The Yorùbá Social Values in Òbasá’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 Òbasá’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 Òbasá’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 Òbasá’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 ọmọlùàbí (a person of a good character). Ọmọlùàbí 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 Ogunshina (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 Àwọn 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 Àwọn 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 Kejì Àwọn Akéwì in 1934. Òbásá’s Ìwé Kejì Àwọn Akéwì and Oríkì Oríle Àwọn Yorùbá were published posthumously in 1945.

Among the critical works on Ọbasá is that of Olábímtán (1975) which examines language and style in Ọbasá’s poetry. Olábímtán (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, Ìkírun àti Òṣòbọ̀ Aróbiodu 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 mọkànlé-ògbọn nísìiyí (AD 1896) tí mo ti bẹrẹ sí ọsáyan kikọjo àwọn ọrọ ọgbọn àtaiyèbáiyè ti àwọn baba nlá wa, tí i maa hàn jáde nínú orin, ègè, rará, ijálá, ọpẹsà, àrọfọ, oríkì, ọlù, fèrè àti ìgbékà 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, rará, ijálá, ọpẹsà, àrọfọ, oríkì, and in the language of the drum and the flute. (Translation from Òlábímtán, 1974b:1032).

Following this assertion, Òlábímtán (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 “Ìkíni”:

Èmi l’Akòwé Akéwì,
Èmi l’Akéwì Akòwé.
Bí mo ti nké kiké;
Bẹ̀ na ni mo nkọ kikọ,
Èmi a sì maa tẹ̀ lọ́tité (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 Olabímtán, 1974b: 1033).

Olabímtán (1975) categorizes Òbasá's poems in to three. They are; 1) those which are strings of traditional sayings with little or no addition from Òbasá; 2) those which have Òbasá's original composition joined to strings of traditional sayings; and 3) those which are Òbasá'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, ipèṣà, àròfọ, oríkì, and in the language of the drum and the flute intertwine.

Akínýemí (1987, 1989, and 2017) is another scholar who has worked extensively on Òbasá's poetry. Akínýemí'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 Òbasá draws from the Yorùbá oral poetic materials in composing his poems, it suggests that when assessing Òbasá 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 Òbasá is very much concerned with the Yorùbá worldview. In his most recent work, Akínýemí (2017) discusses the social values, the Yorùbá worldview and philosophical thought enshrined in the folkloric material that formed the basis of Òbasá's poetry. According to him, one major issue given prominence in Òbasá's poetry is the value that the Yorùbá attach to children: “The child is presented in a number of Òbasá's poems as the axis around which the entire life of the Yorùbá rotates” (10).

Akínýemí (2017:10) also identifies the factors that shape Òbasá as a poet and local intellectual. These factors are: (1) his membership of the socio-cultural group Ègbè-Àgbà-ò-tán (Elders Still Exist Society) formed in Ibadàn in 1909; (2) the establishment of Èlare Printing Press; and (3) the publication of the weekly Yorùbá newspaper, The Yorùbá News. However, Akínýemí's work did not focus on how Òbasá's exposure aids his interrogation of the cultural/institutional practices and ideology that informed the Yorùbá social values in his poems. Also, Akínýemí's work did not identify Òbasá'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 Òbasá's commitment to cultural and ideological interrogation on which Yorùbá value system is based. The study is conducted within the ambit of New Historicism Theaory.
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. Adeyemi & 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 Obasá 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 Obasá’s poetry.

Analysis

To Obasá, knowledge is power. Adéyemi & 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. Obasá gives his impression of the Islamic priest in the poem, “Onímọ̀le” that feeds fat on his followers:

*Bisimilai, Lau; Lau
Lo díja fun ‘Mòle
Abèwu gerè
To faye gbogbo sefè
Bisi ki íla lasán,
Bí kò bà layán
A la’kà, a la ‘kọ
A la ‘bi, a la’mòla* (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, Obasá plays on the syllable *la* to depict the array of food sharing that the privileged leader enjoys. Obasá redirects attention to how religious providence gives the religious leaders power to hoodwink their ignorant and innocent followers.

In “Ọgbifọ̀ Kéwú Ìbádàn,” Obasá 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-, tārā-kèfà
Fa-a- la rà bùkà
O ní;
Olórún yòo mú’ ka sùgbón
Kò ní só jù tálákà
Alefi, Ba Sin, Lamu
Nugunda, Mimú, Ra, Ja,
O ní;
Èni tú bá jùlo l’ái irejè
Mo jù o lo, mo ré o je* (Obasa 1945: 32).
A-la-mu-tàrà-kefà
Fa-a-la rà bùkà
He says;  
God will arrest the wicked but  
It will not be in the presence of the poor  
Àlefi, 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 ika (the wicked) from the syllable ka.

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.

Ewúrẹ inu ńle  
Un  Lórúnmílà ńse gbá-kekẹ-gbá-kekẹ ńmọ  
Àgbébo adié toun ńteyin  
Un Lópele ńle ńbọ mọlé  
Lórúnmílà le ńbọ mọlé  
Etu, àgbonrin, Èsùro,...  
Nowñ rekojá 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 ñàngó ń pàràbà, tí n fàrókò ya, bíi tigi ńlà kọ (Even if Sàngó has the capability to destroy the ìrókò tree, he does not have power over the big tree) supports this line of thinking.
Onísàngó mogi en
Óun 'o gbọn dà si  (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: “Ogbọn” (Obasa 1927: 60) and “Aígbọn” (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 gbọn bí asówọ mà 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 Yoruba 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 “Agánnigan II” where Òkín, the bird of beauty and elegance is used to represent women who allow themselves to be intoxicated by their beauty.

*Agonnégon obinrin*
*Tí i gbọko lowọ olọko*
*Singin nibi...*
*Amo-o-din-mo-ô-se iya Olọbẹ*
*sëpon kanrin;*
*O f'òbe gbọko lowọ olọko*

*O gbọdẹ tan.....*
*O sè bi ire, bi ire*
*O gbà'le lowọ olọko*
*Agonnégon obinrin*
*Ní i fí kerewu b'apa*
*Apapa toro-pa,*
*Inu re ko duro gbọmọ*
*Ki igbọmọ re ipọn*
*Bikoše lagidigba;*
*Omo su si Jojo*
*Inu ọkín baje*
Omo su si Jамо inu mbòge
Eleyinju ege

........
A ri ma le lo, a ko pada sehìn
A ko pada sehìn;
Rọra, Agọnnigọn, rọra...
Bà ti jaye to,
Bẹẹ l'ayeṣe e je ni (Obasa 1934: 7-8).

A wild/nagging woman
Who snatches another woman's husband
Singìn nibi...
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

Obasa cáutions 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. Obasa puts this across by using derogatory adjectives like agọnnigọn for such an elegant lady.
Hamzat (2016) has argued that children are symbol of power among the Yoruba. This informs their quest for children, and the lack of it is the reason for anxiety in the life of any Yoruba man. The importance attached to child-bearing is expressed in the following Yoruba popular sayings *omo lèrè ojà/ayé* (The reward of coming to the world/existence is child bearing), *omo lèrè igbeýawó* (The reward of marriage is child bearing), *orí já o sóin wa* (may our inner head make it possible for our children to survive us after our death). Another Yoruba poet, J.F. Odunjo also underscores the importance of children in one of his poems. The lines go thus:

*Ọmọnìgbeyìn ọlá*

*Ọmọ lara, Ọmọleye …*

*Ọmọ ni yóò jogún ewà lèyìn wa* (Odunjo 1960: 5).

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

The Yoruba equate children with priceless gems in the following sayings *omo ômọ ọsìn, ọmọ niyìn, ọmọ ńidẹ, kọ sí látẹ, olówó kò rí i ra, olóọmọ ló layé, ọmọ bori ówó* (O child, a gift of the ọsìn, 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. Obasa 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.

Obasa commits his poem to proper upbringing of the children in “Àkéju” when he says *omo taa kó ni ó gbélé táa kò tà* (a child not well trained will put up the house we built for sale). Also, in “Àgbón,” the poet begs for nurturing of children:

*Dìndìnrin kí i bá won lágbá*

*Omo tí o gbón nílé kí i mọran 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 chidden into proper omolùàbì (a person of a good character) is exemplified in “Alagbọ̀ran” (Obasà 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 (Obasa 1927: 11). In Obasa’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, Obásá (1945) demonstrates the power attached to wealth in his poems, “Olòwo” and “Owo-Ajè” (9). He eulogizes the power of wealth, by alluding to different names given to money (aje, oṣàn) in Yorùbá society. These names reiterate the importance of money in:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aje ogúngúníṣò} \\
Oṣàn, omo a-ṣèbi-d-àre... \\
Aje naa ní i sọ oṣàn dòru (Obasa 45: 9).
\end{align*}
\]

Money, the mighty
Oṣìn, 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 Òte (conspiracy) in:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Oówo tó sòmoràn lónà òfun} \\
Owó ní i jè bàun... \\
Òte ní i sojú omolùàbì di téranko (Obasa 1945: 9-10).
\end{align*}
\]

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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ko si ohun tolowo ko le rò} \\
Olòwo ní i somi iwè \\
Domi àmálà
\end{align*}
\]
Ohun tówó bá pa tí kò kú
‘Un le pé ká lu logo?...
Olówo ní sòrò nu ònú rẹ̀ n lana;...
Ibi tó bá wẹfúnfúnle ní i dāri
Ní i dāri ọgbẹ̀ sì;
Ibi tó bá wọlọwọ ẹni ní i rán ní 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 discountenances 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:

Èmí mọ lowó mi ní,
Ní i bowó ọmọdè je (Obasa 1945: 9).

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

Obasá 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 - iwofà. A pawned individual stays indoors and reclines in bed like his master during an early morning rain downpour: boltówó geleṣe, iwofà náà a si geleṣe,
- a wealthy man cannot send out his serfs in to the rain as he will send a slave - (Obasa 1945: 10).

Obasa, in “Ife Ète” and “Ifeàn’, 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.

\[
egin{align*}
     Ìgbà tì mo toṣì \\
     Ko sèní tó mò mí \\
     Mo dolowò tan \\
     Gbogbo wọn n’ki mi ní baba \\
     Awoṣ a-ri-ire-bani-jẹ \\
     Àgbọ̀n ọsałè \\
     Ba a ba ku lówùrò \\
     A yà làlè (Obasa 1934: 4).
\end{align*}
\]

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 Obasa, 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. Obasa in the poem “Ète,” illustrates the physical power that hawks have over chicks – It smartly hunts down the chicks on the dung hill:

\[
egin{align*}
     Àṣá n’kèrègbè, kèrègbè, \\
     Bi ìgbègbọ ọmọ adié ọkítàn \\
     Nitorì osíò ọmọ adié \\
     O dì fì-ri-ri-gbàja! \\
     O dì fì-ri-ri-sà kà! \\
     O dì, sìo! Sìo! Sìo! \\
     ‘Un lọmọ adié i pe’ya rẹ̀ \\
     Ìyà o! Ìyà o! Baba o!
\end{align*}
\]
Ó dì, kù-rú-uùu...!
Awó ti lọ!!! (Ọbasá 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 kòró (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 mòkuà
À-tà-tà-n-ùrà!
Enú eyé kò le ran òkúta
Apá èkútè le kò káwùsá, Ìbì yìí kírí ló mọ (Ọbasá 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:
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Ópọlọ́ rin fanda,
Lojú élégusi,
Élégusi kò gbọ́dọ́ yí i látà. (Obasa 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 Òbasá’s opinion, powerful men may fall prey to weaker beings just
as the weak powerless tortoise often outsmarts the powerful elephant. Òbasá
makes an allusion to the power relation between the lion and the dog in the
poem “Tānìmèhin.” 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.

Ónì là rì
Ojọ́ ọ́lă kò yé́ ní....
Ìgbẹ́yìn aye kò jù mọ
Awo ènì tì kò tì i kú
Èyìn kò sè, Èyìn kò sunwọ́n
Àjá mawọ ẹkùn tèṣùn (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 Òbasá, power has its limitations. He successfully puts the message across
by exposing the limitations of power associated with some animals. For ex-
ample, 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 (ẹbì n pejọ̀ 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. Obasá compares hunger with death, and concludes thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{E} & \text{n} \ e \text{bi} \ n \ p \text{a} \ k \ i \ i \ k \text{èe} \text{w} \text{ò} \\
\text{E} & \text{n} \ e \text{bi} \ n \ p \text{a} \ k \ o \ k \text{k} \text{ù} \\
B' & \text{i} \text{k} \text{ú} \text{ b} \text{a} \ t \text{k} \text{ù} \text{n} \\
E & \text{b} \text{i} \ n \ i \ s \ i \ i \\
\text{E} & \text{n} \ i \ k \text{ù} \ n \ p \ k \text{o} \ t \ö \ n \text{k} \text{àn} \\
Gbogbo \ a \text{y} \text{è} \text{l} \text{e} \text{b} \text{i} \ n \ p \ \text{a}. \ (\text{Obasá} \ 1927: \text{73}).
\end{align*}
\]

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 (Obasá 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 “Onijongbòn” (Obasá 1945: 11-13). In Obasá’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 Ìgùnyà 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
O dòde ìgôdò
Odó lóùn ó jòba
Nílù ìgùnyành...
Odó jòba jòba tán
Odó kò raye sinmi mò
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

Obasa 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 reveled as rejoicing at the demise of members of hawk's family. In the same way, the goat dreams of the butcher’s death:
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. Obasá calls attention to values as little as greetings in “Ìkíní” (Obasá 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 “Aye Òdájú” (Obasá 1927: 62). In the poem, the whole lot of snail family; ìpere, ìlákọ, 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 Obasá’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. Obasá’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. Obasá, 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 Obasá 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. Obasa’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 Qbasá’s poems be studied holistically, and recommends that the poems should be reprinted and made available for additional critical assessment.

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