

## Two 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 of the context of literary

<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.

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.

### Ìkíni [Homage/Greetings]

<i>Àgò o! Àgò o!! Àgò o!!! Onilé mo kágò, Kí n tó wọlé. Ewùrẹ wọlé kò kágò, Ní wọn bá mú un so;</i>	Homage! Homage!! Homage!!! I pay necessary homage to the homeowner Before I enter. A goat that enters the house without paying homage, Opens itself to entrapment [or leashing or tethering to the post];	5
<i>Àgùtàn wọlé kò kágò, Ní wọn bá mú un so,</i>	A sheep that enters the house without paying homage, Opens itself to entrapment [or leashing or tethering to the post],	
<i>Àgbà t'ó wọlé tí kò kágò Ó dì mímú so!</i>	Any adult who enters the house without paying homage 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>Òìbó ní, 'Who is that?'</i>	The white man says, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Èkò ní, 'Ìwọ ta ní yẹn?'</i>	The Lagos-Yoruba speakers say in Lagos dialect, <sup>5</sup> 'Who is that?'	

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

<sup>5</sup>Yoruba 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, Ibàdàn, Ègbá, Ọhọri-Ìfòhin, Şakí, Ijío, Kétu, Sàbe, Benin, Ifẹ (Togo), Idásà, Mánigì); South East Yorùbá (Oǹdó, Ọwọ, Ijẹ̀bù, Ikálẹ̀, Ilàjẹ); Central Yoruba (Ilẹ̀-Ifẹ̀, Ijẹ̀sà, Èkítì); and Northern Eastern Yoruba (Ìgbómìnà, Kàkàndá, Ìbòlò, Jùmú, Búnú, Ọwọ̀rò, Owé, Ègbẹ̀) (O. O. Oyelaran (1978) 'Linguistic speculations on Yoruba history' in O. O. Oyelaran (ed.), *Department of African Languages and Literatures Seminar Series I. Ile-Ifẹ, Nigeria: University of Ifẹ*). This classification, according to Lawrence Olufẹmi Adewọle, 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. Adewọle (1987) *The*

<i>Ìwọ ọmọ lèsì yẹn wà?</i> <i>Ègbá ní, 'Lè é iyèn?'</i>	'Whose child is that?' The Ègbá-Yoruba speakers say in Ègbá dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ìjèbú ní, 'Lès'óun wá?'</i>	The Ìjèbú-Yoruba speakers say in Ìjèbú dialect, 'Who is that?'	15
<i>Ìjèsà ní, 'Ìwọ yèsì?'</i>	The Ìjèsà-Yoruba speakers say in Ìjèsà dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ifẹ ní, 'Ìwọ yèsì 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?'	
<i>Ègùn ní, 'Ménùwè?'</i>	The Ègùn <sup>6</sup> speakers say in their language, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Hausa ní, 'Wò ní ní?'</i>	The Hausa <sup>7</sup> speakers say in their language, 'Who is that?'	20
<i>Ìbàdàn ní, 'Ìwọ ta nù-un?'</i>	The Ìbàdàn-Yoruba speakers say in Ìbàdàn dialect, 'Who is that?'	
<i>Ọru kò m'òlòwò,</i> <i>Ló dá fún 'Wọ 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 rì mí,</i> <i>È kò mò 'ní?</i>	I ask, must you see people face to face To recognize them?	25
<i>Bí ẹ kò m'Ọsà,</i> <i>È kò j'iyò lóbè?</i> <i>Ìgbà t'ẹ ẹ kò mò mí,</i> <i>È kò gbòhùn mí?</i> <i>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.</i> <i>Bí mo ti ñ ké kíké</i> <i>Bẹẹ nàà nì mo ñ kọ kíkọ!</i> <i>Èmi a sí máa tẹ l'ótítẹ.</i> <i>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'agbè;</i> <i>Èkà tí mo bá kà tí kò bá pé,</i> <i>K'ègbè ó bó mí lásọ</i> <i>È sí gbà mí ní filà.</i> <i>Àt'asọ àti filà,</i>	My poetry is not like that of the farmer turned poet <sup>8</sup> If my rendition is incomplete Other poets should strip me naked in public And take away my cap. Both clothes and cap	40

*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.

<sup>6</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>7</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>8</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.

<i>Bóyá wọ́n a p'ẹ̀gbàà m̀erín, È ọ́ r' ihun pín fún m̀oríwo. Mo jùbà Baálé ilé, Mo jùbà Àtẹ̀lẹ̀ ilé. Ojú kí í r' ̀arẹ̀wà kó má kí í!</i>	May not fetch even two shillings To be shared by the initiates <sup>9</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 ni mo kí, 'Mi kò l'ólódì kan! B'èkòlò bá jùbà, ilẹ̀ a la'nu;</i>	I greet you all, Without any exception! If the earthworm pays homage, the ground will split asunder;	
<i>Ìbà tí mo jù'un t'Ògàà mi ni: Ògbèni G. A. Williams onínúure!</i>	That homage is for my boss: Mr G. A. Williams, the good man!	50
<i>Editor àgbà n'Ìlé-Èkó – Òun l'Ògàà mi. Oore t'ó se fún mi, N kò ní í gbàgbé láéláé; Òun l'ó kọ̀ mi n'isẹ̀,</i>	The renowned editor in Lagos – He is my boss. 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: Ni mo fi joyè Editor,</i>	That I live on today. In my present position as the Editor [of the <i>Yoruba News</i> ]	
<i>Ş'Ìlé Ìbàdàn Mesì Ògò. Ògàà mi d'èrù, ó rọ̀run – Òrun Alákeji, Àrẹ̀mábò!</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 mí? Ojú mi jọ t'àlejò 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 bojù òrun wò. È se mí ní, Pèlẹ̀, A ti rí'ra kò tó jọ̀ m̀eta? Alàáfùà kí e 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 kọ̀? Àwọn omọdè ñ kọ̀? 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>10</sup> The Èyò-Yoruba say, Health is wealth!	75

<sup>9</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 Yoruba oral artists and their work' in Oyelaran (*op. cit.*).

<sup>10</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.

<i>À kí ijé m'Órìsà n'iyì,</i>	The dignity of the deity is in its unresponsiveness to greetings. <sup>11</sup>	
<i>A kí'yàwó kò jé,</i>	The bride that refuses to acknowledge our greetings	
<i>A fún un lówó, ó gbowó lo.</i>	Takes our money and disappears.	
<i>Qmòdè tí kò k'áààrè,</i>	A child that is not lazy	
<i>Sísinmi ló ñ sinmi.</i>	Will have enough rest later in life	80
<i>Èní tí kò kí'ni 'Kú àbò',</i>	Whoever forgets to say, 'Welcome',	
<i>Ó pàdàni, 'O kú ilé'.</i>	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 lo.</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 yàrá l'o bá wà, o w'òdèdè;</i>	If you are in the room, look at the corridor or the passageway.	
<i>B'èhinkùlè l'o bá wà,</i>	If you are at the backyard,	
<i>O w'òkánkán ilé.</i>	Look at the entrance to the house.	
<i>Á-pè-è-jé</i>	To fail to respond to calls	
<i>Ñjò bí òkú òrun!</i>	Is to pretend to be dead.	90
<i>È bá ʂe mí ní, 'Pèlè,</i>	Say 'Hello, welcome' to me.	
<i>Máa wolè, máa rora.'</i>	'Watch your steps'	
<i>Mo dé o! Mo dé o!! Mo dé o !!!</i>	Here I am! Here I am !! Here I am!!!	
<i>Mo dé wèrè bí eji alè,</i>	I have come unexpectedly as the late night rain.	
<i>Mo dé kèsì bí eji àwùrò;</i>	I have come unannounced as the early morning rain.	95
<i>Mo dé páa-pàà-pá bí eji iyálèta!</i>	I have come speedily like the midday rain.	
<i>'O kó ʂe rẹ dé, 'enu ní í yọ 'ni,</i>	'Here you go again' indicates one's displeasure to another person.	
<i>Ñjè mo kí gbogbo yín,</i>	I offer my greetings to you all.	
<i>È kú àwùrò, ẹ kú ojùmò;</i>	Good morning; and, have a good day	
<i>È kú ináwó àná,</i>	I appreciate your generous expenditure of the past day.	100
<i>A kí í kí'ni 'Kú ijeta'.</i>	You do not offer greetings past the second day. <sup>12</sup>	

### Aláʂejù [One Who Acts in Excess]

<i>Aláʂejù! Aláʂesá!</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-commands-no-respect!
<i>Aláʂejù, Aláʂeté;</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-easily-gets-humiliated!

<sup>11</sup>This refers to the carved image of a deity, god or goddess (the *òrìsà*) that has human features such as eyes and ears but is unable to use them as humans do.

<sup>12</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>Aláṣejù, Aláṣebó</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-oversteps-his/her-bounds!	
<i>Aláṣejù, pèrè ní tẹ!</i>	The-one-who-acts-in-excess! Is the one-who-easily-gets-disgraced!	
<i>Èsúrú ṣ'àṣejù,</i>	The yellow yam acted in excess,	5
<i>Ó tẹ lówó oníyán!</i> <i>'Un ó gbẹ ẹ rẹbété</i>	It cannot be used to make pounded yam! <sup>13</sup> 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 Ìmàle, a b'ori kènkè!</i>	The passive Muslim (woman) leaves her head covered partially!	
<i>A-ṣe-kó-sú-ni, Ìmàle Adòdò –</i>	The Muslim who wants to test other people's patience –	10
<i>Ó ní, 'Bí wọn kò dúnbú omi,</i> <i>Òun kò ní mu!</i> <i>Bí wọn kò dúnbú eja,</i> <i>Òun kò ní je!</i> <i>A-ṣe-kó-sú-ni, omọ,</i>	Refuses to drink water Until the Islamic confession of allegiance is said! <sup>14</sup> (She) may also refuse to eat fish Until the Islamic prayers are said! It is the child who wants to test one's patience	15
<i>Ó fọ kèngbè tán,</i> <i>Ó r'Ààfin rè í gb'ónisẹ wá!</i> <i>Bẹ, egbèrin l'Emesẹ ñ gbà,</i> <i>N'íjọ aláyé tí dáyé!</i> <i>Owó kèngbè ñkọ?</i>	That will smash the gourd, And still come home with the king's palace sheriff! Knowing well that the sheriff charges a thousand! That is the tradition! Who then pays for the gourd itself?	20
<i>Kékeré wọn</i> <i>Kò ju'gbiwó lọ;</i> <i>Bó bá san diẹ,</i> <i>A d'òròdúnrin;</i> <i>Èyí t'ó tóbi ñ'nú wọn,</i>	The smaller ones Cost about two hundred cowries; If it is a little bigger, It costs three hundred; The biggest gourd,	25
<i>Níí pé'rinwó:</i> <i>Ágbéfẹyà, Gbèrùmí,</i>	Costs four hundred: The exceptionally big one, that requires other people's assistance to lift to one's head,	
<i>Àwọn níí tó èdègbeta;</i> <i>Aláṣejù ñ r'òko ètẹ!</i> <i>Bòròkìnní àṣejù,</i>	Costs as much as five hundred. Those who act in excess can be easily disgraced! Noble persons who act in excess,	30
<i>Oko-olówó,</i> <i>Níí m'omọ lọ.</i>	Will not only ruin their wealth, But will also make their offspring look for loans to survive.	
<i>Olòrun Kòkò-yi-bìrì</i> <i>'Un nàa níí f'ojú aláṣejù</i> <i>B'omi gbígboná!</i>	The-incontrollable-God, Is the only one who can control – Those who act in excess,	35

<sup>13</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>14</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.

<p><i>Eni t'ó bá wu Kòkò-yí-bìrì,  Òun nù f'orẹ̀  Aláṣejù lé lówó.  A ni k'ẹ̀rú k'ó na ẹ̀rú,  K'òmọ k'ó n'òmọ;</i></p>	<p>Whatever pleases the uncontrollable-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;</p>	<p>40</p>
<p><i>Kí tálàkà k'ó na tálàkà,  K'ólówó k'ó n'ólówó,  K'òba k'ó na 'ra wọn.  Ṣé Kòkòyí nàà ló yan,  Ọba Gẹ̀ṣì –</i></p>	<p>He may use one poor person to discipline another,  He may use one wealthy person to discipline another,  He may use one king to discipline another.  It is this uncontrollable-God,  Who chose the British king –</p>	<p>45</p>
<p><i>Pé k'ó máa f'ojú àwọn  Aláṣejù b'omi gbígbóná?  Kí wọn bà jẹ k'áyé mí!  Ọba Jámáni –  Òun l'aláṣejù, òun l'òyáyú!</i></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>50</p>
<p><i>T'ó ní òun ó ẹ̀se bí  Ọba Nàpó, Nàgìrì Napoleon  Ọba nà 'kòkò, nà 'ṣaasùn;  Ọba n'awo-n'ẹ̀gbẹ̀rì,  Ọba n'ẹ̀ṣọ-n'ẹ̀ṣọ,</i></p>	<p>He wanted to be like  King Napoleon,<sup>15</sup>  The king who brutalized old and young,  He brutalized the wealthy and the poor,  He brutalized military leaders,</p>	<p>55</p>
<p><i>Ọba n'olóogun-n'olóogun,  Odíndi ọ̀dún mífà sáú,  'Un l'ó gbé l'ẹ̀wò.  Ọba Gẹ̀ṣì ní Sẹ̀n-Tẹ̀lì  St. Helina  Sẹ̀n Tẹ̀lì èwo nù-un?</i></p>	<p>He brutalized warriors and soldiers,  He spent six full years  In prison.  The British king at St Helena  Which St Helena?</p>	<p>60</p>
<p><i>Sẹ̀n Tẹ̀lì tí ñ bẹ  L'òrí omi òkun réré-ré!  Ohun t'ójú Nàpó rí,  Kò le rò ó tán lááláé.  Ojú `ẹ̀ rí dúdú, ojú `ẹ̀ rí pupa,</i></p>	<p>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,</p>	<p>65</p>
<p><i>Ojú `ẹ̀ r'áyìnrin,  Ojú `ẹ̀ rí ràkòràkò:</i></p>	<p>His eyes turned glossy light-blue,<sup>16</sup>  And humiliated,</p>	

<sup>15</sup>The poetic ingenuity in his punning on the name of King 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'ẹ̀gbẹ̀rì / ọba n'ẹ̀ṣọ-n'ẹ̀ṣọ / ọba n'olóogun-n'olóogun*, Qbasa manipulates two features of Yoruba oral literature, wordplay and euphemism. He is punning on the verb *nà* (to beat) in Yoruba and the first syllable of the name Napoleon to describe how King 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).

<sup>16</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>Nàpó l'ó m'èsè re 'bè,</i>	Napoleon went there (the prison) as a powerful and strong man,	
<i>'Un l'ó m'óri re 'lé,</i>	But was thoroughly humiliated and cut down to size.	
<i>Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì, Ọba tíí f'ọba jẹ.</i>	The British king, king who installs other kings.	70
<i>Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì, Ọun nàà níí f'ọjú,</i>	This same British king,	
<i>Aláṣejù b'omi gbígbóná.</i>	Subdued all those who acted in excess.	
<i>Èfúùfú gb'ólógì lọ</i>	If noble figures (like Napoleon) are being humiliated,	
<i>T'oniyẹfun d'ẹgbé yán-án-yán-án!</i>	The generality of the people in the society should take extra caution!	
<i>Ọ̀jiji ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì,</i>	The authority with which the British king,	75
<i>T'ó gbé Nàpó re Sen-Tẹ̀lì,</i>	Sent Napoleon to St Helena;	
<i>'Un nàà ló gbé Ọba Jámání,</i>	Is what he (the British king) also used,	
<i>Wúlẹ̀mù Keji lọ yán-án-yán-án;</i>	To subdue William II, the German leader.	
<i>Ni Wúlẹ̀mù lọ sá pamó,</i>	And, William went into exile,	
<i>Sábẹ̀ iboòrùn ọba Hólándì –</i>	He ran to the Queen in Holland for protection –	80
<i>Wilhemina Ọba obinrin</i>	Queen Wilhelmina	
<i>Ní Hólándì: ọ̀wò re o!</i>	In Holland: I fear you!	
<i>Wúlẹ̀mù Keji, Ọba Jámání! –</i>	William II, German leader!	
<i>Sísá t'ó o sá un,</i>	Your exile,	
<i>O kò s'ayé ire!</i>	Is a disgrace!	85
<i>O ta'fà n'itafà;</i>	You misbehaved;	
<i>O ta'fà sókè tán,</i>	And misruled,	
<i>O yi'dó b'ori!</i>	Only to go into exile!	
<i>Sísá t'ó o sá un,</i>	Your exile,	
<i>O kò s'ayé ire!</i>	Is a disgrace!	90
<i>O 'ò bá mò, o kò sá,</i>	You need not have gone into exile,	
<i>K'ó o wá fọjú rinjú</i>	You should have faced	
<i>Gbogbo ọmọriwò,</i>	The consequences of your actions;	
<i>Kò mà mà s'ibi t'ó gbà ọ,</i>	If you had stayed back to face the consequence of your actions,	
<i>Àfi Sen-Tẹ̀lì.</i>	You would not have had any safe haven, other than St Helena.	95
<i>Lábẹ̀ àsià nlá t'Ọba Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì,</i>	Under the control of the British monarchy	
<i>Tíí f'ọjú àwon</i>	The king who disciplines	
<i>Aláṣejù b'omi gbígbóná.</i>	Those who act in excess	
<i>Ọba Kòkò-yi-biri</i>	The incontrollable-king,	
<i>K'ò b'ẹnikan ní'sẹ ipá,</i>	He did not compel others to do anything.	100
<i>T'imù kálukú ni wón h sẹ.</i>	Everyone is allowed to live as freeborn.	
<i>Àwon Mààdi:</i>	The Mahdis	
<i>Wón kò d'ọko ẹlòmù rí:</i>	Who have not been to other people's farmland	
<i>Wón ní kò tún sí oko mò,</i>	Claimed no other farmland	
<i>T'ó tó ti Baba àwon!</i>	Is bigger than their father's <sup>17</sup>	105
<i>Àimòkàn, àimòkàn,</i>	Due to lack of knowledge and understanding,	
<i>Níí mú ẹkúté ilẹ̀</i>	The house rat	

<sup>17</sup>Lines 104–7 are used as an analogy to describe the ignorance of the Mahdis.

<i>P'ològbò n'ìjà;</i>	Provokes the cat to a fight;	
<i>Aláṣejù l'ajá-kájá</i>	The useless dog acts in excess	
<i>Tí ñ lépa ẹ̀kùn.</i>	And, provokes the leopard to a fight.	110
<i>Ègbè: Ajá t'ó ñ lépa ẹ̀kùn,</i>	Chorus: The dog that provokes the leopard,	
<i>Ìyonu, ní ñ wá;</i>	Is looking for trouble;	
<i>Ìyonu, Ìyonu,</i>	A lot of trouble,	
<i>Ìyonu, ní ñ wá.</i>	(The dog) looking for trouble.	
<i>Aláṣejù l'eni t'ó jeun yó tán,</i>	The one who picks a quarrel	115
<i>Tí ñ wá wàhàlá kiri.</i>	Intentionally with others,	
<i>Iye tí yòò rí, yòò pò ju</i>	May end up being beaten,	
<i>Iye tí ó ñ wá kiri lọ.</i>	Ridiculed, and humiliated.	
<i>Aláṣejù, Aláṣeté!</i>	The one who acts in excess, is the one-who-easily-gets-humiliated.	
<i>Òun l'eni t'ó fẹ̀ sisin kù,</i>	Is like the one who brings on a sneeze	120
<i>Tí ñ f'owò ra'mú.</i>	By tickling his or her own nose <sup>18</sup>	
<i>Láì l'òta, láì l'ètù,</i>	Without arms and ammunition,	
<i>Láì l'Áwòḡdà (Machine gun)</i>	Without the machine gun,	
<i>Mààdì pe Kíṣinà n'ìjà (Lord Kitchener)</i>	The Mahdis challenged Lord Kitchener to a fight;	
<i>Kíṣinà, olórí-ogun Oba Gẹ̀ṣi.</i>	Kitchener the British war commander.	125
<i>Mààdì gbójú l'òògùn</i>	The Mahdis trusted their ability,	
<i>Ó s'omọ̀ ajẹ n'ìkòó;</i>	They trusted their war tactics,	
<i>Mààdì gbójú l'ẹ̀ṣin,</i>	They trusted their chariots,	
<i>Ràkunní, t'òun t'ìbaaka;</i>	They trusted their camels,	
<i>Òpòlopò ofà t'òun t'òkò,</i>	Their many swords and spears,	130
<i>Ta ni mọ̀ gaàrí bí egbàà òkẹ̀</i>	Who can saddle a horse perfectly to carry 2,000 sacks or bags of load? <sup>19</sup>	
<i>Òpòlopò ibọ̀n 'ṣakabùlà!</i>	Many shotguns!	
<i>Bí 'ṣakabùlà pẹ̀gbàà-gbẹ̀,</i>	Even 1,000 shotguns in seven places, <sup>20</sup>	
<i>Pòròpòrò òkà ni wòn</i>	Are no more than ordinary cornstalk	
<i>Lójú àwòḡdà!</i>	When compared to the machine gun!	135
<i>Àtùdìkì ní baba ibọ̀n –</i>	The machine gun is superior to the shotgun –	
<i>K'á tó wòn'ka mètà ètù,</i>	By the time you add three measures of gunpowder to load a shotgun,	
<i>K'á tó k'eyọ̀ ọ̀ta elégèè!</i>	And add pieces of bullet,	
<i>K'á tó fajẹ̀ sí i,</i>	And add the tinder!	
<i>K'á tó f'òpá yọ̀,</i>	And ensure that the measurement is correct	140
<i>K'á tó gún sùsù;</i>	And press everything together with the measuring rod,	

<sup>18</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>19</sup>We are not unaware of the ambiguity in *egbàà òkẹ̀*, which could be translated as either '2,000 x 20,000' or '2,000 sacks or bags'. *Egbàà* in Yoruba numerals is the equivalent of 2,000, but *òkẹ̀* 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 (*òkẹ̀*) contained 20,000 pieces of cowry shells.

<sup>20</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>K'á tó f'ójú ikú ibon,</i> <i>K'á tó bèrè sè-è!</i> <i>K'á tó na'wò yìn ín,</i>	And clean the firing spot of the gun, By the time you aim at the person to be shot, And you take a shot,	
<i>K'ó tó 'sáká', ení,</i> <i>K'ó tó 'sáká', èjì,</i> <i>K'ó tó 'sáká', èta,</i> <i>K'ó tó 'gbùlà-àà'!</i>	And, remember, we may misfire the first time, Misfire the second time, Misfire the third time, Before it will fire up eventually, making a killing sound!	145
<i>B'ó bá kún rere, lákúlákú</i> <i>A rin egbèrin igbónwó,</i> <i>Àtìdìkì n rin ibùsò méjì.</i>	If it (the shotgun) is well loaded, It may kill someone as far as 800 metres arms-lengths (away from the shooter), Whereas the machine gun can kill a target as far away as 2 miles.	150
<i>Ìbòṣò sọjà kòṣòkan,</i> <i>Ti fòhùn n'igbà igba</i> <i>Kí sàkabùlà tó lè</i>	The military gun, That sounds two hundred times, Before the shotgun	
<i>Fòhùn l'èkèkanṣòṣò!</i> <i>Kí sàkabùlà tó pa méfà,</i> <i>Àtìdìkì ti pa irínwó</i> <i>L'ápafòn yán-án-yán-án;</i> <i>Sọjà omọ-ogun òibó –</i>	Will sound just once. 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 –	155
<i>Kìkì atamátàsé.</i> <i>Ègbè: B'ó dúró, a yinbòṣò</i> <i>B'ó bèrè, a yinbòṣò,</i> <i>B'ó dọbálè, a yinbòṣò,</i>  <i>Ìdàṣòmì ọkúnrin,</i>  <i>Ìdàṣòmì ní,</i> <i>Ìdàṣòmì ọkúnrin,</i>	They are all good marksmen, sharpshooters. Chorus: Even while standing, she/he is shooting, Even while stooping, she/he is shooting, Even while lying face down, she/he is shooting, Great Dahomean male-warriors,  Are Dahomeans, Great Dahomean male-warriors.	160 165
<i>Àsẹhìnwá, àsẹhìnbò,</i> <i>Kisínà, ọgágun Oba Gẹ̀gẹ̀sì,</i> <i>'Un l'ó t'ojú oni-Mààdì</i>	At long last, Lord Kitchener, the British war commander, Humiliated the Mahdis,	
<i>Aláṣejù b'omi gbìgbóná</i> <i>Ọ̀un l'ó rán Ààfàà Mààdì!</i> <i>Lọ s'òrun ọ̀sán gangan.</i> <i>Malam Sàidù Ìbùn Hàyátù –</i> <i>Ó l'oun ó ẹ̀ bi Mààdì!</i> <i>Ààfàà Sàidù omọ Hàyátù.</i> <i>Ó mà mà lè yájú?</i> <i>Ó l'áṣejù lẹ̀wọ̀ ọ̀jọ̀!</i> <i>Ó f'arugògò fa ohun</i> <i>Tí ọ̀wọ̀ rẹ̀ kò tó?</i>	The ones who act in excess. He sent the Mahdis To their early grave. Mallam Shaykh Sai'd Bin Hayyat – <sup>21</sup> Also wanted to replicate what the Mahdis did! 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.	170 175

<sup>21</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.

<i>Ajá ñ sínwín kò mọ'ná?</i>	You do not seem to know the limits of your power and strength.	180
<i>O gbójú gbóyà tán, O wá ñ digun òtè N'Ilè Hausá? Lábé àsiá Nlá Oba Gèḡḡì –</i>	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 –	
<i>Oba tí f'oba jẹ: Tí fí ojú àwọn oba Aláḡḡjù bomi gbígbóná! Njẹ, ṣínkún, ọwọ̀ tẹ̀ ọ̀, Ọwọ̀ tẹ̀ ọ̀, ó d'Ilè 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>22</sup>	185
<i>O dé'lẹ̀ Ídà tán O kò lọ gbé jẹ? Ó tún dì ṣínkún, ó di jùà N'ìlẹ̀ Kàmárù! Ègbè: Ọ̀gùlùtu bọ̀ sín'omi – Tàlò</i>	While in Iddah You refused to obey instructions and directives. You were transferred once again To Kamaruland! <sup>23</sup> Chorus: Fragment of an old mud wall drops in water, and dissolves	190
<i>Ará rọ̀ ọ̀ wòḡwọ̀ Ó bọ̀ sínú omi – Tàlò Ará rọ̀ ọ̀ wòḡwọ̀.</i>	You are subdued You have been overpowered You are subdued.	195
<i>Èyin aláḡḡjù, È mà mà ṣẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀:</i>	Those who act in excess, You should be careful:	
<i>Bọ̀wọ̀ Oba bá tẹ̀ yín Ipẹ̀ ṣiṣe kò mà mà sí; Ọ̀fín kò m'olówó, È mà mà ṣẹ̀ pẹ̀lẹ̀. Nítòrí ijà èsìn!</i>	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!	200

<sup>22</sup>The city of Iddah is located in present-day Niger State, north-central Nigeria.

<sup>23</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 Ọ̀basa's interest in social, religious, political and economic events beyond Yorubaland.