

# **27<sup>th</sup> Inaugural Lecture**

## **THE FAMISHED ARTIST IN A FAMISHED SOCIETY**

by  
**Professor Olanrewaju Folorunso**

Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Provost, College of Medicine, Registrar, the University Librarian, Deans of Faculties, Distinguished Professors, Staff of LASU, LASU Students, my beloved relatives and friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

### **Preamble**

Like my brothers and sisters, some of whom are seated here today, I was born at Tepa in Ghana. I started my primary school education in Ghana before completing it in my home town, Oyan, in Osun State, Nigeria. Please, permit me to digress a little to tell you the vital role played in my education by my father (of blessed memory). It was a common phenomenon in the 1940s and 1950s that people from our area in Osun state, particularly people from Oyan, Ofa, Iniṣa and Ogbomoso, went to trade in the then Gold Coast, now Ghana. My father in his wisdom sent all of us home to Nigeria one after the other as soon as we reached school age. This contributed greatly to our educational advancement. But for his foresight and love of education, probably I, and my siblings, would not have gone beyond primary education. This is especially because during that time, many of my contemporaries from our area stayed back in Ghana after their primary education, to serve as clerks in the gold and diamond mining industries. Today, to the glory and mercy of God, the Folorunso family has carved an enviable position of being one of the foremost families to have access to education in Oyan.

Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, Divine Providence has made me today, a Professor of Yorùbá. As a secondary school teacher in the late 1960s, I taught Geography

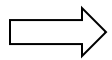
which was my best subject. I made my mark in the discipline. Many of my students at the secondary school are now well-placed in the education, civil service and oil sectors. My Geography students believed in me so much that in 1989, one of them, ignorant of my new discipline, came to look for me in the Department of Geography in Lagos State University.

What informed my shift from Geography to Yorùbá? I was admitted to read Education/Geography at the University of Ibadan, but because of the rigours of practicals in Geography (held between 3pm and 6pm daily) my health was at stake. I had to change to Yorùbá/Education in my second year. The beginning was rough but I have no regrets. By the mercies and grace of God, I have risen to the apex of my career, as Professor of Yorùbá, the chair of which I have the opportunity to inaugurate today.

#### YORÙBÁ AS A DISCIPLINE IN LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY

At the inception of the Lagos State University in 1984, Yorùbá was one of the few units in the Department of Linguistics and Languages. Incidentally, I was the only pioneer lecturer and the first Coordinator of the Yorùbá unit. Mr. Gboyega Alaba, (now Professor), from the University of Lagos served as an Associate Lecturer. Four years later, the Department of the African Languages and Literatures came into being, consequent upon the recommendations of the Babs Fafunwa Visitation Panel of 1988. Fafunwa retired from the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, where a Department of African Languages and Literatures existed (and still exists). Interestingly, Prof. Afọlabi Olabimtan (of blessed memory) was on the Fafunwa Visitation Panel of 1988. Coincidentally, again, the Department of African Languages and Literatures also existed in the University of Lagos, from where Prof. Olabimtan came. All we are saying is this: the name, 'African Languages and Literatures' was a carry over from both the Obafemi Awolowo University and the University of Lagos, from where both Fafunwa and Olabimtan respectively came.

The name, 'African Languages and Literatures', was a model adopted by some of the first generation Nigerian universities, offering courses in Nigerian languages. It was an adopted name from the School of Oriental and African Languages, University of London. But, regrettably, the name, has failed to address the needs of a modern urban society like the metropolitan Lagos, a 'famished state'. Yorùbá, like most other languages in Nigeria, has undergone tremendous changes since the 1960s. It has become a major medium of expression in the mass media, the theatre, religious houses and different social ceremonies such as wedding and naming ceremonies. The name, while broad enough to contain many languages, was too restrictive to accommodate various functional uses to which Nigerian languages are put. The Department woke from its slumber, seriously famished and then saw the need to change the name to African Languages, Literatures and Communication Arts to satisfy the need of an equally heavily famished Nigerian society. This new name has completely revolutionized both the outlook and growth of the Department.



Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, I am happy to say here that the desire of the students to read Yorùbá increased astronomically from between 5 and 7 candidates in the 2000/2001, 2001/2002 session to over 30 in the 2004/2005 session! This innovation, that is, the new nomenclature of the Department is the first of its kind in any Nigerian university where Yorùbá is being taught. Lagos State University now has more students reading Yorùbá than any other Nigerian university. Besides, we also have a correspondingly high intake in our other programmes. For example, when we started our Diploma Programme in Yorùbá and Communication Arts, in 2000, we had 158 students! When we started our M.A. Degree Programme three years ago, we started with 27 students. At the moment, we have 45 students in our 5-year Degree Part-time Programme. The first set will be graduating this year. Our Department is the first to run a Part-time Degree Programme in Yorùbá in any Nigerian university where Yorùbá is being taught. It is gratifying to note, with all modesty, that our pioneering role twenty-two years ago in Yorùbá studies in Lagos State University has yielded much fruit.

Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, in the foregoing segment, I have tried to present the picture of a formerly famished Department in a famished metropolitan Lagos society. The tremendous progress we have made as a Department is largely due to our collective innovation. My colleagues in the Department have been very cooperative. Of course, we cannot sit on the fence and allow ourselves to be rationalized. May God not allow that we should be set back by anything!

Now, to the theme of this inaugural lecture, that is, 'The Famished Artist in a Famished Society'. Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, I stand before you this afternoon, as the first Head of the Department of African Languages, Literatures and Communication Arts and as the first Professor of Yorùbá Studies in the Department, to deliver the first inaugural lecture in the Department; the 9th in the Faculty of Arts and the 27th in Lagos State University.

My main area of research is Yorùbá Poetry. Yorùbá Poetry, like any other African poetry, exists in both oral and written forms. The oral precedes the written and it was more popular than to the outside world. The former, oral poetry, is relatively unknown and as a result there is the erroneous notion of a strong stigma attached to it – 'barbaric', 'backward', 'uncivilized' and the like. This notion has been dispelled by many of my predecessors: Babalolá (1966), Olájubù (1970), Olátúnjì (1971), Olábímtán (1974), Ìṣòlá (1978), Olúkòjù (1978), Àjùwòn (1980), Olábòdè (1981), Àlàbá (1985) and Ògùnṣínà (1990). Through their writings, they have established the indispensability of Yorùbá poetry, both oral and written. The initial wrong perception is largely due to its orality. This concept is held mostly by those not familiar with African cultures, including the 'African literates'. Interestingly, these 'African literates' are often pretenders. When it comes to their survival, they look for African help. For instance, many 'African literates' are known to have carried sacrifices (*ẹbọ*) at midnight, when they feel no one could see them. We have heard the examples of even academics carrying objects of sacrifices on our university campuses in Nigeria, in an attempt to employ esoteric spirits to define their goals. Such secret patrons of traditional religion are sometimes practising Christians or Muslims. This is tantamount to hypocrisy. At the Obafemi Awolowo University during the tenure of Professor Wande

Abimbólá, students were on the rampage and the renowned Professor of Yorùbá who is a traditionalist dared the students, went into their midst and the students began to sing

*‘Babalawo, mo wa bẹbẹ  
Aluginrin  
Babalawo, mo wa bẹbẹ  
Aluginrin’*

Ifa priest I’m begging for pardon  
Aluginrin  
Ifa priest I’m begging for pardon  
Aluginrin

Ọlatunji (1981, 1984) has extensively dwelt on the power of the spoken words. This is a Yorùbá folktale song used effectively by the students, and it worked! Professor Abimbólá is presumed to be a ‘Babalawo’ (Ifá Priest). From the University gate, the students followed him back to the campus peacefully. It is on record that no serious student unrest was recorded at Ifẹ during Abimbólá’s two-term in office. Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, all we are saying here, is that, Yorùbá oral poetry exists and it is potent. Having said all this, we would be examining briefly both oral and written forms of Yorùbá poetry.

#### DEFINITION OF OUR TERMS

Before proceeding further, we will define our terms to make our topic clear. In our discussion, the term ‘famished’ will be examined together along with ‘famine’ because a link exists between the two. *Encyclopedia Americana* defines ‘famine’ as a severe shortage of food resulting in widespread starvation and death. It is infrequently accompanied by violence and revolution. To support this assertion the *Encyclopedia* gives an example of the French Revolution that broke out the year following a disastrous harvest that brought about famine. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 also took place during a period of acute food shortage.

*The New Encyclopedia Britanica*, Vol IV also gives a grim picture when it defines ‘famine’ as extreme and protracted shortage of food causing wide spread and persistent hunger, emaciation of the affected population, and a substantial increase in the death rate. The *Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd edition Vol V. is



very useful to our definition. It also defines ‘famine’ as extreme and general scarcity of food, a period of extreme and general dearth. But it goes further to explain ‘famish’ as ‘to render to the extremities of famine and hunger’. It expatiates with examples of phrases and sentences that go with ‘famish’, such as ‘to famish away’, ‘to famish to death’. ‘You famish for promotion’, ‘they had all miserably famished with hunger’.

Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, from all these definitions, one can safely use ‘famished’ to mean ‘hungry’ or ‘dearth’. One of the famous South African musicians, Chaka Chaka, entitled one of her albums ‘Hungry for Love’. This shows that it is not only food that makes one hungry, it may be several other things.

Our second term, ‘artist’, refers to the poet in Yorùbá society, and it may be the oral or the literary poet. These two major categories are different in several ways, (see Ọlátúnjí, 1979:179 and Fọlọrunṣọ 1999:6); All we should know from the outset is that they both have an impact on Yorùbá society. This is clearly highlighted by Babalọlá (1969) when he says

... in traditional Yorùbá life, almost every special occasion – worship, homage, greeting, merriment, mourning, petition, etc – is celebrated in poetry. (p. iv)

We adopt Ọlátúnjí’s (1979) definition of our third terminology, ‘society’ as:

... the larger community to which the poet, oral or literate belongs, its affairs and aspirations, and its social economic and political condition to which the poet may address himself. (p. xi)

It is from this perspective we refer to Yorùbá society. The artist uses the Yorùbá language which is indigenous to his society. He cannot be separated from his society. This supports the argument in the Sociology of Literature that the artist’s cultural background is closely linked with his writings (Fọlọrunṣọ, 1999).

From time immemorial, the purpose of oral mode of performance has mainly been for entertainment in the royal palace (see Finnegan, 1970, Babalọlá 1973,

⇒ Ọlátúnjí, 1982, Ọlábímtán 1985, Fọlọrunṣọ 1999 and Adélékè 1999). Oral poets

were exclusively employed in the palace, but nowadays, oral performance has moved beyond the palace. The socio-economic situation has driven many of the surviving oral poets to fend for themselves in the public market. This is because the palace no longer enjoys the same degree of benevolence of the subjects as before, hence, the means to sustain the royal palace poets is no longer available. Having moved beyond the royal courts, these famished poets have to look for ways of surviving in the already famished society.

The oral poets were so powerful that according to Finnegan (1970:97), ... they can insult anyone and, ‘...could switch to outspoken abuse if sufficient reward is not forthcoming’. Olábímtán (1987:10), also testifies that whenever traditional oral poets are performing,

credit is given to those deserving of credit and blame is apportioned to those deserving of it. No person, be he a traditional ruler, a chief, a priest or an artisan, could escape their powerful searchlight. They enjoy enviable freedom to speak out on any issue without minding whose ox is gored.’

This point was further eloquently demonstrated by Adéléké (1999). He submits that ‘ ... the minstrel would softly chide the tyrant ruler without fear of being incarcerated’. The artist hinges his immunity from being punished on the old Yorùbá saying that

Ọba kíí pọkọrin: (The King does not kill the minstrel)

The literary artist is equally famished today. He is not getting enough reward from his published poems. The publishing house short changes the artist so as to make maximum profit from the published work. The famished society too does not patronize the publishing houses. The reason for this is not far-fetched; a traditional non-literate society like the Yorùbá does not have a reading culture. This dampens their (both artists’ and the publishing houses’) morale. They are both famished in a society based on survival of the fittest. The Nigerian economy also affects both the artist and his society. The publishing houses reject serious

academic publications because the market is limited to the student population which no longer purchase textbooks.

Another area of contention is the quality of the artist's work. Poets such as Adébáyọ Fálétí, Ọlátúnbòsùn Ọládàpò, Yẹmí Èlébuùbọn and Àlàbí Ògúndépò are good examples of poets that know their onions. Yorùbá society is very enlightened and sophisticated; it is hungry for good works. The commercialization of Yorùbá poetry by the hungry freelance poets has negatively affected their work. They therefore, present sub-standard works. Ọlátúnjì (1982:20), in his interview with Adébáyọ Fálétí reveals that: 'The mature poet must have acquainted himself with the poetic and culture lore of his people and his sensibility and focus has to be extra-ordinary'.

Because the Yorùbá poets of today are famished, the trend now, according to Fálétí is to write in praise of individual and the establishment.

Ọlátúnbòsùn Ọládàpò labels such poets as 'scavenger poets' who have no personal or artistic integrity (see Ọlátúnjì, 1982:23). This trait is found in the poems read at different occasions and those on radio and television by 'hungry poets'. Such artists are hungry for money and not for good performance. They lack the qualities of a good poet, as they have dehydrated ideas.

The famished society often misleads the artist. The artist, therefore, tampers with social norms to satisfy the society. The generation of our youths nowadays is too much in a hurry and always clamouring for change. (see Adélékè 1999). Their language is vulgar and the Yorùbá abhor it. Unfortunately, the famished artists thrive on this. Many Yorùbá musicians vigorously trade in verbal pornography to the delight of their hungry audience. An example is Obesere's popular refrain '*Tọ sibi*', which means ejaculate in it. Apart from this, most of our old Yorùbá songs are being recycled by young musicians now. This is as a result of lack of innovation on the part of the young generation of our musicians. They are too much in a hurry to make wealth. Their songs have no cultural value. The society is famished as they long for quality of our old artists' productions. One of the past artists that portrayed Yorùbá culture in his works was the popular I. K, Dairo of the 1960s. It is his own son that is re-echoing the father's works. An example is:



*Mo sorii re o*  
*Ẹlẹdaa mi mo dupe o.*  
*Bi mo ji ni kùtùkùtù owurọ*  
*Ma porii mi yee*  
*Mo sorii re o*  
*Ẹlẹdaa mi mo dupe o.*

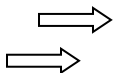
His son has brought alive most of his father's songs to the delight of the audience. The society is tired of the present day artists who have nothing new to offer in their songs. The society, therefore, feels nostalgic for the good old days culturally embedded songs that were highly philosophical.

Another example of a young musician that delights in mixing old songs with their works, is one Tony Tetula in his REB Y RAP music. For example, in his

*You don hit my car*  
*Oyinbo repete*

which originally belongs to Ebenezer Obey of the 1960s, and also in

<i>Solo: Ọmọde meta n şere</i>	} 2ce
<i>Refrain: Ere o, wọn n şere ayo</i>	
<i>Solo: Ọkan loun ó gope</i>	
<i>Refrain: Ere o, wọn n şere ayo</i>	



Here, he blends Yorùbá folktale cultural song with his rap music. These are famished musicians, who have very little or nothing to offer but are desperately begging for survival, in a famished society.



It is pertinent at this juncture, Sir, to know that the 'famished' phenomenon is generally endemic as it affects several other segments of the society. For instance, in the educational sector, students either employ the services of a famished mercenary to write their projects or virtually plagiarize other people's works. In the political sphere, recently some political parties claimed to be shopping for who to succeed the President in 2007, according to them, those who are parading themselves now have nothing to offer. Political analysts believe that after the death of Awolọwọ the Yorùbá have not got a credible substitute; the same goes for the Igbo who have not got a replacement for Azikwe and, after the death of the

Sardauna of Sokoto, the Northerners are still searching for who to lead them. It is glaring that politically the society is famished.

Mr. Vice - Chancellor Sir, my submission is that the famished artist does not exist in a vacuum; both (society and artist) influence each other. The famished society today is forced to patronize artists that have little or nothing to offer, because it does not offer the quality of what it wants.

## YORÙBÁ ORAL POETRY

There are in existence several scholarly works on Yorùbá oral poetry that evolved over the years. For instance, Babalolá (1966, 1967, 1973) worked on Yorùbá *Ìjálá*, *Oríkì*, Abimbolá (1968) on *Ifá*, Olájubù (1970) on *Ìwí Egúngún*, Oṣotóyè (1978) on *orin*; Àjùwòn (1978) on *Ìrèmòjé*, Ìṣòlá (1973) on *Ẹ̀sà Eégún* and Olúkòjù (1978) on *Orin*. Finnegan (1970) and Olátúnjí (1978) have individually examined, in detail, different Yorùbá oral poetic genres. These works are, no doubt, useful because, among other things, they offer an insight into the repertoire of the vast Yorùbá oral poetry. No doubt, oral poetry is a significant sub-generic unit of Yorùbá poetry which has enjoyed a well deserved critical attention.

Before proceeding further, let us identify the various forms of Yorùbá oral poems. These are as follows:

### I **Minor Recitation** (*Àrángbó Kékèké*)

- i. *Òwè* (proverbs)
- ii *àlò àpamò* (Yorùbá riddles)

### II **Major Recitation** (*Àrángbó Kíkún*)

- i. *oríkì* (Yorùbá praise poetry)
- ii. *Ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ifá* (Ifa divination poetry)
- iii. *Ọfò* (Yorùbá incantations)

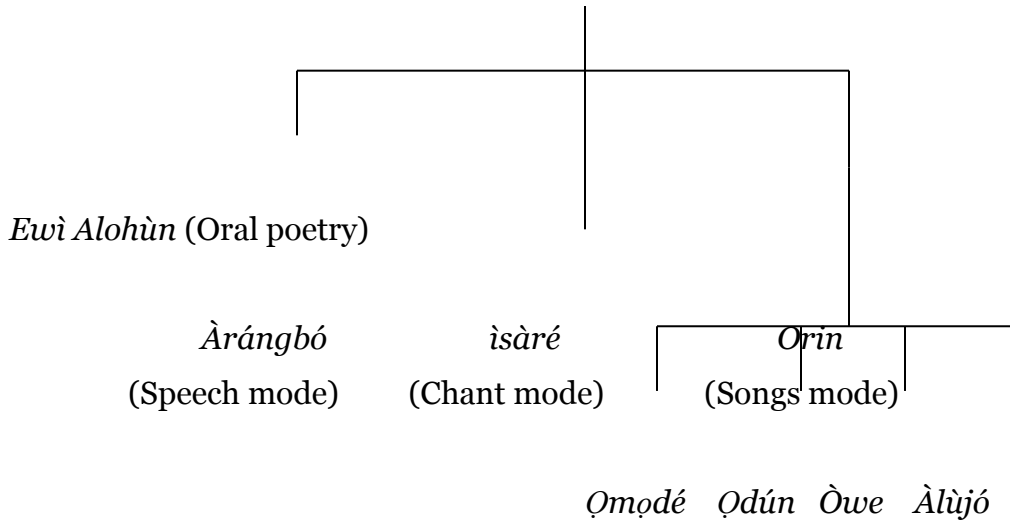
### III **Religious Chants** (*Ajẹmẹ̀sìn*)

- i. *Ìjálá* (Hunters' chants)
- ii. *Ẹ̀sà Eégún* (Masquerade chants)
- iii. *Òrìṣà Pípè*

#### IV Social Chants

- i. *Ràrà*
- ii. *Èkún Ìyàwó* (Nuptial chants)
- iii. *Olele*
- iv. *Asamọ*

These categories of oral poems are depicted in the following diagram:



Let me quickly give examples of some of the oral poems in the diagram:

**Àrángbó** (Recitative)

##### Oríkì

*Ègò Ànùmí ará Ọ̀pòndà*

*Ọ̀mọ ẹ̀ran tó gbójú nì mo mú mawo*

*Adàgbà jalè awèrè*

*Níjọ Ànùmí ti dáyé kò jalè rí*

*Ojú Olóko níní ẹ́é mú tiẹ*

Ègò Ànùmí the offspring of Ọ̀pòndà

The young animal is it that are initiated

He that is matured in stealing

Since Ànùmí was born, he has never stolen

He takes from the owner's farm in his presence

Fọlọrunṣọ (1982)

## Ofò

Òrán nílánlá níí bá apá  
Òrán sèkùsèkù níí bá oṣè  
Òrán tó ju lámọ́rín lọ ní kó lọ rée bá lámọ́rín  
Òrán jánganjàgàn kùí tán lórùn òpè  
Ojoojúmó ní mòólúúú dáràn alápatà  
Ojoojúmó ní pátákó alápatàá gbogbé  
Kó dáràn oṣó  
Kó dáràn àjé

(It is big matters / troubles that happen to the apá tree  
It is confused heaps that is the lot of the baobab tree  
It is matters that are beyond so-and-so that should beset so-and-so  
Enormous confusion is never wanting on top of a palm tree  
It is daily that the cow gets into trouble with the butcher  
It is daily that the butcher's slap is soaked in blood  
Let him (so-and-so) get into trouble with wizards  
Let him get into trouble with witches.)

Ọlátúnjì (1984: 149 - 150)

## Ìsàré (Chant mode)

### Ekún Ìyàwó (nuptial chant)

Odò kan, odò kan  
Àní tí ń bẹ láàrín ìgbé  
Araá 'wájú ò gbòdò mu;  
Èrò ẹyìn kò gbòdò bùwè  
Èmi Àyòkà débè mo bù bójú  
Ojúù mi wáá dojú oge,  
Ìdí mi wáá didí ilèkè  
Ìlèkè, àní tí ẹ bá kà tí ò pé  
Elégbé mo ni  
Gbogbo aráa ilé ẹ máa tú mi láṣo  
Aṣo ni kí ẹ tú o

*È má mà tú tòbí mi*

*Nítorí ohun tí mo gbé wáyé, tí mo fí ñ şomoge ñ bẹ lábé aşo*

(A secret river

That flows in the jungle,

Those work in front dare not drink out of it

Those who follow behind dare not bathe in it

I, Àyòká reach there and washed my face

Immediately, I change to a lovely virgin

My waist is filled with lovely beads

Count the beads, and if any is missing

Oh my comrades

All of you, strip me naked

Strip me naked of all my clothes only

Do not strip me of my underwear

Because what God has endowed me with as a lady is under my underwear.)

Fáníyì (1979)

Suffice it to say that there are other uses of oral poetry beside entertainment. We shall touch on this later.

Most of these Yorùbá oral genres are interdependent, that is, they are interwoven. (Ọlátúnjí, 1971). This is illustrated in this diagram:

	<i>Èkún</i> <i>Ìyàwó</i>	<i>Ràrà</i>	<i>Ìjálá</i>	<i>Ìyèrè</i> <i>Ifá</i>
<i>Àló</i>	×	×	×	×
<i>Èsẹ Ifá</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Òwe</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Oríkì</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Ọfó</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

These oral poems are meant to be performed (Finnegan, 1970; Ọlátúnjí, 1971; Ọlájubù 1970, 1974; and Olúkòjú, 1978). It is in the live performance that the

grandeur of Yorùbá oral poetry lies. The interdependentness of these oral genres can be appreciated during a performance. For example, the bride that is preparing to leave for her husband's house recites *ẹkún iyàwó* (nuptial chant). She interpolates several other oral poems into her chant. For instance, in Abimbólá (1975: 683), Dèjọ Fáníyì says

- 1      *Tatí wéré n tẹdá*
- 2      *Babaa mi Àkàndé, Eríkítólá*
- 3      *Àsùn-un paradà ntigi àjà*
- 4      *Èkúté ò gbóhùn ọmọ rẹ ó má tatí wéré*
- 5      *Baba bó gbóhùn mi o dide*
1.     The ẹdá rat is always attentive
2.     My father, Àkàndé, Eríkítólá
3.     Logs of wood used for ceilings are for ever motionless;
4.     A rat responds when it hears the cries of its offsprings
5.     Father, bestir yourself when you hear my voice

Fáníyì, Dejo (1975)

Ordinarily, '*ẹkún iyàwó*' (Nuptial Chant) would be the least Yorùbá oral poetry that would contain '*ọfò*' (incantation). But this bride interpolates invocation in lines 1, 3, and 4 to make her dead father come to her aid. This confirms the interdependence of Yorùbá genres.

Yorùbá scholars are still researching into Yorùbá traditional oral literature. There are still many works on *Ọya- pipè*, *Èṣù- pípè* and the like.

Mr. Vice - Chancellor, Sir, we have been discussing Yorùbá oral poetry, let us now shift our attention to written Yorùbá poetry.

## WRITTEN YORÙBÁ POETRY

The first Yorùbá verses were published in 1884 (Ọlabimtán, 1974). Indeed, Ọlábímtán pioneered the first critical study of written Yorùbá poetry (1848-1948). After Ọlabimtán (1974), there has been no other in-depth study of written Yorùbá poetry except Ọlátúnjì (1982), who carried out an analytical study of Adébáyò Fálétí, a foremost leading Yorùbá poet. Ọlátúnjì's work is, no doubt, a seminal contribution to the study of Yorùbá written poetry. However, as

illuminating as his work is, it is concerned with only one poet. Fọlọrunṣọ (1999) is, therefore, one of the first elaborate works on modern written Yorùbá poetry as it covers 1949-1989.

### **Growth of Written Yorùbá Poetry.**

The development of written Yorùbá poetry from its earliest beginnings to date has presented the true perspective of a developing African literature. As Fọlọrunṣọ (1999) has rightly observed, the finding

has shown the emergence of the written Yorùbá poetry and its rapid development after the attainment of Nigerian independence. This is perhaps the general phenomenon of the developing countries. Most of the factors that influenced this rapid growth were not in place in the earliest beginnings. The only medium of spreading the written poetry then was through the print media which in itself was very limited. Apart from the Ègbá Printing Press that published selected poets' works, most of the poems written during that period first came out in the existing newspapers.

On the basis of this development, we would group the poets we intend to use as examples in this lecture into three:

- (i) Poems that are printed in books, journals and periodicals.
- (ii) Poems that are read on radio and television
- (iii) Poems that are recorded on discs.

Following this Fọlọrunṣọ (1999) groups the poets into two:

- (a) Academic poets (Teachers in tertiary institutions – universities and colleges of education).
- (b) Commercial poets

### **Academic Poets**

This group consists of poets who publish their poems in books, journals and periodicals. They see the need for 'ewi' (poetry) written in Yorùbá. Most of these academic poets are exposed to poetry of other lands, and they include Adébóyè Babalọlá, Afọlábí Ọlábímtán and Akínwùmi Ìṣòlá. They are distinguished

university scholars and have written critical works on poetry in particular and other aspects of Yorùbá studies in general. It is pertinent to mention here the new generation of academic Yorùbá poets who are equally university scholars. This new breed includes Gbóyèga Àlàbá, Àtàrí Àjànàkú (Dòtun Ògúndèjì), Olúwayemísí Adébòwálé, Dúró Adélékè, Àrìnpé Adéjùmò, Táíwò Olúnládé, Dèjì Médùbí, Jíbólá Abíódún, Ọlátúnjì Ọpádòtun, Dèbò Awẹ and Oyedemi Oyerinde. They have individually made significant contributions to the development of written Yorùbá poetry.

### **Commercial Poets**

These are poets who read or perform their poems through the electronic media. They are tagged ‘commercial poets’ because of the commercialization of their art. Those who read their poems on radio get paid for each poem read, and the poets on discs also make money out of their recordings (Ọlátúnjì, 1982:128 and Fọlọrunṣọ, 1999:5). Though Ọlanrewaju Adepọju, the initiator of poetry on disc (Ọlátúnjì 1982c), published some of his poems in his collection, *Ìrònú Akéwì* (1972), his major contribution to the development of Yorùbá poetry is in his several poems on discs. (Fọlọrunṣọ, 1990, 1997, 1999, 2000).

A critical look at these two categories, i.e. academic and commercial poets, shows a distinctiveness in the characteristics of their respective poetry. The basic factor responsible for this is the mode of presentation. While the academic poets are ‘*akọ ewì*’ (i.e. *a kọ ewì* writers of poems), the commercial poets are ‘*akéwì*’ (i.e. *a ké ewì* chanters of poems). (Ọlátúnjì 1982, and Fọlọrunṣọ 1999).

Since the poems of the commercial poets are performer-based, their texts may not be stable, as pointed out by Fọlọrunṣọ (1999). The performer, like an oral poet, deviates from what he is reading or chanting as he delves into other issues during a live performance.



Either on radio or television, a whole production may lack unity of ideas, rhythm and thought. Since the production comes to us through the audio, its fixation is difficult. Despite this, audio disc poetry is by far more popular in a predominantly less literate society. Furthermore, there is also the atmosphere of spontaneity and the oral effect of disc poetry as opposed to the coldness and the passivity of the printed poetry text.

From our studies of these poets, we discover some shortcomings in their works, particularly, their styles of composition. While discussing style in poetry, Aristotle talks of ‘good and bad style’. It is his contention that ‘the virtue of style must be that which is clear and not pedestrian’. Unfortunately this kind of ‘pedestrian’ presentation is common to many of the present day Yorùbá poets. Let us take Láuwayì Ògùnníran in Akinjóbín (1969:23) as an example:

*Ikú pa Abírí, Abírí kú*  
*Ikú pa Abìrì, Abìrì ròrun*  
*Ikú pagbe, olóri idáró*  
*Ikú pàlùkò, olóri ìkosùn*  
(Death killed Abírí, Abírí died  
Death killed Abìrì, Abìrì died  
Death killed the Blue Touraco Musophagidae,  
the head of all that use indigo  
Death killed ‘àlùkò ‘ (type of bird), the head  
of those that use leguminasae akin)

But Fálétí, in his innovativeness, expresses the same theme thus:

*Kò sẹni tí kò ní kú*  
*Kò sẹni oko baba rẹ kò ní dìgbòrò*  
*Kò sẹni tí ikú kò le pa, ikú tó pÒjike nílà oòrùn*  
*Ikú tó pỌlábòdé Òyó*  
*Ló tún pAdélabú, aníyì níBàdàn*

(There is no one who shall not die  
There is no one whose father’s farm will

not become a forest  
 There is no one that death shall not kill.  
 It is death that killed Ojike in the East  
 Death that killed Ọlábòdé of Ọyó  
 It is (that death) that killed Adélabú, the  
 reputable man in Íbàdàn)  
 (Ọlátúnjí 1982: 59-60)

Both Ọgúnníran and Fálétí are saying the same thing, and, that is, everyone will die, no matter how highly placed. But Ọgúnníran's presentation is too pedestrian. He merely stings together Yorùbá common sayings, while Fálétí employs elevated language.

Discussing further what makes good poetry, Longinus also emphasizes the correct choice of words by the poet 'to move and influence the reader'. In fact, it is his contention that 'the choice of novel and grandly appropriate words is wonderfully effective in poetry.' This view is evident in Adébáyọ Fálétí's work in Akinjogbin (1969:144). He says:

...  
*Nwọn jíṣé tífá ran wọn sọba wọn:*  
*Pẹnikan mbọ látòkèèrè*  
*Tó pónṣọ bí yangan tí ngbẹ lọ,*  
*Táṣọ rẹ jẹ kíkì àbàwón bí aṣọ àparò*  
*Tó tálàkà bí àgùntàn*  
*Tó ráágó bí itélèdí,*  
*Tójú tipón tayọ síṣọ*

(And they delivered the Ifá's message to the Ọba  
 That a stranger is coming from a far away distance  
 Whose clothes are as brown (dirty) as those of a bushfowl  
 That is as wretched as a sheep  
 That is as filthy as an underwear  
 That has suffered beyond description.)

This is a description of an abject poverty-stricken man whose picture can be captured and registered in the mind. The appropriate selection of words in this extract is lacking in most Yorùbá poets' works.

Both Aristotle and Longinus single out metaphor as a device that enriches the poet's work. They submit that to use metaphor 'is a sign of genius, for to use metaphors well is to see resemblance.' We have quite a number of Yorùbá poets that use metaphor successfully. We will take Atilade (1961:122) as our example:

...

*E bá mi gbédi fún Lugardi*

...

*Tó wó asia Egbẹ Royal Niger palè*

*Tó sì gbé ti Ìjọba Gèèsì ró*

...

*Baba onikalamu ibon, onimoràn idà*

...

*Ó fọgbón sorun iwájú*

*Pò mọ tìpàkó*

...

*Ó mú Yorùbá 'Wọ orun;*

*Ó mú Ibò nílà Oorun*

*Ó pa wọn pò mọ Hausa Òkè Oya*

(...

Let us give respect to Lugard

That revoked the Royal Niger Company Charter

And raised the British Government's flag

...

The man with the pen of gun, a sharp adviser

...

He used his sense

To cause confusion  
...  
He chose the Yorùbá in the West  
He chose the Ibo in the East  
And put them together with the Hausa  
of the Upper Niger)  
(Fọlọrunṣọ: 1999)

In this extract, Atilade's main concern was the unity of the country, considering the heterogeneity of the numerous ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. The lines

*Ó fọgbón sorun iwájú*  
*Pò mọ tìpàkó*

is a metaphor that Aristotle claims goes beyond the ordinary. It literally means he tactfully tied the hair of the forehead with that of the occiput. According to (Fọlọrunṣọ 1999), whoever does this, to the Yorùbá, is a confusionist because a situation so created is an uneasy union. The result could be very agonizing. Politically, Nigeria now still suffers the pains of that amalgamation of 1914. The examples we have examined show that we have Yorùbá poets that can compare favourable well with other poets all over the world. Poetry is different from other genres of literature. It is the climax of all writings and this lies in the choice of words employed – the poet uses ornamental language to bring out the beauty in his message.

## LATEST TRENDS IN YORÙBÁ WRITTEN POETRY

### 1. Transmission of Programmes on Electronic Media

One Bọsún Şówáńdé initiated the reading of poems on radio in the late fifties on the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) West. Adébáyò Fálétí followed suit on the NBC and later on the radio and television network of the former Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (WNTV - WNBS) Ìbàdàn. It is not surprising that many other poets began to read their poems on Broadcasting Corporation of Òyó State (Radio O-Y-O) (Ọlátúnjí (1982:102). Now, all the radio stations in Yorùbá speaking states have air time for poem-reading. According to Ọlátúnjí (1982):

A further development from this has been the phenomenon of poetry on discs. Oláńrewájú Adépòjù initiated it and others have followed suit...poets who have poems on discs include most of those who started as radio poets..

Apart from being didactic in their presentation, as we have observed earlier, the works of these poets, lack beauty. We take cognizance of the issue of commercialization of art which informs our preference to refer to some poets as 'emergency poets'. We must add, however, that Olátúnjí's remark that the poets 'are not interested in the affairs of their fellow men' may not be taken in the absolute. These poets, we must emphasize, have different objectives - they all express sociological concerns, but the degree of commitment differs from one poet to another. For example, Olátúnbòsún Oládàpò is far more committed to the promotion of cultural values than any other consideration. Oláńrewájú Adépòjù, on the other hand, is more politically inclined. Therefore, he often casts his poetry along the traditional Yorùbá praise poetry (see Fọlọrunṣọ, 1990: 257-266). Let us consider some examples from his albums. Having seen the achievement of the Gowon regime, who according to Adépòjù, had some civilian elders in his government, Adépòjù (1985) in his poem, 'Tẹmí Yé Mí', says:

*Şebí a jagun abélé njóşí  
A à yá kóbò jagun Ojúku  
Baba tó şíşé òún kò tí ì kú  
Ẹ wí fún sójà kó fòrò làgbà*

(Didn't we fight a civil war the other time?  
We did not borrow a single kọbọ to persecute  
Ojukwu's was  
The man who performed that feat is still alive  
Advise the soldiers to invite the elders.)

In the same disc, Adépòjù, in what he thinks as the inadequacies of the Buhari government, declares:

*È é tí jé o?  
Gbàtí ò sógun mó, tí ò sòtè mó*

*Owó yíyá ẹẹ jẹ?*  
*A ti ẹẹ tún jẹ gbèsè tó báun?*  
*Ẹbí sílẹ̀ kan àbò là ń ra mílùkì láyẹ Gowon?*

(What is happening?  
When there is no more war,  
Why are we borrowing money?  
Why do we have so heavy a debt to repay?  
Is it not only fifteen kòbò that we used to buy a tin of  
milk during Gowon's regime?)

In another disc, 'Níbo Là N Lọ?' (Where are we heading to?), Adépòjù has this to say on the removal of oil subsidy:

*Ẹ gbó, kí ló de o?*  
*Òtótó nì àbí iró nì tepo mótò tó fẹ̀ léwó?*  
*Fífowokúnwó epo àbí ńlá?*  
*Epo té é fowó kún nìjósí*  
*Tí gbogbo nnkan torí rẹ̀ tó léwó*  
*Tó jẹ̀ pé ohun tó dá sílẹ̀*  
*Ẹ jà lówólówó*  
*Bówó bá tún gorí epo*  
*Wàláhì ohun tó léwu nì*  
*Ah, ògá wa Gbàdàmósí Babangida*  
*Ẹ jáwó kúrò nìbè*  
*Ẹ mó òrùn tó wúwo fún m̀kúnnù.*

(Listen, what is happening?  
Can it really be true that oil subsidy will be removed?  
You want to increase the cost of oil or what?  
The increase that was effected the other time  
And the price of every commodity went up  
So more so that its effect  
Is still with us

If there is another increase in the cost of fuel  
Surely, it is dangerous  
Ah! Gbadamosi Babangida, our leader,  
Forget about it.  
Don't put too much burden on the masses.)

From these poems, it can be seen that the poet, Adépòjù, speaks for the masses.  
But we observe some inconsistencies in his submission as seen below:

*Okọ Mariam, Àrẹ Babangida*  
*O ó gbérù dórí*  
*Eni bá pé kébọ ó mó dà*  
*Ni ó máa bébọ lọ*  
*B'Ọbasanjọ ẹ fẹyìn tì*  
*Tó káşọ kaki sílé léró wóóó*  
*Kórí ó ẹ tì yín náà bée.*  
*Àwọn gbèsè tá a ti jẹ*  
*K'Ààrẹ Babangida tóó dé*  
*Ó ti ń san wón diè diè*  
*Àşólórí wa Babangida*  
*ń faná sígbèríko*  
*Kanga ìgbàlódé*  
*Tó ti gbé fáwọn àgbè*  
*Àşé bín-ín-tin kó*  
...  
*Owó tí wọn rí lórí SFEM*  
*Wón ní òun ni ò jé ká ti té lórílè-èdè yí*  
*Ni wón ń fí sánwó oşù*  
*Fáwọn òşìşé ọba*  
*Iye owé tí wọn rí lórí SFEM òún*  
*Wón ní nni wón fí ń já títi lódà nílẹ*

(The husband of Mariam, President Babangida  
You will succeed

Whoever prays that your sacrifice be not acceptable  
 It is he, that would be used as part of the sacrifice  
 Just as Qbasanjò retired  
 And left office peacefully  
 May you be destined to leave in like manner  
 All the debt we incurred  
 Before President Babangida's regime came in  
 Is already repaying them little by little  
 So, our Head, Babangida  
 Is busy with rural electrification  
 Modern boreholes  
 That he has provided for the farmers  
 Are numerous  
 The money realized from SFEM  
 Is the source of our good standing  
 It is that we use to pay salaries  
 To government workers  
 The amount realized from SFEM  
 Is used to tar our roads)

Here, Adépòjù praises Babangida. His praise-singing tendencies are reminiscent of the oral mode of performance traced to Òyó, where court bards performed at the royal palace mainly for entertainment.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, this phenomenon of radio and disc poetry will continue to occur. For example, some people continue to tune their radio to '*Ìjì-n-jì Akéwì*' (Radio O - Y - O), *Atótó Arére* (FRCN) Ìbàdàn and '*Òrò Ìyànjù*' (NTA) Ìbàdàn. These programmes are very enlightening and, hopefully, will continue to be so.

Another innovation is the use of Yorùbá for request programmes on radio. Because of the Yorùbá people's love of poetry, the programme has become very popular on some states' radio stations. The programme is called '*YÙNGBÀYÙNGBÀ*' on the radio service of the Osun State Broadcasting



Corporation, Osogbo. During my interview with Messrs Adeyemọ Akànjí and Yinusa Oyekanmi in Osogbo, the two presenters of *ỲUNGB̀AỲUNGB̀A* disclosed to me that there is no week the cards for the programme are not exhausted, because of its popularity. The programme continues to be one of the major sources of revenue for the corporation. The kernel of the subject matter of *ỲUNGB̀AỲUNGB̀A* request is *oríkì*, which attracts people to the programme. As I have said elsewhere, *oríkì* is very important to the Yorùbá. (For more of the significance of *oríkì* to the Yorùbá see Babalọlá, 1966, 1975), This is, perhaps, why people rush to buy ‘request cards’ for the *ỲUNGB̀AỲUNGB̀A* programme, and it is definitely an illustration of the immeasurable benefit of Yorùbá poetry to the society.

Besides the request programme, poetry is also used for most of the advertisements and personal-paid-announcements rendered in Yorùbá on radio stations in the Yorùbá-speaking communities of Nigeria. Let us see the following examples of radio jingles.

Example I

*Iṣé ẹnì niṣé ẹnì*  
*Má tíjú iṣé rẹ*  
*Ikán kì í tíjú à n mọ'lé*  
*Èèrà kì í tíjú à n lànà*  
*Alápàándèdè kì í tíjú à n fò kiri ní gbangba*  
*Má tíjú iṣé rẹ*  
*Bígi lo bá n gé ṣowó*  
*Bí wọn sì gbà ò kí o gbálè ojà*  
*Bíràánṣé lo sì jé lábé ìjọba*  
*Iṣé ẹnì niṣé ẹnì*  
*Má tíjú iṣé rẹ*  
*Ò bá à ṣàgbè*  
*Ò bà á ṣakòwé*  
*Bó o jé inájà*  
*Bó o jóníwóróbo*  
*Iṣé ẹnì niṣé ẹnì*

*Şişé, işé kî í pani*  
*Àíşe rè gan an làbùkù*

(Our job is our job  
Don't feel ashamed of your job  
The termites do not feel ashamed of molding their anthill  
The ants do not feel ashamed of making a path  
The swallow is never ashamed of flying about in the open  
Don't feel ashamed of your job  
Whether you are a firewood seller  
Or a market cleaner  
Or a messenger in the office  
Our job is our job  
Don't feel ashamed of your job  
Whether you are a farmer  
Whether you are a clerk  
Whether a businessman  
Whether a petty trader  
Our job is our job  
Work, work does not kill  
To do otherwise is disgrace)  
(Radio O-Y-O, 1985)

Example 2

*Káro dédéédé*  
*Ká kàn duduudu*  
*Asán ni*  
*Ká wa góòlù sóri, ká wa sórùn*  
*Ká wá sésè nítorí şe - ká - rí - mi*  
*Asán ni*  
*Í ó şe ju oní-nnkan lọ níni ayẹyẹ*  
*Asán pátátápá ni*  
*Gbogbo rẹ pátá*  
*Òtúbánté gbàà ni*

(To dress flamboyantly  
 To dress gorgeously  
 All is vanity  
 To adorn all your body with jewelries  
 To adorn your ankles, to show off  
 Vanity upon vanity  
 Outdressing more than the celebrant  
 It is all vanity  
 Everything is vanity  
 It is completely a trifling affair)  
 Radio O-Y-O (1986)

### Example 3

*Lílé:*    Àṣíírí ìkoòkò kò yẹ kó tọwó ajá tú  
*Ègbè:*   *Hin - in*  
*Lílé:*    Àṣíírí ìdánwò kò sì tó kó tẹnu rẹ jade  
*Ègbè:*   *Hin-- in*  
*Lílé:*    Ènì a fẹ̀yìn tì, tí ó bá yè wíwí níní wí  
*Ègbè:*   *Hin - in*

(Solo:    It is not the dog that should leak hyena's secret  
 Chorus: *Hin - in*  
 Solo:    it is not you that should leak examination  
 Chorus: *Hin - in*  
 Sole:    One's confidant should let one know before  
              withdrawing his support.  
 Chorus:    *Hin - in*)  
 Radio O-Y-O (1986)

These radio jingles are rendered in the poetic form. This makes the messages cogent and very effective. Example 3 is rendered and fashioned along *Ìyèrè Ifá* chant which makes the message very potent. The development of written Yorùbá

poetry that we have highlighted has presented the true perspective of a developing African literature (see Fọlọrunṣọ, 2000:15)

#### WHY IS YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE NEGLECTED?

Despite the development of written Yorùbá poetry that we have just highlighted, the study of Yorùbá is diminishing fast. It is disheartening that people have apathy towards the study of Yorùbá at all levels of our educational system. I have often wondered why people look down on indigenous African languages. If a Frenchman could study French in France as a discipline or a British studies English in Britain, then what is wrong with a Yorùbáman studying Yorùbá in Nigeria? It is even more ridiculous for parents to have the erroneous notion that their children would become pagans if they studied Yorùbá. For over thirty years that I have been researching in Yorùbá, I have never gone near becoming a pagan. Though my belief in Christianity might have been called to question several times during the course of my lectures on *Ifá Òrúnmìlà* or *ọfò* (Yorùbá incantations), yet, I have never compromised my religious belief. My students, many of whom are here in this auditorium, can bear witness to my favourite Christian song, whenever I find myself at the crossroads in the course of any lecture.

*Mo ti gba ònà ìyè yìí ná*

*Rárá mi ò ní padà*

*Jesu ni ònà ìyè náà*

*Tó lọ sílẹ̀ ògò*

(I have taken to this path of life

No, I shall not turn back

Jesus is that path of life

That leads to the glorious home.)

I would like to disabuse the minds of parents, particularly those from Lagos State, who discourage their children from studying Yorùbá. It is very unfortunate that we have more than enough candidates every year from other states who apply to read Yorùbá, but the 70:30 admission ratio would not allow. What is more disheartening is that African (or is it Yorùbá?) intellectuals just sit down

theorizing and dumping everything that is indigenous as fetish, barbaric and outdated. They are ignorant of their own culture and, sad still, they are not very familiar with imported cultures they run after. They are neither here nor there.

How many of us here allow our children to speak Yorùbá at home? During the last Odúnjò Memorial Lectures at the University of Ìbàdàn, (on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006), the Chairperson of the occasion, former Vice-Chancellor of LASU, Prof. (Chief, Mrs.) Jadesọla Akande, gave a gloomy picture of some Yorùbá children who could not read ‘*Eni a bá bá lábà*’ intelligibly. When one of them was asked his name, he said, ‘My name is Adeyẹmọ’ in foreign intonation. This is what Olúwolé (2000) referred to as ‘speaking English in *false* voice like *Ọsanyìn*’. What a shame! How many of us here can even speak impeccable Yorùbá for just a minute? Unfortunately research has shown that it is not the same with Hausa or Igbo. An Igbo woman speaks Igbo with her children at home, even when in another linguistic group. The Yorùbá are so arrogant that they feel it is degrading for them to speak Yorùbá openly with their children. What is interesting is that these children who are not allowed to speak Yorùbá cannot speak correct English either. We seem to have forgotten that the ability to speak one’s mother tongue enhances one’s dexterity in foreign languages.

The Babs Fafunwa six-year Primary Project, which began in January 1970, at the then University of Ife, confirmed this assertion. The controlled class that was taught every subject in Yorùbá performed better than those that were taught in English. Examples of this abound all over the world. The Afrikaans language of South Africa used to be the sole medium of instruction from the primary to the university level. It is only after the demolition of apartheid that the English language came to be used along with the Afrikaans language in some of their universities. For instance, Free State University and the University of Pretoria use both as media of instructions. We also have examples of Russia, China and Japan that had to change from using English as a medium of instruction, before they could make a headway. Today, China and Japan are leading countries in the manufacture of electronics and other electrical appliances in the whole world. This is partly the aftermath of their abandoning a foreign language for their

respective mother tongues. It will benefit us as a nation to revisit Babs Fafunwa's six-year Primary Project and draw a logical conclusion. To use Yorùbá as a medium of instruction from primary through university is attainable, although it will be a long-term project. Russia, China and Japan did not achieve that feat in a day.

Another area of contention is the new phenomenon of Yorùbá intellectuals in other disciplines using Yorùbá as a springboard. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, we learnt in History, in our secondary school days, of the scramble for Africa. Now, the order of the day for intellectuals is the scramble for indigenous materials for discourse analysis. This is very true of many scholars in foreign languages – English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. Let us consider some examples to buttress our stand. One thesis in English is on 'The Head Parameter and Grammaticality in Yorùbá/English Code Switching Among Undergraduates in Selected Universities'. This is the habit of speaking first in one language, then in another language in the course of the same conversation. This thesis is not in core linguistics, it is in English and the examples for analysis are from Yorùbá. We are not discouraging inter-disciplinary collaboration, but we are of the opinion that one should be well grounded in Yorùbá instead of using residual knowledge just because one is *omọ onílẹ̀* (son of the soil), that is, native speakers of the language. Another major example to buttress this point is the work on 'Major Themes of Yorùbá Oral Poetry' for a PhD in English! It is an in-depth analysis of recurring themes in Yorùbá oral poetry. The following data were collected:

- *Ìyèrè Ifá* (*Ifá* divination chant)
- *Èṣù pípè* (*Èṣù* invocation chant)
- *Ṣàngó pípè* (*Ṣàngó* invocation chant)
- *Ọya pípè* (*Ọya* invocation chant)
- *Èsà egúngún* (masquerade chant)
- *Ìjálá* (hunters' chant)
- *Ìrèmòjé* (hunters' funeral dirge)
- *Òkú pípè* (funeral dirge)
- *Èkún iyàwó* (nuptial chant)
- *Oríkì orílẹ̀* (lineage praise chant)

- *Ràrà* (praise chant)
- *Qfò* (incantation)
- *Etíyerí* (satirical chant)

A candidate for PhD in Yorùbá interested in this area needs just these data for his thesis. We are not saying there should not be interdisciplinary accord among different fields of study, but definitely, as the Yorùbá would say

*Bí a ó bá jé òsákálá*  
*Ká jé òsákálá*  
*Bí a ó bá jé òsokolo*  
*Ká jé òsokolo*  
*Òsákálá - sokolo kò yẹ omọ ènìyàn.*

(If one wants to be òsákálá  
 So be it  
 If one wants to be òsokolo  
 So be it  
 To bear Òsákálá - sokolo is unacceptable)

One has to be well versed in one discipline before dabbling into another field. Take, for example again, another thesis which derived its primary texts from African folktales and selected African novels. The author is an expert in English but dependent on her native intelligence as a speaker of Yorùbá. This is not academic enough. She needed to have been jointly supervised by a lecturer in Yorùbá and another in English. The reason is that these experts in English cannot be presumed to have a good percentage grasp of data collected on Yorùbá for their analysis. For the list of such doctoral researches that are deeply rooted in African languages, (see Adéléké 2000:111). It is the practice in almost all Nigerian universities.

On the other hand, many disciplines that could benefit from Yorùbá are not taking full advantage of researches carried out in Yorùbá language. For example, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, you are a reputable scholar of Physics which explains the causes of lightning and thunderstorm. It is true that the Yorùbá attribute thunder and lightning to Şàngó. We are not asking those in Physics to worship

Ẓàngó; God forbid. But the knowledge of what the Yorùbá say of Ẓàngó could help their interpretation of thunder and lightning as physical occurrences. For instance, they do say:

*Ìjì kì íjà kó wọ ilé aró* (Lightning cannot strike the smith).

This is because there are many iron objects that deflect it. Again, how about those in Religious Studies? What do they understand about African Traditional Religion without the collaboration of the Department of African Languages, Literatures & Communication Arts?

Those in Law have a lot to learn from Yorùbá traditional law. The Yorùbá had a way of settling disputes before the arrival of the Whitemen. Many of our African disputes could be resolved in the African way. Scholars have researched into the legal system of the Yorùbá and found out that solution to conflict could be sought from traditional Yorùbá myths (see Adéléké, 2004:179-191)

Recently, Pópólá (2006) in a lecture on ‘Yorùbá Jurisprudence: Contents, Lessons and Challenges’ at the J.F. Odúnjọ Memorial Lectures, 2006, went into the rich Yorùbá principles of jurisprudence long before the advent of the British law system. Quoting a few of the basic principles of law in Yorùbá oral tradition to buttress his argument, he offered these proverbs for illustration:

(i) *Etí, gbọ èkejì kó o tó dájó*

(Hear the other side before you judge)

Or *A gbọ ejó ẹnìkan dá àgbà òṣìkà*

(He who listens to one side of a case and makes pronouncement is a bad judge)

This stresses the importance of fair hearing (*audi alterem partem*) from both sides before judgment. Furthermore, the proverb:

(ii) *Òfin tí a bá torí ẹrú dá*



*A kì í torì ọmọ bà á jé*

(A law made because of the slave  
is not breached because of a child)

And

(iii) *Ìbí kò jubí*  
*Bá a ẹ berú*  
*La a bi ọmọ*

(We are all born equal  
It is the same way a slave was born  
That a child was also born)

show the principle of equality before the law. The Yorùbá are conversant with the value of justice; they make use of impartial witnesses. This is evident in:

*Olè níi mèsè olè tó lorí àpáta*

(It is a thief that can discover the path of another thief  
on a rock)

These are indices that Yorùbá jurisprudence has been in existence from time immemorial. The Yorùbá effective system of justice is vivid in these principles that are generally referred to as proverbs.

In her paper entitled ‘Democracy and Indigenous Governance: The Nigerian Experience’, in 2000, Prof. Sophie Olúwolé (then of the University of Lagos) now of the Lagos State Univeresity, cited a catalogue of democratic principles and policies of Fundamental Human Rights and Responsibilities. Let us consider some of these illustrations:

(a) The Right of Property Ownership.

(i) *Oko kì í jé ti baba ati ọmọ*  
*Kí ó má láàlà*

(There is always a line of demarcation between the  
farms owned by the father and his son )

(ii) *Àtàn ní jogún àkísà*  
*Ọmọ ẹni ní jogún ẹni*

(Dunghill inherits the rag  
One's off-springs inherit one's property)

(b) The Right to Labour.

(i) *Bí ọmọdé bá tó fún lókó*  
*A fún un lókó*  
*Bí ó bá tó fún ládàá*  
*A fún un ládàá*

(When a child is ripe for freedom  
He is set free)

(ii) *Aláìnísé obínrin kò yẹni*  
*Obínrin tí ò nísé*  
*Ara rẹ̀ nì yó tà jẹun*  
*A kunjú, a kẹnu*  
*A sàgbèrè lònà ọjà*

(A jobless woman is not fit as a wife  
A woman that has no job will sell herself for a living  
She will paint her face and her lips  
She will flirt all around)

(c) The Right of the child

(i) *Ọmọdé ò jobì*  
*Àgbà ò joyè*

(A child that is not cared for  
Will not support the elder)

Or

*Àgbà tí ò bá jàjẹ àwèyìn*

*Nì yóò rùgbá è délé*

(An elder that eats the last morsel  
Washes the dishes)

(ii) *Bòmódé bá láṣọ bí àgbà*  
*Kò lè lákùsà bí àgbà*

(A child can have as many clothes as an elder;  
He can not claim to possess rags as much as the elder)  
(See Olúwólé. 2000 for full details).

These are Yorùbá ideas, concepts and principles about human rights and social responsibilities that had been in place before the colonial invasion of Africa. Our present day judicial system has a lot to learn from the Yorùbá to complement our modern law.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in conclusion, I raise the fundamental question ‘Why is the artist famished and why is the society famished?’ The answer is simple: we are all guilty. Prof. Sophie Olúwólé, giving a lecture on ‘Education, Culture and National Identity’ says

Our educational system today relegates the development of Nigerian languages to the background. Parents pride themselves in restricting their children from speaking Yorùbá. Private schools advertised as ‘English speaking’ charge higher fees for that purpose. Yet it has been long realized that the philosophy of life, the morality, what a people regard as good and beautiful are all expressed in their own language. Hence, when we lose our mother tongue, we lose our culture

Our language is part of our culture; if we lose our language, we lose our culture and vice versa. It is very unfortunate that most of us still believe that most of our cultural heritage is primitive, including our language. This wrong notion that is borne out of our colonial mentality is still haunting us till today. Appiah (1985: 252) quoted in Olúwolé laments:

The relation of the African writer to his past is a web of delicate ambiguities. Since he was taught to despise, even ignore his oral tradition, there are many difficulties in this de-colonization of the mind, he still has to learn to assimilate and transcend it.

But for how long will he (the African writer) come to the reality of his being an African? No matter how much we imitate Western culture, we can never become Europeans or Americans.

We should not forget that our cultural heritage is still very relevant, even to the outside world. For instance, Akeem Lasisi, a poet/journalist carried *ìjálà* (the hunters' dirge) beyond the shores of Nigeria. *The NEWS Magazine*, Vol. 25, No. 22, of October 5, 2005 reported Mr. Lasisi as saying

...I have also performed at POETRY Africa organized by the Department of Creative Arts, University of Natal, South Africa... Bob Holman, a leading performance/Rap poet, who came from the U.S. was shocked at the way I spontaneously performed *Ìjálá* and English poetry. Later, he came to me, accusing me of using juju (African magic/charm) to hypnotize the audience while the rendition lasted.

If the performance of *ìjálá* could be so appreciated in far away South Africa, then, there is hope for its sustenance and continuity on Yorùbá soil. All we need is to revive its study and practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my next assignment is to thank all those that have made this day a memorable one. First, my gratitude is to the Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, who spared my life to see this day. He has been so faithful to me. He deliberately grants me special favour by making the impossibility possible. He is really the Unchanging Changer.

Next, I thank the Vice-Chancellor for giving me the opportunity to give this inaugural lecture today. I am very grateful, Sir.

My thanks also go to my parents (of blessed memory), they were wonderful parents. My father, Pa Isaiah Babatunde Fọlorunṣọ and my mother Madam Serah Ẹmioye Fọlorunṣọ. May their souls rest in perfect peace.

I thank all my teachers, particularly, at the university level. I remember both eminent Professor Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjì and late Professor Afọlábí Ọlábímtán, who both led me to this area of my studies, poetry. I am equally grateful to Professor Emeritus Adébóyè Babalọlá who, during my research, put all his books at my disposal, including his personal handwritten notes. I also thank Dr. E.O. Olúkòjù who supervised my PhD Thesis.

Now, to my colleagues. First, at Lagos State University, particularly, my Department. I gained from the wealth of experience of Mr. Fíoyè Òyèṣàkin, an Associate Professor of Yorùbá Studies. I say thank you. I thank my other colleagues – Dr. Olúnládé, Mr. Adéníyì, Mrs. Oyínlólá, Dr. Abóḍerìn, Mrs. Sàlámí, Mrs. Ònàdípe and Mr. Adésànyà.

I am equally grateful to Professor Sophie Olúwólé of the Department of Philosophy for her immense contribution to the success of this inaugural lecture. Mama, thank you very much. I also thank Dr. Ọláitán of the Department of

Physics for making his publications on the link between Physics and Yorùbá available to me.

I also thank Professor Àlàbá of the University of Lagos, Professor (Fr.) Ilésanmí, formerly of the Obafemi Awolowo University (now retired), and Professor Bísí Ògúnṣínà of the Ado-Ekiti University, Ado - Ekiti.

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I am very grateful to my Church, Chapel of Light under the indefatigable Chaplain, the Rev. Canon (Professor) Dàpò Ashaju and his beautiful wife,

Harriet. They have been too wonderful to my family. We will continue to be one, when we meet at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I cannot forget to thank ‘my daughter’, the genius of graphics, Mrs. Bọsẹde Oyetejù Amọo, who usually speaks in pictures, *obìnrin bí ọkùnrin*, but for her, this inaugural lecture would have been shoddily delivered. The Lord will continue to strengthen you. He will give you power for witty inventions’, Amen.

Now, to my family. I appreciate all my brothers and sisters, some of who are here present this afternoon. I cherish the love we have shared together from our childhood days till now. Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. I am particularly grateful to my elder sister, Chief (Mrs.) Felicia Ọmọyẹni Bello. She is more than a sister to me, she is mother. She took care of me since the day I was brought home from Ghana, and she is still performing that role. God bless you.

Last, but not the least is my immediate family. My children, Muiyiwa, Ọlanrewaju and Sinmisọla are wonderful gifts from God. They have been always supportive, very understanding and very caring. You will all shine for Jesus. And now their mother, my wife, Barrister Olùşọlá Ayọbami, who combines beauty with brain. She is God-sent. She stabilizes my life. She is the big brain behind my educational achievements. What can I say again? I love you very much.

And to God Almighty, the Author and Finisher of my life, my Porter and Essence of my life, be all the GLORY, HONOUR AND PRAISE.

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