mortal says he wishes to be crowned a king  
 In the city of Igunyan  
 The mortal succeeded being crowned a king  
 Thereafter, he has no peace of mind anymore  
 Without the mortal  
 Women cannot pound yam  
 Without mortal  
 Women cannot pound pap  
 Mortal's moving up and down  
 Pepper is peppering the mortal in the eyes  
 Pepper is peppering the mortal in the nose  
 Pepper is peppering the mortal in the mouth  
 The mortal is pounded  
 Till it cracks  
 The mortal is completely destroyed

Ọbasá employs personification to paint a picture of how the once strong mortar degenerates in physical strength like a human being. Thus, any one in quest of power is warned to be cautious. If human is conscious of these limitations, s/he will heed the warning of Foucault (1974) that power is not synonymous with oppression. He / She will boast less, knowing that pride precedes fall, and care more for the welfare of others. Negative use of power can only breed jealousy, envy and betrayal, agitation and conflict. This is what happens in the animal metaphors that Obasa employed in one of his poems in which chickens are revealed as rejoicing at the demise of members of hawk's family. In the same way, the goat dreams of the butcher's death:

*Kòlòkòlò ìbá kú,  
 Adìẹ̀ kò sunkún,  
 Ewùrẹ̀ walápata,  
 Bì kó kú, bì kó kú...* (Oḅasá 1927: 42).

A fox's death  
 Will not call for hen's mourning  
 The thought of the goat to a butcher  
 Is that of death

The Yorùbá attach value to the welfare of individuals and groups. Oḅasá calls attention to values as little as greetings in “Ìkìní” (Oḅasá 1927: 62) as an agency for securing peace and harmony. Enquiries are made about the physical, psychological, and economic welfare of people being greeted, and it is an honor that should be reciprocated. In the contemporary period, new development reveals that the era of being one's brother's keeper has gone, insensitivity to each other's plight reigns. The Yorùbá social value of caring for and sharing with others is being ignored nowadays. The snail family is used to illustrate this in the poem entitled “Ayé Ọ̀dájú” (Oḅasá 1927: 62). In the poem, the whole lot of snail family; *ìpere*, *ìlákò*, and *ìsawùrú* are being swept away by flood, and yet all claim not to know. Human beings should be concerned about the quality of life of others in Oḅasá's view.

### Conclusion

This study has examined the Yorùbá ideology about power, and shows that ideology informs views expressed in the society on social values. The findings reveal that the Yoruba's ideology about power dictates their views about life. Oḅasá's poetry texts contain intellectual and philosophical construct, explaining social conditions and beliefs about life in the Yoruba society. His poems reveal that power has nothing to do with birth or wealth, physical strength or might, beauty and elegance. Power is achieved through wisdom and skill. Oḅasá, in line with Foucault's (1974) call engages in cultural and ideological interrogation in the poems under examination to prove that power is not synonymous with oppression. In Foucault's view, power is an action exercised for the good of the people.

The essay concludes that Oḅasá was a versatile and a thorough-bred Yorùbá poet whose poems call attention to the Yorùbá social values, deconstruct and redefine power in a way that engender or promote development. Oḅasá's interrogation of the ideological values in poetic language reveals that he conceptualizes power in physical, economic, as well as in socio-political terms.

He, however, notes that power is not measured by any of these but by concern about the quality of life of others. The essay suggests that Ọbasá's poems be studied holistically, and recommends that the poems should be reprinted and made available for additional critical assessment.

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