

Antelope (Woman) and Buffalo (Woman):
Contemporary Literary Transformations
of a Topos in Yorùbá Culture

by

Anja Oed

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Abstract

This thesis explores four contemporary literary transformations of the topos of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn*, antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) respectively, in D.O. Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Qdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* and *Igbó Olódùmarẹ*, Amos Tutùqlá's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Mobólájí Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent", and Ben Okri's three *àbíkéú* narratives, *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment*, and *Infinite Riches*. The introductory chapter raises theoretical issues regarding the notion of a topos itself and examines how these resonate with central Yorùbá concepts. Furthermore, it provides an overview of Yorùbá cultural beliefs associated with the figures of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) and comments on contemporary literary transformations of this topos in general. Each of the consecutive chapters represents an in-depth analysis and interpretation of one contemporary author's literary transformation of the topos of antelope (woman) and/or buffalo (woman). By putting each writer's deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn* in a biographical, historical and socio-cultural perspective, I explore how he or she – more or less consciously – invests it with new meanings and, in the process, transforms it, and how the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) thus comes to serve manifold symbolic or metaphoric purposes, reflecting on and expressing a whole range of issues. Not only is the topos as such continuous beyond the precolonial period but it also assumes a new relevance with respect to the socio-cultural and political anxieties generated in the colonial and post-colonial climates. The contemporary literary transformations explored in this thesis all mediate and negotiate personal, socio-cultural and political anxieties in the wake of sustained contact with the West, especially through Christian missionary activity and colonialism. The thematisation of gender relations plays an important symbolic, metaphoric and metonymic role in this respect, since the way in which each writer's literary transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn* relates to the issue of women and female agency in Yorùbá culture, or, more generally, in Nigerian culture, is an important means of communicating and conceptualising change.

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Anja Malin Oed

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Note on the representation of Yorùbá texts

While this thesis is written in English I have decided to retain certain Yorùbá key terms, which are generally defined the first time they are used. Quotations from interviews held in Yorùbá are generally represented in both Yorùbá and English. Translations of such quotations are based on transcripts and first translations by Ṣọlá Ajíbádé; in my own retranslations, I have aimed to get as close to the Yorùbá text as possible. I have decided to retain both the tone-marks and sub-dots of Yorùbá proper names as well as of Yorùbá key terms in the English translations. Quotations from written Yorùbá texts – unless they themselves represent quotations – have generally been edited wherever either the absence of tone-marks and/or sub-dots or the inconsistency with which they were used seemed to be primarily determined by a lack of sufficient typing, printing or editing facilities. Whenever quotations have been thus edited, this is marked in the text. Furthermore, I have either retained or added tone-marks and sub-dots to Yorùbá proper names referred to in the text but omitted all tone-marks (but not the sub-dots) in the names of authors whose works are cited in the bibliography in order to guarantee that these will remain easily identifiable to non-Yorùbá speakers.

Chapter 1

Antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) as a topos in Yorùbá culture

1.0. Introduction

In Yorùbá culture today, there coexist various beliefs regarding the relationship between human beings and animals, which are not necessarily synchronised into a coherent whole. Many animals are believed to have originally been human beings, who were permanently turned into animals for one reason or another. Some human beings, for instance *àjé* 'witches, powerful women (and sometimes men)'¹ and *oḍe* 'hunters', are believed to have the power to transform into animals. Also, while every living being has its own *èmi* 'animating spirit', *àjé* may send theirs into the bodies of particular animals to deal with people whom they want to punish or destroy. Furthermore, some animals are believed to have the ability to transform into human beings. According to some people, all animals may originally have had this ability but today, only a few are usually named, such as *àgbònrín* 'harnessed antelope', *esón* 'buffalo', and *òkéké* 'bush-rat'. Other people believe that such beings are spirits of some sort and naturally

¹ *Àjé* are usually elderly and very knowledgeable women who command special powers. Because of their power, they are generally called or alluded to as *iyá wa* 'our mothers', which shows both respect and deference. Similarly, they are alluded to as *àwọn ayé* 'those of the world' or simply 'the world', or *iyá ayé* 'mothers of the world'. *Ayé*, which is here translated as 'the world', 'implies the phenomenal world that any number of spirits, by assuming human or animal form, can penetrate' (Drewal/Drewal 1983: 11). Age, in Yorùbá culture, implies wisdom, knowledge and understanding, so that *iyá ayé* are also conceived of as 'wise women'. In contrast to *iyá mi* 'my mother', *àjé* can be referred to as *iyá mi*. Another name for *àjé* – which also involves a change of tone – is *eniyán* as opposed to *eniyàn* for ordinary human beings. According to Drewal/Drewal (1983: 10), witches' "supernatural capacity [is] reflected in the power of transformation". Because of their powers of transformation, *àjé* are also referred to as *abarú méjì* 'owners of two bodies', *olójú méjì* 'owners of two faces', or *aláwò méjì* 'owner of two colours/natures/personalities'. Especially witches are believed to transform into (night)birds, which is why they are also called *elegye* 'bird people' (derived from *eni eye*). Henry Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal (1983: 209), commenting on the nocturnal mother masks of Gèlèdè, point out that "Birds, especially night birds, are among the most pervasive symbols associated with the mothers, since they are the form the mothers are believed to assume on their nocturnal voyages". According to M. Drewal (1992: 178), "female images of the transformed bird stress secrecy, elusiveness, and covertness".

hybrid – no more human than animal and not usually or predominantly the one or the other – and therefore essentially different from both human beings and animals. It is believed that in the olden days, many of the strangers coming to trade in the market or attending festivals in the town² were really spirit beings from *ìgbó* '(the) bush or forest'. Only people with extraordinary, esoteric powers, such as *àjé* or *ṣàṣà*, would normally be able to distinguish them from ordinary human beings. Similarly, bush animals might take off their skins or borrow human features so as to disguise themselves in order to pursue their business in town, such as bargaining for vegetables and other provisions they lacked and trading their own products, to acquire wives, or simply to enjoy themselves in the human world (Olayemi 1975; Drewal/Drewal 1983; personal interviews).

Generally, animals of both sexes are believed to have the power to transform into human beings. All of my informants asserted that male animals always turn into men, while female animals always turn into women; likewise, young animals turn into young people and old animals into elderly people. However, in Yorùbá tales relating the encounters of intrepid hunters with such animals, the latter always transform into beautiful young women.³ Moreover, while various kinds of animals are believed to have such powers of transformation, these tales most commonly feature an antelope or buffalo (woman). The latter has, moreover, a religious dimension as it is generally associated with the *òrìṣà* 'deity' Oya. While the specific details of the tales may vary, their general outline is as follows. A hunter encounters an extremely beautiful woman in the bush. Usually, he secretly watches as she takes off her animal skin and hides it in

² Incidentally, festivals are frequently celebrated in the market place, which, moreover, may often be positioned at a crossroads. It is a characteristically liminal place. As Drewal/Drewal (1983: 10) have noted, the "market is a transient place, at once the domain of women and the worldly domain of spirits, the place where they enter 'the world' to mingle freely with mortals".

³ There are, as far as I know, no tales of hunters encountering animal men in the forest, if only because hunters are not ordinarily tempted to secretly follow other men into the forest, or because male animals would gain nothing by transforming themselves into men when hunters are about to shoot at them. There may also be reasons beyond the internal logic of such tales.

a tree or termitarium. Sometimes this happens just when he is about to shoot the animal⁴. If the woman is carrying a basket of vegetables or other provisions on her head, this indicates that she is on her way to the market. The unfortunate hunter's initial surprise soon turns into great desire for the beautiful female stranger but, as Val Qláyemí (1975: 968) has observed, each "of the marriages between hunters and animal-women invariably ends in disaster: co-wives discover by a ruse that the new wife is an animal; she returns to her animal state when she is insulted by them; and in frenzied anger she kills many people, including the co-wives and their children, before returning to the jungle".

In variants featuring an antelope woman, the hunter often confronts her immediately, urging her to become his wife. Alternatively, he may wait until she returns to the place where she has hidden her skin at the end of the day, or even watch her a few times before confronting her. The antelope woman eventually accepts his marriage proposal on the condition that the hunter must never tell anybody of her animal identity, and follows him to his home. Even though the senior wife/wives may be suspicious of her from the outset because of her unknown family background and, sometimes, because of her odd behaviour, her secret remains hidden for many years, during which she gives birth to a varying number of children. Eventually, however, the hunter inadvertently betrays her secret to the co-wife/co-wives, who have usually been nagging him about her origin for a long time or even set up a trap for him; and in one way or another, the antelope woman finds out about it, whereupon she usually kills the co-wife/co-wives and her/their children before returning to the bush. In variants featuring a buffalo woman, the hunter secretly watches until the strange woman has disappeared and then proceeds to take possession of her animal skin, which he takes home. His first wife secretly watches him as he hides the skin in the attic or granary of the house. When the (buffalo) woman returns to retrieve her animal skin from the tree or termitarium where she has left it

⁴ As I was told by Chief Àwàlà, female antelopes who, due to their special powers of insight and alertness, realise that a hunter is about to shoot them sometimes transform into women so as to trick the hunter by diverting his attention, thus saving their lives.

she discovers, with great dismay, that it has been stolen. Either she has seen the hunter earlier in the day and suspects it was him, or she follows footprints around the skin's hiding-place, which lead her directly to the hunter's house. She marries him and stays in his house for many years during which she gives birth to numerous children, ignorant of the fact that the senior wife knows about her animal identity. One day, however, during an argument, the senior wife ridicules the junior wife because of the latter's buffalo skin, which she knows to be hidden in the attic or granary. Thereupon, the buffalo woman retrieves her skin, turns back into a buffalo, kills the senior wife and her children and runs off into the forest, where her husband is hunting, with the intention of killing him as well. She finds and pursues him but in one way or another, his life is saved; either because he has offered the required sacrifices before first encountering the buffalo (woman) and marrying her or because he, as a hunter, has the power to transform into a tiny water insect, a secret which his mother prevented him from sharing with his wife on an earlier occasion, and can thus escape.

This thesis explores contemporary literary transformations of *àgbònrín* 'antelope (woman)' and *ẹfòn* 'buffalo (woman)' as a topos in Yorùbá culture.⁵ For several reasons, I frequently insert the word 'woman' in brackets. *Àgbònrín* or *ìgalà* 'harnessed antelope' and *ẹfòn* 'buffalo' represent zoological terms denoting particular kinds of bush animals which are not always and necessarily associated with the power to transform into human beings and which, therefore, cannot generally be translated as 'antelope person' or 'buffalo person' respectively.⁶ Yorùbá personal pronouns in the third person singular do not provide a clue to distinguishing between animals and human beings either.⁷ Accordingly, the terms retain a certain ambiguity, which, wherever that is desirable, can only be transposed into an English text by using brackets. In turn, when I refer to an antelope or buffalo that has transformed into a human being, I

⁵ The notion of a topos will be discussed in the following subchapter.

⁶ However, it is the term *àgbònrín* rather than *ìgalà* that is associated with the transformation of animals into human beings and vice versa (see 1.2.1.), which is why I generally use *àgbònrín* to refer to the harnessed antelope. In any case, according to some people, *àgbònrín* is the term which is more commonly used today.

⁷ The Yorùbá (non-emphatic) personal pronoun in the third person singular is *ó* 'he, she, it'.

generally drop the brackets. Furthermore, while antelopes and buffalo generally might, in principle, transform into either men or women, depending on their sex, this thesis is specifically concerned with those that turn into women. In this regard, the brackets indicate the gender-specificity of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* as a topos in Yorùbá culture. Again, when I refer to an antelope or buffalo that has visibly transformed into a woman, I usually drop the brackets.⁸

More specifically, this thesis explores four contemporary literary transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in D.O. Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Qdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* (1938) and *Igbó Olódumare* (1949), Amos Tutùolá's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), Mobólájí Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent" (1996), and Ben Okri's three *àbíkéú* narratives, *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1994) and *Infinite Riches* (1998). These works are extremely diverse. As I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, each writer's literary transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* is, in its own specific context, both unique and intriguing; and even though I shall attempt to discuss the broader significance of my approach with regard to critical discourses on contemporary African literatures, I do believe that the natures of these transformations would themselves suffice to justify the critical and interpretative attention given to each text. My approach to the individual literary works and, more specifically, to the writers' transformations of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* by necessity reflects their own heterogeneity. It has been shaped by what I felt to be the requirements of each individual text. At a more fundamental level, in order to disclose the various meanings the topos takes on in the individual texts – which may at times be hidden or contradictory – I have aimed to put each literary work in a biographical, historical and socio-cultural perspective.

This project has developed out of PhD research on Ben Okri's literary work as visionary fiction. My interest in the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* originates in Okri's deployment of the

⁸ There are a few exceptions to this overall paradigm, whenever it seemed appropriate to add, drop or even shift the brackets. However, these exceptions are also motivated by the underlying principle to retain ambivalence while being as specific as possible.

figure of the antelope (woman) in his *àbíkéú* narratives. I was struck by the beauty of a tale told by the *àbíkéú* narrator's father, Dad, which seemed to be related to or inspired by the figure of the antelope woman in Yorùbá (and, more generally, West African) cultural beliefs; moreover, I was fascinated by the way in which suffering women appear to assume the elusive identities of (white) antelopes, which, in turn, seemed to open up a new perspective on Okri's otherwise more male-dominated and male-oriented concern with visionary identity and agency. While working on Okri, I began to pay new attention to the motif of *àgbònrin* in narratives by D.O. Fágúnwà and Amos Tutùqlá, both of whom are Yorùbá writers. Furthermore, I came across Fèmi Lásodé's and Wálé Ògúnyemí's video *Şàngó: Legendary Afrikan King* (1998), which depicts the love-relationship between the *òrìṣà* Oya as buffalo woman (who, in the film, is represented as antelope woman) and Şàngó, the fourth Alààfin (the *oba* 'king' of Òyó's title); likewise, I found a brief discussion of Hubert Ògúndé's play entitled "Half and Half" (Hoch-Smith 1978) and became interested in the tradition of the motif in Yorùbá culture more generally.⁹

My interest in the tradition and symbolic and/or metaphoric potential of the motif of *àgbònrin* was, moreover, sustained by the fact that, from the very beginning of my PhD research at SOAS, I had been studying the Yorùbá language. Quite independently from my project on Okri's literary work, this was motivated by my general interest in Yorùbá culture, which dates back to a seminar on African art and iconography taught by Prof Rowland Abíódún at Amherst College, Massachusetts, in spring 1994, during which I was introduced to the work of, among others, Karin Barber, Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry Drewal. On coming to SOAS, I was delighted to (finally) be able, beyond pursuing my actual PhD research, to attend courses in Yorùbá in the department of African Languages and Cultures. My increasing efforts

⁹ Hoch-Smith's discussion of the play appears to be based on a performance that she watched in Ìbàdàn. There exists, however, a (possibly edited) typescript of the play by Èbùn Clark (the author of *Hubert Ògúndé: The Making of Nigerian Theatre*), which was never published. I am very grateful to Karin Barber for this information as well as a copy of the play.

By that time, however, I had already decided to concentrate on transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in contemporary prose fiction. Otherwise, it might have been very interesting to include discussions of the film as well as the play in this thesis.

to learn Yorùbá – originally legitimated in relation to my project on Okri's fiction – soon developed a dynamic of their own, which I eventually found impossible to resist. Beyond my attraction to the Yorùbá language as such, the latter promised access to a fascinating and stunningly beautiful tradition of verbal expression, which made me regret that I had not chosen to do (nor been able to do) my PhD research in this field in the first place.

In September 1999, I first went to south-western Nigeria with the intention of writing up my thesis on Okri's fiction while simultaneously learning more about Yorùbá culture and developing my knowledge of the Yorùbá language. In the back of my mind, the figure of the antelope (woman) was, as it would seem with hindsight, only waiting for a chance to get out. It promised an opportunity to use and expand my knowledge of Yorùbá in a way that would be more immediately relevant to my research project as well as, in some ways, more original. I was fascinated by the physical beauty of the harnessed antelope (which I admired in the zoo on the campus of the University of Ìbàdàn) and its significance in Yorùbá cultural beliefs, which I was only beginning to learn about. I was introduced to its non-identical twin sister, the figure of the buffalo (woman), which was equally compelling. Last but not least, I was intrigued by its symbolic and/or metaphoric potential and the ways in which various contemporary writers had deployed the motif in their literary work.

It is not an easy decision to change the focus of one's PhD project during the third year but, after the first few weeks in Nigeria, I decided to follow what had originally been but a side track in my research and explore contemporary literary transformations of the motif of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman). During the remaining time of my first stay in Nigeria, which lasted from September 1999 until May 2000 and during which I was based in Modákéké and Ilé-Ifè, as well as during a second stay, which lasted from October until December 2000 and during which I was based in Òyó and Ìbàdàn, I interviewed different kinds of priests and/or native healers as well as distinguished hunters, whose knowledge of the antelope

(woman) and buffalo (woman) is complementary. Furthermore, I met a number of Yorùbá writers and scholars, with whom I was able to discuss some of my ideas.

The present chapter functions as an introduction to the following chapters, each of which represents an in-depth analysis and interpretation of one contemporary author's literary transformation of the topos of antelope (woman) and/or buffalo (woman). In the first part of this chapter, I shall raise some theoretical issues regarding the notion of a topos itself. In the second part, I shall provide an overview of Yorùbá cultural beliefs associated with the figures of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) and comment on the contemporary literary transformations of this topos in general. In order to characterise and convey information about the two figures, the priests, healers and hunters whom I interviewed naturally drew upon relevant *oríkì* 'salutary and descriptive poetry' and *ìtàn* 'narrative/s, history' as well as *ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ifá* 'Ifá divination verses' they were familiar with; furthermore, I have been able to draw on various written representations of relevant *oríkì*, *ìtàn* and *ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ifá*. All of these also represent artful manifestations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman).

However, each of the oral representations occurred in the context of my visit and as a direct consequence of my articulation of interest in the figure of antelope (woman) and/or buffalo (woman), which means that rather than being deployed as a topos, the figure itself, in its own right, occupied the centre stage of our discourse. The written representations (e.g. Gbàdàmọ́sí and Beier 1963a; Babalolá 1966; Beier 1970; Àrẹ̀mú 1979) – which exist in transcribed, more or less edited, and sometimes translated form – were, most often, 'collected' under similar circumstances. Furthermore, the written representations of *oríkì* in particular are decontextualised to such a degree that it is virtually impossible to fully reconstruct and explore the deeper levels of their meaning and function as a topos.¹⁰ Theoretically, it would be possible

¹⁰ The meaning of specific *oríkì*, which may appear cryptic and fragmentary when standing on their own, become accessible through *ìtàn*, which comment on their historical origin. Yet in addition to that, *oríkì* assume further, more immediate layers of meaning in relation to the specific context of particular performances (Barber 1991).

to explore oral transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in a similar way but this would have required a methodologically fundamentally different kind of field research.¹¹ Therefore, while I do draw on these representations in the second part of this chapter in order to illustrate the complexity and richness as well as the conceptual background of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) I have decided in this thesis to focus on literary transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in contemporary prose fiction.

1.1. *Topos and tradition*

Most generally, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1991: 226), 'topos' is a term "for a motif commonly found in literary works, or for a stock device of rhetoric". A topos is, according to Lothar Bornscheuer (1976), characterised by habituality, potentiality, intentionality, and symbolicity. Its habituality, or traditionality, is, most significantly, what distinguishes a topos from other kinds of motifs: a topos may also be described as a motif but not every motif is also a topos. While a motif can function to create an internal or intratextual network of meaning or allusion (i.e. as a leitmotif), a topos always exists as an intertextual

¹¹ My actual field research had, partly for financial and partly for political reasons, to remain relatively sporadic. While I was based in Ilé-Ifè and Modákéké and when I had just begun to conduct a first series of interviews with local informants, there was a new, violent outbreak of an old conflict between the two towns and the surrounding villages and farms, during which many people were killed, houses burnt and property destroyed. During this time, it was hardly possible to keep up any kind of field work routine or to sustain contacts which had just been established. Travel was, for prolonged periods of time, virtually impossible, as renewed fighting in villages and farms along the way could break out any time, thus always making a safe return even more of a question of good fortune than usual. Public traffic had ceased altogether or was considered a high risk. People either left the two towns as well as the campus in Ifè or lived in constant fear. Furthermore, some of my main informants on either side were ritually and otherwise involved in the fighting, which would have made communication with them – for which they hardly had the leisure anyway – dangerous both for them and myself. The fact that I was a European did not make me less suspicious. During my second stay, when my research project had become more clearly defined and I wanted to renew some of my old contacts, I found, to my dismay, that my most knowledgeable informant in Işéyìn had had to flee the town, along with his big family, as his house and all his property had, also for political reasons (which were completely unrelated to the situation in Ifè and Modákéké), been burnt and destroyed.

phenomenon. Furthermore, while a motif may be deployed for primarily aesthetic reasons, a topos is usually adapted in accordance with an agenda that goes beyond merely aesthetic concerns. It is, in this regard, evoked or deployed and, in the process, transformed, so as to deal with particular themes or topics which may, or may not, be interrelated. The fact that a particular topos is repeatedly deployed and, in the process, transformed, demonstrates its continuous interest over time, which adds to its conceptual and symbolic value. The richness of a topos, its multi-layeredness and complexity, usually increase in the course of time. Finally, while a motif consists, most often, of a recurrent image, symbol, idea, character-type, narrative detail, or verbal pattern, the notion of a topos can accommodate more complex phenomena, such as whole stock narratives or plots (e.g. tales), which may reverberate with aspects of cultural belief systems.¹²

As I would propose, the notion of a topos may help to re-negotiate various issues that have been central to critical discourses on contemporary African literatures, to move beyond a preoccupation with the politics of the 'post-coloniality' of these literatures *per se* and thus, to shift the focus of literary analysis to the close reading and interpretation of specific texts in relation to their biographical, historical, and socio-cultural contexts. In the following three sections of the present subchapter, I shall reflect upon aspects of the notion of a topos which I have found particularly important with regard to my exploration of transformations of the motif of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in contemporary prose fiction. At the same time, I shall show how these aspects resonate with concepts in Yorùbá culture itself. I shall begin by examining the notion of a topos in relation to the Yorùbá notion of *àṣà* 'tradition', which encompasses continuity as well as change and agency. Second, I shall relate the notion

¹² The figures of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) are not limited to Yorùbá culture: similar female characters are prominent in many other traditions both in (West) Africa and in other parts of the world. However, while a topos may not necessarily be exclusive to a specific cultural context, it is always – in contrast, for instance, to archetypes – culturally specific. It is inspired by and becomes meaningful against a culturally specific backdrop, even though it may also potentially become meaningful in other, wider contexts and its significance may then transcend its habitual cultural context.

of a topos to Yorùbá beliefs regarding the relationship between *òrò* 'here: matter, issue' and *òwé* 'proverb, idiom' and the way in which the meaning and function of a particular topos take shape and are defined in relation to specific historical and socio-cultural as well as biographical contexts. Third, I shall focus on the notion of a topos with respect to processes of representation and interpretation in Yorùbá culture, specifically in terms of Ifá divination.

1.1.1. Àṣà Yorùbá: *continuity and change*

Most importantly, a topos is characterised by habituality, or traditionality, which means that it has previously been repeatedly deployed by different people in similar or different contexts and, thereby, become familiar, i.e. a 'commonplace' (Bornscheuer 1976). It is always in relation to other texts that a particular topos attains its habituality or, as it is passed on in the course of time, traditionality. In this section, I shall relate the notion of a topos to an understanding of tradition that is based on continuity as well as change. As I would propose, the notion of a topos is particularly productive for literary analysis because, while presupposing continuity as well as change, it transcends the issues of orality, genre, and language, which are often associated with or taken to signify cultural continuity and have tended to dominate previous critical discussions of contemporary African literature in relation to tradition. Thus, it becomes possible to focus on the close analysis and interpretation of a specific topos – here, the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfẹn* – as an intertextual phenomenon with regard to its characteristic potentiality, intentionality and symbolism, which represents a significant step in a new direction.

With respect to African literatures, 'tradition' is often associated with the past and thus deprived of its fundamentally dynamic and continuous nature. Thus distorted, it may appear, in Paulin J. Hountondji's (1983: 139) words, as if "it were something dead, external and/or superior to us". But as Hountondji (*ibid*) stresses, tradition did not originally "mean a given set

of customs, but a movement: that of transmitting (Latin: *tradere* = to transmit) habits and values from one generation to another":

In its passive sense, the word has come to mean the result of this movement, i.e. the total legacy, cultural, political, social, economic, intellectual, etc., of a given society. We ... need ... to remember that, behind tradition as a result, there was originally tradition as movement, a process of transmitting which points back to an original and essential process of social creation of values.

In the Yorùbá language, the very notion of culture and tradition embraces both continuity and change. The Yorùbá word for 'custom, tradition, traditional usage' is *àṣà* (Abraham 1958: 70). *Àṣà Yorùbá* may be translated as 'Yorùbá culture or tradition'.¹³ If people want, more specifically, to refer to 'original' Yorùbá culture or tradition, the term they use is *àṣà ibílẹ̀* (*Yorùbá*) literally 'customs being-locally-born (of the Yorùbá)'. Rowland Abíódún (1994: 40) notes that *àṣà* means not only 'tradition', but also 'style', the latter probably being the primary signification, and points to the dynamic which is inherent in the concept of *àṣà*:

Because tradition emerges from the kinds of choices persons make with respect to social, political, religious, and artistic modes of expression, it makes sense to hypothesize that *àṣà* (tradition) derives from *àṣà* (style). ... When used in the context of Yoruba artistic discourse, *àṣà* refers to a style or the result of a creative and intelligent combination of styles from a wide range of available options within the culture. This is the reason that *àṣà*, whether as 'style' or 'tradition', is never static and cannot be, since the concept of *àṣà* already embodies the need for change, initiative, and creativity.

John Pemberton III (1994: 135) likewise asserts that the Yorùbá "concept of 'tradition' does not imply a fixed, unchanging heritage but entails creative imagination, exploration of a subject and/or medium, and innovation". As Abíódún (1994: 40) very appropriately puts it, beyond an "awareness of the existence of personal and community styles that accommodate change and innovation", the Yorùbá "also have a sense of history built into the concept and meaning of *àṣà*".

¹³ The term 'culture' is more problematic, in this regard, unless it is understood as a similarly dynamic phenomenon.

Furthermore, the fact that the noun *àṣà* 'style, tradition' derives from the verb *ṣà* 'pick/ed up (several things)' (Abraham 1958: 603), suggests that not only a sense of history, but also a sense of agency is built into the Yorùbá concept of culture and tradition. This is what Qlábíyí Yáì (1994: 113) has in mind when he writes that "[s]omething cannot qualify as *àṣà* which has not been the result of deliberate choice (*ṣà*) based on discernment and awareness of historical practices and processes (*itàn*)". In the same respect, John Picton (1994: 16) has argued that

there is always a subtle balance between individual agency and given structure, the former enabled by (while yet recreating) the latter, and no one is a mere automaton acting only according to the program of a ready-made environment, but as language enables any given speech act, so particular historical and social circumstances enable the practice of an art (and, one may as well add, tradition enables creativity).

Apart from continuity, both change¹⁴ and agency are thus inherent in the concept of *àṣà Yorùbá*.

Beyond being associated primarily with the past, 'tradition' is, especially with regard to contemporary African literatures, often misconceived of as 'oral tradition'. Much criticism of contemporary African literatures has been concerned with the fact that, and/or the ways in which, contemporary African writers – and especially those who have chosen to write in English – draw on (or appear to draw on) the 'oral tradition', either in terms of genre/form and/or language or in terms of religious, mythic or other cultural beliefs and images. As Eileen Julien (1992: 7) has pertinently argued, 'orality' functions as a prime indicator and signifier of 'Africanness' in this regard; it is, as she puts it, conceived "as a metonymy for 'African'", especially in situations where the production of contemporary literature is associated with other, European languages and where there is thus perceived to be no, or limited, linguistic continuity: "Orality is then viewed as a precious good threatened by writing, but one that

¹⁴ The notion of cultural change is, of course, not to be equated with the notion of evolution of progress (Harrow 1994).

nonetheless will be or must be distilled and preserved inside it" (Julien 1992: 22). While this is understandable as part of a (post-)colonial quest for continuity between indigenous African cultural traditions and contemporary literature, it tends to underscore the misconception that tradition is a phenomenon of the past rather than a continuous dynamic which is constantly recreated and transformed; furthermore, it suggests that oral traditions are fundamentally or essentially different from, or somehow more traditional than, contemporary written literatures.

In this regard, Olátúbòsún Ògúnsanwó's (1995: 46) suggestion that what "traditional literary artists like D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola did was to textualize the shared literary heritage of the folktale, of course with the creative refashioning that naturally accompanies artistic transmutations from the oral into the written literature", and his resort to the notion of 'neo-traditional art' to discuss contemporary literary transformations of traditional material by writers such as Okri because they represent "a bold re-writing and re-interpretation of the writers' socio-cultural past" and the "re-contextualization has taken place only after their colonial experience" (*ibid*: 42) are misleading because they seem to preclude that oral renditions of, for instance, tales, are not creatively refashioned; that there is, in other words, a dichotomy between a supposedly stable 'traditionality' before colonialism – in form of the oral tradition – and an innovative, dynamic 'neo-traditionality' in the wake of colonialism. In an interview, Okri (Ross 1993: 339) has criticised such assumptions with regard to storytelling, which he generally considers "a very important part of people's upbringing":

You invented stories; you were encouraged to take existing stories and weave your own variation of them. But I worry about the whole perception of this storytelling, because it seems to focus too much on orality, when I think the most important part of it is the imagination. I don't understand these oralists. They miss the point. They seem to think it's just the mouth, but actually it's the way in which the imagination takes a particular strand and transforms it. It's a bit like a jazz solo in many ways.

It is not my objective, in this thesis, to assert cultural continuity by locating the origin of contemporary literary transformations of the motif of *àgbònrin* and *ẹfọn* in the so-called 'oral

tradition', or to explore the relationship between this 'oral tradition' and contemporary 'written literature'. While the motif did, in this case, exist as a topos before the Yorùbá language was set down in writing, the origin and authenticity of a topos are not intrinsically linked with orality or, more generally, Africanity. As I would emphasise, the traditionality of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* does not reside in its association with 'orality' as such, but in the fact that it has repeatedly been deployed in the past and continues to be deployed in the present; that, in other words, it has, independently from the mode, genre/form or language in which it may appear in different situations and at different times, been passed on through time. Its traditionality is inseparable from the various transformations it has potentially undergone and the various (layers of) meanings it has potentially assumed.

In the introduction to this chapter, I have already explained why, for methodological reasons, I have chosen in this thesis to focus on contemporary written transformations of the topos of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn*, even though oral transformations, which are equally contemporary, continue to be produced. Furthermore, regarding the matter of language, the fact that only the first of the texts studied is written in Yorùbá must not be mistaken to suggest that literature in Yorùbá is historically located somewhere in between an 'oral' and a 'written' tradition of verbal expression; that it represents, in other words, one stage in the 'development' of contemporary Yorùbá fiction (Barber 1995). Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá, for instance, one of the greatest contemporary Yorùbá writers, is currently working on a play in Yorùbá on the *òrìṣà* Oya as buffalo woman, which, had it been completed already, I would have loved to include in my study.¹⁵ Oládèjò Òkédíjì, likewise one of the finest contemporary Yorùbá writers, and I discussed the possibility of using the topos of antelope/buffalo (woman) in, for instance, a modern, social realist

¹⁵ However, some contemporary writers writing in Yorùbá may have felt that the Yorùbá reading public was interested in 'realistic' rather than 'mythic' or fantastic fiction. This was suggested to me by Mr Òkédíjì (January 2000) in personal communication. While he found the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* fascinating, he also argued that today, people might not be interested in reading about "that sort of thing" any more. He was referring to a Yorùbá readership in particular. While virtually all Yorùbá readers are very proud of their literary tradition and a writer like Fágúnwà, who is generally regarded as the pioneer of contemporary Yorùbá literature, many of them also feel that contemporary literature should be 'realistic' (which, of course, does not make it less Yorùbá).

detective story. Contemporary literary transformations of the topos of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* in English and Yorùbá continue to coexist. While a writer's choice of language may be an interesting phenomenon in itself, it does not affect the traditionality of a topos in any way.

Furthermore, the traditionality of a topos does not depend on any genre in particular; a topos may not even be exclusive to the verbal arts. While the importance of individual genres may decrease or increase, genres may change over time and new ones may be created, or the boundaries between them may become blurred, a topos can potentially be adapted to and deployed in all of them. Throughout this thesis, I refer to 'the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn*' to evoke the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) as a stock motif and a complex of particular cultural beliefs to do with the power of transformation in beings that are part human, part antelope or buffalo or, by extension, part human, part animal. Furthermore, I use the term 'tale' to refer to the stock narrative or plot associated with the topos of antelope woman and buffalo woman, which may then potentially be transformed in manifold ways by individual writers as well as oral artists and performers. The adjective 'traditional', as in 'the traditional tale', points to the topicality of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn*, i.e. its habituality, or traditionality, its potentiality, intentionality, and symbolicity. The contemporary literary texts discussed in this thesis are, in turn, all referred to as narratives. Terms such as 'novel', 'romance' or 'short story' have, in previous discussions of some of the works discussed, been subject to passionate dispute and caused considerable confusion due to their various cultural and conceptual histories and the political connotations they have acquired in post-colonial literary discourses. Furthermore, some of the authors discussed integrate, in one way or another, different genres in their literary texts, which renders the latter generically heterogeneous. For the purposes of this study, a classification of these texts in terms of genre is neither necessary nor desirable. Independent of their length, their other formal or stylistic characteristics, their subject matter, and the language in which they are written, they all share a distinct literary ambition as well as a fictionality.

As I would suggest, the preoccupation with questions of orality, language, and genre *per se* as signifiers of cultural (dis-)continuity has taken much critical energy away from the task (and pleasure) of close literary analysis and interpretation. Julien (1992: 7) has, in this regard, problematised the way in which the "category of 'African orality' permeates literary criticism", which is not only "subject to ideological pressures" but also "has come to define and confine the scope of our interest in and perception of African writing". It is most important to recognise that the continuity of a topos goes beyond the issue of continuity in the face of culture contact, and that it easily transcends linguistic boundaries. The way in which it is transformed will inevitably reflect cultural and linguistic changes in one way or another – they will be adapted and thematised as everything else – but contemporary literary transformations of a topos are not intrinsically related to models of culture contact.

By dealing with the motif of *àgbònrin* and *efòn* as a topos, one acknowledges its habituality and traditionality – as the notion of topos, by definition, encompasses and emphasises continuity – while moving beyond negotiating the modalities of the text in which it occurs. Thus, it becomes possible to shift the focus of critical analysis to the changing inner symbolic and metaphoric structures of literary texts, to the matter of understanding and interpreting the dynamics of an author's deployment and transformation of a particular topos within specific personal, socio-cultural and historical contexts. What makes a writer's narrative original, then, is no longer "determined by the extent to which" the latter "echo[es] oral traditions" (Julien 1992: 10) but, if the writer chooses to deploy a particular topos (whose history may be shorter or longer), by the ways in which this topos is, in relation to the writer's specific personal, socio-cultural and historical context, given new meaning/s and, in the process, consciously or less consciously reshaped and transformed. A writer's transformation of a topos may vary in the extent to which the former turns it into some sort of metaphor or symbol, deploys it as a parody or allusion, dissociates it from stock narratives or plots, fragments it, restructures it, or

recycles its accumulated meanings in a new context; in any case, these are strategies that have always been constitutive characteristics of Yorùbá (verbal) art. The recognition of a topos thus represents the starting point for in-depth analysis and interpretation, not its end.

1.1.2. *Òrò and òwe: meaning and context*

While a topos may be conceived of or appear in formulaic or stereotypical form or comprise of formulaic or stereotypical elements, its meaning is not fixed but always determined in relation to specific, changing contexts, which may be both literary and extraliterary. As Chidi Okonkwo (1991: 50), quoting Walter L. Reed (1977: 64), reminds us,

'All kinds of literature have felt and responded to the demands of representation, the need to modify or transform the inherited types and formulae the better to approximate the contemporary experience of author and audience'. Confronted by the peculiar configuration of socio-historical, economic and political forces in their societies, African writers have responded variously, each according to the ideological impulse behind his or her art.

Informed by the agenda of particular writers, which may be more or less concealed, a topos potentially engages in a multiplicity of relationships. While some of its meanings may be fully intentional, it may also acquire surplus meanings, which are generated in the process of literary signification and which, insofar as they conflict with the writer's official agenda, have a distinct subversive potential. A topos is, accordingly, characterised by potentiality and intentionality, which means that it can be 'refreshed' and thus be given new (layers of) meaning as it is deployed – and transformed – to achieve a particular effect or to serve a particular metaphoric or symbolic purpose. Abíólá Ìrèlè's (1975: 75) elaboration on a famous essay by T.S. Eliot, according to which tradition should be understood "not so much as [an] abiding, permanent, immutable stock of beliefs and symbols, but as the constant refinement and extension of these in a way which relates them to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and significantly new", captures this aspect of the notion of a topos very well. Eileen Julien (1992)

asserts, similarly, that a contemporary African writer who chooses to draw upon particular elements of an oral tradition – such as, with regard to this study, the motif of *àgbònín* or *efòn* – does so for concrete formal or aesthetic reasons.¹⁶ Ato Quayson (1997) has spoken of 'strategic transformations' in this respect. Brenda Cooper (1998), in turn, has emphasised the politics of such choices and transformations.

In Yorùbá philosophical discourse, the dynamic and transformative relationship between meaning or matter on the one hand and form on the other is conceptualised in terms of *òrò* and *òwè*. Rowland Abíódún (1987: 252) points out that in "Yoruba traditional thought, the verbal and visual arts are, more often than not, considered as metaphors. As such, they embody a purer and more active essence called *òrò*". *Òrò* is, as Abíódún emphasises, "not the same as the 'spoken word'", as it is frequently translated: "[r]ather, it means 'a matter, that is, something that is the subject of discussion, concern, or action'" (*ibid.* 252) or, as Abíódún also puts it, it signifies "abstract and spiritual concepts or ideas" (*ibid.* 264). Drawing on Ifá literature, Abíódún relates the mythological origin of *òrò*, which I shall briefly summarise in what follows.

At creation, Olódùmarè, the Creator God, created *ògbón* 'wisdom', *ìmò* 'knowledge', and *òye* 'understanding, perceptiveness', "which are among the most important forceful elements of creation" (Abíódún 1987: 253), as intermediary forces, because he himself "was too charged with energy to come into direct contact with any living thing and have it survive" (*ibid.* 254). Olódùmarè released *ògbón*, *ìmò* and *òye* so that they would fly away and find places where they could live. All of them returned after an unsuccessful search, humming like bees. Therefore, Olódùmarè swallowed *ògbón*, *ìmò* and *òye* and was, subsequently, "disturbed by the incessant humming" in his stomach until he finally "decided to get rid of them in order to have some peace" (*ibid.* 255). *Ògbón*, *ìmò* and *òye* were then ordered to descend to earth, making the sound

¹⁶ The same is, of course, equally true for more recent topoi.

hòpò. Because of the sound of their descent, which was accompanied by lightning and thunder as they were "heavily charged lifeforces from heaven" (*ibid*: 255), they were now known as *hòpò-rò* or *òrò*.¹⁷ After being suspended in mid-air like an egg, *Òrò* dropped to earth, where it split (*là*) and was now identified as *Èlà*, God of Wisdom, Knowledge and Understanding "in all their verbal and visual forms", who "functions in the Ifá divination complex" (*ibid*: 255).¹⁸

Abíódún emphasises the crucial role of *Èlà*¹⁹ in making *òrò* communicable: "with the indispensable aid of the deity *Èlà* ... the highly energy-charged heavenly constituents of *Òrò* could be digested and applied to human needs" (*ibid*: 253).²⁰ The Yorùbá axiom *Èlà lòrò 'Òrò* is *Èlà* "underscores the fact that 'Èlà relieves *Òrò* of its mystical and enigmatic character'" (*ibid*: 255). Abíódún then points out that *Èlà* communicates *òrò* in the form of *òwe*, which has come, most narrowly, to signify 'proverb/s' but which "can metaphorically apply to the communicative properties" of a variety of both verbal and visual genres/art forms. *Òwe* is the means of communication between *ará ayé* 'people on earth, humankind' and *ará òrun* 'beings in heaven'. Through *òwe*, human beings are able to understand, assimilate and utilise *òrò* while communication with the *òrìṣà* and other beings in heaven is also "made possible through the channel of *Òwe*" (*ibid*: 256). The well-known Yorùbá saying *Òwe ṣesin òrò. Tí òrò bá sọ̀nù, òwe la fi í wá a* '*Òwe* is the horse of *òrò*. If *òrò* gets lost, *òwe* is employed to retrieve it' underscores the significance of *òwe* as a means of communication: "*Òwe* serves to illuminate and elucidate *Òrò* at all levels of its meaning, to the extent that *Òrò* ceases to be enigmatic" (*ibid*: 256).

Furthermore, the idea that with "the aid of *Èlà*, *Òrò* is made manifest, and that it is beautifully 'clothed' in poetry, maxims and wise sayings, all of which are *Òwe*", implies "that although *Òwe*

¹⁷ The word *rò*, which has a variety of meanings (Abraham 1958), is also used as a verb in the expression *òjò ní rò* 'rain is falling'. *Hòpò-rò* or *òrò* is thus a compound of the sound *hòpò* and the verb used to describe the falling of rain.

¹⁸ He points out that *Èlà* is a deity whose name is sometimes used interchangeably with the name of *Òrúnmìlà*, Deity of Divination, even though *Èlà* "is probably a separate deity in its own right within the Ifá divination system" (1987: 255). Adéoyè (1989: 246-7) lists and discusses the differences between *Èlà* and *Òrúnmìlà*.

¹⁹ For more information on *Èlà* as an *òrìṣà* see Adéoyè 1989. According to Adéoyè, *Èlà* was born to a virgin.

²⁰ *Orí* descends from heaven as *Òrò* (Abíódún 1987).

is basically communicative, it often acquires aesthetic properties and may delineate artistic processes in order to be effective in the fulfilment of its function" (*ibid.*: 256). In conclusion, Abíódún (*ibid.*: 270) points out that

Ordinary items and objects, be they verbal or visual, which are not normally intended to be *òwe* can acquire the function, when or if the situation calls for it. This phenomenon is supported by the saying: *Ìjà ló dé l'orín d'òwe*, 'it is because people are quarrelling that a song innocently sung becomes an *Òwe*'. Functioning as art, and existing as an independent entity, *òwe* lends itself to almost an unlimited range of interpretation and application. *Òwe* also functions among the Yoruba as an important pedagogic tool in traditional education. They use it in settling disputes and finding solutions to hard problems. And, not infrequently, *òwe* is used to concretize abstract and religious concepts in traditional belief. ... they employ *òwe* in its verbal, visual and performing modes to bring an idea to a greater effect. *Òwe* hints at the Yoruba creative genius, their deep esoteric knowledge of things and events around them, as well as their intellectual power of vivid expression. Understandably, the society holds in high esteem those who can skillfully and effectively use *òwe*. Rulers, diviners, artists and elders all endeavour to master *òwe* in its explicatory and aesthetic dimensions to win the respect of their subject, audience, or client. Yet the recognition and understanding of *Òwe* in any form is not automatic. It is systematically acquired through alertness, intellect, and a conscious study of Yorùbá oral tradition...

Òwe can be many things – different genres such as a proverb (as it is generally translated today) or a song, but really any form of metaphoric or symbolic verbal and visual expression. Older Yorùbá people, with whom I regularly discussed texts written in a literary, very elaborate and 'deep' Yorùbá, would exclaim *òwe ni* 'it is *òwe*' whenever we came across an idiomatic expression or phrase or literary image of one kind or another, disregarding its specific genre or rhetoric function.²¹ In any case, there was agreement that the use of *òwe* represents an attempt to express and/or mediate some kind of *òrò*, or *ìjìnlẹ̀ òrò* '(deep) matter/issue'. The semantic relationship between *òwe* and *òrò*, in turn, is constantly redefined in relation to specific contexts.

²¹ However, for the purposes of modern literary analysis, a more specific critical terminology has been developed, so that English terms such as proverb (*òwe*), metaphor (*àfíwé èlẹ̀lẹ̀*), simile (*àfíwé tààrà*), symbol (*àròkò*), etc now have specific equivalents in Yorùbá (Bámgbóṣé 1984; Awóbùlúyì 1990).

In a sense, while literary narratives as a whole may be regarded as *òwè*, this is particularly true for smaller units conveying symbolic or metaphoric meaning, such as *topoi*. The general function of a literary *topos* is comparable to that of an *òwè*: it is used to express and communicate something of importance to the writer. Furthermore, while a *topos*, like an *òwè*, is repeatedly used and – through its habituality or traditionality – recognisable as a *topos*,²² its meaning, also like that of an *òwè*, is not fixed, static, or predetermined but continuously renegotiated in relation to the writer's specific personal, socio-cultural and historical circumstances. Moreover, there is never a 'natural' identity between a *topos* and the meaning or matter it expresses or communicates; between, in other words, signifier and signified. A *topos* is, accordingly, not identical with the argument or point it serves to communicate or the experience it expresses itself; it can have different referents or rhetorical functions. While ultimate or absolute meaning or matter, in the sense of a transcendental signified, may be always already deferred, they can be approached through the deployment and transformation of a *topos*, as *òrò* is made (more) accessible and comprehensible through *òwè*. Last but not least, the aesthetic dimension of *òwè* is mirrored in the skilfulness and artistic originality of a writer's deployment and transformation of a *topos*.

In this thesis, my quest is not for the 'origin' or 'original meaning' of the *topos* of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) but for some of the meanings it acquires in contemporary literary narratives in relation to specific personal, socio-cultural and historical contexts, as it serves as a vehicle through which particular issues or experiences are dealt with or conveyed. Furthermore, the meaning of the *topos* emerges in the context of the metaphoric or symbolic structure of the literary texts in which it occurs. It is not possible to say that *àgbònrín* or *efón* stand for, symbolise, or are used to explain one thing or another in absolute terms. Sandra T. Barnes (1989a: ix; 1980), in the introduction to a study of the Yorùbá *òrìsà* Ògún, asks if he is

²² While it can only be passed on by being somewhat formulaic or stereotypical, the formula or stereotype on which particular transformations of the *topos* are based may, in turn, be intentionally subverted in one way or another.

"the same in all contexts and at all time periods", or if he means "different things to different peoples". In addition to exploring the ways in which individual writers have deployed and transformed the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman), as proposed in the first section of this subchapter, this thesis examines what *àgbònrín* and *efòn* come to mean to different people in these various contemporary literary contexts.

1.1.3. *Òrúnmìlà's touch: representation and interpretation*

The relationship between the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) as *òwe* and the experience or matter it communicates or conveys in specific literary and extraliterary contexts as *òrò* is determined and continuously redefined by processes of literary signification and representation. In turn, knowledge about the meaning of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* is always the result of an exegetical process, which involves both the writer as the one who deploys and transforms the topos and the reader as the one who desires to make sense of it. As Abíódún (1987) emphasises, in Yorùbá culture everybody partakes of the responsibility to interpret *òwe*. Being able to use *òwe* creatively as well as appropriately and to decode the meaning of *òwe* as used by others are conceived of as key skills in a sophisticated person. A topos is polyvalently interpretable. It has long been recognised in Yorùbá philosophical discourse that the meaning of texts, whether oral or written, perpetually needs to be interpreted afresh as their referents change. As I shall propose in the third and final section of this subchapter, the body of *àgbònrín* '(the) harnessed antelope' itself becomes a metaphor for the process of representation and interpretation in this regard.²³

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of *àgbònrín* is its "short, dense, rufous to bright chestnut pelage", which is "boldly patterned with white stripes and spots" (Happold 1987: 215;

²³ While this does reflect Yorùbá cultural beliefs about *àgbònrín*, it is not directly related to the topos of *àgbònrín* as antelope woman.

see plate 1). This is also the reason why *àgbònrín* is often translated into English as 'harnessed antelope'.²⁴ its "bold white markings look like a harness" (*ibid.* 215). According to Chief Jàwésolá Àwàlà of Ìṣẹ̀yìn (interview January 2000), a hunter and Òṣanyìn priest, the markings are considered an ornamentation: as he emphasised, anyone looking at the skin will notice the attractiveness of *àgbònrín*'s body-cloth; furthermore, it is generally given much attention in traditional beliefs about *àgbònrín*. Most importantly for my concerns here, the harnessed antelope's skin with its white markings assumes, as I hope to show, particular significance with regard to Yorùbá religious and/or philosophical discourse on representation and (re-)interpretation in relation to Ifá divination. There are several etiological myths relating how *àgbònrín* first became a human being and, most particularly, how it came to have those characteristic white markings on its body.²⁵ According to Chief Gàníyù Awótúndé of Ilé-Ifè (interview January 2000), a hunter and Òṣanyìn priest, *Àgbònrín* was one of the first thieves in the world.²⁶ He was a man, one of the *ṛba*'s slaves – the *ṛba* being Òrúnmìlà, God of Divination – who had turned himself into a harnessed antelope and then stolen meat (the thigh of an animal) intended for the *ṛba* in the market of Ilé-Ifè, whereupon he was pursued by Òrúnmìlà. At the time, Òrúnmìlà was already aged and could not run so fast anymore. When he stretched out his hands to get hold of the antelope, he initially failed to capture it but left his fingerprints on its body. The small round spots on the body of *àgbònrín* are the marks of Òrúnmìlà's fingerprints, whereas the white stripes are scars of the whips with which it was

²⁴ Another common translation is 'bushbuck'.

²⁵ Apart from the tale which I shall proceed to relate in some detail, there exist other tales according to which *Àgbònrín*, as Òrìṣànlá's (or Qbàtálá's) slave, stole the latter's professional equipment and was eventually identified as the thief by means of a trick, which left marks of white chalk (*efun*) and camwood (*osùn*) on his clothes; when Òrìṣànlá failed to capture him, he uttered a curse to the effect that he would continue to live as a bush animal with the marks of chalk and camwood on its skin forever (see, for instance, "Bí àgbònrín ṣe di ẹranko inú igbó" 'How *Àgbònrín* Became a Bush Animal' in Adérinkòmí/Ògúndélé 1993).

²⁶ According to Chief Awótúndé, the most powerful people are always thieves. As he explained, *àgbònrín* does not care at all, for instance, whether a farmer whose crop of *ilá* 'okra' (believed to be *àgbònrín*'s favourite food; in Fágúnwà's *Igbó Olódumare*, the hero tries to bribe a deer by telling it about a wonderful *oko ilá* 'okra farm') it has ravished will be absolutely desolate, or whether this farmer will even curse it. This is taken to be a further proof of its reckless, thief-like nature. The antelope here seems to partake of the power of 'big people' in Yorùbá culture more generally, which manifests itself in the ability to get away with outrageous behaviour, and to be respected for getting away with it, too (Barber 1981).

beaten when it was eventually caught. The slave was sent to live in the bush in the shape of the antelope into which he had turned himself.²⁷ Chief Ifáyemí Èlẹ̀buibọ̀n of Òṣogbo (interview December 1999), a renowned Ifá priest, knows a similar myth (related in *odù Ìrẹ̀lẹ̀mẹ̀jì* in Ifá) according to which Àgbònrín stole not meat, but a particular ritual/sacred knife (*abẹ̀ Ẹ̀sẹ̀nbáyẹ̀*).

Very interestingly, the fingerprints left by Ọ̀rúnmìlà on the body of *àgbònrín* are now conceived of as *odù Ifá* 'figure in Ifá divination system'. In Chief Èlẹ̀buibọ̀n's (interview December 1999) words: "Qwọ́ tí Ọ̀rúnmìlà fì bá a lára ló dàbí ẹ̀sẹ̀ Ifá rẹ̀" 'The hand which Ọ̀rúnmìlà put on its body resembles his Ifá divination verses'. According to Chief Awótúndé (interview November 2000), the white spots inscribed on the body of *àgbònrín* through the touch of Ọ̀rúnmìlà's fingers represent the sixteen *odù Ifá* in general. They are not arranged in any particular order.²⁸ According to Chief Àwàlà (interview January 2000), however, they represent the *odù Ifá* referred to as Èjìogbè, which is conceived of as the most important *odù Ifá* (Chief Àwàlà, *ibid*) and particularly favourable (M. Drewal 1983).²⁹ The sign/mark of this particular *odù Ifá* is among the things God has given to *àgbònrín* (*ibid*).³⁰ Afọlábí Èpẹ̀ga and Philip John Neimark (1995: 1) describe Èjìogbè as "the most important *odù*" (this was also pointed out to me by Chief Àwàlà), which is "regarded as the father of the *odùs*" and "occupies the first position" in "the fixed order of Ọ̀rúnmìlà". Or, in Abíódún's (1975: 454) words, "Èjìogbè ... is regarded as the first, the most important, and in fact, the 'father' of all *odù*. It is this *Odù* which brought honour and authority to Ifá".

²⁷ Many animals are believed to have originally been human beings, who (were) later turned into animals for one reason or another, often as a punishment. Other examples given by Chief Awótúndé are *ẹ̀kùn* 'leopard' (interview January 2000) and several other bovids, for instance *egbín* 'kob antelope' and *ẹ̀súrú* 'red-flanked duiker' (interview November 2000). Compare footnote 38.

²⁸ In actual fact, individual *àgbònrín* "vary in the exact details of these markings and there are probably variations between populations in different parts of the country" (Happold 1987: 215).

²⁹ According to Èpẹ̀ga and Neimark (1995: 1), "Odù Èjìogbè speaks of light, good general welfare, victory over enemies, spiritual awakenings, long life, and peace of mind".

³⁰ According to Chief Awótúndé (interview November 2000), the fact that the body of *àgbònrín* has Ifá on it is also the reason that its skin must not be burnt with fire. Wherever it is burnt, everybody living in the area will be affected by smallpox.

During Ifá divination, the *babaláwo* 'Ifá divination priest' repeatedly casts sixteen *òpèlè Ifá* or *èkúrò Ifá* 'oil-palm nuts of Ifá' (which are called *ikin*) in a particular way.³¹ He then dips his finger in powder and, depending on whether one nut or two nuts remain, makes two marks or one mark respectively on an *opón Ifá* 'Ifá divining board'.³² This process is repeated eight times each for the left and right sides of the board. The pattern that emerges at the end of this process represents one of the sixteen main *odù* and is associated with a corresponding set of texts in Ifá divination literature.³³ The text eventually identified as relevant for the case of a particular client is then meaningfully related to this client's circumstances. It may remain unclear if the white spots on *àgbònrín*'s body represent the most important *odù Ifá* in particular or, more generally, the marks which may represent any one of the sixteen *odù Ifá* when arranged into the specific pattern associated with this *odù Ifá*. However, by leaving his fingerprints on the body of *àgbònrín*, in the form of white spots, Òrúnmìlà inscribed an *odù* on it in much the same way as an *odù Ifá* is inscribed, using a finger dipped in white powder, on an *opón Ifá* by a *babaláwo*.

As Margaret Thompson Drewal (1994: 173) has suggested, *babaláwo* in general are "quite conscious that they are engaged in acts of interpretation and representation", using "metaphor as an hermeneutic tool" (*ibid.*: 171). Similarly, John Pemberton III (1994: 135) has commented on the 'searching' mode of Ifá divination, which represents an exploration of "the deeper meanings of the verses of Ifá, examining the metaphors in relation to the concerns, needs, and aspirations of a suppliant", which requires the *babaláwo* to "think anew about the human

³¹ The process of Ifá divination has been described briefly by Abraham 1958. There exists a substantial body of literature on Ifá divination (see, for instance, Bascom 1969; Abímbólá 1968, 1969, 1975a, 1976, 1977).

³² According to Armstrong *et al* (1978: 3-4), the Yorùbá term for "the dust from the *iròsùn* tree (*Baphia Nitida*), which is used in divination to dust the surface of the divining tray, so as to receive the marks of the *Odù* which the diviner makes with his fingers" is *ìyèrè òsùn* or *iròsùn*. *Ìyè* is the term for "any wood dust from a tree which is produced by borer insects" (*ibid.*).

³³ The process of divination is not complete at this stage, however; each of these main *odù* has 16 subordinate *odù* called *ompo odù*, which gives a total of 256 *odù*; these also have their 16 subordinate *odù*, giving a total of 4096; and for "each of these 4096, there is a couplet or story" (Abraham 1958: 275-6).

condition in the context of rites and verses bequeathed to the later generations by the ancient *babaláwo*". Relating the principle of 'searching' to art, he concludes that for "the Yoruba, artistry is the exploration and imaginative recreation of received ideas and forms" (*ibid*). If the texts of Ifá divination literature are continuously recreated and become meaningful in relation to particular contexts, then it would seem that the way in which the harnessed antelope itself figures as another kind of divination board on which such texts are inscribed represents a beautiful image for the literary transformations undergone by the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* as a topos in Yorùbá culture. As *odù Ifá* are continuously interpreted and applied to perpetually changing personal, socio-cultural and historical contexts, the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* has also been repeatedly explored and imaginatively re-created by contemporary writers, and in the process assumed new meanings and functions.



Plate 1 Skin of *àgbònrín* 'harnessed antelope'

1.2. Antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman)

In zoological terms, harnessed antelope and buffalo belong to the family of bovids, of the order of artiodactyls or even-toed ungulates.³⁴ There are 25 non-domestic species of bovids in Nigeria, which are associated with specific vegetation zones.³⁵ In Yorùbáland, the relevant vegetation zones are the rainforest west of the river Niger and, in the north, derived savannah. Of the 25 species, only three occur in both zones: *àgbònrín* or *ìgalà* 'harnessed antelope, bushbuck' (*tragelaphus scriptus*), *ẹfòn* 'African buffalo' (*syncerus caffer nanus* and *syncerus caffer brachyceros*), and *etu* 'Maxwell's duiker' (*cephalophus maxwelli*). While *ẹfòn* has become extremely rare, *àgbònrín/ìgalà* and *etu* are the most common and wide-spread bovids in Nigeria. The other bovids found in the rainforest are *ẹkìrì* 'black duiker' (*cephalophus niger*) and *gìdìgìdì* 'yellow-backed duiker' (*cephalophus sylvicultur*). The other bovids found in the derived savannah are *èsúrò* 'red-flanked duiker' (*cephalophus rufilatus*), *ẹkùlù* 'crowned or crested duiker' (*sylvicapra grimmia*), *òtòlò* 'waterbuck' (*kobus ellipsiprymnus*), *egbín* 'kob antelope' (*kobus kob*), *àgbá-ń-réré* 'roan antelope' (*hippotragus equinus*), and *irá-kànnùgbá* 'western hartebeest' (*alcelaphus buselaphus*).³⁶ All of these figure, more or less prominently, in Yorùbá cultural beliefs.

In Yorùbá thought, the notion of individual difference is very prominent. It is believed that each individual has his or her own distinct *ìwà* 'character' and, in relation to that, a particular destiny. Accordingly, each individual is special in his or her own unique way, and it is a life-long task to live in accordance with one's particular character and thus to realise one's destiny

³⁴ The nomenclature used in this thesis is based on Happold (1973, 1987) and complemented by Abraham (1958). There is occasional disagreement about the scientific name of a species or subspecies, or about whether a particular subspecies should really be classified as a different species. These questions are not the concern of this thesis, and I circumnavigate them by using the common Yorùbá terms for each species, which may subsume various subspecies, whenever confusion might arise otherwise. While alternative terms deriving from languages other than Yorùbá may be in use in some areas (Happold 1973), I shall be using those terms that are most commonly known. By using the Yorùbá terms I also avoid the confusion arising when they are translated into English, as few Yorùbá speakers are familiar with the standard English common names of animals occurring in Nigeria.

³⁵ Today, most West African bovids are to be found in the various nature parks and reserves.

³⁶ While *oribi* (*ourebia ourebi*) seems to occur in the derived savannah as well, I was not able to confirm any of the Yorùbá terms Happold (1983) lists for this species with my informants.

(Abíódún 1990).³⁷ The Yorùbá priests, hunters and healers I interviewed in the course of my field research all agreed that harnessed antelope and buffalo are important animals with special physical and spiritual powers; but, as some of them also pointed out, so are all the other animals as well, each in its own way. This becomes evident when one studies the *oríkì* of animals. Yet it is believed that in some ways, for reasons beyond human understanding, Olódùmarè, God of Creation, has given greater power to harnessed antelope and buffalo than to other animals. This is partly inferred from their extraordinary or even flamboyant appearance and their observable behaviour, which is conceived of as awe-inspiring or, in some ways, outrageous.³⁸ In the first two sections of the second subchapter, I shall provide an introduction to the conceptualisation of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn* in Yorùbá cultural beliefs. In the third and final section of this subchapter, I shall reflect, in turn, on literary transformations of the topos in the work of four contemporary writers.

1.2.1. The antelope (woman)

In Yorùbá cultural beliefs, *àgbònrín* or *ìgalà* '(the) harnessed antelope, bushbuck' occupies an important position among bush animals. In zoological terms, it belongs to the subfamily of *tragelaphinae* or spiral-horned antelopes. It is medium-sized – its shoulder height varies between 69 and 76 cm (27-30 in), while its weight varies between 32 and 54 kg (70-120 lb) – and is known for its extraordinary decorativeness and beauty (Happold 1973, 1987). Normally, only male *àgbònrín* have the characteristic horns, which are ca 25 cm (10 in) long and whose single spiral extends slightly backwards and outwards while turning slightly forward at the tip

³⁷ I further elaborate on the significance of *ìwà* in relation to Fágúnwà's transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* in Chapter 2.

³⁸ *Àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn* are not the only bovids who are believed to either have been human originally (before they were turned into animals for one reason or the other) or to be able to turn into human beings. *Egbin* '(the) kob antelope', for instance, who is considered an extremely beautiful animal, used to be a most attractive woman who went into the bush because of her excessive ostentatiousness, which caused men to run after her. There, she was turned into an antelope by Ọlórún (Chief Awótúndé, interview November 2000). *Egbin* is also used as a personal name for very pretty women; similarly, some personal names contain a reference to *egbin*.

(Happold 1973). With its two horns, *àgbònrín* can penetrate thick bush, while its running speed provides some protection from natural enemies. When it is disturbed, it utters "a 'dog-like' bark", bounding "away with a bouncing gait and the tail held upright so the white undersurface is clearly visible" (Happold 1987: 215). Furthermore, *àgbònrín* are solitary and mainly nocturnal animals that spend the day resting in dense cover. According to Happold (1987: 215), "in some savanna regions they lie on or close to termitaria", which is interesting because in many variants of the antelope/buffalo woman's tale, the antelope/buffalo woman either hides her skin in a termitarium or completely disappears into one.

In D.O. Fágúnwà's *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1949a: 41), the hunter narrator salutes a harnessed antelope with words highlighting its most distinctive physical features: "pàtàkì ní ìwọ́ jẹ́ láàrín àwọn ẹranko nítorí ìwọ́ funfun, ìwọ́ sì pupa, bẹẹ̀ ní ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ́ lágbára, ìwọ́ sì ní ìwo lórí ẹ̀sẹ̀sara" 'important are you among the animals because you are white and you are also rufous; furthermore, your legs are powerful, and you also have two pointed horns on your head' (my translation). Similarly, in *Ìrèkè-Oníbùdó* (Fágúnwà 1949b: 97), the antelope is greeted with the words "àgbònrín, ẹranko tí ó ní ara pupa àti ara funfun, ẹranko abi-ìwo-lórí ẹ̀sẹ̀sara 'harnessed antelope, animal that has a rufous and white body, animal who has two pointed horns on its head' (my translation). Likewise, the harnessed antelope's skin and horns are described and evoked in *oríkè*, which shows how central they are to what is believed to be the essence and character of *àgbònrín*. The white markings on its body are, for instance, compared to the movement of an earthworm, as in "Abiaşọ bii ìrínkòlò" 'You garbed in a coat marked like wormcasts!' (Abraham 1958: 281) and "Oníkòlò abẹgbẹ̀winnìwinnì 'Animal whose coat displays wormcast patterns, whose sides are variegatedly adorned'" (Babalolá 1966: 102-103). Furthermore, its skin is compared to *àdìrẹ*, a type of tie-dyed cloth with a pattern which results from tying the cloth before dying it (*ibid*): "Afinjú ẹranko tí í-ta mó ẹ̀ẹ̀bó lówó / Tí í-di 'şọ rẹ́ ní àdìrẹ. 'A gentleman of a quadruped who boycotts European cloths / And wears *àdìrẹ* clothes". Yet another *oríkè* compares the markings to *tùrè*, a type of Yorùbá facial markings consisting of three short lines and four long: "Àgbònrín onílàtùrè. 'O bushbuck having *tùrè* marks all over

the body" (*ibid*). Another comments on the flamboyance which the skin lends *àgbònrín*: "Ìṣàrà t'ó t'orí ìwo ṣ'òṣó. 'The handsome gentleman who's a dandy from the horns downwards'" (*ibid*). The horns, in turn, are evoked when the harnessed antelope is saluted as "Àgbònrín' onímògalà. 'Bushbuck, antlered antelope'" (Abraham 1958: 281). One *oríkè* compares them to thorns: "Lábòṣin, ẹranko abẹgúnní orí ... Ìwo dàgbà tán, ó kojú 'ẹ sókè gangangan. 'Labòsin, animal with thorns on its head ... When full-grown, the horns point vertically upwards'" (Babalolá (1966: 102-103). Similarly, another *oríkè* collected by Àrẹmú (1979: 58-59) salutes the harnessed antelope as "A-yòwo-ṣaara" 'The one with pointed horns' (based on Ajíbádé's translation).

Furthermore, various *oríkè* express the hunter's respect for the harnessed antelope, which is underscored by the role *àgbònrín* plays in hunters' funereal rites (Abraham 1958; Babalolá 1966)³⁹ as well as by the fact that some hunters use its skin for decorative purposes and as a symbol of their status (see plates 6 and 7). *Oríkè* collected by S. Adébóyè Babalolá (1966: 102-103) indicate that the harnessed antelope is not only highly valued as game but also considered a great challenge to a hunter's skills:

Ọdómọdé ọ pa Dì-ùn-kàn.	It is unusual for a young hunter to bag a bushbuck.
Dì-ùn-kàn kì í jẹ lósàn-án,	The bushbuck doesn't roam a-feeding in the day time;
òru l'ẹbọra a máa jẹ. ...	it is at night that this extraordinary animal roams a-feeding. ...
Àgbà ló lè pa Dì-ùn-kàn	It's usually a senior hunter who can kill a bushbuck.

³⁹ According to Abraham (1958: 38), "on the death of a hunter, an *àgbònrín* is hunted: a part of the meat is used for giving a feast, the rest being taken to the 'bush' and offered to the spirit of the deceased hunter" (compare Babalolá 1966). According to Chief Tímí Rájí Òjó of Òkèigbó, there is a chant consisting of *oríkè àgbònrín* which are only chanted during hunters' burial ceremonies:

Àgbònrín mà dé	The harnessed antelope has arrived indeed
Ẹran amúlolo	A powerful animal
Àgbònrín Orókè ló ní dẹrù bọdẹ pẹpẹ	A harnessed antelope on top of a hill will scare a hunter on the plain ground
Wọrọwọ dééèè!	The <i>wọrọwọ</i> vegetable has arrived indeed!
Ayé mà dẹrẹ ọl	The world is peaceful ọl
(the last two verses are repeated three times)	

'Orí mi bá m' sè' n 'ìbọ̀n òru.	Shooting game at night is a matter of 'I was just lucky'.
Èlẹ̀hìndídán abẹ̀dọ̀gbàdà	Smooth-backed animal, having a broad and weighty liver
Ẹ̀ng bá pà 'kan ọ̀so ọ̀gbọ̀nrín	If I can but kill only one bushbuck,
Ma já 'jàn ọ̀rùn mí.	I shall cast away the junior-rank emblem now hanging from my neck.

Oríkì collected by Adébáyọ̀ Àrẹ̀mú (1979: 58-59) similarly comment on the desirability and power of *ọ̀gbọ̀nrín*, but also on its behaviour as observable to hunters:

Àgbọ̀nrín onírùuyẹtu,	Àgbọ̀nrín, the one with a brisky tail
Ọmọ lárín-mí.	Child who rests under the shrub
Ọ̀gbọ̀gbọ̀ Àgbọ̀nrín	Young Àgbọ̀nrín
Tí wọ̀n sunwọ̀n léwe,	That are good when they are young
Ọmọ lárín-mí ...	Child who rests under the shrub. ...
Ọmọ lárín-kinkin lábẹ̀ ikin,	Child who rests peacefully under the shrub
Ọmọ a-jólóògùn-láyà.	Offspring of the one-who-makes-a-charmed-man-afraid
Àgbọ̀nrín ẹ̀lẹ̀rín-ín ọ̀wẹ̀njẹ́le.	Àgbọ̀nrín, the one who has a pleasant way of laughing.
(based on Ajíbádé's translation)	

In the bush, when a hunter sees a harnessed antelope which he wants to kill, he will chant a particular incantation (*ọ̀fọ̀*), referring to the animal not as *ọ̀gbọ̀nrín* or *ìgalà* but calling it Gbàlàsà, its secret name (*orúkọ ọ̀sírí*). When the hunter does so, the harnessed antelope will approach him with its characteristic bark, and he will be able to shoot it (Chief Awótúndé, interview November 2000). In order to help a hunter to settle his debt, hunters can do something called *bẹ̀lẹ̀wínṣẹ̀wín*, which causes *ọ̀gbọ̀nrín* to come out of termitaria or *irókò* trees, thus offering themselves to hunters waiting in the farm; but it is only hunters who are very sure of themselves who would aim to kill such animals (senior hunters, interview November 2000). Furthermore, hunters generally perform a rite of atonement (*se ẹ̀tùtù*) before killing *ọ̀gbọ̀nrín* – both in the bush and in farms where they are destroying the harvest – so as not to be harmed by them (*ibid*). A hunter can also make himself imperceptible to *ọ̀gbọ̀nrín* in order to kill it.

Both *awọ àgbònrín* 'skin of the harnessed antelope' and *ìwọ àgbònrín* 'horn/s of the harnessed antelope' are widely used for ritual and medicinal purposes. The skin, or pieces of it, are commonly offered for sale in local markets, particularly those that specialise in medicinal ingredients. Many hunters, healers and priests are in possession of at least one piece of antelope skin, which they store or display in their various reception or consulting rooms or carry in the pockets of their trousers (see plates 3-7). The white spots are sometimes cut out for medicinal or ritual purposes (Chief Àwàlà, interviews January and April 2000; Chief Awótúndé, interview November 2000). According to Chief Awótúndé, when the spots are cut out and mixed with other ingredients and the paste is applied to particular parts of a hunter's gun and the hunter then goes into the bush with this gun, any harnessed antelope that might be around will be drawn to him as game. According to Chief Àwàlà, the skin can be used, for instance, in medicines for people troubled by *àjé* 'witches, powerful women (and sometimes men)'. More generally, it is an *ajéḡḡùn*, which means that it enhances the effect of *oòḡùn* 'charm/s, medicine/s': if a piece of the harnessed antelope's skin is added to any charm or medicine, the latter will work effectively. The explanation is that it contains *àṣẹ* '(the) power to make things happen'.⁴⁰ While the horns of bovids in general are used for medicinal and ritual purposes by healers and priests and are readily available in local markets, those of the harnessed antelope are valued particularly highly because they, like the skin, are believed to contain more *àṣẹ* than those of other bovids (see plate 5).

⁴⁰ Literally meaning 'order, command, authority' (Abraham 1958: 71), *àṣẹ* is a "Yorùbá concept of power"; it "has no moral connotations; it is neither good nor bad. Rather, it is a generative force of potential present in all things ... and in utterances" (Drewal 1992: 27). Drewal/Drewal (1987: 233) note that the concept of *àṣẹ* as a life force "is at the foundation of Yoruba philosophy and social organization". According to Chief Àwàlà of Ìṣẹ̀yìn, *àṣẹ* is a command of Olódùmarè, the Creator, which is used to say that something should exist or not: through *àṣẹ*, something will naturally come to pass. *Àṣẹ* is, for instance, the power that Olódùmarè gave to fire to burn things: the burning effect of fire is a natural and inevitable consequence. *Àṣẹ* was used to create the world. It is conceived of as the power to make things happen (Thompson 1983), "the power to bring things into actual existence" (Drewal/Drewal 1983: 5), and as the power to transform a situation. The verb underlying the noun *àṣẹ* is *ṣẹ* 'become fulfilled' so that *àṣẹ* would mean 'the instance or process of becoming fulfilled, fulfilment'. *Àṣẹ*, or *á ṣẹ*, furthermore means 'It will come to pass' or 'May it happen'.

Their special powers also make *àgbònrín* very attractive to *àjé*. According to senior hunters (interview November 2000), *àgbònrín* and *àjé* are closely related. They are like members of the same family, whose behaviour will be similar. *Àgbònrín* are also referred to as *eran àjé* '(the) witches' meat/animals'. Like *àjé*, who are said to be particularly active at night, *àgbònrín* too are nocturnal. It is believed that *àjé* preferably use *àgbònrín* to carry out errands.⁴¹ Neither *agbára àjé* '(the) power of *àjé*' nor *agbára àgbònrín* '(the) power of *àgbònrín*' are inherently evil. However, my informants agreed that the power of *àjé* not only has a great destructive potential but also does often manifest itself in destructive ways. When *àgbònrín* is used by *àjé*, it is usually to a destructive effect. For instance, it is believed that *àgbònrín*'s favourite kinds of food are *ilá* 'okra' and, to a lesser degree, *kókò* 'cocoyam', which are cultivated in farms. People can thus harm others by destroying their harvests, either by transforming into *àgbònrín* or through an *àjé*, whose *èmi* may enter the body of *àgbònrín*. Furthermore, both *àjé* and *àgbònrín* are believed to have powers of transformation; and, like *àjé*, *àgbònrín* is therefore called *abara méjì* 'owner of two bodies' or *aláwò méjì* 'owner of two natures/colours'. According to Chief Àwàlà, in the beginning of its existence, *àgbònrín* was not created as an animal, but as *àlùjànú*, a kind of spirit being. Even though it had been given a human face and human skin, and could look like a human being, it was not unequivocally human since its ways (*ṣe*) and character (*inà*) differed from those of human beings. But it assumed the shape of an animal whenever it would benefit as an animal and that of a human being whenever it would benefit as a human being. As one *oríkì* collected by Àrẹ̀mú (1979: 59) expresses it: "ilúmòmí àgbònrín tí í paradà dènyàn" 'famous *àgbònrín* who transforms into a human being' (based on Ajíbádé's translation). In this way, the harnessed antelope is believed to be able to move about in the bush without fear and

⁴¹ According to some hunters, different kinds of spirit beings (*oríṣàrínṣì inin*) rear different kinds of animals – like human beings rear domestic animals – to harm others. This is also an important reason why hunters have to perform rituals and offer sacrifices before hunting: they have to appease the owners of the animals they want to shoot so as to be able to kill them and avert danger for themselves. Likewise, *àjé* can also release certain animals when appropriate atonement has been made. In this regard, hunters do not behave stubbornly (*lo agídè*) towards *àjé* because, as they say, they are of the same mother (*omọ ỳà ní wá*) (senior hunters, interview November 2000).

in the town without trouble. The colour of the white markings on its skin is believed to be what it uses for the complexion it puts on when visiting the town (Chief Àwàlà, interview January 2000), which is why antelope women are generally believed to be of a comparatively light complexion and their skin, like that of *àgbònrín*, is frequently described as *pupa* 'rufous'.

The character of the harnessed antelope is, like that of women, conceived of in very ambivalent terms. While some of my informants maintained that *agbára àgbònrín* was evil and potentially destructive, Chief Àwàlà (interview January 2000) emphasised its gentleness and compassion. He likened the way it nurses its young ones to the tenderness with which women take care of babies and young children. Furthermore, "[a]rẹwà àti onísùúrù ẹ́dà ní àgbònrín" 'the harnessed antelope is a beautiful and patient creature' (*ibid*), whose exceptional organisation and understanding/perceptiveness resemble those of human beings and especially women.⁴² In a tale (*ìtàn*) related to me by Chief Àwàlà (*ibid*), it is these qualities that eventually led to the discovery of *àgbònrín*'s secret:

Nígba tí àpẹ̀jẹ wà láàrin àwọn ẹranko nígbà iwáṣẹ́ nínú igbó wọn ní Ẹ̀àáró fúnra wọn. ... Àgbònrín yí ló jẹ́ ẹranko tó lóye bí ẹ̀niyàn ẹ̀yí tí kò yé àwọn ẹranko ẹ̀lẹ́gbẹ́ rẹ́. Ẹ̀gbẹ́n wọn rí i pé ọ̀yẹ àti ẹ̀tò wà fún un ju ti àwọn lọ́. Wọn wáá rò ó pé ta ní yóó wà nídí ẹ̀tò ọ̀únjẹ́ síṣẹ́? Wọn pinnu láti fi àgbònrín sí i, ọ̀un ló lè ẹ́ ẹ́ nítorí ó ní sùúrù, ó sì ní imọ́ ẹ̀tò. Níbi tí àwọn ẹ̀gbẹ́ rẹ́ tí ní pako ní ọ̀un tí ní dáná. Nígba tí ị̀galà tí rí ọ̀lọ́dẹ́ ló yíra padà tó di arẹwà obinrin. Ó ní dáná rẹ́ lọ́. Nígba tí ọ̀lọ́dẹ́ dé ó bá a sọ̀rọ́. Ó fẹ́ àgbònrín níyàwó wá sí igboro. Ọ́dẹ́ tó fẹ́ ẹ́ tí ní obinrin sílẹ́ kó tóó lọ́. Níbi tó tí ní dáná fáwọ́n ẹ̀gbẹ́ rẹ́ lóko àrojẹ́ ní ọ́dẹ́ tí fẹ́ ẹ́ tí àṣírí rẹ́ tí tú.

When there was a banquet for the animals in the bush at the beginning of time, they were helping each other with the work that had to be done. ... Now, the harnessed antelope is perceptive like a human being, and this is incomprehensible to its fellow animals. But they know that it is more perceptive and better organised than they. They were wondering whom they should put in charge of cooking food. They decided to choose the harnessed antelope for the job, who'd be able to do it because it was patient and organised. While its fellows were cutting grass, it was cooking. When the harnessed antelope perceived a hunter, it transformed into a beautiful woman and

⁴² Organisation and perceptiveness may be conceived of negatively when they are associated with cunning.

continued to cook. When the hunter reached her, he talked to her. He married the antelope (woman) and brought it/her to the town. The hunter who married it/her already had a wife at home before he had gone [into the bush]. It was while it/she was cooking for its fellows in the wayside-farm that the hunter married it/her, that its secret [eventually] leaked out.⁴³

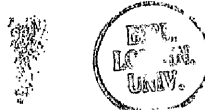
Today, *àgbònrín* and *ìgalà* are used synonymously to signify the harnessed antelope; even though the former seems to be more common in some areas (for instance, in Òyó and towns near Òyó). Another tale related to me by Chief Àwàlà (interview April 2000), which represents a variant of the antelope woman's tale, explains how *ìgalà* came to be called *àgbònrín*:

Nígbà tí ìgalà wà ní àwò èniyàn gégé bí obinrin nínú igbó ní àgbà ọdẹ tó ní ọdẹ nínú igbó padẹ rẹ. Ọdẹ yí ti pa ẹran sílẹ lóríṣíṣíṣí sùgbón, iya itọjú rẹ ní jẹ ẹ. Ọdẹ fẹẹ fẹ ẹ, ó sì sọ pé òun náà yóó fẹ ọdẹ sùgbón kí ọdẹ wo òun dáadàá nitorí pé òun ní àmí lára. Ọdẹ ní kó sàà wà pẹlú òun. Wọn sọ fún wa nínú itàn pé ẹsẹ àgbònrín kò dàbí ẹsẹ àwa èniyàn sùgbón ojú àti àwò èniyàn ló mú sára tó wáá rẹwà gan-an. Ó sọ fún ọdẹ pé, 'Mo rẹwà púpọ sùgbón wo ẹsẹ mi! Ní ọdẹ bá sọ pé, 'Ọdẹ kì í wo àwòfin, bó bá tí rí ẹran ní yóó mú un lójú'. Ló bá ní sé itorí ẹsẹ òun ní ọdẹ ẹ pe òun lẹran. Ọdẹ ní rára, òun fi pòwe ní. Ó bi ọdẹ pé sé ọdẹ máa fẹ òun, ọdẹ ní òun ẹ tán. Ní ọdẹ bá tún òwe rẹ pa pé, 'Bí ẹnikan bá fẹẹ fẹ obinrin kò ní í wo àléébù ara rẹ tí yóó fi fẹ ẹ'. Bẹẹ ní wọn lọ síbi ẹran tí ọdẹ pa jọ wọn sì ní tọjú ẹran.

Nígbà tí wọn ní tọjú ẹran àgbònrín yípo ó gbé àwò ẹranko tí í lò nínú igbó wọ. Ọdẹ rí í, ó ní òun ò rí irú ẹran yí rí látí ojọ tí òun tí ní rín. Báyyí ló bèrẹ sí í ní í wò ó, ó ní pé ẹran tún ní èyí ní ẹmẹta. Ó bá yíra padà di èyàn, ó bó àwò rẹ, ó fi lé ọdẹ lẹwọ. Ọdẹ yí sì tí ní iyàwó kan tẹlẹ nílẹ. Ìgalà ní wọn pe àgbònrín tẹlẹ. Ó sọ fún ọdẹ pé Ìgalà ní orúkọ òun. Nígbà tí ọdẹ délé ó sọ fún iyàwó rẹ tó wà nílẹ pé òun ríre mú bọ. Nígbà tí ọdẹ mú un délé ló di àgbònrín. Ọdẹ sọ fún iyàwó ilẹ pé òun ríre mú bọ o, tí òun rí fi kó ẹrù òun wálẹ. Iyáálẹ rẹ bèèrẹ pé, 'Òun dà?' Ó bèèrẹ orúkọ rẹ. Ọkọ ní kó pè é ní orúkọ tó bá wù ú. Iyáálẹ bá ní, 'Òun lẹ fi kó ẹrù wálẹ?' Ọkọ ní, 'Bẹẹ ní'. Iyáálẹ ní, 'Kí ní a fi ní kó ẹrù wálẹ látí oko? Agbọn ní. A jẹ pé "Agbọn ní in". Kò burú a tí rí agbọn fi kó nńkan'. Bẹẹ ní obinrin Ìgalà yí kò gbọ Yorùbá jìnlẹ yẹn. Bí iyáálẹ rẹ bá tí ní pè é ní 'Agbọn ní in' ó kọ ẹ bí orúkọ rere ní. 'Agbọn ní in, lọọ fọ abọ!'

Nígbà tó di ojọ kan tó rí ẹni tó lọọ ra agbọn ní ó wáá bèèrẹ nípa rẹ lẹwọ ọkọ rẹ pé, 'Sé "agbọn" tí iyáálẹ ní pe òun niyí?' Ọkọ ní, 'Rára, "Àgbònrín" ní'. Báyyí ní wọn ní béré ayọ lọ. Nígbà tó yá ní iyáálẹ rẹ bèèrẹ pé, 'Ìse ẹni yí kò mà jọ-ti èyàn? Ìwà ẹranko ló ní

⁴³ Similarly, Fágúnwà relates a tale of *àgbònrín* as *agbáwo*, a kind of steward to the other animals, in *Igbó Olódùmarè* (34). Here, however, in Fágúnwà's tale, it uses its position to deceive the others.



hù'. Ni ọkọ bá sọ fún un pé ẹranko ni òun fẹ ẹ àti pé àwọ rẹ ní bẹ nínú àkà. Ó sọ fún iyáálé pé, 'Àsírí ní' àti pé kó má fí sọrọ sí i nítorí 'Ó pitú hàn mí nínú igbó o: èèyàn ni mo rí i, ó sì fàmi hàn mí, mo sì pa á mọ. Ìwọ náà nìyí aya ọdẹ o ti dawo'.

Báyí ni wọn ní béré bọ. Gbogbo ohun tí wọn sọ kò yé Àgbònrín. Bẹẹ obìnrin kò lè gbé papọ láìjà. Wọn jà lójọ kan ni iyáálé sọ fún un pé kó máa jẹ kó máa mu àwọ rẹ wà nínú àkà: 'Bí o ẹ lè dára tó àwọ rẹ ní bẹ nínú àkà'. Kò yé e. Nígba tó tún di ọjọ kan wọn tún jà ni iyáálé rẹ bá sọ pé 'Sé bí ẹranko ni ọ, máa jẹ máa mu àwọ rẹ wà nínú àkà. Awọ tí o bọ sílẹ fún ọkọ mi wà nínú àkà. Kò sí bí o ò ẹ ní hùwà ẹranko'. Ló bá ju àwọ rẹ mọ ọn láyà. Ó sì ti bímọ méjì fún ọdẹ, ọkan wà nílẹ ọkan tẹlẹ bàbá rẹ roko ọdẹ. Báyí ló yíra padà di ìgalà. Ọmọ rẹ tó wà nílẹ náà yíra padà di ìgalà. Èyí tó tẹlẹ bàbá rẹ tó ní ti oko bọ, bó ti rí wọn ló fura pé iyá òun àti àbúrò òun ló ti paràdà yí. Ìtàn kan sọ pé òun náà paràdà ó di ẹran míràn. Ìtàn kan sọ pé ó padà wálé ó sì lò nínú agbára bàbá rẹ, sùgbón bàbá rẹ rò pé ẹranko ni ó sì yìnbọn pa á.

It was when the harnessed antelope was in human form, just like a woman in the bush, that an experienced hunter, who was hunting in the bush, met it. This hunter had already killed various animals but suffered from the lack of a helper. The hunter wanted to marry her, and she said that she would also like to marry the hunter, but that the hunter should look at her very closely because she had a mark on her body. The hunter said that she should just be with him. In tales we were told that while the legs of *àgbònrín* were not like the legs of us human beings, it put on the face and form of a human being who, moreover, was extremely beautiful. She told the hunter, 'I am very beautiful but look at my legs!' So the hunter said, 'A hunter doesn't scrutinise [or: is not too particular]; when he has found game, he will get hold of it'. Then she said that it was because of her legs that the hunter called her 'game'. The hunter said not at all, he had spoken figuratively/used a proverb. She asked the hunter whether he (still) wanted (to marry) her; the hunter said that he was ready. Then the hunter paraphrased his proverb, saying that 'When somebody wants to marry a woman, he won't look at the blemishes on her body before he marries her'. Thus, they went to the place where the hunter had killed the game together and took care of the game.

When they were taking care of the game, *àgbònrín* transformed by putting on the animal skin that it (normally) used in the bush. The hunter saw it, he said he hadn't seen this kind of game before in his life. Thus, he began to look at it; he said that this was game three times. It then turned back into a human being, took off its skin, and gave it to the hunter. And the hunter already had one wife at home before. *Ìgalà* is what they used to call *àgbònrín* before. She told the hunter that her name was *Ìgalà*. When the hunter got home, he told his wife, who was at home, that he had found something good to bring home. It was when the hunter took her home that she became *Àgbònrín*. The hunter told the senior wife that he had found something good

to bring home, which he had used to carry his load home. His senior wife asked, "Where is it?" She asked for its name. The husband said that she could call it by any name she liked. The senior wife then said, 'Was it her that you used to carry your load home?' The husband said, 'That's right'. The senior wife said, 'What is it we use to carry a load home from the farm? It's *aghòṣṣ* '(a) basket'. We shall call her "Agbòṣṣ nì ín" or, "It's a basket". Not bad, we have found a basket to carry things'. But this woman of Ìgalà origin did not understand such deep Yorùbá. Whenever the senior wife called her 'Agbòṣṣ nì ín 'This is a basket', she understood it as a good name. "'It's a basket", go and wash the bowls!'

One day when she saw somebody who went to buy a basket, she eventually questioned her husband about it: 'Does the senior wife call me "basket"?'. The husband said, 'Not at all, it's "*Àgbòṣṣrín*". So they continued with the *ayò* game [i.e. they went on with their lives]. Eventually, her senior wife suggested that the behaviour of this person [the junior wife] did not resemble that of human beings; that it was the nature of animals that she displayed. So the husband told her that he had married an animal (woman) and that its/her skin was in the granary. He told his senior wife that it was a secret and that she must not talk about it because, 'She demonstrated her strange powers to me in the bush: I saw her as a human being, and she showed me a sign/mark, and I am hiding it. You yourself are the wife of a hunter, you have become a cult member [i.e. you must keep it secret]!'

They continued their game. *Àgbòṣṣrín* did not understand everything they said. Now women cannot live together without fighting. One day when they were fighting, the senior wife said to her be she eating or drinking, her skin was in the granary: 'However beautiful you may be, your skin is in the granary'. It was incomprehensible to her. Another day when they were fighting again, her senior wife said, 'Are you not like an animal? Be eating, be drinking, your skin is in the granary. The skin that you surrendered to my husband is in the granary. There is no way you will not behave like an animal'. So she threw the skin at her chest. And she [i.e. the antelope woman] had given birth to two children for the hunter; one was at home, one followed its father to the farm for hunting. Now she transformed back into a harnessed antelope. Her child who was at home also transformed into a harnessed antelope. On his way back as he saw them, the one who followed its father to the farm suspected that they were its mother and younger sibling who had transformed like this. According to one account, it also turned himself into another animal. According to (another) one, he returned home and took from his father's power [i.e. to transform himself as well], but his father thought that he was an animal and shot him with his gun.

Notwithstanding the fact that female *àgbòṣṣrín* do not usually have horns, this tale was also used to explain why *àgbòṣṣrín* have the kind of horns they have, which are conceived of as resembling

a particular hairstyle commonly worn by women: "Bí ẹ bá rí ìwò àgbònrín, bí irun dídì ló rí, irú èyí tí àwọn obìnrin máa rí dì" 'When you see the harnessed antelope's horn, it looks like plaited hair, of the kind plaited by women' (Chief Àwàlà, interview January 2000). Two days before the antelope woman left her husband's compound, her hair had been plaited into this particular style and so, when she turned back into an antelope and entered the bush, her horns took the form of the hairstyle she had been wearing as a woman.

Furthermore, as Chief Àwàlà asserted, Àgbònrín, or Àgbònyín (as it is often pronounced in the Òyó area), continues to be used as a personal name exclusively by the family of the Alààfin, *oba* 'king' of Òyó, which is, historically, the most powerful and prominent of the Yorùbá states. The association between the royal family of Òyó and the harnessed antelope is alluded to and evoked by various *oríkè*, which are meaningful on different levels. A compilation of *oríkè* by Bákàrè Gbàdàmósí (1961: 50) contains the following verses:

Àgbònrín, ọlórùn jọ̀lọ̀,	Àgbònrín, the one with a fat neck
Òfí l'órùn,	The one with a robust neck,
ọmọ olúwo n'ísàlẹ̀ ị̀sọ̀nà,	The offspring of the Olúwo at Ìsàlẹ̀ Ìsọ̀nà
A kú fún ọmọdẹ̀ rẹ̀rìn-ín,	The one who died for the child/children and makes the child/children laugh
Ọmọ ọba l'Ọ̀yọ̀,	The offspring of the king of Òyó,
Elénjá (ìfun, ẹ̀kí àti ẹ̀dò)	Elénjá (intestine, villi and liver),
abẹ̀dò gbàdà,	Owner of a big liver,
Èranko tí a kò gbọ̀dò mú wọ̀lé ọba.	The animal which we must not carry into the king's palace.
Bí o bá mú un délé ọba ńkọ̀?	What if you take it into the king's palace?
Wọ̀n á ní, ọmọ ọba ní olúwa rẹ̀ pa.	They will say, it is the offspring of the king that the person has killed. ⁴⁴

(based on Ajíbádé's editing and translation)

⁴⁴ Also compare with the following lines of *oríkè àgbònrín* collected by Adébáyò Àrẹ̀mú (1979: 58-9):

Ìgalà, ikú elénjá,	Ìgalà, Ikú Elénjá (fairy death)
Abẹ̀dò-gbàdà.	The-one-with-a-big-liver.
A-kú-fọ̀mọ̀dẹ̀-fa-gán-nà-yọ.	The-one-who-died-for-the-child-and-he-drew-out-his-cutlass.

(based on Ajíbádé's editing and translation)

Together with Ulli Beier, Gbàdàmọ́sì (1963a: 22) later published an English version, which seems to be based on the same material:

Royal prince of Oyo!
 Antelope with a smooth neck,
 that is swinging as you walk.
 Antelope with a mighty liver and a mighty heart.
 Child of the house of Oluwo.
 You must die to make the children of the hunter happy.
 We must not carry it past the palace of the king.
 But if one dares to carry it past the palace?
 The king will say: you have killed a royal prince.
 Leave him here to be buried by me.

While the above translation is, in contrast to the Yorùbá text, gender-specific and the verses are presented in different order, it does retain some of the cryptic allusions of the Yorùbá text in a way that suggests that there are deeper layers of meaning which are not accessible without further background knowledge. Later, Beier (1970: 81) published yet another translation, based on the former one, in which these verses are meaningful only on a more superficial level as imagery for the harnessed antelope's regal appearance:

Royal prince
 with a mighty heart
 and a mighty liver.
 Your smooth neck sways as you walk.
 Descendant of kings,
 must you die
 to make the children of the hunter
 happy?
 We must not carry your body
 past the king's palace.
 For, if we dare, he will say:
 you have slain a royal prince
 leave him here
 to be buried by me.

On one level, these *oríkì* may simply be taken to suggest, by means of hyperbole,⁴⁵ that *àgbònín* is so beautiful and regal that its body might easily be mistaken for that of a child of the Aláàfin, who by virtue of its royal birth also naturally possesses exceptional beauty. Another aspect of the connection between the royal family of Òyó and the harnessed antelope may, moreover, be to do with the white markings on the body of *àgbònín*. Various kinds of bovids have slit-like openings/marks on their face which may remind one of the characteristic Yorùbá facial marks and which may suggest a general connection between bovids and human beings.⁴⁶ In addition to their facial marks, however, people related to the family of the Aláàfin by blood traditionally had *èyò* marks all over their right arms. This tradition is the result of an incident related by Samuel Johnson (1921),⁴⁷ in which a Hausa slave of Šàngó, the fourth Aláàfin of Òyó, was punished cruelly by slashing 122 razor cuts all over his body. But when those incisions eventually healed, his body looked so attractive to the *olorì* 'royal wives' that Šàngó, who is said to have been very vain, became extremely jealous of his slave's 'adornment'. The *olorì* advised that similar marks should "not be performed upon a slave, but on actual members of the royal family as distinctive of royalty" (*ibid.*: 150). As he could not bear the fact that another man was admired to this extent, Šàngó decided to get similar incisions on his own body indeed. The pain, however, was so great that he commanded people to stop when they had completed two cuts on each of his arms; but henceforth, these incisions were a royal privilege. In this regard,

⁴⁵ Hyperbole represents a popular literary device in Yorùbá verbal art.

⁴⁶ *Ètu* 'Maxwell's duiker', for instance, is described and evoked as follows (with reference to the slit-like opening of the suborbital gland below each eye):

Pélé ojú, wọ́nran bí ẹ̀ni da idẹ	(Owner of) a <i>pélé</i> facial mark that is bright like a fashioned bronze
Abi-àbàjà wu ọ́mọ̀ iyá rẹ̀ Èsúró	Owner of an <i>àbàjà</i> facial mark admired by <i>èsúró</i> 'red-flanked duiker', offspring of its mother
Bààmú wúrà, baba èsúró	(Owner of) a <i>bààmú</i> facial mark of gold, who is superior to <i>èsúró</i>
Àkọ́bí baálẹ̀ Ògbómọ̀şó	First-born of the <i>baálẹ̀</i> 'village head' of Ògbómọ̀şó
Abi-bààmú-pọ̀nràn-pọ̀nràn	Owner of a bold <i>bààmú</i> mark
Ò-ní-bààmú kí wọ́n má ẹ̀ kọ̀ ọ̀ ní òmíràn mó.	(The one) who (already) has a <i>bààmú</i> mark so that it won't be given another one.

(Gbàdàmọ̀şí 1961: 50; based on Ajíbádé's editing and translation)

⁴⁷ The same incident is also referred to in Qládẹ̀jọ̀ Òkédìjì's play *Šàngó* (1987).

àgbònrín may appear related to the royal family of Òyó because it also has marks of distinction on its body, while other people only have facial marks.⁴⁸ The comparison hyperbolically suggests, moreover, that the royal marks are also on the whole body, not just on the arms.

According to Chief Adéléké of Òyó (interview October 2000), "Ọmọ ọba ni àgbònrín, alágbára ẹdà/èniyàn ni àgbònrín. Kò ní oríkì kan tó dá dúró fúnra rẹ. Oríkì ọba náà ni wọ́n í kì wọ́n" "The harnessed antelope is the *ọba's* offspring, it is a powerful creature/person. It does not have an *oríkì* that stands for itself. They salute it with the *oríkì* of the Ọba himself".⁴⁹ This relationship between the harnessed antelope and the royal family of Òyó is associated with the term *àgbònrín* in particular: "a ò lè pe ọmọ ọba ní ìgalà" 'we cannot call the Ọba's offspring *ìgalà*'; similarly, it is the term *àgbònrín* rather than *ìgalà* that is associated with the harnessed antelope's power of transformation, even though both signify the same animal: "A kò lè pe èniyàn ní ìgalà sùgbọ́n a lè pe èniyàn ní àgbònrín" 'We cannot call a person *ìgalà* but we can call a person *àgbònrín*' (*ibid*). Because of the relationship between the Aláàfin's family and *àgbònrín*, the latter may not be killed or eaten, especially by members of the royal family.⁵⁰ Chief Adéléké (*ibid*) suggested that a child of the Aláàfin's family may be called Àgbònyín/Àgbònrín when it is considered particularly beautiful or when, in the case of a royal wife's infertility, Ifá is consulted and predicts the birth of a particularly beautiful and powerful child. The most

⁴⁸ Also compare the *oríkì* already quoted above, "Àgbònrín onílàtùrè". 'O bushbuck having *tùrè* marks all over the body" (Babalọlá 1966: 102-3). According to Babalọlá (*ibid*: 103), *tùrè* is "one of the traditional styles of facial scarification among Òyó Yorùbá". I would like to thank Àlàgbà Ọládẹ́jọ Ọkédìjì for suggesting this connection to me in personal communication.

⁴⁹ These are the *oríkì* given to me by Chief Adéléké (*ibid*):

Àgbònrín, ọmọ ọba	Àgbònrín, offspring of the Ọba
A ẹ bí ọba jáyé	The one who enjoys life like a king
Ká tóó mọ pé àgbònrín kì í ẹ ọba	Before we discover that Àgbònrín is not the king
Ó tí jáyé jìnnà	He/she/it has already enjoyed life very much
Àgbònrín rẹwà lèyàn púpọ	Àgbònrín is a very beautiful person
Ọmọ ọba ni	He/she/it is the offspring of the Ọba
Ọmọ Alówólódùbùiyere.	Offspring of Alówólódùbùiyere.

Beyond that, all of the Aláàfin's *oríkì* also apply to *àgbònrín*.

⁵⁰ Various old citizens of Òyó confirmed that many people do not eat antelope meat, either because of its relation with the royal family or because it is, due to its powers of transformation, more generally associated with human beings.

important reason to call a child Àgbònyín/Àgbònrín, however, is when a hunter who is married to a wife related to the Aláàfin's family and who has long desired to have children goes on a hunting expedition and encounters a harnessed antelope in the bush, who then transforms into a woman. This antelope (woman) will tell the hunter that he and his wife have been suffering from infertility, but that they will give birth in the future and should call the child, whether it be a girl or a boy, Àgbònyín/Àgbònrín.⁵¹

The fact that Àgbònrín/Àgbònyín is also used as a personal name within the royal family (*ìdílẹ̀*) of Òyó, suggests that there is more to the connection between them. The *oríkì* quoted above may also be understood as an allusion to a particular historical incident. In Òyó, I was told a story (*itàn*) in explanation of the *oríkì* quoted above, according to which *àgbònrín* is the offspring of the Olúwo at Ìsàlẹ̀ Ìṣòṇà. While Olúwo is a chieftancy title in the cult of Ifá, Ìsàlẹ̀ Ìṣòṇà is the name of a quarter of Òyó. The story suggests that *àgbònrín* is referred to as 'offspring of the Olúwo' because Ifá once demanded that the Aláàfin's only daughter, whose name was Àgbònyín, be offered as a human sacrifice.⁵² Understandably, this demand caused great despair in the palace. Eventually, however, a solution was found. It was decided to call the bush animal *ìgalà* by the name of 'Àgbònrín' and regard it as a member of the Aláàfin's family. As such, it could function as a scapegoat for the girl Àgbònyín. When the substitutionary sacrifice was offered in the middle of the night, it was presented as 'Àgbònyín', and because it was dark nobody saw that it was not the Aláàfin's daughter who was sacrificed. In turn, *ìgalà* was henceforth to be addressed and greeted as Àgbònyín, or Àgbònrín. Likewise,

⁵¹ It is hard to tell if this story more generally gives one of the reasons for calling a child Àgbònyín or whether it refers to a particular incident.

⁵² The Aláàfin's name was specified as Òrànmíyàn: "Lamúrúdu ló bí Odùduwà, Odùduwà ló bí Òkànbí, Òkànbí ló bí ọmọ méje, àbíkéyìn wọ̀n ní Òrànmíyàn bàbá ọmọ náà" 'Lamúrúdu gave birth to Odùduwà [who is believed to be the progenitor of the Yorùbá people], Odùduwà gave birth to Òkànbí, Òkànbí gave birth to seven children, the last-born of whom was Òrànmíyàn, the father of this child' (Alháji Abódúnrin of Òyó, interview December 2000).

the royal family's *oríkì* would also apply to *ìgalà* (Alháji Abó dúnrín of Òyó, interview December 2000).⁵³

In this section, I have aimed to represent some of the cultural beliefs and narratives associated with the figure of the antelope (woman), which, because of its enigmatic connection with and relevance to the royal family of Òyó, has gained particular significance. In one way or another, these beliefs and narratives all contribute to the stature of the antelope (woman) as a topos in Yorùbá culture and to the symbolic/metaphoric potential this topos has acquired in the course of time. In the following section, I shall represent some of the cultural beliefs and narratives associated with the figure of the buffalo (woman), which, in turn, is associated with the *òrìṣà* Oya. While the physical and spiritual properties of harnessed antelope and buffalo differ significantly, the figures of the antelope/buffalo woman and their respective tales correspond in many ways. Whether they have a common historical origin and whether, or why, they might have been absorbed into the stock of narratives associated with the royal family of Òyó on the one hand and a particularly powerful *òrìṣà* on the other must, for now, remain a mystery.

⁵³ There is also an interesting inversion of this tale in *Başòrun Gáà* (1972), a play by Alàgbà Adébáyò Fálétí. In the play, Ifá requires the Aláàfin Abíódún's rival, Başòrun Gáà, to kill an *àgbònrín* for a powerful medicine/charm. Instead, Gáà, who is described as both ambitious and cruel, kills the Aláàfin's daughter, who is called Àgbònyín. Alàgbà Fálétí (personal communication, December 2000) told me that the main historical source for his play was a text by Hethersett, which was not further specified. More generally, the play beautifully plays on and renegotiates the notions of humanity/humaneness and animality in relation to social class and status, which I intend to discuss in a separate paper.



Plate 2 Sculpture of a hunter carrying an antelope on his shoulders
(campus of Obáfẹmi Awólọwọ University, Ilé-Ife)



Plate 3 Antelope skin on the wall of Chief Ganiyu Awotunde's consulting room (Ilé-Ifè)

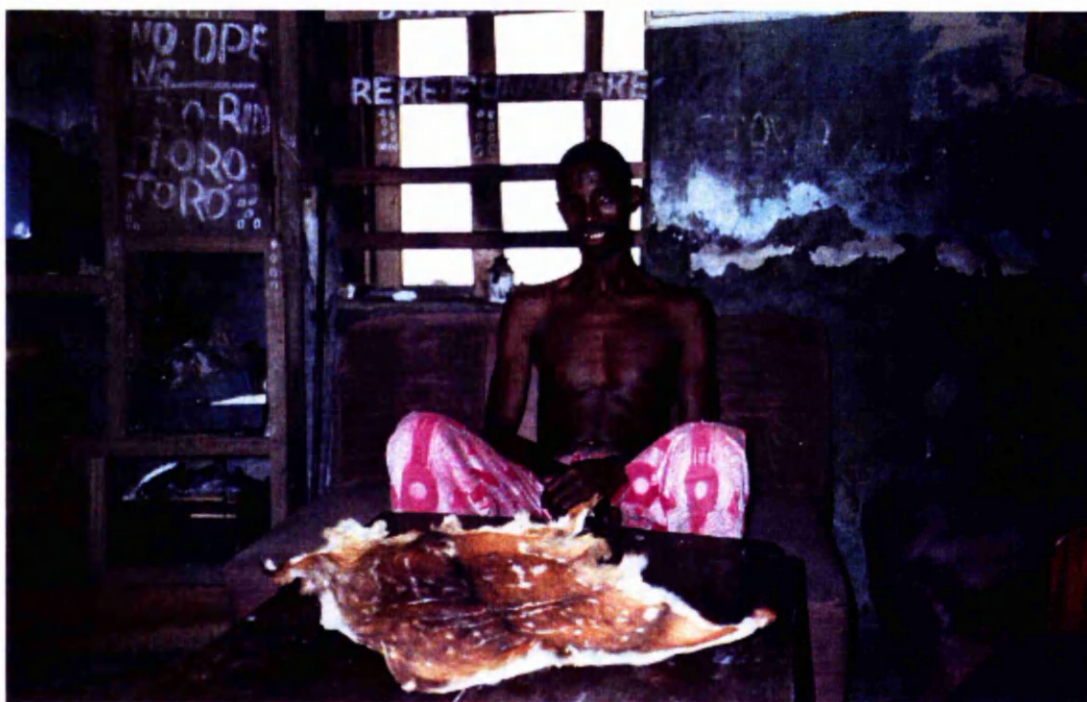


Plate 4 Chief Ganiyu Awotunde, his antelope skin lying on the table in front of him



Plate 5 Chief Jawéşolá Àwàlà with a piece of antelope skin in his pocket; an antelope horn containing *àşę* is attached to his *Òsanyìn* figure in the background (*Ìşęyìn*)



Plate 6
Chief Tìmi Rájí Òjó's chair,
upholstered and decorated with
the skin of a harnessed antelope
(Òkèìgbó)



Plate 7
Chief Tìmi Rájí Òjó sitting in his
chair

1.2.2. The buffalo (woman)

Eḡḡon 'buffalo' (*syncerus caffer brachycerus* and *syncerus caffer nanus*) are bovids belonging to the subfamily of bovinæ. According to Happold (1973: 38), bovinæ are "a subfamily of the 'cow-like' artiodactyls, from which domestic cattle have originated". They are "large heavy mammals" which are easily recognised by their horns, which are "heavy and flattened, with a broad boss covering most of the top of the head", and which "extend outwards, upwards and slightly backwards, curling inwards" at the tip (Happold 1987: 211-2). One *oríkè* refers to the buffalo as "Òrú-rú-n-rú, a-ró-rí-gbéwo-rù-bí-òkè" 'Òrú-rú-n-rú, the one who has a head to carry mountain-like horns' (Àrè-mú 1979: 54; based on Ajíbádé's translation). The horns are present in both male and female buffalo. Also with reference to the horns, the buffalo is commonly saluted as "Òròp t'ó l'ábẹ ní 'gbèrì iwo 'A demonic animal [or spirit] who has razors at the tips of his horns'" (Babalólá 1966: 108-9; compare Abraham 1958: 174-5 and Àrè-mú 1979: 54); or as "Òròp tí í pón abẹ sí igbèrì iwo" 'The spirit/demon who sharpens the knives at the tips of its horns' (Àrè-mú 1979: 54; based on Ajíbádé's translation). Yet another *oríkè* describes and evokes it as "Eḡḡon abeegunlóríwakaka. 'The Buffalo who aggressively carries projecting bony growths upon his head'" (Babalólá 1966: 108-9). Generally, *syncerus caffer brachycerus* denotes the typical large savannah buffalo with a body length of 244 cm (100 in) and a shoulder height of 127-152 cm (50-60 in), whose large, blackish horns can reach a width of up to 65 cm (26 in) (Happold 1973, 1987). Its colour varies from very dark to light tan. *Syncerus caffer nanus* denotes the relatively small, rufous forest buffalo with a shoulder height of 102-127 cm (40-50 in) and smaller horns. The buffalo's occurrence in both vegetation zones is expressed in an *oríkè* which refers to the buffalo as "Òdò-ndó / agbégi-gbé'jù 'Corpulent beast / at home both in the heavy forest and in the savannah woodland tracts'" (Babalólá 1966: 108-9). Buffalo live in large herds and are both diurnal and nocturnal; "they usually rest in the shady riverine forests during the day" (Happold 1987: 213).

According to Chief Àwàlà (interview April 2000), Olórún (i.e. Olódùmarè) created the buffalo as a fierce and bold wild animal: "Ìwà lile ni iwà efòn ... Ó jé oníjàmbá, ó maa í bínú" 'The buffalo's character is tough ... It is dangerous, it is full of anger'. It is counted among "òwó ẹranko abijà" '(the) class of violent/ferocious animals' (*ibid*). According to senior hunters (interview November 2000), a hunter who has shot a buffalo will not confront it immediately but follow it until it dies because of the foam coming out of the buffalo's nostrils, which is described as *agbára efòn* 'power of (the) buffalo' and which the hunter must not come into contact with, lest he die of leprosy (*èlẹ*).

Killing a buffalo, like killing an elephant, represents one of the greatest challenges to any hunter. Various *oríkì* assert that "Efòn kùn n'jù / Qmọndé sáré gungì. 'When the bushcow roars in the forest / A child [or: an inexperienced hunter] runs and climbs a tree'" (Abraham 1958: 174-5); or

Ògbó kù lábàtà	'When a buffalo rumbles at the riverbank [or: in the swamp]
Qmọ ojo í wo igi àmúgùn ...	The offspring of a coward looks for a tree to climb ...
Efòn kù n'jù, qmọdé sáré gungì!	When a buffalo rumbles inside thick forest, a child hastens to climb a tree!
(Àrẹmú 1979: 54-5; based on Ajíbádé's translation)	

Other *oríkì* warn:

Olóògùn àtẹ̀sín,	Let the hunter whose medical charms are but last year's
padà lẹ̀hìn ẹ̀ran. ⁵⁴	turn back from pursuing the buffalo.
Ẹ̀ran yíó s'òko jẹ.	Otherwise the beast will eat him up like grass as if by mistake.
Efòn l'òrò tí í-lé 'mọ	The buffalo is the demon who frightens a young hunter,

⁵⁴ In an *oríkì* collected by Àrẹmú (1979: 54) this line reads "Olóògùn ẹ̀sín, má tọ Efòn lẹ̀hìn" 'The person with an outdated charm, don't pursue the buffalo'.

g'n èdè wàràwàrà.

Forcing him to climb up a thorny tree post
haste.

(Babalolá 1966: 108-9; compare Abraham 1958: 174-5 and Àrèmú 1979: 54)

In a variant of this *oríkì*, not only children and young hunters but even a *baálé* 'head of the household' will climb a tree for safety when the buffalo is around (Gbàdàmóṣí 1961: 49). Another *oríkì* refers to the buffalo as "Èran tí kò mò pé 'mo di iyá mi'" 'Animal who does not know that my mother is my stronghold/support' [and thus will not let me go] (Àrèmú 1979: 54, based on Ajíbádé's translation; compare Abraham 1958: 174-5). In yet another *oríkì*, the hunter is so afraid when confronted with the buffalo that he pretends to have given up his profession:

Ọ ríṣé èpè pé n kò ní í ṣe ọdẹ mọ!	You can see the effect of the curse, I am no more hunting!
Àwìn àpò ni mo gbà.	I bought my bag on credit.
Ikú tí í lé ọmọ gun igi èdè wàràwàrà.	The death that makes children climb dangerous trees hastily.
Ọrọ tí í lé ọmọ gun igi ègùn-àta,	The spirit/demon that makes children/ young hunters climb a tree with thorns,
Èranko tí kò gbọ oògùn. ...	The animal which you cannot capture with charms. ...
Ò-rí-fowó-méwèwá júwe,	The one you see and describe with all the ten fingers,
Èran tí í yọ, tí í kọni lóminú.	The animal who appears and makes you fearful.

(Gbàdàmóṣí 1961: 49; based on Ajíbádé's editing and translation)⁵⁵

⁵⁵ There exists an English version of *oríkì gún* by Ulli Beier (1970: 80), which seems to be based on Gbàdàmóṣí:

The buffalo is the death
that makes a child climb a thorn tree.
When the buffalo dies in the forest
the head of the household is hiding in the roof.
When the hunter meets the buffalo
he promises never to hunt again.
He will cry out: 'I only borrowed the gun!
I only look after it for my friend!'
Little he cares about your hunting medicines:
he carries two knives on his head,
little he cares about your dane gun,
he wears the thickest skin.

Like *oríkì àgbònrín* '(the) harnessed antelope's *oríkì*', *oríkì ẹfọ̀n* '(the) buffalo's *oríkì*' are resonant on different levels. Many *oríkì* compare the buffalo's acoustic impact to the soundscape preceding a typical rain- and thunderstorm in Yorùbáland. The buffalo is saluted as

Labalábá inú ọ̀dàn	Butterfly of the savannah,
tí í-maa í fò láìf'ara kan bẹ̀rẹ ...	flying about without touching the grass ...
Ẹfọ̀n ọ̀gbó, ọ̀mọ akùmárọ.	O buffalo, ancient beast who rumbles like rain but produces no precipitation.

(Babalolá 1966: 108-9; compare Ìrẹ̀mú 1979: 54 and Abraham 1958: 174-5)⁵⁶

Beyond the beauty and meaningfulness of these *oríkì* as images, I would suggest that they can also be understood as an allusion to the buffalo's connection with Oya, Goddess of Storms (or Thunderstorms), who is associated with the strong wind preceding the seasonal heavy rainfall: "Whenever there is a heavy gale, with trees uprooted or heavy branches broken off and the roofs of buildings blown off, the Yorùbá believe that Oya, the wife of Şàngó, is at work. It is believed that she precedes or accompanies her husband when there is a thunderstorm" (Awólálú 1979: 46).⁵⁷ There is a tale according to which, on the day that Oya and Şàngó entered the ground (*wọ̀lẹ̀*) – which is the phrase usually used when referring to the beginning (or return to the other world) of an *òrìşà* – Oya was the first to disappear, followed by Şàngó, her second husband (Ládélé et al 1986). This is believed to be the reason that until this day, Oya precedes Şàngó in thunderstorms. While Şàngó, God of Lightning and Oya's second husband, is believed to be responsible for lightning, Oya herself is, by many, believed to cause the thunder which precedes both rain and lightning (compare Ògúnmolá). This is also in accordance with the belief that Oya's power exceeds that of Şàngó and that it is she who gives

⁵⁶ For comparison, this is Beier's (1970: 80) English rendition of these *oríkì*:

He is the butterfly of the savannah:
he flies along without touching the grass.
When you hear thunder without rain –
it is the buffalo approaching.

⁵⁷ Furthermore, Oya is the *òrìşà* of Odò Oya 'Oya's river, or: the river Niger'.

power to Šàngó. Not only is Qya characterised in Ifá as tough and fierce but she is also believed to be tougher and fiercer than Šàngó:

Qya ló rorò tó jòkọ lọ,	Qya is fiercer than her husband,
Qya ló rorò tó jòkọ lọ.	Qya is fiercer than her husband,
Qkára rorò ju Šàngó o,	Qkára is fiercer than Šàngó o,
Qya ló rorò jòkọ lọ.	Qya is fiercer than her husband.

(a chant chanted by Šàngó devotees, quoted in Adéoyè 1979: 37)

Qya's fierce character and wild temperament represent a further link with the buffalo.

According to Abíódún (1987: 256), "Yoruba deities like Èṣù, Šàngó, Qya, Ògún become closer and more approachable to worshippers through their sculptural forms, songs, incantations, dances, etc". *Ọ̀rọ̀ ọ̀rìṣà* 'the matter of the ọ̀rìṣà' is conveyed through various forms of *òwè* 'here: symbolic or metaphoric form/s of expression'. Among the symbols representing Qya, there are two buffalo horns. These, along with the other symbols – most prominently, a thunder axe, and two swords or celts (similar to but different from those associated with Šàngó) – are kept in a particular calabash (*igbá Qya*) in the shrine of Qya (*ojúbo Qya*). According to Bridget Mojíṣọlá Òkédìjì (1978), these symbols are kept by the people of the family of Onírá, who are chief among the Qlọya 'Qya's followers' because they are believed to have originally found or been given the symbols of Qya at the place where she disappeared from this earth.⁵⁸ The buffalo horns represent, moreover, Qya's Èlẹgbára, who is an ọ̀rìṣà named Aye which

is, in form, the horn of a buffalo. ... Aye, much dreaded, is used for taking oaths. It is filled with water which has to be drunk by the person taking the oath. If the person is guilty, he must come to propitiate Aye; otherwise, the consequence will be disastrous for him. Aye is worshipped every ninth and seventeenth day. (Fádípè 1970: 286)⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Rá* means 'to disappear', which is why the place where she disappeared is now called Irá.

⁵⁹ According to Fádípè (1970: 286), almost every ọ̀rìṣà has an Èṣù or Èlẹgbára linked with it, which may be placed outside the compound or beside the ọ̀rìṣà's shrine; but in "the case of a few other ọ̀rìṣà, for example, Qya ... and Šàngó ... the Èlẹgbára is neither the customary iron-stone nor the modern representative, but something distinctive of each of the ọ̀rìṣà".

According to Chief Adélékè of Òyó, the two buffalo horns will also appear on any *agò egúngún* 'mask of an ancestral masquerade' that belongs to Qya (interview November 2000).

In some respects, the deeper meaning of the two buffalo horns which symbolically represent Qya seems surprisingly obscure, especially – and perhaps paradoxically – in the town of Òyó, where the worship of Qya as an *òrìṣà* is especially prominent.⁶⁰ B. Òkédijí (1978), for instance, concludes that there does not seem to be any deeper connection between the two and suggests – at the end of a dissertation on Qya submitted to Obáfémí Awólówò University in Ilé-Ife – that the buffalo horns may represent a symbol for Qya's power simply because like the buffalo, Qya is very powerful. My own fieldwork confirmed the impression that in contrast to Qya's followers elsewhere those in Òyó do not seem to know about any deeper connection between Qya and the buffalo.⁶¹ For instance, Alháji Abódúnrìn of Òyó (interview December 2000) suggested that while the buffalo was not directly connected with Qya, in the olden times people used to take one part of animals that they believed to have helped them in one way or another as a symbol for worship:

Irú nńkan tí àwọn ècẹyàn bá gbàgbó náà ní wọn ní lò láti fi ṣagbára. Inú irú nńkan yí ní àwọn àgbàlagbà máa ní kó agbára oògùn wọn sí. Àṣẹ ní wọn ní fíwo un ẹ ní èyí tó jẹ pé ohun tí wọn bá sọ máa rí bẹẹ.

'It is the kind of thing people have belief in that they use as a source of power. It is inside this kind of thing that the elders keep the power of their charms/medicines. They use the horn for *àṣẹ*, so that everything they say will come to pass.

The obscurity of the relationship between Qya and *efò* in Òyó may, perhaps, be explained with regard to the fact that there seem to be two *òrìṣà* of the name of Qya, and, in turn, two *òrìṣà* of

⁶⁰ See Gleason 1987 for further thoughts on the connection between the buffalo woman and Qya in a wider West African context.

⁶¹ I did not get the impression that this was because my informants considered the information too secret to be passed on to the uninitiated. B. Òkédijí recorded and interviewed senior performers and priests among the Qlọya 'followers of Qya' in Òyó, while the Alháji interviewed by myself is a senior member of a family of Qlọya.

the name of Šàngó (Adéoyè 1979, 1989), who are sometimes confused or merged.⁶² One of them is Qya as one of the original *òrìṣà*, who spent one human lifetime on earth, returned, at some point, to the other world, and was married first to Ògún and later to Šàngó. Her departure from the human world is usually associated with the discovery of the fact that she was a buffalo (woman) when she first met Ògún.⁶³ The other one is Qya as the wife of the fourth Aláàfin called Šàngó, who was deified after her death because of her power and influence as a human being (B. Òkédìdí 1978).⁶⁴ She died, or committed suicide, when finding that Šàngó had committed suicide after causing a tragedy through his rashness (Johnson 1921). Some of my informants tried to reconcile the two accounts by suggesting that the original *òrìṣà* Qya was later reincarnated as the woman who was to become the wife of the fourth Aláàfin, who, in turn, was a reincarnation of the original *òrìṣà* Šàngó. Perhaps the reason that the buffalo woman's tale, which is associated with the original *òrìṣà* Qya, is not so well known in Òyó, the town of the Aláàfin, is that it has, to some extent, been displaced or overlaid by the story of Qya as the wife of the fourth Aláàfin, which is more central to Òyó royal historiography. Moreover, as I have shown in the previous section, the antelope woman's tale – which, in many ways, is quite similar to that of the buffalo woman – is, in and around Òyó, associated with the family of the Aláàfin, which might also be significant.

⁶² The two are merged, for instance, in the video film *Šàngó*, for dramatic reasons. The different accounts of Qya's life have to be seen in relation to the fundamental controversy regarding the person of Šàngó (Ìṣòlá 1991; Awólàlú 1991). As Qya's marriage with Šàngó, the fourth Aláàfin, is often used to situate her historically, the confusion prevailing the historical identity of Šàngó extends to her.

⁶³ It is not easy to synchronise the various accounts. How could Qya have married Šàngó after Ògún if she left the human world as the (buffalo) wife of Ògún? Adéoyè (1989) solves this problem by introducing(?) another hunter figure, who married Qya after both Ògún and Šàngó (compare Chapter 4). However, my own informants insisted that the hunter who met the buffalo woman who later became the *òrìṣà* Qya was Ògún. An explanation might be that in the course of time, the identities of earlier deities merged with the identities of newer ones, as suggested by Awólàlú (1991) with respect to Šàngó, into whose identity an earlier deity called Jákútà seems to have been subsumed (compare Adéoyè 1979, 1989). Jákútà is now a cognomen for Šàngó, which is associated with particular tale about Šàngó. This might explain some of the divergences and logic incongruences between the different tales associated with Qya, Ògún and Šàngó.

⁶⁴ The fourth Aláàfin Šàngó, in turn, is described as very vain, flashy and ostentatious; moreover, he is associated with fire-spitting tricks or magic, which resonates with beliefs about Jákútà/Šàngó, who is believed to punish people by means of lightning.

And yet there are *oríkè* which suggest a closer relationship between the figure of the buffalo and Qya. One *oríkè efòn* collected by Àrẹ̀mú (1979: 54) suggests that "Gbogbo ẹ̀ni tí ń tọ Ẹ̀fọ̀n lẹ̀yìn / T'Qya ni wọ̀n ń ẹ̀" 'Everyone who follows the buffalo / Belongs to Qya' (based on Ajíbádé's translation). The same verses also form part of the *oríkè orílẹ̀ Olúpo* 'oríkè associated with the lineage of Olúpo' collected by Babalọ́lá (1978: 9 and 20). In the remainder of this section, I shall present different tales that, in one way or another, explain the connection between Qya and *efòn*. On the one hand, there is a tale – which I was told by Chief Adélékè of Òyọ́ and which I have not found anywhere else – which suggests that while there is a connection between the two, it is purely symbolic. Qya, as the wife of Ògún, had the problem of giving birth to *àbíké* 'born-to-die' children⁶⁵. This is generally agreed upon. According to Ifá (interview Chief Ẹ̀lẹ̀buibọ̀n of Òşogbo, April 2000), this is what happened:

Odù Ìwòrìrẹ̀kú nì:

Ìwòrìrẹ̀kú eégún ò gbódò na babaláwo

A dífá fún Qya

Níjọ́ tí ń fọ̀mọ́ gbogbo ẹ̀ ọ̀wọ́ àbíké

Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ́

Pé tó bá fẹ́ẹ́ bímọ́

Kó má bímọ́ sínú ilé mọ́

Inú ọ̀gán ní kó bímọ́ sí

Ìgbà tó bímọ́ wọ̀n yadi

Èyí tó lè sọ̀rọ́ ló ń sọ̀rọ́ bí egúngún.

It is the *odù* Ìwòrìrẹ̀kú:

Ìwòrìrẹ̀kú, the *egúngún* 'ancestral masquerade' must not beat an Ifá priest

Divination was made for Qya

On the day she was lamented that all her children were *àbíké*

They told her that she should offer a sacrifice

That whenever she was about to deliver a baby

She should not give birth inside a house anymore

Inside a termitarium should she deliver

When she gave birth to (her) children, they were dumb

The (only) one who could speak spoke like an *egúngún* 'ancestral masquerade'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ For a more detailed explanation of *àbíké* see 5.1.3.

⁶⁶ According to Chief Ẹ̀lẹ̀buibọ̀n (*ibid*), until today a *babaláwo* can prepare a medicine to stop *àbíké* children from dying by collecting the *àbíké*'s placenta, mixing it in a pot with other ingredients, reciting the appropriate incantation and burying the whole thing in a termitarium. Alhájì Abódúnrín of Òyọ́ (interview December 2000) also told me that Qya's *egúngún* can cure *àbíké*.

Moreover, there is an *oríkè* *Qya* which refers to the *òrìsà* as "Qya tó ràdàn-ràdàn tó renú ògán rée bí sí" 'Qya, who was pregnant and gave birth inside a termitarium' (*ibid*). The termitarium thus came to be like another abode for *Qya* (*ibid*). Chief Adéléké (interview October 2000) now linked this incident with *Qya*'s acquisition of buffalo horns:

Qya kò rí ọmọ bí rárá fún ìgbà pípé. Ó wáá lẹ ọmọ. Ògún sì ni ọkọ rẹ tẹlẹ kó tóó di pé Ẹàngó gbà á. Wọ́n dífá fún un, wọ́n wáá sọ fún un pé 'ìwọ Qya, o ò gbódò gbé inú ilé tíí o fi maa bímọ yí, inú ìgbé ni kí o lẹ maa gbé'. Nígbà tó dé inú ìgbé ó rí òkítì ògán ló bá kó sínú rẹ. Ẹfọ́n débẹ, ó n gbọ ohùn ó sì bèrẹ sí yípo. Qya sì nìyí, alágbára ni, Olóògùn ni. ... Ẹfọ́n sàá n gbọ ohùn nínú ògán. Nígbà tó yá ni Qya bá jáde sí i nítorí alágbára ni Qya. Bááyí ni Qya se pa ẹfọ́n. Qya sì mú ìwọ rẹ. Nígbà tí Qya fẹ́fẹ́ bímọ, ọmọ rẹ kéré púpọ. Ìtàn sọ fún wa pé nínú ìwọ rẹ ni Qya gbé ọmọ sí tíí tó fi dàgbà dáadáa. ... Ìwọ méjèèjì ló gbà lórí ẹfọ́n níjọ kinni nínú òkítì ògán. Nígbà tó gba ìwọ méjèèjì, ó kó ọmọ rẹ sí ọkan, gbogbo nńkan tí yóò maa lò fún ọmọ ọwọ rẹ ó kó o sínú ìwọ kejì. Ìdí tí ìwọ méjèèjì fi dúró fún Qya niyẹn. Nínú ìwọ kejì náà ni Qya kó gbogbo ohun àmúṣagbára rẹ sí.

Qya was barren for a long time. Then she went to plead for a child. And Ògún was her husband before she married Ẹàngó. Ifá divination was done for her; then, they told her: 'You, *Qya*, must not live inside a house until you give birth to the child; you should go and live in the bush'. When she arrived in the bush and saw a termitarium, she entered it. A buffalo arrived, it heard a voice, and it began to move around [the termitarium]. And this *Qya* was powerful, she had charms. ... The buffalo clearly heard a voice inside the termitarium. *Qya* eventually came out of it, because she is powerful. Thus, *Qya* killed the buffalo. And *Qya* took its horns. When *Qya* wanted to give birth to her child, her child was very small. In the tale (*itàn*), *Qya* carried the child in a horn until it had grown up well. ... She took both horns from the buffalo's head the first day in the termitarium. When she had taken the two horns, she put her child into one [of them]; into the second horn she put all the things she would need for her child. This is the reason that the two horns stand for *Qya*. Into the second horn, *Qya* put everything she used for her powers.

Other tales, which *Qya* priests in Òyọ do not seem to be familiar with but which are well-known elsewhere, suggest that the relationship between *Qya* and the buffalo is more substantial. Chief Ẹlẹbuibọn (interview December 1999) recited the following tale about *Qya*,

which relates how the *òrìṣà* Ògún, God of Hunting, Iron and Warfare, encountered a buffalo during one of his hunting expeditions, who took off its animal skin and transformed into a beautiful woman.⁶⁷

Nínú ẹṣẹ Ifá Òṣagùn-únlẹ̀jà, ó sọ pé:

Ẹṣin ló gbófá
Ẹṣin ò rántí Ifá
Atatátúúrú awo ọḍẹ
Ló dífá fọḍẹ
Níjọ tí ní lẹ̀gùn àwúrọ̀

(Ọḍẹ ní lọ pẹfọn, Ògún ní ọḍẹ yẹn)

Ojú aya ní ní pọn ọḍẹ
Wọn ní kó rúbọ
Pé yóó rí obìnrin fẹ
Ó ní iyán egùn

Ó ní ọtí aṣẹ
Ó rúbọ
Wọn ní kó gbé e lọ sídì ọgán
Nígbà tó gbé ẹbọ sílẹ̀ nídìí ọgán

Ló bá gẹ̀gùn lórí igi
Níbẹ̀ ló tí ní sọ ọgán
Ó rí obìnrin arẹ̀wà kan tó jáde láti inú ọgán

Nígbà tó bó àwọ̀ ẹfọn sílẹ̀
Ó kó àwọ̀ yí sọrí ọgán
Nígbà tọḍẹ rí i pé ó lọ tán

Lọḍẹ bá palẹ̀ àwọ̀ mọ
Ó kó o wá sílẹ̀

Among the Ifá verses of [the *odú*] Òṣagùn-únlẹ̀jà we have the following ones:

The horse was well versed in Ifá
The horse never remembered Ifá
Atatátúúrú the hunter priest
Performed divination for the hunter
On the day he was going to the hunting-platform [in a tree, where the hunter lies in wait for prey] in the morning

(The hunter was going to kill a buffalo; Ògún was that hunter)

The hunter was eager to get a wife
They told him he should offer a sacrifice
So that he would find a wife to marry
He said [the sacrifice should include] a good meal of pounded yam

He said [the sacrifice should include] a pot of wine
He offered the sacrifice
He was told to take it to a termitarium
When he had placed the sacrifice by the side of the termitarium

He climbed a hunting-platform on top of a tree
There, he was watching the termitarium
He saw a beautiful woman who came out of the termitarium.

When she had taken off her buffalo skin
She put this buffalo skin on top of the termitarium
When the hunter saw that she had completely disappeared

The hunter removed the skin
He took it to his house

⁶⁷ For elaborate variants of this tale, see Verger (n.d., currently being edited by Oyètádé/Coriolano-Lykourezos) and Adéoyè (1979: 36-37).

Nígba tò nájà tán
 Ó padà sídì ọ̀gán
 Kò bá àwọ̀ rẹ̀ mọ̀
 Ara fu ú pé èyàn rí ọ̀n láàárọ̀

 Ó fi ilẹ̀ ọ̀dẹ̀ wẹ̀lọ̀
 Ó wá sílẹ̀ ọ̀dẹ̀
 Pé ọ̀n wá sí ọ̀jà láàárọ̀

 Ilẹ̀ sì tí sù
 Kò sí ibi tí ọ̀n ó sùn
 Ọ̀dẹ̀ gbà á sílẹ̀
 Ọ̀dẹ̀ náà tí fura pé obìnrin àárọ̀ ní

 Ó sọ̀ fún ọ̀dẹ̀ pé kò fi ẹ̀nu rẹ̀ mọ̀nu

 Ọ̀n gbà láti ẹ̀ yàwó rẹ̀
 Ẹ̀gbọ̀n nńkan tò rí kó má sọ̀ fún ẹ̀nikankan
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ní wọ̀n ní gbé pọ̀ ní lẹ̀kọ̀láyá
 Tó sì bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í bímọ̀
 Ẹ̀gbọ̀n àwọ̀n yàwó yòókù
 Tí ọ̀dẹ̀ tí kọ̀kọ̀ fẹ̀ tẹ̀lẹ̀
 Fẹ́ẹ̀ mọ̀ bí obìnrin yí tí jẹ̀
 Tó jẹ̀ pé èyàn kì í wá a wá
 Kí í lẹ̀ sílẹ̀ tiwọ̀n bí àwọ̀n ẹ̀ máa ní lẹ̀
 Wọ̀n ní yọ̀ ọ̀kọ̀ wọ̀n lẹ̀nu
 Ẹ̀gbọ̀n kò sọ̀
 Nígba tò yá ó sọ̀ fún wọ̀n pé àwọ̀ rẹ̀
 Ọ̀n gbé e sórí àjà
 Ọ̀kọ̀ dá oko àgbàdọ̀
 Ó sọ̀ fún àwọ̀n yàwó
 Kí wọ̀n kó agbọ̀n wá sóko àgbàdọ̀
 Láti wáá bó àgbàdọ̀ wálẹ̀
 Ìyáálẹ̀ sọ̀ fún obìnrin ẹ̀fọ̀n yí
 Pé ọ̀kọ̀ àwọ̀n ní káwọ̀n wá sóko
 Láti wáá bó àgbàdọ̀
 Ó dáhùn pé ọ̀n ò ní í lẹ̀ lẹ̀ o
 Pé otútù mú ọ̀n
 Ní ìyáálẹ̀ bá bínú ló bá sọ̀ pé

When she had finished her business in the market
 She returned to the termitarium
 She could not find her skin any more
 She suspected that somebody had seen her in the morning
 She inquired about the hunter's house
 She went to the hunter's house
 [And explained] that she had come to the market in the morning
 And night had already fallen
 And there was no place where she might sleep
 The hunter took her into the house
 The hunter already suspected that it was the same woman whom he had seen in the morning
 She told the hunter that he should not disclose what he had seen to anyone
 She agreed to be his wife
 But he not should not tell anybody what he had seen
 Thus, they lived together as husband and wife
 And started to have children
 But the other wives
 Whom the hunter had married before
 Wanted to know who this woman was
 Because nobody came to visit her [as relatives]
 She didn't go to their house either as they used to do
 They were nagging their husband
 But he did not say anything
 Eventually he told them that her skin
 He had taken up to the ceiling
 The husband had a maize farm
 He told the wives
 To bring baskets to the maize farm
 So as to bring maize home
 The most senior wife told this buffalo woman
 That their husband said they should come to the farm
 In order to harvest maize
 She answered that she wouldn't be able to come
 That she had a cold
 So the senior wife got angry and said,

'Máa je, máa mu, àwò rẹ́ ń bẹ́ lákàá'
 Ibẹ́ nì Qya tí mò pé ọ́dẹ́ tí sọ
 Àsírí pé àwò òun ń bẹ́ lákàá
 Nígba tò rí í pé gbogbo wọn lọ sóko tán
 Ó bọ́ sínú àkà
 Ó gbé e
 Ó pọ̀nmí sí í
 Ó gbé e wọ
 Ó lọọ bá wọn lóko
 Ó pa ìyáálẹ́ rẹ́ àtí gbogbo àwọn ọmọ
 Ó bá bèrẹ́ sí í ní í lẹ́ ọ́dẹ́ ká
 Ọ́dẹ́ gungì ló bá ń kọ̀rìn pé:
 Àjànàturùpọ̀n má mà pọ́dẹ́ o
 Àjànàturùpọ̀n má mà pọ́dẹ́ o
 Ọ́dẹ́ ló nì ìyán egùn

 Ọ́dẹ́ ló nì ọ́tí aṣẹ
 Nnkan tò fí sètùtù nǹjọ́sì tò gbé wá sídì ọ̀gán,

'Tnú kì í sì í jẹun ẹni kó paní'
 Ẹfọ̀n wáá rántí pé
 Òun ò gbọ́dọ́ pa á
 Ó fí í sílẹ́
 Ó lọọ bá àwọn ọmọ tírẹ́ tò bí fún ọ́dẹ́

 Ó bọ́ ìwo fún wọn
 Ó sọ fún wọn pé bí ohun kan bá ń dùn wọn
 Wọn ò ní í rí òun mò
 Sùgbọ̀n kí wọn máa sọ fún ìwo yí
 Ìdí nìyí tí ìwo ẹfọ̀n fí wá ní ojúbọ́ Qya nù un.

'Be eating, be drinking, your skin is in the granary'
 Thus, Qya learnt that the hunter had leaked
 The secret that her skin was inside the granary
 When she saw that all of them had gone to the farm
 She went to the granary
 She retrieved her skin
 She put water on it
 She put it on
 She went to meet them in the farm
 She killed the senior wives and all the children
 She began to pursue the hunter
 Climbing a tree, the hunter sang a song:
 Àjànàturùpọ̀n, definitely don't kill the hunter
 Àjànàturùpọ̀n definitely don't kill the hunter
 It was the hunter who had a good meal of pounded
 yam
 It was the hunter who had a pot of wine
 [Thus he was alluding to] the things he had used for
 his sacrifice the other day and which he had brought
 inside the termitarium
 'Death does not kill a person after eating his/her food'
 Then, the buffalo (woman) remembered that
 She must not kill him
 She abandoned him
 She went to meet her own children whom she had
 borne for the hunter
 She took off her horns for them
 She told them that when something worried them
 They wouldn't see her any more
 But they should tell these horns [about it]
 That is why the buffalo's horns are at the shrine of
 Qya.

One *oríkè* quoted by Babalola (1978: 20) salutes the buffalo as an animal with a difference:

"Gbogbo ẹranko ní ń lo kíjipá / Tẹfọ̀n ló kó kan. 'All animals use skins / [But] that of the

buffalo is different".⁶⁸ Interestingly, while the Yorùbá term for 'skin' is *awò*, the buffalo woman's skin is generally referred to as *àwò* 'colour, nature'. Like *àgbònrin* and *ájé, èfòn* '(the) buffalo (woman)' is also referred to as *aláwò méjì* 'owner of two natures', which signifies somebody who is unstable or unpredictable or who can transform into different personalities or beings.

1.2.3. Contemporary literary transformations of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman)

Barnes (1989b: 1) has argued that there "is a privileged class of supernatural and mythic figures who consistently grow in their renown and complexity". Regarding the figure of Ògún, God of Hunting, Warfare, and Iron, she emphasises that the *òrìṣà* cannot be relegated to "a dying tradition" and suggests that "a deity's capacity to survive, flourish, and expand depends on the meanings he projects and, perhaps equally important, on the way those meanings are 'packaged' ... The many manifestations of Ogun yield many meanings. Multiple meanings inevitably give rise to multiple interpretations" (Barnes 1989b: 3). I would suggest that antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) represent further examples of such 'supernatural and mythic' or, one might add, religious figures, whose symbolic and/or metaphoric potential continues to find resonance in the literary imagination of contemporary writers and their personal, socio-cultural and historical situations. While many previous discussions of some of the texts examined in this thesis – especially those by Fágúnwà, Tutùqlá, and Okri – have been preoccupied with the topos of the hunter and his divine patron Ògún, which in many ways interacts with the topos of the antelope/buffalo (woman), this thesis, in contrast, is concerned with literary transformations of the latter (while not ignoring the ways in which these interact with the former), and represents a significant shift of critical and interpretative energy.

⁶⁸ While *kijipà* does not literally mean 'skin', it denotes a kind of thick, beautiful woven cloth commonly found in the Íṣẹyìn area, which is used as a cover cloth (*àṣò iborà*) to protect the body from the cold; older women use it as *irò* 'wrapper'. I am grateful to Akin Oyètádé for pointing this out to me.

As I have already pointed out, the symbolic or metaphoric resonance of a topos and, accordingly, its significance may change and increase over time. Elleke Boehmer (1993: 320), adapting Balzac, has suggested that metaphors are "the private history of nations". Similarly, the history of transformations of a particular topos as well as of the meanings it conveys will provide insight into the ways in which culture and society change and, most importantly, how people conceive of and conceptualise the world they live in at different points in time. In the final section of this subchapter, I shall briefly comment on a possible relationship between the significance of the antelope/buffalo woman's tale as a topos in contemporary literature in the general biographical, socio-cultural and political contexts of its various transformations.

The antelope/buffalo woman's tale is characterised by a high degree of anxiety. Her power of transformation represents a focal point in this regard. On the one hand, her hybrid identity, which allows her to assume either human or animal form, induces considerable anxiety in the hunter. It indicates supernatural powers, which represent a potential threat even to an intrepid hunter and which the latter tries to appropriate and control by taking possession of the antelope/buffalo (woman)'s skin and also by marrying the female stranger. Both actions are designed to ensure that she remains in human form and, therefore, becomes accountable as a human being. Ultimately, the antelope/buffalo (woman)'s hybrid identity and the supernatural powers associated with it prove fateful and disastrous for the hunter, leading, as they do, to death and destruction. In some variants of the tale, the hunter's own life is only saved because his mother has prevented him from inadvertently sharing the secret of his own powers of transformation with his animal wife. On the other hand, the antelope/buffalo (woman)'s hybrid identity becomes a source of anxiety for herself. Its discovery by the hunter and the loss of her skin and, consequently, her power of transformation make her as vulnerable as an ordinary human being. Moreover, when she realises that the secret of her hybrid identity has

been revealed, she implores the hunter to keep it to himself by all means if she is to become his wife and live in the human world.

The heightened atmosphere of anxiety in the antelope/buffalo woman's tale arises essentially from an instability of power relations. The power of the intrepid hunter with his impressive arsenal of charms competes with both the antelope/buffalo (woman)'s ability to transform herself into either an animal or a human being and with other supernatural powers this might entail. The general scenario has many symbolic repercussions, as the figure of the hunter (*oḍe*) epitomises powers that are accessible to human beings as well as powers generally associated in Yorùbá culture with men, while the figure of the antelope/buffalo woman epitomises powers that are accessible to superhuman beings as well as powers generally associated with women (especially with regard to *àjé*). I would propose that the fundamental instability of power relations and the concomitant anxieties in the antelope/buffalo (woman)'s tale account for much of its symbolic and metaphoric potential. The tale easily lends itself to either the legitimization or the renegotiation of power relations.

In the history of the antelope/buffalo woman's tale as a literary topos, it has frequently been appropriated and transformed to thematise gender relations, which, to some extent, may be symbolic or metaphoric of relations between the human world and the other world. The literary transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) explored in this thesis were all written during or after the colonial period, a historical context with which, I would suggest, it seems to resonate particularly well. While the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) was used to negotiate or legitimate power relations before the colonial period – for instance, in terms of the relationship between men and women, between husband and wife, or between junior and senior wives in the same household – the question of power acquired another dimension during and after the colonial period. Not only was the topos as such continuous beyond the precolonial period but it also assumed a new relevance with

respect to the socio-cultural and political anxieties generated in the colonial and post-colonial climates. Its contemporary literary transformations all mediate and negotiate personal, socio-cultural and political anxieties in the wake of sustained contact with the West, especially through Christian missionary activity and colonialism. The thematisation of gender relations plays an important symbolic, metaphoric and even metonymic role in this respect, as the way in which each writer's literary transformation of the motif of *àgbònín* and *ẹfón* relates to the issue of women and female agency in Yorùbá, or, more generally, Nigerian culture is an important means of communicating and conceptualising change.

This thesis explores the meanings that contemporary writers communicate through their literary transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in Yorùbá culture, including potentially subversive surplus meanings generated in the process of their deployment of the motif of *àgbònín* and *ẹfón*. While common themes and subthemes do emerge, the individual chapters represent a commentary on the diversity of contemporary literary forms of expression, and on the diversity of the issues that contemporary writers negotiate in their literary works. In each of the following chapters I shall begin by defining the specific personal and historical situations in which the authors find or locate themselves and by attempting to define the agenda underlying and informing their literary transformations of the topos. How is the figure of the antelope/buffalo (woman) conceptualised by different contemporary writers? How do these representations interact with personal, socio-cultural and historical factors? In other words, how do these factors shape and inform the ways in which the individual writers represent and transform the topos of the antelope/buffalo (woman), and how does this reflect back upon their personal, socio-cultural and historical contexts?

In Chapter 2, I examine the way in which Fágúnwà, in line with his literary agenda and moral outlook, restructures and modifies the motif of *àgbònín* – which he contrasts with the concept of *ìwà* '(good) character' – as a metaphor in relation to changing conceptualisations of women

and female agency. In Chapter 3, I argue that Tutùplá's hero's quest for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts may be seen as symbolically reflecting (on) the so-called African condition; at times rather troublingly so. Tutùplá's employment of the motif of *àgbònrín* as a figure for power and the way in which the hero emulates the condition of *àgbònrín* in the course of his stay in the Bush of Ghosts play a crucial role in this regard. Beyond that, however, Tutùplá's use of comic irony subverts the hero's master narrative of his quest, which throws new light on the way in which his literary work is, or is not, symbolic of 'the African condition' in the twentieth century. In Chapter 4, I suggest that Adénúbi's transformation of the motif of *efòn* is inspired by her desire to popularise the buffalo woman's tale. Like Fágúnwà, she relates the motif to contemporary marital experience; but, letting the buffalo woman tell her own story at crucial points in her narrative, she does so – very innovatively – from a female perspective. At the same time, however, she also sustains the traditional plot of the buffalo woman's tale, which results in interesting ambiguities and incongruities. In Chapter 5, I discuss Okri's deployment and transformation of the topos in relation to the historical setting of the *àbíkéú* narratives and to post-colonial discourse. Okri generally draws upon the motif of *àgbònrín* (and *efòn*) in order to explore society's potential and responsibility for transformative vision and agency in the face of change.

Chapter 2

Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Qḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè*
and *Igbó Olódùmarè***2.0. Introduction**

In his ground-breaking study, *The Modern Yorùbá Novel: An Analysis of the Writer's Art* (1998: 148), Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá recalls "Fágúnwà's warning about his novels. That his novels were like proverbs" and that, in Yorùbá belief, "only the wise can get the full meaning of a proverb". It is significant that the very first sentence of Fágúnwà's (ÒQ 1) first narrative, *Ògbójú Qḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè*, compares the beating of the *ògìdìgbó* drum to *òwè* 'proverb, idiom', and proceeds to point out that "Ìtàn tí ng ó sọ yí, ìlù ògìdìgbó nì; èmi nì ẹnì tí yóó lu ìlù náà, ẹyin nì ọlọgbọ́n tí yóò jó o, ẹyin sì nì ọmọ̀ràn tí yóò mò ọ̀n pẹ̀lú" "The tale I will be telling here, it is an *ògìdìgbó* drum; I am the person who will be beating this drum, you are the knowledgeable person who will be dancing to it, and you will also be the wise person who will make sense of it'.⁶⁹ Fágúnwà's metaphor sets the tone for the interpretation of his narratives: they are to be read as *òwè*. As I will suggest, the same is true of the figure of the antelope (woman). In Ìṣòlá's (1998: 145) words,

The real meaning of the stories they tell lies in the correct understanding of the metaphor and in making the right intellectual associations. Characters in Fágúnwà's novels represent types and philosophically illustrate essences and concepts. The way the stories are told constitutes a particular idiom clearly understood by the people. ...

⁶⁹ In this chapter, I quote from the two revised editions of *Ògbójú Qḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè* (1983) and *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1982), which, in page references, are abbreviated as *ÒQ* and *IO* respectively. The page numbers provided refer to these two editions. I have chosen to further edit the texts orthographically and typographically, which I think is in line with Fágúnwà's own intentions: Fágúnwà, himself a head teacher, supplemented both of them with didactic chapters, in which he advises his readers – many of them pupils at Nigerian schools – of the importance of using tone-marks correctly and of adhering to the modern orthographic standard, especially in school examinations, for which both books are immediately relevant. Translations are mine unless marked as quotations from somebody else's work.

The Yorùbá man's [sic] understanding of these stories includes a great deal of conscious intellectual awareness in making the right connotations.

Similarly, Abíólá Ìrèlè's (1975: 84) observation that "Fagunwa's work belongs ... to the great tradition of allegorical and symbolic literature, set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references" points to the importance of cultural competence for the process of interpretation. Together, intellectual and historical awareness on the one hand, and cultural competence on the other, represent the prerequisites for understanding and appreciating what Ìrèlè (1982: 100) refers to as the "modern relevance" of Fágúnwà's *òwè*, and with regard to this thesis, his transformation of the topos of *àgbònrín*.

This is the first of four chapters dealing with transformations of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* in the literary work of contemporary writers. Ayò Bámgbóṣé (1974: 61), in his seminal study of Fágúnwà's work, *The Novels of D.O. Fagunwa*, observes that "Women appear to be a fascinating topic for Fagunwa. Every novel has some women characters, and the author concentrates on three aspects concerning them: characteristics of women, polygamy, and rivalry between wives". Most of the female beings Fágúnwà's hunters encounter in the bush are witches or spirits of the kind that are familiar from traditional Yorùbá folktales, which – among other sources – Fágúnwà has been said to rely on as a reservoir of stock types and characters. The antelope (woman) represents but one example. However, neither Fágúnwà's representation of *àgbònrín* nor the cultural and moral values he expresses and perpetuates in his narratives are a literary reproduction of the 'oral tradition' or the *Weltanschauung* associated with it. His deployment, reconfiguration and transformation of the motif of the antelope woman in *Ògbójú Qḁḁ* and *Igbó Olódùmarè* are informed by a specific, historically motivated and strongly didactic agenda. This agenda itself is inspired and shaped not only by the Yorùbá oral tradition, but also, and very greatly, by modern conservative Christian values.

In both *Ògbójú Qḁḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* and *Igbó Olódùmarè* the figure of the antelope (woman) proper may not at first seem very central to the plot. It is only twice that brief variants of the

tale appear. In the first chapter of *Ògbójú Ọdẹ*, as the narrator recalls his father's misfortune in marrying a wife who was not only *àjẹ* '(a) witch' – which he knew from the outset – but also, as he found out only after her death, *àgbònrín* '(an) antelope (woman)'. After a stranger has reproached him for not dealing with his wife and her atrocious behaviour, the narrator's father, an intrepid hunter, is on his way home when he encounters an antelope feeding on okra in his farm:

... bàbá mi gbé ibon, ó n bọ ní ilé. Ó sì wáá jẹ pé ní ọ̀nà ibi tí ó n bá lọ yí, ó nílátí kan oko ilá rẹ kan bá yí kí ó tóó dé ilé; nígbà tí ó sì máa fi dé ibi oko náà, ilẹ̀ tí n sù, ọ̀sùpá sì tí yọ. Bí ó sì tí dé ibẹ̀ tí ó gbé ojú wo òkè tí ó sì wo ipẹkun oko náà lódì kejì, ó rí i, ẹnìkan n bọ, ó sì yára sá gun igi kan lọ, ó n fẹ́ wo ohun tí olúwarẹ yóó ẹ. Tààrà tí ẹnì náà n bọ, inú òkítì ọ̀gán kan bá yí ló bọ sí, kò sì pé púpọ̀ náà tí ó bọ sí ibẹ̀ nígbà tí àgbònrín kan jáde láti inú òkítì ọ̀gán náà tí ó bọ sí inú oko tí ó n ká ilá jẹ, ni bàbá mi bá da ojú ibon kọ ọ, ó hó iná mọ ọ̀n lórí, dídún tí ibon náà sì dún, igbe ẹ̀niyàn ni àgbònrín náà sì ké, ó wí pé: 'Mo gbé ol' Inú ahéré tí n bẹ ní ibi oko ilá yí ni bàbá mi sùn mọjú ọjó náà. Nígbà tí ilẹ̀ ọjó kejì sì mọ, ó lọ wo ibi tí ọ̀n tí yínbon lu àgbònrín náà, kò sì rí ǹkankan àfi ẹjẹ. Ó bá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í tọ̀sẹ̀ ẹjẹ náà lọ, ó tọ ipasẹ̀ rẹ̀ títí ó fi dé ilé koko; sùgbón nígbà tí ó dé ààrín ilú kò rí ẹjẹ náà mọ àfi ẹ̀gbà tí ó kù díẹ̀ kí ó wọ ilé wa tí ọ̀n tún n rí ẹjẹ náà, ó sì tọ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ wọ ìyàrá ìyá mi. Èmi pàápàá kò sùn mọjú ní ilé wa nítórí àwọn à̀njànnú kò ní jẹ kí olúwarẹ sinmi lóru; ẹ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan ni ìyá mi pàápàá máa n sùn ní ibẹ̀, ó sì nílátí tọ̀rọ̀ àşẹ̀ lówọ̀ bàbá mi náà ni. Ibi tí bàbá mi tí n sí ilẹ̀kùn ìyàrá ìyá mi ní ọjó ni mo dé, nígbà tí ó sì sí i tán, tí a wọlé, tí mo rí ìyá mi, díẹ̀ lókù kí ng sálọ. Láti orí títí dé ẹ̀jìkà rẹ̀, tí ẹ̀niyàn ni; sùgbón láti ẹ̀jìkà dé ẹ̀şẹ̀, àgbònrín pátápátá gbàà ni. Ẹ̀jẹ̀ bọ ó lára, ẹ̀şinşin sì n kùn ún wọnyín. Nígbà tí bàbá mi fi ọ̀wọ̀ kàn án bá yí, ó ti kú, ó sì tí bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí í rà – àşẹ̀ ọ̀n ni, ó di àgbònrín, tí ó wáá n ká ilá jẹ lóru. (ÒỌ 4-5).

My father took his gun, he was returning home. And it happened to be the case that on the way, he would get to his okra farm before reaching home; and when he reached the location of that farm, dusk had fallen and the moon had already come out. And when he had reached the place where he lived, he saw a hill, and he saw the end of the farm on the other side, he saw it, somebody was approaching, and he quickly proceeded to climb a tree, he wanted to see what this person was going to do. The person who was approaching now directly entered a termitarium, and, not long after s/he had entered it, a harnessed antelope came out of the termitarium and went into the farm to reap okra to feed, when my father cocked the trigger of his gun to shoot it, he fired at its head, and the gun went off with a bang, and the harnessed antelope uttered a human cry, it said: 'I perish!' It was inside a hut that was at the farm that my

father slept that day. And when the next day dawned, he went to look at the place where he had shot the harnessed antelope, and he did not see anything but blood. So he began to spoor the track of that blood, he followed its footprints until he finally reached the home; but when he arrived in the centre of the town, he did not see any blood any more, only when he had almost entered our house did he spot blood again, and he followed it into my mother's room. I myself did not sleep in our house because the spirits did not allow anybody to rest at night; my mother herself rarely used to sleep there, and she had to ask for my father's power/charms. It was on the day when my father was opening the door to my mother's room that I arrived home, and when he had finished opening it, when we entered it, when I saw my mother, I nearly ran away. From head to shoulder, she was human; but from shoulder to feet, her body was completely transformed into that of a harnessed antelope. Blood covered her body, and flies were buzzing over it. When my father now touched her, she had already died, and she had begun to rot – imagine, she transformed into a harnessed antelope to pick and feed on okra at night! (my translation)

The second variant of the antelope woman's tale appears later in the narrative when the narrator himself encounters the character of a female spirit (*iwini*) who briefly transforms into a harnessed antelope before agreeing to marry him:

Bi mo ti ní rìn káàkiri nínú igbó yí ni mo dédé bá obìnrin arẹwà kan pàdé, ó wù mí gidigidi. Mo kí i, òun nàà sì kí mí, mo bèrè bí ó ti ẹ dé ààrin aginjù bí irú èyí sùgbón ó kò sí mí lẹnu, mo bè ẹ tí tí kó gbà, mo sì dẹrù bà á wí pé bí kò bá gbà láti fẹ mí èmi yóó yìnbón lù ú sùgbón ó dà mí lóhùn pé ìbón mí kò ọ, mo sì yìn ín sí i, sùgbón ó dún Ẹ́áá ní ọta kan kò sì jáde. Lẹ́yìn eléyíí ó wò mí tí tí ó wí pé 'Bí kò ẹc àánú rẹ tí ó ẹc mí lóníí èmi íbá pa ọ lẹ́ẹkan ẹso'. Èmi nàà sì dáhùn pé kò lè pa mí lára, obìnrin nàà sì kọ́jú sí ọ̀nà tírẹ ó ní lẹ. Ẹwà rẹ tún fà mí, mo tẹlẹ e, mo sì di í ní ọ̀rùn ọwọ́ mú, bí ó sì tí wò mí lójú ó ẹsubú lulẹ, ó sì di igi nílá kan sùgbón mo di igi nàà mú síbẹ nítorí obìnrin nàà wù mí púpọ. Lẹ́yìn eléyíí ni mo rí i tí igi nàà yípadà tí ó sì di àgbònrín tí òun tí iwo lóri ẹ́araşara, sùgbón mo di í mú síbẹ, ó jà tí tí sùgbón mo di í mú gbòningbònin. Láìpẹ ó tún yípadà, ó di iná ileru tí ní jó sùgbón ng kò fi í sílẹ, bèẹ nàà ní iná nàà kò sì jó mí. Bẹẹ ni ó bèrẹ sí í padà tí tí ó tún fi di obìnrin arẹwà bí tí àtíjọ, nítorí tí ó tún di ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ nùkan... Níkẹ́yìn tí ó di obìnrin bí tí àtíjọ ó wò mí, ó sì rẹrìn-ín múşé, ó wí pé: 'Èmi yóó fẹ ọ iwọ ọ̀gbójú ọdẹ'. Ó sì fẹ mí, a sì gbé ara wa ní iyàwo... (ÒQ 41-2)

When I had been roaming the forest, I happened to encounter a beautiful woman, I was very strongly attracted to her. I greeted her, and she also greeted me, I asked how she had ended up in a forlorn place like this but she refused to answer, I implored her so that she would agree [to tell me all about it], and I intimidated her, saying that if she

didn't agree to marry me I would shoot her, but she answered that my gun would refuse [to kill] her, and I fired it at her but even though it gave off a noise no bullet came out. After this, she looked at me for a long time and said, 'If it weren't for the compassion I'm showing you today I'd have killed you straight away'. And I also replied that she couldn't kill me, and the woman turned towards her path and walked away. Again, her beauty pulled me, I followed her, and I caught hold of her wrists, and when she had looked me in the face she fell to the ground, and she turned into a big tree but I held the tree down because the woman attracted me very much. After this, I saw that the tree transformed again and turned into a harnessed antelope which had two pointed horns on its head, but I overwhelmed it, it struggled for a while but I firmly held it to the ground. Soon, it transformed again, it turned into a blazing fire but I did not let go of it, and so the fire did not burn me. Then it began to transform back until it became a beautiful woman again, as in the beginning, because it again turned into many things... After she had turned into a woman as in the beginning she looked at me, and she smiled, she said, 'I shall marry you, you brave hunter'. And she married me, and we celebrated our wedding... (my translation)

As I hope to show, these two incidents become meaningful in relation to Fágúnwà's literary and didactic agenda when they are supplemented by further information about both (antelope) women in the wider context of his two narratives.

More specifically, this chapter explores the ways in which Fágúnwà's transformation of *àgbònín* underscores and perpetuates the (re-)conceptualisation of women as wives, or housewives, and of female agency as domestic agency, in the wake of British colonial rule. It begins by situating *Ògbójú Qdẹ* and *Igbó Olódumare* in a biographical and literary context. Secondly, it provides the socio-cultural and historical background information that is necessary for an understanding and appreciation of Fágúnwà's deployment of the motif of *àgbònín* in the two narratives. Thirdly, it explores the ways in which Fágúnwà restructures and modifies the antelope woman's tale and deploys it as a vehicle for his moral vision, examining Fágúnwà's strategic transformation, to borrow Ato Quayson's (1997) term, of the motif of *àgbònín*, and discussing its implications and ramifications.

2.1. D.O. Fágúnwà

2.1.1. Life

Daniel Ọlórúnfẹ́mí Fágúnwà was born in Òkè-Igbó, Nigeria, in 1903. His formal schooling began at St Luke's School, Òkè-Igbó, in 1916, when he was already more than twelve years old. In 1924, when he had completed his primary education, he started teaching there while still a pupil. From 1926 to 1929, he trained as a teacher at St Andrew's College, Ọ̀yọ́, and again worked as a teacher thereafter. Fifty years before Fágúnwà's arrival, St Andrew's had been founded to "produce evangelist-teachers who would help in the spread of Christianity in the ever-widening missionary field" (Ayándélé 1966: 293). Fágúnwà was concerned with education throughout his life-time: studying or teaching at various levels, training teachers, working with the Ministry of Education in Western Nigeria, and finally becoming the Nigerian Representative at Heinemann Educational Books. In 1931, Fágúnwà met his wife, whom he married six years later. He lost his life in an accident during a trip to northern Nigeria in 1963. While waiting for a ferry by the river Niger at Baro he fell into the water, and was drowned.

Before Fágúnwà's mother and father – Rachael Ọ̀ṣúnṣọ́mí and Joshua Akíntúndé Fágúnwà – were converted to Christianity, they had been devotees of the *òrìṣà* 'deities' Ọ̀ṣun and Ifá respectively. Fágúnwà's paternal grandfather had been an Ifá priest. Fágúnwà himself became a devoted Christian. Originally, his middle name was Oròówọ́lé, a name which derives from the name of an *òrìṣà* and literally means 'Orò enters the house'. He changed this name to Ọlórúnfẹ́mí, which derives from an epithet of the supreme being Olódùmarè, Ọlórún, and literally means 'Ọlórún loves me'.⁷⁰ Fágúnwà's decision to change his middle name to

⁷⁰ Ọlórún literally means 'owner of heaven'. Today, Ọlórún is also used by Christians to refer to God. The god of the Bible, the god of the Qur'an, and the Yorùbá supreme being, Olódùmarè, are often conceived of as sharing numerous characteristics (Ìdòwú 1962; Awólàlú 1979). Another epithet of Olódùmarè is, for instance, Èlẹ́dàá, which means 'Creator'.

Olórúnfémi is characteristic of his general tendency to synthesise two belief systems by filling old terms and concepts with new meanings informed by a Christian worldview.⁷¹

2.1.2. Work

D.O. Fágúnwà is generally recognised as one of the most important protagonists in the development of contemporary Yorùbá (written) literature. As early as 1963, A. Olúbùnmò (1963: 26) predicted that Fágúnwà would "almost certainly go down to history as the father of systematic creative writing in Yoruba", in his enthusiasm overlooking the fact that Fágúnwà was not actually the first Yorùbá writer to publish a literary text.⁷² Bámgbóşé (1974: 1) asserts that "Before him no other writer has had the same impact on the Yoruba literary scene, nor the same influence on subsequent writers". 18 years later, in the early 1990s, Bísí Ògúnşínà, the author of *The Development of the Yoruba Novel* (1992), is still able to agree with this position. Ìrèlé (1982: 99) likewise endeavours "to make a point which needs strong reiteration: that his work stands at the head of creative writing in the Yorùbá language and exerts the most pervasive influence on every category of Yorùbá literature".⁷³

Fágúnwà began to write fiction in the mid 1930s. While there were earlier instances of fictional writing in Yorùbá, as Ògúnşínà (1992) has shown, Bámgbóşé (1974: 15) is correct in pointing out that at this time "there was hardly any written tradition in Yoruba to fall back upon". The most important piece was a narrative by Isaac B. Thomas entitled *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Aiyé Èmi Şègilólá* 'The Biography of Myself, Şègilólá' (first published serially between 1929-30), which structurally and thematically follows the pattern of Samuel Richardson's epistolary works

⁷¹ The biographical information in this section is based on Olúbùnmò 1963, Bámgbóşé 1974, Ìrèlé 1975, Qlábíntán 1975, and Ògúnşínà 1992.

⁷² Ògúnşínà 1992 traces the development of Yorùbá prose fiction in written form.

⁷³ This is not the place, nor is it my intention, to 'rank' Yorùbá authors according to their significance and achievement. Arguably, many other giants have emerged on the literary scene in the course of the 20th century. The above authors are cited to illustrate Fágúnwà's fame, not to establish him as the greatest Yorùbá writer of all.

Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded (1740-1) and *Clarissa: or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747-9), two classics in the history of English literature (Bámgbóṣé 1974; Ògúnṣínà 1992). Though Fágúnwà was familiar with certain classics in English literature, as well as English translations of Aesop's fables, classical Greek literature and the *Arabian Nights*, and might very well have followed Thomas's example, he chose to take an altogether different path.⁷⁴ As Bámgbóṣé (1974: 15) puts it: "He could use his knowledge of English literature to produce a European type of novel (Already [*sic*] he had the realistic story of Şègilólá), or he could create something of his own, drawing his inspiration from traditional material". Nevertheless, I would suggest that despite their many differences, what Thomas's and Fágúnwà's narratives have in common is part of their literary agenda, which finds expression in their respective themes. Their narratives represent different literary responses to what Ògúnṣínà (1992: 15) describes as "a moral obligation" in the face of the "significant forces of change" (*ibid.* 20) that were in the process of overturning Yorùbá moral values.⁷⁵ In this regard, both authors are concerned with the relationship between the sexes. They are both writing within the context of the kind of socio-historical situation depicted by N.A. Fádípè (1970) in his *Sociology of the Yorùbá*, which I shall discuss below. In both Thomas's and Fágúnwà's narratives, female beauty is the cause of regret and undoing – in *Ìtàn Ìgbésí* it is the heroine Şègilólá herself who is undone as she gradually turns into a prostitute (Ògúnṣínà 1992), while in *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, it is Olówó-Ayé, the hunter hero, who is lured into marriage by the beauty of an (antelope) woman and eventually suffers for it. Despite their different settings and narrative techniques, Thomas's and Fágúnwà's narratives both clearly address questions and problems arising in urban Nigeria in the early decades of the 20th century.

⁷⁴ While the setting of Fágúnwà's narratives is distinctly Yorùbá his sources include not only Yorùbá folktales and traditional religious or mythic beliefs but also a variety of literary works in English (partly translations) and Christian religious literature. This has been analysed in detail by Bámgbóṣé 1974.

⁷⁵ As Ògúnṣínà (1992: 23) points out, *Ìtàn Ìgbésí* "enjoyed a wide publicity and readership. Not only was it read among the early literate Christian converts, it also enjoyed publication for twenty-eight years. It was so popular among the Yoruba audience that its contents became useful texts for church dignitaries, moralists and parents". The enthusiastic reception of Thomas's narrative in Nigeria is quite comparable to that of Fágúnwà's narratives.

Fágúnwà wrote and published most of his fiction during British colonial rule. Apart from his literary narratives, his publications include two volumes of travel writing, *Ìrìnàjò* (1949), a collection of folktales entitled *Ìtàn Olóyìn* (1954), a short story entitled "Àjàlá àti Àjàdà" in *Àsàyàn Ìtàn* (1959), and several volumes of a Yorùbá primary school reader, *Táíwò àti Kẹhìndé, Ìwé I-III* (1948-50), which he authored jointly with L.J. Lewis (Bámgbóṣé 1974). A short narrative entitled *Òjó Asọtán* (1964), jointly written by Fágúnwà and G.L. Láṣebikan, was published posthumously. However, Fágúnwà's literary fame is based on his five longer narratives: *Ògbójú Qḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* (1938)⁷⁶, *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1949), *Ìrèké-Oníbùdó* (1949), *Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje* (1954), and *Àdùtú Olódùmarè* (1961). *Ògbójú Qḁ* in particular has become accessible to a broad international readership through the publication of nobel laureate Wólé Šóyínká's translation *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga* (1968). Together, Fágúnwà's five book-length narratives represent a pioneering and substantial contribution to contemporary Yorùbá literature and indeed to the literature of the world. This distinction derives from Fágúnwà's stylistic brilliance, his vivid manner of description, and his creative imagination.

2.1.3. *Ògbójú Qḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ and Igbó Olódùmarè*

The publication of *Ògbójú Qḁ*, which has become Fágúnwà's most famous and most widely read work, marked the beginning of his literary career. Furthermore, it "marks an important stage in the development of Yoruba written literature" (Bámgbóṣé 1974: 1). In Olúbùnmò's (1963: 27) view, if "Fagunwa had not written a single line after 'Ogboju-Ode....' he would still have been regarded as an important Yoruba writer". Originally written in 1935 and submitted for a literary competition in 1936, *Ògbójú Qḁ* was bought by The Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and subsequently published two years later. As Bámgbóṣé (1974: 3) records, "The

⁷⁶ The dates cited for this book vary. Some authors give 1939 as the date of publication. 1938 is given by Bámgbóṣé 1974 and Ògúnṣínà 1992, two of the strongest sources.

book was an instant success, and was very popular especially in the schools". A new edition, which has been orthographically updated and reprinted many times since, was published by Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd in 1950.

Igbó Olódùmarè, Fágúnwà's second narrative, was probably written between 1939 and 1942 (Bámgbóşé 1974) but was published more than ten years after *Ògbójú Qdẹ*. Many writers agree that *Igbó Olódùmarè* is Fágúnwà's best narrative (Olúbùmmò 1963; Bámgbóşé 1974). It represents a sequel to *Ògbójú Qdẹ* in the sense that it takes up the story of the hero-narrator Àkàrà-Oògùn's father, which is begun in but also limited to the first chapter of *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, most of which relates Àkàrà-Oògùn's own story. Fágúnwà himself conceived of these two narratives as part of a trilogy, the third volume of which is *Ìrìnkèrindò*. However, as Bámgbóşé has pointed out, the three narratives are only loosely connected. Most importantly, the narratives' three heroes are members of the same family: the hero of *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, Àkàrà-Oògùn, is the son of the hero of *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Olówó-Ayé, and a maternal cousin of the hero of *Ìrìnkèrindò*, who is named *Ìrìnkèrindò*. As the motif of *àgbònrin* is not deployed in *Ìrìnkèrindò*, my discussion will be limited to the first two narratives of the trilogy.

The narrative situation in Fágúnwà's texts is multi-layered and embraces both oral and literary traditions. As Bámgbóşé (1974: 4) has noted, there is "some autobiographical element in the novels", which "usually takes the form of identification of the author with the scribe or recorder who takes down the story". *Ògbójú Qdẹ* and *Igbó Olódùmarè* are each centred around a group of episodic hunters' tales. *Ògbójú Qdẹ* is framed by the account given by the author's narrative persona of a story-telling session with a wise old hunter. This hunter, in turn, acts as the first-person narrator of his own adventures in the forest, but also as the narrator of his father's story. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the author's persona and the same hunter unexpectedly meet again, whereupon the latter acts both as the narrator of his father's story but also as the reader of a manuscript written by his father in the first person. In both narratives, Àkàrà-Oògùn

approaches the author's persona for the specific purpose of having his own and his father's narratives typed in order for them to benefit a wider readership.

Storytelling is a traditional means of imparting cultural and historical knowledge and values, which operates on a very basic level in Yorùbá culture and which addresses itself to young and old alike. By linking the scenario of story-telling to that of a typical quest narrative in the form of a hunters' tale, Fágúnwà simultaneously draws upon several literary modes and genres, which he deploys according to his own agenda to such an extent that he may be said to have created, following an age-old pattern, a new genre in the context of Yorùbá literature. According to Bámgbóṣé (1974: 5), who speaks of 'the Fágúnwà tradition', until "comparatively recently, almost all the Yoruba novels followed Fagunwa's pattern of the story of the wandering hero (generally a hunter) and his experiences in a forest or some other locale peopled by supernatural beings".⁷⁷ By activating the traditional story-telling mode, Fágúnwà deliberately raises particular readerly expectations with regard to both the form and the function of his texts. At the same time, by making a hunter the hero of his tales, he situates them in the context of traditional beliefs about the spiritual dimension and metaphysical implications of hunting in Yorùbá culture, which are expressed in genres such as *ìyálá*, *ìrèmòjé*, *itàn* and *ẹ̀ṣẹ Ifá*. In Ìrèlẹ's (1982: 100) words, the "primary achievement of Fagunwa was the way in which he was able to fill out the restricted outline of the folk tale and to give it the dimension of a developed narrative from retaining its essence and its allegorical and symbolic quality while giving it a modern relevance".

⁷⁷ For a discussion of writers in the Fágúnwà tradition see Bámgbóṣé (1974: 5-7).

2.2. Women, wives, and female domestic agency in Yorùbá culture

In order to understand the implications and the significance of Fágúnwà's deployment and transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* in relation to his ideal of female agency, some socio-cultural and historical background information is necessary. This subchapter introduces the notion of women as *omọ ilé* 'children of the lineage' and *ìyàwó* or *aya* 'wives'⁷⁸ and discusses their role and position in pre-colonial Yorùbá households.⁷⁹ It also discusses the historical situation in Nigeria at the time Fágúnwà was writing his narratives and examines the conceptual transformation of wives into housewives, which was enhanced by socio-cultural changes in the wake of colonialism.

2.2.1. Women, wives, and female domestic agency

The women in a precolonial Yorùbá *agbo ilé* or *agboolé* 'household, compound' primarily belong to two categories. On the one hand they are counted as *omọ ilé* 'children of the lineage/house', people born into the *ilé* 'lineage, family' residing in the compound, while on the other they are counted as *aya* or *ìyàwó* 'wife', i.e. people married to an *ọkọ* 'husband', who belongs to the *ilé*. In a way, all *omọ ilé* of a compound, especially those born before the arrival of a wife, are regarded

⁷⁸ The two terms are synonymous (Ògúnṣínà 1992). *Ìyàwó*, however, can also refer to a bride.

⁷⁹ As Yorùbá society is highly stratified, it may appear problematic to depict the position of women and wives in an 'average' Yorùbá household, as Yorùbá women do not represent a homogeneous group (Àíná 1998). It does make a difference whether a woman is born into a royal family with extensive land and great labour power, as the daughter of a wealthy businesswoman bound to establish her in the same business, or as that of a small-scale farmer or petty trader; whether she is born as a senior wife's first child or as the fifth child of a junior wife, whether she becomes somebody's first or fourth wife, etc. While mobility within the hierarchical structure of Yorùbá society is in principle possible and even common, the position and roles of women in a traditional Yorùbá household depend, to some extent, on the status and socio-cultural roles of both their own lineage and that of their husbands. The positioning of women in Yorùbá households at different socio-economic levels of society follows, however, similar principles. While this is true for precolonial Yorùbá households, the underlying principle also applies, more or less modified, to many Yorùbá households in contemporary Nigeria.

as *ọkọ* to that wife.⁸⁰ Each adult woman usually belongs to both categories. In her father's house, a woman is counted as an *ọmọ ilé*, a member of the (patri-)lineage, and she retains this status even after her marriage.⁸¹ In her husband's compound, a woman is, in turn, counted as an *ìyàwó* or *aya*, a wife of the lineage. While her children are counted as *ọmọ ilé* of her husband's lineage, she herself does not become a member of her husband's *ilé*. Fádípẹ (1970: 114) notes that women generally "look upon the compounds into which they have been married as more or less their own" and "are not encouraged by their parents to do otherwise", especially after they have given birth to children. However, many other scholars point out that Yorùbá women usually remain in close contact with their own *ilé* and may even choose to stay there temporarily, for instance before and during childbirth and at times of sustained conflict (M. Drewal 1992; Barber 1991; Oyèéwùnmí 1997). Women may also decide to divorce their husbands and return to their own *ilé*, usually their father's. The phenomenon seems to be especially common among women who are past menopause.

The issue of choosing a wife or a husband and, more generally, of getting married is of supreme importance in Yorùbá culture. Traditionally marriage was and to some degree has remained a matter between two lineages rather than two individuals (Beier 1955; Fádípẹ 1970; Barber 1991; Olárínmóyè 1993; Barber/Oyètádé 2000). In Fádípẹ's (1970: 69) words, the "kindred are equally interested in the marriage as the individuals themselves". There are different reasons for the families' interest in the marriage of their offspring. As Fádípẹ (1970: 69) points out, the "interest relates to the purposes of the relationship and its terms and conditions, the prospects of realising the principal purpose of the union and the possible consequences – legal, social, economic, political and religious – to the groups concerned with

⁸⁰ Furthermore, some of the girls or young women living in a compound are usually *ọmọ ọdọ* 'house children, children living with the household', often young relatives (both female and male), who help with daily chores and, in return, may either be paid or helped with school fees and accommodation. Historically, depending on the socio-economic status of the *ilé*, there could also be one or more female *ìwọ̀fà* 'pawns, bond persons', or *erú* 'slaves'.

⁸¹ Compare, however, Fádípẹ (1970: 134): "Although the patrilineal form of organization prevails, the Yoruba reckon descent bilaterally".

such a union". The relatives of both sides ensure that "the choice of either party is socially approved" (*ibid.*: 69). Furthermore, "The members of the two principal parties involved "are both witnesses and guarantors of the permanence of the union" (*ibid.*: 68). Esther A. Oḷárìnmóyè (1993: 16) likewise stresses that the fact that a marriage relationship is arranged and supported by two groups rather than two individuals enhances its continuance, as "it is believed that a person to person relationship is more liable to be shaky and unstable than one between groups whose stability depends on the constitution and structure of the groups. Marriage is therefore always more than simply a legalised sexual union between a man and a woman". The interest of a lineage in an intended marriage manifests itself in extensive research into the history and circumstances of the spousal family (on both the mother's and the father's side) to determine their social status and moral character and to find out whether they have any hereditary diseases or outstanding debts. These inquiries are necessary "in order to ensure not only soundness of stock (and, thus, to eliminate as far as possible the risk of a union which would bring shame or unhappiness upon the family), but also to guarantee the peace of members of the family, and to avoid being saddled with debts to which they were no party" (Fádípè 1970: 71).

Traditionally, women get married relatively young: according to Fádípè (1970: 65), "no woman over the age of 25 would remain unmarried". This is to some degree ensured by the institution of polygyny. Men traditionally need sufficient economic resources to marry and ascertain their independence from their fathers; therefore, by the time they can afford to get married, they are usually older than the women who are ready to marry. Furthermore, as *omo ilé*, men are senior to their wives in the sense that the latter only enter the compound upon marriage (Àiná 1998; Fádípè 1970). As seniority is the most fundamental ranking principle in a compound, this

twofold seniority has important implications for the relationship between husbands and wives (Àinà 1998).⁸²

Yorùbá culture is patrilocal. While men remain in their family's compound for the duration of their lives, women, upon marriage, leave their own family's compound to live in that of their husband (Àinà 1998; Fádípè 1970). In contrast to those women "who have been married into the compound at each generation", "all the members of a compound are related to one another on the father's side (Fádípè 1970: 99). A wife's position in her husband's compound is defined by her relative status within the affinal group. While the precise position or rank of each *omo ilé* is precisely determined by his or her age, that of an *iyàwó* or *aya* or is determined by the duration of her marriage not only to her husband, but in relation to the totality of the wives of the compound. Thus, a wife is *iyàwó* '(a) junior wife' to all other wives who were married into the household before herself. Senior wives in the compound are referred to as *iyáálé* 'mother of the lineage/house' and enjoy higher status than junior wives.⁸³ Furthermore, an *iyàwó* or *aya* remains, at least in principle, junior to those *omo ilé*, especially males, who were born before she moved into the compound.⁸⁴

The residence pattern significantly weakens the position of young wives in their new compounds and represents "both an expression and a reinforcement of a man's privileged

⁸² Àinà (1998: 6-7) notes that in a marriage relationship women kneel in front of their husbands and other male relatives on their husband's side, not just older ones, "as a visible sign of the wives' subordinate positions to their husbands". Fádípè (1970: 102) reports that people "have come to expect occasional quarrels between husband and wife and even occasional exhibitions of temper on the part of the husband. They also expect a certain amount of bullying of his wife by a husband".

⁸³ Ògúnládé (1990: 54) observes that today, change can be seen in the form of "greater assertiveness of the modern wife over her husband and the home" in the form of "struggle between the wives and their mothers-in-law".

⁸⁴ Before the onset of menopause, wives, who are members of the household by marriage, are not allowed to "raise a hand against those who are members of the compound by blood except perhaps the young ones who are born after their marriage (Fádípè 1970: 102). A wife's "position of subservience in her husband's family" is underscored by the "extensive repertory of names for applying to the various relations of her husband's" (*ibid.* 123).

position in husband-wife relationships" (Àinà 1998: 6) and in the whole compound. The process of integration of a new wife into her husband's compound represents a symbolical expression of her subordinate position and role in the new household. It ensures that she is aware and constantly reminded of her subordination and subservience to everybody else in the compound.⁸⁵ Fádípè (1970: 80-1) points out that upon marriage, the "leading of the bride to her husband's home marked a serious crisis in her life":

She left the known for the unknown, and with a very heavy heart. She left a compound in which women who were not related by blood flattered her; indulged her; tolerated her weaknesses and faults; took her under their protection when she had incurred anger; consoled her and gave her advice; and helped her at times with her tasks. She left all this for a compound where the role was to be reversed; where, if she was to avoid making a failure of her married life, she must for some considerable period of her life place her services at the disposal of all and sundry and thus constitute herself into a sort of common drudge. In the new compound she had to strive to please and to suppress her own spontaneous reactions ... and try to place herself on the best possible terms with a whole host of strangers: She had to put up with the innumerable petty tyrannies of women in the same legal position as herself, wives of other members of her husband's family who by virtue of entering the compound before her were entitled to varying degrees of authority and privilege over her. ... In short, it constitutes no less a mental than a physical wrench for a girl to be asked to exchange the familiar physical and social environment of twenty years or more for an almost totally unfamiliar environment on leaving for her husband's home.

Mary Èbùn Modúpè Kóláwólé (1998: 22) notes that in "most societies young men enter into marriage feeling triumphant but the girl expects the worst and this prepares her mind to tolerate abuse and violence in marriage". Women's anxieties on this occasion are well expressed in the genre of *ekún òyàwó* (Fádípè 1970; Barber 1991). Fádípè (1970: 114-5) describes "the socially approved type of young wife", who

seeks to gain the good opinion of members of the compound by being respectful and deferential, at least, for about a year after her marriage. She must kneel before the relatives of her husband who are of about her age and upwards, and affect extreme

⁸⁵ Compare Barber (1991: 106ff, 109-10, 123, 157, 159, 162, 168-72, 248) on a woman's position in the lineage.

bashfulness and modesty. Only slightly less reserved must be her deportment towards the other wives of the compound. She must ... be obliging and helpful, and ready voluntarily to relieve members of her husband's family as well as senior wives of the compound of a great deal of manual work which would otherwise have fallen to their turn. A great deal of drudgery and heavy work normally falls upon junior wives, whether they like it or not. But the young wife must be ready to go beyond what is formally demanded of her ... This servile phase in its extreme form continues until the arrival of a child enables the young mother to pay more attention to her own immediate business. These obligations do not disappear altogether, however, particularly those of deferential behaviour to senior wives and relatives of her husband. They only become less exacting.

Traditionally, the primary reason for and purpose of marriage has been procreation in order to ensure the continuation of the lineage. The fact that its continuation depends on wives who do not belong to the husband's lineage may generate anxieties as to the 'ownership' of children (M. Drewal 1992). Fádípè (1970: 90) argues that "one great cause of stability of the marriage tie was the existence of children" and even suggests that a "woman who had given birth ... had provided hostages for the husband's extended family". Margaret Drewal (1992) has interpreted the subordination of women of child-bearing age in relation to the necessity for the lineage to establish paternity. A predominantly patrilineal organisation of kinship and a patrilocal residence pattern make it possible to establish paternity. They prevent women from taking away the children, who guarantee the continuity of the patrilineage. Only after the onset of menopause do women have greater liberties and authority in the compound (Fádípè 1970: 116).

On the one hand, a man's status and prestige are related to the number of his wives and children, who are an indicator of his wealth and success in life (Àiná 1998; Fádípè 1970). Thus, it is desirable to have more than one wife. At the same time, polygyny has the potential to create instability, which explains the need to integrate wives powerfully and effectively into the household of their husband's family. P.B. Ògúnlàdé (1990: 62) concludes that women

"generally have never really preferred polygyny as a marriage value. It should be more correct to infer that society and culture have left them no choice where polygamy as a value dominates".⁸⁶ Many Yorùbá reveal or express anxieties regarding female jealousy in the polygynous household, or against wives and female agency in relation to the home and husbands more generally (Délànò 1976; Kóláwólé 1998; Fàààṣèké 1998). The resulting insecurities and instabilities are partly balanced by the highly regulated integration of a new wife into a compound. Domestic agency, which is generally the responsibility of *iyàwó* or *aya* rather than female *omọ ilé* (Oyèéwùmí 1997) is controlled and supervised by female members of the household such as a husband's mother. On her arrival in the husband's compound, a bride is presented to the husband's mother with the words 'Here is your bride' (Fádípè 1970). The relationship between junior and senior wives is highly regulated with regard to duties and privileges.

Traditionally, every adult woman would also have been a wife. However, domestic agency constitutes just one aspect of female agency. The fact that every woman is a wife by no means limits female agency to the domestic realm alone. A woman's domestic responsibilities arguably decrease as she gets older and as wives junior to herself are married into her husband's compound (Hoffmann 1983; Oyèéwùmí 1997). Usually, the wives of a compound are responsible for general domestic chores, taking care of the husband and the children (Adédòkun 1990; Ògúnlàdé 1990). Fádípè (1970: 87) points out that

In married life it was the duty of the woman to do all the work connected with the household other than carrying out repairs to the walls and roof of their house or hut ... The preparation and serving up of food is one of the most exacting of her duties, involving the chopping of wood, the grinding of pepper and onions and other condiments for the soup, as well as the actual cooking.

⁸⁶ Some authors, however, argue that polygyny also relieves some women of domestic chores and marital responsibilities, thus granting them greater independence and more time to pursue their own businesses (Hoffmann 1983).

These responsibilities are, however, shared by the wives of a compound (Hoffmann 1983). The distribution of labour among the wives in terms of both quality and quantity depends on a wife's position and status (Fádípè 1970). Traditionally, *wíwá oúnje* 'finding food, preparing or cooking food' would be considered a woman's job. This, however, does not imply that Yorùbá women are housewives (Oyèéwùmí 1997). On the contrary, women in traditional Yorùbá culture have engaged in various industries and, most importantly, in trading. Some of these occupations require regular and prolonged absences from the home. This is made possible by rotating systems according to which wives take turns in the preparation of food and in taking care of their husbands. Likewise, childcare responsibilities are shared among the wives of a compound. Furthermore, it is common for men who are working on the farm or who undertake hunting trips to the forest to purchase or prepare their own food.

2.2.2. The conceptual transformation of wives into housewives

In the mid-1930s, when Fágúnwà was writing *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, the institution of marriage as well as the notion of marital relationships and the definition of male and female agency in relation to home and family were, in the wake of colonialism, undergoing significant changes. Fádípè's sociological study of Yorùbá culture was originally submitted to the University of London as a doctoral dissertation in 1939, the same year that Fágúnwà's first narrative, *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, was published. In this study, Fádípè (1970: 91; also *ibid.*: 319) asserts that

In spite of the relative stability of some of its cardinal features, marriage is one of the social institutions of the Yoruba which has been most in a state of flux as a result of the diffusion of foreign ideas and the quick process of economic growth. Rapid changes in customs and practices have been steadily going on since the establishment of British rule over the whole country.

These changes manifest themselves in three important respects: first, the popularisation of marriage on the basis of "mutual consent of both parties ... without the preliminaries of consent of parents and the payment of bride-price", a practice which had previously been

"largely confined to slaves and people without kin"; second, the "abandonment of betrothal of girls in infancy and without their consent"; and third, the "popularisation of divorce" (*ibid.* 92). Marriage was, accordingly, becoming increasingly individualised. The issue of choosing the right spouse was becoming the responsibility of individuals rather than the extended family. Qlábísí Àìná (1998: 25) asserts that, more and more, "family relations tend to be losing their hold on the individual's life". At the time Fágúnwà was writing, marriage, especially among the growing educated elite, was becoming a question of attraction and love between one man and one woman rather than a family affair. Fádípè (1970: 319) describes traditionally inconceivable situations where a young man who is "a comparative newcomer" to a town where he works and lives "beyond the restraining influence of parents and family" may decide to marry some wayward girl of whose history and previous love relationships he is completely ignorant (*ibid.* 67; compare Coleman 1958). Ògúnṣínà (1992: 60-61), discussing Thomas's *Ìtàn Ìgbésí*, likewise comments on certain "changes in the general pattern of life":

As sophistication in the social life of Lagos becomes more pronounced, certain cultural norms get lax. Friendship between boys and girls becomes a mark of social popularity. Premarital chastity loses its sanctity. With the prevalence of extramarital sex relations, infidelity between husband and wife increases.

The early decades of the 20th century were also a period of increasing moral anxiety as "the forces of cultural change – colonialism, christianity, western education and [western] civilization" – were bringing into being alternative, modern ways of life.

Káyòdé Àlào (1998: 95) has asserted that "Nigerian society believes primarily in the role model of women as perfect housewives. The worth of a woman is often measured in terms of her success in family life matters". The definition of female agency as primarily domestic agency is relatively recent. Like the institution of marriage, the definition of male and female agency in the context of marital relationships was also changing. Male agency was beginning to be conceived of as 'breadwinning' and female agency as 'housekeeping' (Oyèéwùmí 1997; Àìná 1998). Various scholars emphasise the role of western education in this respect. For a long

time the monopoly of Christian missions, western education perpetuated western conceptions of gender and gender roles (Fádípẹ 1970; Oyèwùmí 1997; Àiná 1998). A comparison of curricula for boys and girls respectively reveals that the emphasis of girls' education was placed on training in domestic subjects: "For the Christian missions, both girls and boys needed to be educated, but for different places in the new society the colonisers were in the process of fabricating" (Oyèwùmí 1997: 131). The missionaries had "a vested interest in producing mothers who would be the foundation of Christian families" (*ibid.*: 139).

Many political and administrative decisions imposed on Yorùbá society by British colonial rule were based on the patriarchal assumptions of British Victorian gender ideology and were brought to bear on the role of women in politics and in the process of industrialisation. The notion that only men are important in economic and political terms and that women as housewives are both foreign to traditional Yorùbá culture (Oyèwùmí 1997; Àiná 1998). As Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí (1997: 131-132) concludes:

The message was plain: the boys were educated to become clerks, catechists, pastors, missionaries, diplomats, and even politicians. The role of the girls was to look dainty and attractive, ready to become wives and helpmates of these potentially powerful men. ... The specter of housewifery for women had appeared on the Yorùbá landscape, contrasting with the traditional Yorùbá practice of all adults ... being gainfully employed. Both notions have been perpetuated by education, and both have had implications for the limited career options of Yorùbá women in the colonial and neocolonial Nigerian state until today.

Furthermore, both notions have fundamentally and lastingly affected Yorùbá attitudes to women and female agency. As Oyèwùmí (1997: 151) argues, "A corollary of women's exaggerated identity as wives was that other identities became muted".

The education of girls became significant as the young male elite that was being trained by the missionaries needed Christian wives. Oyèwùmí examines the reasons why the number of girls in missionary education fell and rose at particular times. Initially, Yorùbá parents had been no

less interested in educating girls rather than boys. By the turn of the century, however, it had become obvious that, due to sex-based limitations on career options, which were imposed by the colonial rulers, girls could not expect to use their education to earn wages. This, in turn, made it more profitable for parents to send boys to school than girls. In due course, this became "a personal problem for educated men who were seeking Western-educated wives" (*ibid.* 132). By way of illustration, Oyèéwùmí (*ibid.*) points out that as early as 1902, "the main item on the agenda at the reunion of St. Andrews College, Òyó, a premier institution for men [the place, incidentally, where Fágúnwà received his teacher's training and later taught] was 'Where shall we get our wives from and how should they be trained?'" She quotes numbers according to which by 1930 "there were thirty-seven thousand boys, but only ten thousand girls, in approved missionary schools. By 1947, the number of girls had increased to thirty-eight thousand, but this was a mere 25 percent of the total number of children in school" (*ibid.*). Kristin Mann's (1985) study of marriage among the educated elite in colonial Lagos shows that the number of girls in schools increased as it became apparent that educated women were in great demand as wives, and ideally housewives, to educated and financially capable men.

It has been argued that in Yorùbá culture, conceptions of women's procreative power as well as their economic independence have generated socio-cultural anxieties that find expression in, for instance, beliefs about *àjé* and witchcraft (Nadel 1952; Prince 1961; Lloyd 1968; Hoch-Smith 1978). Today, the reconceptualisation of female agency in domestic terms seems to have generated new anxieties. On the one hand, a man is seen as the nominal head of the home.⁸⁷ The term *baálé*, a form of address referring to a husband, derives from *bàbá ilé* (Fádípè 1970;

⁸⁷ It would be very interesting to examine the ways in which the importance ascribed to the concept of *orí* 'head' in Yorùbá philosophical and religious thinking interacts with the biblical metaphor of man as the head of woman – which dominates contemporary notions of gender/marital relationships – just as Christ is the head of the body of the church; especially with respect to the point that traditionally, the distribution of power in gender-relationships was determined by seniority rather than sex. Today, several images – of *oba* and rulership, of *orí* and Christian headship – have become synthesised into a unified metaphor for male supremacy.

Barber/Oyètádé 2000).⁸⁸ *Baálé mi* is also used by a wife to address her husband (Abraham 1958: 94). However, as Oyèéwùnmí (1997: 151) points out, in spite of the fact that traditionally, the position of a Yorùbá wife was junior to that of her husband, "the perception of an *aya* as a dependent and an appendage was a new one". On the other hand, the more female agency is defined exclusively as domestic agency and the more men come to depend on it for their most basic needs, the more power women effectively have in the home.⁸⁹ Despite formal subordination, or perhaps because of it, female domestic agency retains, or attains, a threatening potential. Ayò Òpéfèyítímí (1998: 51) asserts that female domestic agency, especially the preparation of food, "confers a certain amount of power over men". In a more recent publication, he reinterprets the saying *ayé lojà, òrun nílé* '(the) world is a market, heaven is home' and concludes that if women in effect have more power in the home and if they control the market, "then they are the power which controls heaven and earth" (*ibid*). Furthermore, he observes: "we see that some women have the power to make their husbands live longer than some do ... the death of most men are [*sic*] traceable to the 'competence' and duties of some wives during the trying periods of their husbands" (1998: 50). His line of argument shows clearly that until today, socio-cultural anxieties regarding wives and female agency are very much alive, even though their focus seems to have shifted to the home and to female domestic agency. They are enhanced by the changes the structure of the typical Yorùbá household has been undergoing since the nineteenth century and by the decreased significance of the extended family in marriage.

⁸⁸ Oyèéwùnmí (1997) suggests that it derives from *pba ilé* 'king of the house', which is gender-neutral as an *pba* may theoretically be either male or female. There are instances of female *baálé* 'lineage chiefs'. Usually, however, *baálé* is derived from *bàbá ilé* and would have been subjected to a process of contraction and tonal modification which represents a very common process in the Yorùbá language. In the same way, *iyáálé* is derived from *iyá ilé*. The following possible processes of derivation leading to *baálé* were suggested to me by Akin Oyètádé: a) *bàbá ilé* > *bàá ilé* > **bàálé* > *baálé*, and b) *baba nílé* > *baba nílé* > *baálé*.

⁸⁹ The indirect power of Yorùbá women, for instance in politics, has often been pointed to in this regard.

2.3. *The motif of àgbònrín in Ògbójú Qḁḁ and Igbó Olódùmarè*

Fágúnwà's narratives problematise female agency in many ways, but the issue becomes concrete advice as he specifically talks about women as wives. Even though domestic agency is considered part of female agency in the traditional Yorùbá household, not all women and wives engage in domestic agency at all times, and nor is female agency limited to domestic agency alone. However, when Fágúnwà deals with women as wives, he primarily, or even exclusively, conceives of female agency in terms of a woman's domestic duties regarding her husband and, by extension, her children. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Àkàrà-Oògùn asserts that "ìtójú ọkọ ni pàtàkì iṣẹ obìnrin tí ó ní ọkọ" (IO 27) 'taking care of her husband is the important task of a woman who has a husband'. In Yorùbá culture, it is in the domestic realm that the issue of female agency is particularly sensitive. A woman's closeness to her husband in the domestic realm puts her in a position in which she could potentially harm him. Fágúnwà expresses this idea early in *Ògbójú Qḁḁ* (ÒQ 3) when his narrator's persona is advised by the hunter hero as follows:

Wò mí ọrẹ mi, bí o kò bá tí ì ní iyàwó, jẹwọ ronú kí o tóó ní in. ... Ohun tí ó ẹ pàtàkì jù ní pé iwà iyàwó ẹ kò gbọdọ Ẹàidára, níwọn bí ó tí jẹ pé iyàwó ẹ ní yóò máa wá ounjẹ fún ọ, oun ní yóò máa bu omi fún ọ, oun ní yóò sì mọ púpọ jù nínú àṣírí ẹ. Qlọrun tí dá wọn mọ ní tímọtímọ tó bẹẹ tí ó fi jẹ pé ẸààẸà ọnà ní wọn kò lè gbà mú ni.

Look at me, my friend, if you have not got a wife yet, please think well before you get married. ... Most importantly, your wife's character should not be prone to doing evil, for it is your wife who will cook food for you, she will be the one to serve your drink, and she will also know your secrets better than anyone else. God created them so very intimate to us that there is hardly any way in which they cannot get at a person. (my translation)

Female agency is here conceived of as powerful in the sense that a man depends on it for his most basic needs, and for that very reason it is also conceived of as problematic. One of Fágúnwà's major themes is, consequently, the importance of choosing a wife whose character is good. It is significant that the formulation of this theme is situated in the very beginning of

the narrative. As Bámgbóṣé (1974: 31) has observed of Fágúnwà more generally, the latter, "like a traditional story-teller, announces that he is going to tell a story and says what type of story it is going to be". This asserts the centrality of the issue of choosing a wife to *Ògbójú Qḍe* and *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

Many of the old and new anxieties about the issue of taking a wife, which men had begun to face when Fágúnwà was writing his narratives, are crystallised in the antelope woman's tale. The antelope (woman) does not belong to any human lineage. Her family background is usually unknown. The traditionally all-important research into each spouse's family history is not carried out; the hunter's *ilé* is not involved in bringing the antelope woman into the household. The antelope woman's powers are associated with witchcraft. The conceptualisation of wives as housewives and of female agency as domestic agency reflects changing cultural attitudes in the wake of British imperialism. At the same time, it also represents a new expression of old socio-cultural anxieties regarding women and female powers. More specifically, it bundles traditional anxieties regarding female agency and projects them onto female domestic agency. Fágúnwà's theme, the importance of choosing the right wife, needs to be understood in this context.⁹⁰

In what follows, I would suggest that Fágúnwà's deployment and transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* illustrate how colonialism has affected the conceptualisation of female agency in Yorùbá culture. Furthermore, his construction of the motif of *àgbònrín* as a metaphor in relation to female agency represents an attempt to cope with and control male anxieties about female agency, especially in the domestic realm and particularly in the face of rapid cultural change and the resulting socio-cultural insecurities, which it reflects. The new Nigerian (and especially the Yorùbá) educated elite, which was most concerned by these processes of change,

⁹⁰ While this is not Fágúnwà's only theme in *Ògbójú Qḍe* and *Igbó Olódùmarè*, it is a prevalent one which is explicitly raised at various points in the two narratives.

constituted Fágúnwà's primary readership. Significantly, the motif of *àgbònrín* is, in *Ògbójú Qḍe*, associated with the institution of polygyny, which Fágúnwà also problematises. As Bámgbóṣé (1994: 11) has pointed out, "The institution of polygamy is a strong element in the novels. All the heroes' parents are polygamous and the cause of disaster and death in many cases is traced to polygamy with its attendant evils of jealousy and rivalry". Fágúnwà's problematisation of polygyny is, of course, in line with the preaching of Christian missionaries and churches, who declared monogamy the only legitimate form of marriage. In the same vein, Fágúnwà aims to offer examples of successful courtship and marital relationships.

On the one hand, Fágúnwà builds on the traditional concept cluster of *obìnrín* 'woman', *ewà* 'beauty', and *àgbònrín* 'harnessed antelope'. On the other hand, he builds on another traditional concept cluster, which is constituted by *obìnrín* 'woman', *ewà* 'beauty', and *ìwà* 'character', and which will be discussed in greater detail below. Fágúnwà draws on the partial overlap between these two clusters in order to indirectly suggest an additional connection between *ìwà* and *àgbònrín*. I shall argue that he unites the two concept clusters into a single unit and rearranges their individual elements in a new pattern, simplifying them significantly in the process, with important implications for the representation of female agency in *Ògbójú Qḍe* and *Igbó Olódùmarè*.

2.3.1. *Ìwà and ewà*

In both *Ògbójú Qḍe* and *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the issue of 'woman' in relation to 'character' and 'beauty' is central to the problematic of choosing the right wife. It is explicitly raised by Àkàrà-Oògùn in the introduction to his first tale in *Ògbójú Qḍe*. Good character is regarded as the all-important quality in a future wife. Àkàrà-Oògùn's discourse on marriage asserts that a wife's

good character is more important than physical beauty.⁹¹ This view resounds with a number of Yorùbá sayings which more generally problematise the relationship between beauty and good character, or which use the troublesome relationship between character and beauty as an image. According to a Yorùbá proverb, *Èni tó fẹ̀ arẹwà fẹ̀ òyọnu; èni gbogbo ní í bá wọ́n tan* 'Someone who marries a beauty marries trouble; everybody claims s/he is related to them' (Akínládé 1987; Abraham 1958; Dèlànò 1976).

Often, this notion is interpreted as referring to women in particular. While Yorùbá sayings are generally not gender-specific, they often acquire gendered meanings in the process of translation, or they come to be applied to one gender or the other. Ilésanmí (1998: 38) draws attention to the saying that *Bóbìnrín dára bí ò níwà, igi lásán ní* 'If a woman is beautiful but lacks good character/manners, she is merely wood' and points out that the Yorùbá "recognise the beauty of women but place greater value on their character". The conceived relationship between good character and beauty is well expressed by a Yorùbá aphorism, *ìwà lẹwà* 'character is beauty', which is drawn from Ifá divination literature.⁹² Physical beauty without good character is considered superficial and deceptive: like a trap, it may lure a man into an unhappy marriage and even endanger his life. The story of Àkàrà-Oògùn's parents, which immediately follows the narrator's discursive introduction of the theme, represents a dramatic case in point and functions as a cautionary tale regarding the issue of choosing a wife on the basis of beauty

⁹¹ Interestingly, the relationship between men, character and beauty is not as persistently problematised. While Àkàrà-Oògùn's father is frequently referred to as *pkùnrin arẹwà* 'man of beauty', his character does not seem to represent an issue. Àkàrà-Oògùn himself is aware of the roughness of his own character and of his hunters' ways but does not problematise these in the least. Kàkó, another exceedingly handsome hunter, has a violent character, which leads him to kill his devoted spirit bride on an impulse (incidentally, Kàkó's reaction is reminiscent of the way Jesus Christ deals with his mother when she attempts to interfere with his mission, which lends his deed a pseudo-heroic touch even though Kàkó is criticised and eventually punished for it). Furthermore, while female beauty is problematised it nevertheless seems an indispensable requisite in a woman as far as Àkàrà-Oògùn himself is concerned, to the degree that there is a striking discrepancy between his life and his moral discourse. In turn, he ridicules the foolishness of the 'thousands' of women whom he, having acquired wealth, married because they were not interested in his character but attracted to him merely because of his sudden wealth.

⁹² While this aphorism is usually taken to be an equation, it most literally means 'it is (good) character that is beauty'. Strictly speaking, this is not an equation, as *ìwà* is focalised. It would be a totally different matter to claim that *ewà nìwà* 'beauty is character'.

alone. It also introduces the central motifs Fágúnwà deploys to develop his theme. It is primarily with respect to her husband that the character of Àkàrà-Oògùn's (antelope) mother is, with hindsight, rendered problematic: it is suggested that her husband was no match for her. His failure to control her (character) almost costs him his life as he is eventually confronted by a messenger from Heaven and held accountable for his passivity in the face of her evil deeds. To save his own life, Àkàrà-Oògùn's father has to promise to shoot his wife immediately on coming home.⁹³

Ìwà represents a central concept in Yorùbá culture, signifying either 'character' or, more specifically, 'good character'. It is regarded as the most desirable attribute for a person. Olódùmarè, God of Creation, is conceived of as Olúwà, derived from Olú-ìwà, 'the head, chief source, and originator of *ìwà*' (Abíódún 1990: 73).⁹⁴ An *òmólúwàbí* 'child born by Olúwà', in turn, is somebody who is characterised by *ìwà*. The possible interpretation of *ìwà* as 'character' but also as 'good character' is important and very relevant to the following discussion. According to Timothy A. Awóniyi (1975: 364-65), *ìwà* 'good character' encompasses "respect for old age, loyalty to ... parents and local traditions, honesty in all public and private dealings, devotion to duty, readiness to assist the needy and the infirm, sympathy, sociability, courage and itching desire for work and many other desirable qualities".⁹⁵ The importance of *ìwà* finds expression in the Yorùbá concept of education, or child-training, the goal of which is to bring an individual up to become an *òmólúwàbí*.

⁹³ This incident occurs just before he unknowingly shoots his wife in the form of a harnessed antelope. In the course of the narrative, the moral conclusion of Àkàrà-Oògùn's story is underscored by further case stories of evil wives. In the city of spirits, for instance, the king's favourite wife acts as the chief conspirator against him, which illustrates her ungratefulness and greed.

⁹⁴ Fádípè (1970) suggests that *Olúwà* means 'Owner of us'; this translation, however, does not account for the final low tone in *Olúwà*.

⁹⁵ Awóniyi draws on J.A. Májásán's (1967: 37 unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "Yorùbá Education: Its Principles, Practice and Relevance to Current Educational Development", University of Ìbàdàn.

Furthermore, not only is *ìwà* the Yorùbá term for (good) character, but it is also – and this is particularly interesting in the context of the present argument – the name of a female *òrìṣà* in Ifá divination literature. As Abíódún (1990: 69) points out, *Ìwà* (Character) is "considered the daughter of Sùúrù (Patience), who is the first child of Olódùmarè".⁹⁶ In Yorùbá religious and philosophical thought, the concepts of character and woman are thus metaphorically linked in the person of *Ìwà*. In Ifá, this link is very meaningful. While *Ìwà* is an extremely desirable woman whose presence brings good fortune – wealth, honour, and popularity – she also requires a lot of patience of her husband Òrúnmìlà, God of Divination, as she has certain bad habits. Ifá divination literature relates that Òrúnmìlà, who eventually lost patience with *Ìwà* and drove her out of his house, was soon ready to make great sacrifices in order to regain her, notwithstanding her difficult nature.

Abímbólá (1975: 400) argues that *ìwà*, as an ambivalent attribute, can only be symbolised by a woman, since women, according to stereotypical moral beliefs in Yorùbá culture, already "represent the two opposite poles of emotional involvement". His interpretation is didactically oriented in the sense that he reads Òrúnmìlà's desire and quest for the beautiful but difficult *Ìwà* as an allegory to the effect that "every individual must take care of his character as he takes care of his wife. Just as a wife can sometimes be a burden to her husband, ... good character may be difficult to have as an attribute, but without people who have it, the world will be a very difficult place to live in" (*ibid*). According to this interpretation, what *Ìwà* and *ìwà* 'good character' have in common is both their desirability and the fact that their imperfect nature requires a lot of effort. A beautiful character is, in other words, as difficult to attain, and to maintain, as a beautiful wife, but both are worth the trouble.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Compare the Yorùbá saying *Ìbíní kò ṣe ñńkan, sùúrù nì bàbá ìwà* 'Anger does not accomplish anything; patience is the chief virtue/the father of virtue' (compare Délánò 1976: 23).

⁹⁷ Compare the Yorùbá saying *Ìwà nì òrìṣà; bí a bá tí hàn ú sè nì í fí í gbe ẹni* 'Character is a god; according to the way you behave it supports you' (compare Délánò 1976: 25).

Abíódún's study of *ìwà* as an aesthetic principle in Yorùbá culture suggests a further layer of meaning. Bàbátúndé Lawal (1974: 239) has pointed out that the word *ìwà* frequently implies *ḡwà-ìnnú* 'the intrinsic beauty, or worth, of things'. Abímíbólá (1975: 393) has analysed the semantic relationship between two possible translations of *ìwà*, suggesting a significant connection between *ìwà* 'character' and *ìwà* as a noun derived from the verb *wà* '(to) be or exist'. Abíódún bases his argument on both of these points. Deriving from 'existence' as well as 'character', *ìwà* comes to mean 'essential structure' (Picton 1992 as quoted in Abíódún 1994). Quoting the Yorùbá saying *Mọ̀ ìwà fún oníwà*, which he idiomatically renders as "'Concede to each person his or her own particular character', which may not be like yours or pleasing to you" (Abíódún 1990: 69), he argues that "in Yorùbá, a thing can lose its *ḡwà* and be deemed ugly (*òburḡwà*) if its character or identity is lost" (*ibid.* 70). In this sense, *ìwà* will be considered desirable and beautiful if it represents the fulfilment of its destiny. Recognising the centrality of the concept of *ìwà* to the definition of *ḡwà* in Yorùbá thought as well as the dynamic relationship existing between the two, Abíódún emphasises that *ḡwà* "pertains not so much to the superficial physical appearance of things as to their deep essence in Yorùbá culture and metaphysics", their mode of being or existing: "Each creation, be it a divinity, person, or thing, possesses its own inner beauty as a necessary consequence of *ìwà* (being and character)" (*ibid.* 69).⁹⁸ Picton (1992: 46, as quoted by Abíódún 1994) likewise argues that it is the concept of *ìwà* "whereby an artist seeks to realise completely the identity and character of his subject".

Ìwà ḡwà consequently not only means that (good) character is beauty but also refers to *Ìwà* as (the personification of) beauty, and the resulting semantic complexity is very interesting. To truly fulfil one's own destiny may be as difficult as *Ìwà*, Òrúnmìlà's wife, but one's destiny – like *Ìwà* – being conceived by Olódùmarè, the Creator, is not to be blamed for that.

⁹⁸ It is important, in this regard, that unlike most other nouns in the Yorùbá language, *ìwà* does not derive from a verb expressing agency. This supports Abíódún's interpretation of the term. Behaviour, in turn, means *ìlòsì* (which derives from the verb *lò* 'to use') as in *ìlòsì rẹ̀ dára* 'his/her behaviour is good' (Abraham 1958), or *ḡḡ* (which derives from the verb *ḡḡ* 'to do'). In contrast, *ó hùwà* (*hù* + *ìwà*) *rere* means 's/he has a good character' (*ibid.*). The verb *hù* means 'to sprout, to grow'.

Paradoxically, it is the nature of (good) character to be difficult, but rather than spoiling the beauty of character its difficult nature is an integral part of it. It is interesting to note the shift of emphasis between Ifá divination literature and Fágúnwà's narratives in this regard. While both Ifá and Fágúnwà thematise woman in relation to beauty and character, Ifá does not actually limit the meaning of *iwà* to 'good character'. Both interpretations interiorise the notion of beauty, but while Ifá conceives of inner beauty as the full realisation of one's inner essence or the fulfilment of one's destiny (*orí inú*), Fágúnwà understands it as good character, as opposed to merely superficial physical beauty.⁹⁹ This is, of course, motivated by his didactic agenda. While Ifá also has a clearly didactic dimension its philosophical complexity is much greater.

2.3.2. The motif of àgbònrín and Fágúnwà's discourse on taking a wife

The second concept cluster which is relevant to my argument is that of *obìnrín* 'woman' in relation to *ewa* 'beauty' and *àgbònrín* 'harnessed antelope'. I would argue that in Fágúnwà's narratives, this concept cluster is related to and refocused on the issue of character in a wife. At the very beginning of *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, Àkàrà-Oògùn prepares his listener for what to expect in this regard: "nígbà tí ñ bá sì ní sọ ohun tí ojú bàbá mi rí nípa ìyàwó rẹ yí, èrù yóó bà ọ gidigidi" 'and when I tell you about what my father went through on account of this wife of his, you will be terrified' (ÒQ 3; my translation). As the messenger from Heaven points out to his father,

⁹⁹ At the end of *Ògbójú Qdẹ* the sage Ìrágbèje, in the culminating lesson he teaches the group of hunters before they return home, relates the story of an *oba* who forgot the importance of good character:

Qba kán wà tí ó tóbi, ó lówó, ó bímọ, ó ní igbèríko ju gbogbo àwọn oba iyókù lọ, ó sì lẹwà gidigidi sùgbón iwà rẹ kò dára ... Qba yí ti gbàgbé pé iwà lẹwà, ewà kan kò sí níbikan... (ÒQ 90-91)

Once upon a time there was a very powerful *oba*. He was rich, he had children, he had more land than any other *oba*. Also, he was of stunning beauty, but his character was not good ... This *oba* had forgotten that good character is beauty, that beauty does not exist anywhere else... (my translation)

Interestingly, this tale, arguably the only one that seriously problematises the character and agency of a man, does so in relation to the Creator God, which suggests that man (here: the *oba*) stands in a similar relationship to God as a woman to a man. This echoes a traditional Christian view based on *Ephesians* 5:21-24. Compare footnote 87.

she killed almost her entire family, sparing only the life of her eldest son, Àkàrà-Oògùn, because she felt slighted by her husband's settlement of a quarrel between herself and her co-wives. The messenger accuses Àkàrà-Oògùn's father of having married his wife for her beauty, despite the fact that she was an *àjé* 'witch, powerful woman'. This is interesting and does not quite seem to go to the heart of the matter; in any case, it is modified by the information the reader is given in *Igbó Olódùmarè*.¹⁰⁰ Neither in the beginning nor in the course of Olówó-Ayé's marital relationship, which is rendered in *Igbó Olódùmarè*, does his wife's identity as *àjé* seem to have affected his own life, or even his wife's character, for the worse. The narrator's announcement that the sequel to *Ògbójú Qdẹ* will provide more detailed information on Àkàrà-Oògùn's father's life raises readerly expectations of more gory details about his life with a wife who was not only a witch but also an antelope woman, but these expectations are disappointed. Being *àjé* as such is not necessarily a negative qualification in Yorùbá belief. It is mostly in narrative retrospect, at the beginning of *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, that Olówó-Ayé's wife appears as a paragon of evil. This is, of course, underscored by Şóyĩnká's translation of *ògbólógbòó àjé*, the epithet of Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother, as "deep seasoned witch from the cauldrons of hell" (1968: 9; compare Awọwọ 1963). Bákàrè Gbàdàmọsí and Ulli Beier (1963b: 35) translate the same phrase as "hardened witch", to the same effect. But neither was her identity as a witch ever hidden to her husband, nor does it sufficiently account for her evil character. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, both she and her elder sister, who is also a witch, frequently use their supernatural powers to

¹⁰⁰ The evil nature of Olówó-Ayé's wife's character is not substantiated in *Igbó Olódùmarè*. Even in *Ògbójú Qdẹ*, she is at one point evoked as the stereotypical benevolent, powerful mother as Àkàrà-Oògùn turns to her (spirit) in his desperation. This is an interesting incongruity, which may perhaps be explained by Fágúnwà's tendency to shift between a Yorùbá and a Christian view of the world.

Olówó-Ayé's advantage.¹⁰¹ Perhaps Olówó-Ayé, as a powerful hunter, felt confident that his own charms would be strong enough to control his wife, so that her *àjé* identity did not represent an obstacle to their marriage. But significantly, what he did not know when he married his first wife and what he finds out only after her death is that she was not only a witch but also an antelope woman.¹⁰²

In the passage from the first chapter of *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* quoted above, when the narrator's father Olówó-Ayé is on his way home after the encounter with the heavenly messenger, he passes a field of okra. As it is getting dark, he hides in a tree when, suddenly, he sees a human figure approaching. The human figure disappears into a termitarium from which, shortly afterwards, an antelope emerges, who starts feeding on the okra. While these motifs are quite familiar from folktales about *àgbònín*, Olówó-Ayé (supposedly in contrast to the audience or reader) remains unsuspecting and, on seeing the antelope, shoots at it, whereupon it utters a human cry. As night has already fallen, Olówó-Ayé does not search for his game until the next morning, when he finds that the antelope has disappeared. He is, however, able to follow the trail of its blood, which leads him straight to the room of his first wife in his own house, where he discovers that the antelope he has shot was his own wife. The latter had not completely

¹⁰¹ In sharp contrast to this, as part of his introductory remarks but totally unrelated to the plot of the second narrative, Àkàrà-Oògùn also reasserts the stereotypical, negative image of his mother as a witch in the beginning of *Igbó Olódumare* (IO 4):

Ìwọ ọrẹ mi, gégé bí mo ti sọ fún ọ ní ìjọsì ògbólógbòò àjẹ ní iyá mi. Òun a maa fò lósàn-án, òun a maa fò lóru, òun a sì maa fi agbárí èniyàn mu omi. Iyá mi ti fi apá ọmọdẹ jẹ àkàşù ẹkọ, òun ti fi ẹsẹ àgbàlagbà jẹ ìrẹsì, òun sì ti fi pári ẹrẹkẹ gé ní dé wa gàrí mu.

My friend, as I already told you, in the olden days my mother was a well-versed witch. She used to fly in broad day-light, she used to fly at night, she also used to drink water from a human skull. My mother used to use the arm of a child to eat a lump of *ẹkọ*, she used to use the leg of an elder to eat rice, and she used to use the jaw bone of a sturdy man to drink *gàrí*. (my translation)

Ironically, he immediately proceeds to point out that "Ìtàn bí bàbá mi ti ẹ fẹ iyá mi yẹ ní síso, nítorí ng kò ì tí ì sọ eléyíni fún ọ rí, bẹẹ ni itàn dídùn náà ni" 'The story of how my father had married my mother needs to be told, because I haven't yet related it to you; it is also a sweet/delightful story' (IO 4-5; my translation).

¹⁰² Fágúnwà draws on both the antelope woman's tale *per se* and cultural beliefs about *àgbònín* and especially the relationship between *àgbònín* and *àjé*.

succeeded in turning back into a human being before she died. Structurally, Olówó-Ayé's discovery serves as the ultimate explanation for his wife's excessively evil character.

In Yorùbá thought, *àgbònín* may not only change into an exceedingly beautiful woman but it is also conceived of as one of the most beautiful animals in the forest, which links the concept of *àgbònín* with that of female beauty. Fágúnwà's narrative repeatedly refers to the antelope's proverbial beauty. A leopard character in one of Ìràgbèje's stories claims, for instance, that, with the exception of beauties like *àgbònín* '(the) harnessed antelope' and *etu* 'Maxwell's duiker', few animals surpass his own beauty. Interestingly, the idea that a woman's beauty may lure a man into an unhappy marriage is paralleled by an incident involving a harnessed antelope: the only other harnessed antelope proper, apart from Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother and wife that is mentioned in *Ògbójú Ọdẹ* is instrumental in his father's capture by a spirit being as, stunned by the antelope's beauty, he follows it into a cave. This instance, in the context of the problematic image of *àgbònín* and its implications for female agency, metaphorically underscores Fágúnwà's warning about (female) beauty as a trap.¹⁰³

2.3.3. *The polarisation of iwà and àgbònín*

As such, the two triangular concept clusters – woman, beauty and (good) character on the one hand, and woman, beauty, and the harnessed antelope on the other – are both familiar in the context of Yorùbá oral literature. But beyond that, Fágúnwà indirectly suggests an important connection between *iwà* and *àgbònín*, and he deploys this connection in the development of his overall theme. Fágúnwà's unification of these two concept clusters has important implications for the distribution of meaning within the metaphorical structure of his narratives. Both *Ìwà* and the antelope woman are associated with exceptional beauty. Both *Ìwà*'s and the antelope

¹⁰³ In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, moreover, Fágúnwà relates a story in which a harnessed antelope is appointed steward by its fellow animals in the bush but deceives them.

woman's characters are very ambivalent, to say the least. The concept of beauty in Ifá divination literature is able to contain this ambivalence. Whereas Ifá does not blame Ìwà for her bad habits, which are simply part of her nature, her husband is blamed for his impatience with her. Fágúnwà's agenda, however, is less accommodating. To him, it becomes necessary to distribute the nature of *ìwà* 'character' to opposite poles. Character as a unified concept is, accordingly, split into a binary opposition of good and evil. In Fágúnwà's narratives *ìwà* signifies good character, and the concept of *àgbònṛín* is introduced in order to signify bad character. In his conception, *àgbònṛín* embodies evil, and so does Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother – the relationship between his mother's identity as *àgbònṛín* and her evilness being causative. Both the antelope woman and Ìwà are beautiful, and in this respect they are sisters, but the lesson to be learnt from Fágúnwà is that their likeness is superficial, deceptive and highly dangerous to a man in search of a wife. The beauty of good character is superior to that of the antelope woman's body, which is spoilt by her evil nature. By simultaneously suggesting a connection between *ìwà* and *àgbònṛín* and splitting *ìwà* into good and evil, Fágúnwà gives new meaning to both *ìwà* and *àgbònṛín* as metaphors for good and evil female agency respectively.

This point is underscored by Fágúnwà's refocalisation of the folktale. While he deploys some of the characteristic elements of the traditional material, I would suggest that he deliberately edits it whenever it potentially undermines the unambivalence of *àgbònṛín* as an epitome of evil. At the same time, he also rids the story of those elements that potentially problematise the figure of the hunter, whose part is here enacted by Olówó-Ayé. Unlike the hunter in folktales, who often marries *àgbònṛín* against his own better judgment and tries to control her by taking possession of her antelope skin, Olówó-Ayé never begs the woman to marry him; rather, it is she who begs him to marry her and who successfully conceals her antelope identity from him until the very last minute. His ignorance to some degree explains and excuses his failure to control her. Had he known she was an antelope woman, he might never have married her. Her identity as *ájé* as such does not represent the essence of her evilness, but it enhances the

plausibility of her overall evilness, especially against the backdrop of Christian beliefs. Furthermore, as Olówó-Ayé ignores his wife's antelope identity, he never breaks any promise not to share her secret with anybody, nor does he behave imprudently. With regard to Fágúnwà's warning about wives getting so intimate with their husband that they will know all his secrets, it would be subversive to Fágúnwà's agenda for the hunter to give away his wife's secret. His wife's violent vandalism is, consequently, divorced from any significant failure on his part. Last but not least, rather than running away with her own children in the story's ending, Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother has already killed almost all of her husband's children before her antelope identity is even discovered.

If Fágúnwà deploys *àgbònrín* as a metaphor for evil female agency, why, then, does he use the motif not only with regard to Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother, but also with regard to the hero's wife, who is not characterised as evil at all (once she has agreed to marry him)? As in the characteristic plot of *àgbònrín*'s tale, Àkàrà-Oògùn – in the second passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter – sees an extremely beautiful woman in the forest and, being strongly attracted to her, pursues her, imploring her to become his wife. When the woman does not agree to marry him, he tries to shoot her, but, because of her power, he fails to kill her. The reason for this, however, is not that she is half human, half antelope but that she is *iwín*, a spirit. Like *àgbònrín*, this spirit woman has the power of transformation, and she suggestively uses it to turn into an antelope. However, Àkàrà-Oògùn is not too impressed by her power to transform herself, until she herself is finally impressed that he is not impressed, and accepts his marriage proposal. This moment of their encounter represents, I think, an inverted variant of another traditional tale, "Ọmọ Ọwá àti Ọkọ Rẹ", which relates the story of an *ọbá*'s daughter who refuses to respectfully address her newly wedded husband as *Bàbá* 'Father'. To intimidate her and effect her submission, the husband transforms himself into a python, a leopard, a deep river and a blazing fire, which finally forces her to acknowledge his supremacy.¹⁰⁴ In Fágúnwà's

¹⁰⁴ This story is – in a completely different context – related in Ọláyemí 1975.

narrative, it is the woman who shows off by transforming herself into a tree, an antelope, many 'other things' (in Şóyínká's translation, these are specified as water, a snake and a bird), and back into a spirit woman, while the man refuses to be impressed or intimidated, until she finally acknowledges his supremacy; but despite this inversion, the message is essentially the same.

It is not necessary for Àkàrà-Oògùn to take away this woman's antelope skin to domesticate and marry her; his fearlessness in the face of her performance has the same effect. Furthermore, the woman ceases to use her transformative power once she has become Àkàrà-Oògùn's wife. She still has superhuman powers – she can, for instance, foresee the future – but the only time this is referred to in the text, she uses it to anticipate her husband's plans, so that she is able to meet him on the way, thus saving him extra trouble. Furthermore, the source of her power is associated with neither the power of *àgbònrin* nor that of *àjé*, both of which have assumed negative connotations in the narrative, but with her spirit identity.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the characteristic antelope (woman), this woman has a known family background, which renders her trustworthy; and even though her relatives are spirits, Àkàrà-Oògùn observes that they are unusually good.¹⁰⁶ Àkàrà-Oògùn's (antelope) wife leaves him in the end, but this moment is totally transformed in Fágúnwà's narrative. Not only is she forced to leave her husband because, being a spirit, she cannot follow him to the world of human beings, but she also leaves him not on her own account but because she is taken away by a male spirit relative. Consequently, she does not disappear as an angry antelope but as a dutiful spirit wife who, rather than either stealing food (as *àgbònrin* in the field of okra) or just leaving her husband to take care of himself, makes supernatural provisions for whatever meals he may want to take in the future.

¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, Kàkó's bride – a paragon of female virtue – was also a spirit.

¹⁰⁶ Her family background is, in fact, not very commending: the freak who devours Àkàrà-Oògùn's best friend turns out to be her relative! This is another incongruity in the text.

Regarding the characterisation of Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother, Fágúnwà draws upon the motif of *àgbònrrín* but refocalises particular elements of the traditional folktale with the effect that she appears unambivalently evil. Regarding the characterisation of his spirit wife, while she is not an antelope woman Fágúnwà uses her momentous transformation into an antelope to associate her with the motif of *àgbònrrín* and refocalises particular elements of the folktale with the effect that she appears unambivalently good. What is happening here? I would argue that just as Fágúnwà splits up the concept of *ìwà* into good and evil, he also splits up the concept of *àgbònrrín*. He does so by dividing the characteristic narrative elements of the folktale into two groups, which are then associated with two different female characters, both of which are associated with *àgbònrrín*. He uses these to underscore his polarisation of female character and agency. While the concept of *ìwà* in Ifá divination literature embraces both good and bad character, Fágúnwà in accordance with his theme – the importance of choosing the right wife on the basis of her character rather than physical beauty alone – identifies it more narrowly with positive female agency. While the traditional concept of *àgbònrrín* is potentially as ambivalent as *ìwà* – the antelope woman often bringing many children and good fortune to her human husband – Fágúnwà deploys it for the representation of Olówó-Ayé's wife, with the effect that *àgbònrrín* becomes a metaphor for negative female agency. To Fágúnwà, taking a wife is too sensitive an issue, with too immediately practical consequences for a man's everyday life, to allow for the philosophical ambivalence Ifá can afford. The narrative motifs and the metaphors he deploys are carefully restructured so as to unify his plot and his moral framework.

In this context it is interesting to note that, before Àkàrà-Oògùn married his spirit wife, he almost married yet another extremely beautiful and virtuous woman, whose name, incidentally, was Ìwàpèlẹ́. In Yorùbá thought, *ìwàpèlẹ́* 'gentle character' is regarded as "the most desirable *ìwà*" (Abíódún 1990: 71) or "the most important of all moral values, and the greatest attribute of any man" (Abímíbólá 1975: 395), its antonym being *ìwà lẹ́lẹ́* 'hard or difficult character'.

Ìwàpèlẹ́, however, died before Àkàrà-Oògùn could marry her. His spirit wife, in turn, may be regarded as a positive inversion of *àgbònrin*. Thus neutralised, she functions as a reincarnation of Ìwàpèlẹ́, a reinstatement of good character, and thus as a triumph of *ìwà* over *àgbònrin*. While Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother is turned into a scapegoat for male anxieties concerning negative female agency, Ìwàpèlẹ́ and especially Àkàrà-Oògùn's spirit wife function as a powerful reaffirmation of ideal female agency. Àkàrà-Oògùn's mother's death is structurally paralleled by Ìwàpèlẹ́'s death, and it is significant that Ìwàpèlẹ́ is resurrected as the protagonist of what is, in effect, a neutralised transformation of *àgbònrin*'s story.

If Fágúnwà's narratives abound with evidence intended to caution the male reader regarding the issue of character in a wife, they also offer reassuring examples of good wives and mothers. Significantly, these are to be found not only in the hunter hero's tales, but also in the life of the author's narrator persona; and even more significantly, they draw on details from Fágúnwà's own life. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the most obvious autobiographical references are to incidents surrounding the death of Fágúnwà's father, the experience of which the author shares with his narrator persona, and to the name of Fágúnwà's mother, Rachael, which is identical with the Christian name of the narrator's mother.¹⁰⁷ At the beginning of *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the author's narrator persona reflects upon his father's example:

Òun àti iyá mi fẹràn ara wọn, wọn sì fi àpẹẹrẹ rere lé ilẹ́ fún àwà ọmọ ... iyá mí jẹ obìnrin tí ó fẹràn baálẹ̀ rẹ̀ tí ó sì fẹràn ọmọ. (IO 2)

He and my mother loved each other, and they gave a good example to us children ...
my mother was a woman who loved her husband and children. (my translation)

Women such as Ìwàpèlẹ́, Àkàrà-Oògùn's spirit wife, but also the narrator persona's own mother function, in turn, as positive role models for the female reader, who is naturally invited

¹⁰⁷ See Bámgbóşé (1974: 4-5) for a more complete discussion of autobiographical references in Fágúnwà's narratives.

to identify with the female characters.¹⁰⁸ Fágúnwà skilfully links the fictional realm to the realm of the reader's real-life experience. While the reader may share the narrator persona's awe at Àkàrà-Oògùn's tales from the olden times, the author's narrator persona is firmly rooted in the here and now, which reinforces the immediate relevance of the points made.

2.3.4. Fágúnwà's moral vision

Bámgbóṣé (1974: 5) has noted that the "greatest personal influence of all in the novels is perhaps that of Fagunwa, the trained Christian teacher from St Andrew's College Òyó", which shows itself "in the almost endless sermonettes (often directed to children and their parents)" and "in the deeply-held Christian values", among other things. Fágúnwà enhances the power of his moral vision by anchoring it in two systems of beliefs and values at the same time – a traditional Yorùbá system and a conservative Christian one – both of which are sources of authority and legitimation. Olúbùnmò (1963: 29), one of Fágúnwà's earliest critics, expresses it as follows:

Fagunwa is one of those lucky Yorubas who are old enough to have had their foot firmly planted in the morality and beliefs of a hard-working, artistically sensitive, philosophical and deeply religious people. But also, he is one of those lucky Yorubas who while they are old enough are yet young enough to have been able to go to school and to have had their horizons greatly widened and their sensibility sharpened.

While he does not actually synthesise the two systems into a coherent whole, many traditional Yorùbá values can be readily identified with conservative Christian ones. Fágúnwà's Christian socialisation would have equally underscored Yorùbá views on education and child-training. We recall that his mother and father, former devotees of Òṣun and Ifá respectively, were Christian converts. Akínwùmí Ìṣòlá (1991) notes that the early 1940s were a period of intense

¹⁰⁸ Early in *Ògbójú Ọdẹ*, Àkàrà-Oògùn encounters yet another spirit lady, who repeatedly comes to his aid and whose name is Ìrànṣówó 'act of helping, assistance', which Šóyínká translated as 'Helpmeet'. Even more than Fágúnwà's original name, Šóyínká's translation echoes the biblical account of the creation of the first wife in human history as *olìrànṣówó* 'assistant'.

evangelisation in south-western Nigeria, which would have enhanced the Christian outlook of Fágúnwà's moralistic discourse. In Olúbùnmò's (1963: 29) view, "at bottom, Fagunwa's code of morality and philosophy of life are decidedly Christian". Yet it would appear that traditional Yorùbá and conservative Christian values are generally presented as one, despite occasional incongruities, and the concept of *ìwà* plays an important role in this regard. On the one hand, his deployment and transformation of the motif of *àgbònín* and his discourse on the importance of choosing a good wife seem to correspond with the more didactic vein of many Yorùbá sayings and traditional tales as well as with a didactic, if perhaps equally legitimate, reading of Ifá. On the other hand, they bespeak and illustrate the impact of the process of Christianisation, which began in the nineteenth century, on the conceptualisation of female agency.¹⁰⁹

In truth, the difference between the concept of *ìwà* in Ifá divination literature and a conservative Christian ethics is quite significant. Traditional Yorùbá philosophy allows for ambivalence. As J. Omosadé Awólàlú (1979: 28) points out, "the Yorùbá world does not know of totally opposing forces – one representing evil and the other good". The character of *Ìwà* is no exception in this regard. Many other *òrìṣà* have similarly ambivalent characters. Perhaps the most famous example is Èṣù, the Yorùbá trickster deity who, in Christian terminology, has become the Devil even though, as Awólàlú (1979: 28; compare Ìdòwú 1962) asserts, "Èṣù is not the personal embodiment of evil standing in opposition to goodness". Rather, Awólàlú (*ibid*) sees in Èṣù "a personification of good and evil; and the way the Yorùbá pay attention to him is indicative of their acknowledgement of the presence and co-existence of good and evil forces in the world". In Fágúnwà's narrative discourse, this ambivalence is displaced by a clearly formulated binary opposition of good and bad. However, Fágúnwà gives his moral

¹⁰⁹ In Fágúnwà's case, Christianity, and not Islam, is the decisive influence, even though Islam has also and to some degree similarly and simultaneously affected the modern conceptualisation of female agency and women in Yorùbá culture. In this context the impact of Islam cannot, however, be discussed.

vision, which is principally informed by a conservative Christian worldview, more gravitas by backing it up with traditional Yorùbá beliefs.

Fágúnwà's narratives, which are widely read and form part of the Nigerian national school curriculum, have had considerable impact, and continue to do so, especially regarding the socialisation of a young readership (Awóniyi 1973; Ìṣòlá 1988). Olúbùnmò (1963: 28) describes Fágúnwà's early readership as follows:

It will appear as if he writes particularly for those who have not had much formal education, for school children; for those who still wholly or partially believing in traditions also live and work in a country in which Christian ideas have become widespread; those who, having been born in a [*sic*] small remote villages may have moved into large towns carrying with them the recollections of the farm for those who even remain in the villages but who have heard enough to know how a modern girl reacts to a suitor who comes to her in a big American car. With these people, Fagunwa is immensely popular. They enjoy the very pronounced didactic element in the books; indeed a good many of them expect a book to teach some morals.

The fact that a book is expected "to teach some morals" is taken for granted by Fágúnwà, who begins his very first narrative by cautioning his readers to listen to the *ògìdìgbó* drum that is his narrative, to dance to it and to make sense of it. Ìṣòlá (1998: 161) has pointed out that the "correct interpretation of the metaphors is one of the main concerns of many Yorùbá writers, and that is why, led by Fágúnwà, they have to do a lot of 'preaching' to make sure that the metaphor is not misinterpreted". In Fágúnwà's case, the magic of the *ògìdìgbó* drum worked; as Ògúnṣínà (1992: 25) points out, *Ògbójú Qdẹ* "became instantly popular and was recommended for school use". By the mid-1950s, Fágúnwà had not only "created a great impression in the Yoruba literary scene" but had also won the hearts "of illiterate parents who often requested their children to read the books to their hearing" (*ibid.*: 46-47). Ìrèlẹ (1982: 98) comments on their "immense popularity among the Yoruba public" noting that all of Fágúnwà's narratives "have been reprinted no less than 10 times, and certainly not only because they are used in

schools". Bámgbóṣé (1974: 7) observes that "it is ... true to say that no other novelist in Yoruba has had the same impact on the reading public".

In *Ògbójú Ọḍe* and *Igbó Olódūmarè*, female agency represents a highly sensitive issue, especially with regard to the problematic of choosing a wife, which, at the time Fágúnwà was writing his narratives, was becoming an increasingly challenging task for the male individual.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, Fágúnwà's deployment of the motifs of *imà* and particularly *àgbònrín* in order to polarise female agency amounts to sacrificing traditional philosophical ambivalence on the altar of a didactic agenda, which reverberates with both Yorùbá traditional and conservative Christian gender stereotypes. On the other hand, this sacrifice may appear justified if one accepts Fágúnwà's didactic orientation. But even then Fágúnwà's tendency to idealise and perpetuate a very limited view of positive female agency remains problematic. Many scholars agree that women's marginal position in contemporary Nigerian society – which, as many scholars have asserted, represents a contrast to their position in pre-colonial Yorùbá society – is a product of socialisation, as many girls and women have interiorised the notion that they are inferior to men and have accepted their subordination and marginalisation as the natural order of things (Àiná 1998; Oláitán 1998; Adédòkun 1990; Olúróḍe 1990; Oyèékànmí 1990). Oyèewùmí (1997: 135) has suggested that

Perhaps the most damaging lasting effect of the association of men with education, gainful employment, and leadership may be its psychological effect on both men and women. ... The notion that females are not as mentally capable as males is commonplace among some of the Western-educated in contemporary Nigerian society. It is part of the colonial legacy.

Furthermore, Fágúnwà chose the scenario of a hunter's sojourn in the forest to develop the essentially domestic theme of choosing a wife. Not only is this a skilful narrative device to

¹¹⁰ Women, in turn, have traditionally been warned about the consequences of disobedience and the rejection of their family's choice of a spouse through equivalent tales of girls whose decision to marry a man of their own liking eventually leads to their destruction, as their husband turns out to be some kind of beast or a skull.

make his moral advice more palatable but it also transposes the issue of choosing a wife in the face of patriarchal anxieties regarding female agency onto the heroic mode of the monomythic quest in the form of traditional hunters' tales. Ògúnṣínà (1992: 29) rightly observes the "symbolic function of Fagunwa's characterisation". What would seem problematic, however, is the gender-specificity of the symbolism underlying Fágúnwà's characterisation. The heroic elevation of male agency appears to coincide with the limitation of ideal female agency to support and assistantship, specifically in a domestic sphere and with respect to a husband. When Ìrèlé (1982: 102) asserts that "Fagunwa's work reflects a vision of man and his place in the universe" and that his narratives "express ... a triumphant affirmation of man's central place in the entire scheme of creation" (1975: 82), one cannot help but wonder whether or not Fágúnwà's vision of woman is equally affirmative. Psychological research has revealed how important images are for the development of a person's identity. The marginalisation and limitation of female agency would seem to have serious consequences for the development of contemporary Nigeria (Àiná 1998; Oláitán 1998; Àiréwèlé/Ukeje 1998; Okojie 1998).

Chapter 3

Tutùplá's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts***3.0. Introduction**

In his recently published book, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, Oyèékàṅ Owómóyèlà makes an interesting suggestion about Tutùplá's life and work as symbolic of what he refers to as 'the African condition'. In the preface he writes:

the controversy that swirled around him in his lifetime left little room for sober analyses of his life and work: what they say about desire and choice under colonialism, and the convenient fictions that rationalized the accommodations that the colonized found expedient. To the extent that the constraints that existed under colonialism have survived the official end of the regime, Tutuola's life and career will continue to deserve our attention for the insight they can offer into the African condition in our time. (Owómóyèlà 1999: x)

In Owómóyèlà's view, Tutùplá's life and work are symbolic of 'the African condition' in the twentieth century particularly because without the West's sustained interest in his literary work he would never have been successful in Nigeria, where he was initially rejected on the same grounds on which he was initially praised in the West.¹¹¹ Rather than "employing folkloric and mythical materials for significant commentary on life and the human condition", Tutùplá used them "to pander to the European taste for exotic African light entertainment" (Owómóyèlà 1999: 152). Furthermore, Tutùplá's literary work reflects the degree to which contemporary Africans have internalised Western values: the "happy embrace of colonial fashioning" that

¹¹¹ While the West was fascinated by Tutùplá's supposedly distinct 'West African' brand of the English language as well as by the kind of material he used in his narratives, which appeared to be drawn directly from the oral tradition, Yorùbá readers (as well as non-readers) passionately objected that Tutùplá's English was "foreign to West African and English people, or anybody for that matter"; and that, moreover, "his stories [were all ...] well known" and had "been published in one form or another, most of his plots were borrowed from Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode*" (Johnson 1954: 322; reprinted in Lindfors 1975: 22).

Owómóyèlà (1999: 12) senses in his narratives represents "a triumph of the European missionizing and civilizing enterprise in Africa". Owómóyèlà (1999: 153) concludes that "The survival of Tutuola's reputation (already much tarnished) into the twenty-first century is as unlikely as the persistence of the African condition into it would be lamentable".

This chapter explores the idea that Tutùqlá's literary work is symbolic of 'the African condition' with reference to his second narrative, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), which, unlike its predecessor *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), has not been the focus of much in-depth critical analysis and interpretation. As I shall argue, the hero-narrator's quest for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts may be seen as symbolically reflecting (on) 'the African condition'; at times – especially in the light of more than forty years of post-colonial discourses – rather troublingly so. Tutùqlá's employment of the motif of *àgbònín* as a figure or metaphor for power and the way in which the hero-narrator of *My Life* emulates the condition of *àgbònín* in the course of his stay in the Bush of Ghosts play a crucial role in this regard. Beyond that, however, Tutùqlá's use of comic irony subverts the hero-narrator's master narrative of his quest, which, I would suggest, throws new light on the way in which his literary work is, or is not, symbolic of 'the African condition' in the twentieth century. I shall begin with a brief overview of Tutùqlá's life and literary career followed by a discussion of previous interpretations of *My Life* as a quest narrative so as to place my own reading in both a biographical and an interpretative context. Second, I shall discuss the socio-political scenario within which Tutùqlá locates his narrative. As I shall suggest, not only are the hero-narrator's adventures in the Bush of Ghosts symbolically analogous to the experiences of his brother and mother in the real world of what would appear to be nineteenth-century Yorùbáland but their symbolic significance also extends to the colonial experience in the twentieth century. Third, I shall analyse what I perceive to be Tutùqlá's improvisations and variations on the motif of *àgbònín* in *My Life* and examine the ways in which these not only symbolise 'the African condition' but also potentially problematise and subvert it.

3.1. Amos Tutùqlá

3.1.1. *Life and literary career*

Amos Tutùqlá, as he is internationally known, was born in 1920 in Abẹ̀òkúta, one of the earliest centres of missionary activity in Yorùbáland. The story of his life is characterised by continuous struggle against the odds, by frustrated aspirations, and by passionately disputed achievement. Christianity had a distinct influence on his literary work: his parents were Christians, he himself attended schools established by missionaries and was, throughout his life, a devout Christian. Like Fágúnwà, Tutùqlá changed his name. According to an elderly member of the family speaking on the writer's funeral, Tutùqlá substituted his original family name, Qdẹ̀gbàní 'Hunter [i.e. Ògún] saved me', with one of his father's first names, Tutùqlá (Owómóyèlà 1999).¹¹² Tutùqlá's father was a cocoa farmer but his mother's profession is unknown; in any case, his parents did not have the financial means to ensure either the quality or the continuity of their son's education. When Tutùqlá first started school in 1930, he was funded by an uncle; two years later, when the need arose, his mother and his aunt arranged for him to work in the household of an Igbo civil servant in return for tuition fees and school supplies. After two more years the Igbo civil servant was transferred to Lagos and took Tutùqlá with him. Under extremely difficult circumstances, Tutùqlá reached Standard V in 1934 before he decided to resume his education in Abẹ̀òkúta, this time funded by his father. However, when the latter died in 1939 Tutùqlá, having reached Form I, had to discontinue his school education for good, as none of his relatives could afford to pay his tuition fees, and his own attempt to make money through farming failed for lack of rain. In the same year Tutùqlá returned to Lagos, where he trained to become a blacksmith and, two years later, began to work as a metal worker with the Royal Air Force. Six years later, when he lost his job and wanted to set up his own workshop, he once again realised he did not have the financial means

¹¹² The father's name would accordingly have been Charles Tutùqlá Qdẹ̀gbàní. Owómóyèlà (1999: 149-50) discusses Tutùqlá's motivation for changing his surname in greater detail.

to do so. After a year of unemployment, he found a job as a messenger in the Department of Labour in Lagos in 1946, and it was there that he first started writing fiction.

Tutùqlá eventually submitted a manuscript to The United Society for Christian Literature, an advertisement for which he had seen in a magazine, and which offered him help in finding a publisher (Collins 1969). The subsequent publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Faber and Faber in 1952 represents the beginning of Tutùqlá's unusual career as a writer. Only eight days after it was published, Faber and Faber received the manuscript of Tutùqlá's second narrative (Lindfors 1980 [1970]: 225). Two years later, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* was published, followed by *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* in 1955, *The Brave African Huntress* in 1958, *Feather Woman of the Jungle* in 1962, *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* in 1967, *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* in 1981, *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* in 1982, a collection of Yoruba Folktales in 1986, *Pauper, Brawler, and Slanderer* in 1987, and *The Village Witch-Doctor and Other Stories* in 1990. Tutùqlá's life certainly became more varied and interesting through his literary career. While he kept a job as a storekeeper with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation from 1956 until his retirement two decades later, he also worked on a stage adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* together with a professor at the University of Ìbàdàn. Moreover, Collins (1969: 22) mentions that Tutùqlá was "a charter member of the Mbari Club, the writers' and publishers' organization of Ibadan". As his international fame increased Tutùqlá was appointed writer-in-residence at the University of Ilé-Ife in 1979, and was variously invited to travel abroad and received international awards. Yet his comparatively modest educational background set him apart from his more intellectual and largely university-educated fellow-writers in Nigeria, most of whom not only had well-paid professional occupations but were also, in contrast to Tutùqlá, highly respected in their own country. Tutùqlá was "attentive to the controversy his work ... occasioned" (Owómóyèlà 1999: 144) and continuously tried to improve the quality of his creative writing. When Tutùqlá died in his home in the village of

Odò-Qnà in 1997, he was "not by any means a locally famous personality" (Owómóyèlà 1999: 146) and felt neglected and bitter, despite international recognition as a writer.

3.1.2. My Life in the Bush of Ghosts

The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts, a narrative which according to Lindfors (1989) was written in 1948, represents Tutùqlá's "first attempt at writing a long narrative for publication" and has been described as the "prototype for *My Life*" (Owómóyèlà 1999: 13) even though *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was to be published in the interim.¹¹³ *My Life*, Tutùqlá's second narrative, relates the involuntary sojourn of its narrator, who in the beginning is a seven-year-old boy, in the Bush of Ghosts. The first chapter describes the circumstances leading to the boy's entry into the Bush of Ghosts, where he is lost for twenty-four years. The narrative is organised as a series of incidents or episodes that take place within or on the way to different Towns of Ghosts before the hero-narrator eventually finds his way back into the human world and is reunited with his family in his home town. While Tutùqlá's hero-narrator in *My Life* is, at least initially, not a hunter – only after fourteen years in the Bush of Ghosts does he eventually qualify as one – many critics have commented on Tutùqlá's indebtedness to Fágúnwà's hunters' narratives in general, and especially for *My Life* (Moore 1962; Collins 1969; Ìrèlé 1975; Owómóyèlà 1999). Tutùqlá himself never denied Fágúnwà's influence on his work; he even suggested that *My Life* was his version of *Ògbójú Qdẹ* and *Igbó Olódùmarè* (Awóyinfá 1983, 1997; quoted in Owómóyèlà 1999: 150). In any case, if Tutùqlá chose to write in the same genre as his admired literary predecessor – and suffered from being accused of plagiarism – he certainly was not the last to do so. Ayò Báṁgbóṣé (1974: 6), while asserting that Tutùqlá's "debt to Fagunwa is considerable", has described Tutùqlá as the "most successful" of "all the writers in the Fagunwa tradition".

¹¹³ *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* was published in a facsimile edition in 1982 and – revised by Tutùqlá himself and edited by Lindfors – was republished in 1989.

Those scholars who have ventured beyond discussions of Tutùqlá's narratives in relation to the Yorùbá oral tradition as such (Dussutour-Hammer 1976, Belvaude 1989), or as recycled and inferior versions of Fágúnwà's literary work, have been, in Ato Quayson's (1997: 44) words, predominantly concerned with tracing "universal patterns". Their attempts have yielded some very insightful readings of Tutùqlá's narratives, especially of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Gerald Moore (1957: 34; 1962), one of Tutùqlá's earliest critics, read *My Life* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as variants of "the cycle of the heroic monomyth, Departure – Initiation – Return". The notion of the monomyth, a term derived from James Joyce, was developed by Joseph Campbell (1949) in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* and has inspired various other interpretations of Tutùqlá's narratives as quests, or quest romances, as well (Collins 1969, 1980; Priebe 1975, 1988).¹¹⁴ In this regard the hero-narrator's entry into the Bush of Ghosts in *My Life* structurally represents his separation from the realm of human beings and the beginning of his quest; his prolonged stay in the bush represents a kind of initiation; and his exit from the Bush of Ghosts coincides with his return to human society. While there seems to be general agreement on the presence of Campbell's monomythic pattern in *My Life*, the issue of the concrete significance of the hero-narrator's quest or the process of initiation he supposedly undergoes has generally been addressed in rather vague and, at best, universal terms. Moore (1957: 38) argued that while "there is no deliberate quest or definite objective" in *My Life*, the "whole book may ... be seen as a kind of extended Initiation or 'rite of passage'" from "a state of innocence" to a state of "lost ... innocence" with a "full knowledge of good and evil". Indeed, the hero-narrator's entry into the Bush of Ghosts could be seen in direct relation to his ignorance, or rather innocence: it is because he does not know "the meaning of 'bad' and 'good'" (ML 22) that he originally enters the bush. Ultimately, however, this interpretation is unsatisfactory. At the end of the very first paragraph of *My Life*, the hero-narrator declares,

¹¹⁴ Collins (1969: 26), who, like Moore, linked his interpretation of Tutùqlá's narratives to Campbell's heroic monomyth, described them as examples of romance in Northrop Frye's (1962) sense, or "naïve quest romances" (1969: 26). According to Frye (1962: 157), the "complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest".

referring to his seven-year-old self, that "at this stage I quite understood the meaning of 'bad' because of hatred and had not yet known the meaning of 'good'" (*ML* 17).¹¹⁵

Richard Priebe (1975; 1988: 58) took the discussion of Tutùqlá's narratives as quests to a new level by situating them in the context of a wider theoretical and interpretative framework, suggesting that they were, "in effect, riddles writ large". In his view, Tutùqlá is a riddler whose "works, like myth, explore the riddles of existence" (1988: 58). More generally, Priebe – drawing on the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Campbell (1949), but also on Victor Turner (1967, 1969) and Mary Douglas (1970) – argued that in contemporary anglophone West African fiction there are two mainstream tendencies, one giving rise to what he termed literature of a mythic consciousness and the other to literature of an ethical consciousness. According to this model, the latter relies on a rhetoric that is more explicitly didactically oriented than the former, which is characterised by a different "type of philosophical and value system" (Priebe 1988: 3): "The writer who holds a mythic awareness of literature retreats from the openly didactic and insists on viewing life with regard to open and perpetual contradiction" (Priebe 1988: 12). As a result, literary works of a mythic consciousness have the indirection of a riddle, and their themes emerge as questions rather than projections of a straightforward didactic message.¹¹⁶ Priebe argued that such works, including those of Tutùqlá, are often structured like a ritual, during which the hero, who is characteristically a marginal figure, undergoes symbolical rites of passage. The hero experiences conflict and suffering, which are essential for his rebirth "into a higher state of consciousness about the human condition" (Priebe 1988: 15). The hero's liminality has a powerful potential to revitalise society and to reaffirm traditional values.

¹¹⁵ In my view, 'not knowing the meaning of bad and good' simply represents a standard image for the hero's youth, which the narrator then – taking it literally – reconsiders and, in turn, modifies.

¹¹⁶ While Priebe's model is generally not unproblematic it has inspired very insightful analyses and interpretations.

Priebe (1988: 59) suggested that the riddle with which Tutùqlá confronts the reader in *My Life* is "the riddle of hatred, as the hero learns what hatred does as he is driven into a bush of terrors". The narrator's very last sentence, "'This is what hatred did'" (ML 174), at least rhetorically suggests a kind of structural conclusion in this regard. Even in the beginning of *My Life*, however, the hero-narrator, despite his proclaimed ignorance of good and bad, is not at all unfamiliar with what either love or hate can do. As he himself admits, hatred was no riddle to him even in the very beginning when he and his brother were having a lonely lunch together, afraid that the co-wives' hatred might lead them to poison their food; nor was it a riddle when, out of hatred, the co-wives failed to inform the boys of the imminent arrival of a host of slave-raiding enemies in the town. In turn, if one sticks to a literal interpretation of 'good' and 'bad', the hero-narrator actually already knows something about the meaning of 'good', as it is his mother's love that causes her to leave the two boys cooked yam for lunch when she is not at home, and it is out of love that his brother carries him when they are running away from their enemies, and is very distressed to be forced to leave him behind. While these interpretations testify to a critical desire for narrative and symbolic coherence, ultimately they do not solve the riddle of the direction of the hero-narrator's quest in *My Life*. In focusing on myth and symbolic structures, Moore, Collins and Priebe have greatly enhanced critical understanding of Tutùqlá's work in general, but the problem is that, especially with regard to *My Life*, these structures become meaningful only in rather abstract and vaguely universal terms, if at all.

A problem with Priebe's reading in particular is that the marginal heroes of literary works of a mythic consciousness are supposed to embody the potential for a revitalisation of society and the reaffirmation of 'traditional' values. As Priebe (1988: 7) argued, even though writers of a mythic consciousness have a different relationship to society than writers of an ethical consciousness, who assume a more openly didactic stance, their existence "is defined in relation to traditional values, values that are no longer the wellspring of the society at large". Priebe made this point in connection with the work of Douglas and Turner. According to

Douglas (1970), the very notion of dirt and disorder precludes the existence of their opposite, in other words, an organised system. Ritual preoccupation with dirt and disorder is a way of dealing with the dangers to societal order that they represent. Turner's (1967, 1969) research on the complementarity of structure and anti-structure underscores this idea. Symbolical inversions represent the ritual production of an anti-structure, "whereby the ineffable ... gets named in terms of its opposite" (Priebe 1988: 17); they are "negations that imply utopian or mythic visions" (*ibid.* 6). Symbolical inversion has a revitalising effect. Preventing the structure from becoming too rigid and moribund, it represents a reaffirmation of socio-cultural values and norms. It is difficult to conceive of the hero-narrator of *My Life* in this way.¹¹⁷ Priebe's (1988: 7) model is based, to some degree, on the assumption that traditional values are good – "the wellspring of the society at large" – but if anything is reaffirmed in *My Life* at all, it is the victory or power of hatred, or perhaps the principle of the survival of the fittest through adaptation, as it transpires that the hero-narrator's senior brother, after spending his youth in great misery suffering at the hands of various slave-owners, has become an appallingly cruel owner of slaves himself. Part of the problem with previous readings of the hero-narrator's quest in Tutùqlá's second narrative would also seem to arise from the implicit idealisation of the motif of the quest in terms of the monomyth, which is intrinsically heroic and precludes the existence of a worthy aim or objective, i.e. of a boon that matches the heroic quality of the hero's quest itself. As I will argue below, it is important to recognise that while the hero-narrator's symbolic quest in *My Life* is indeed accompanied by suffering and humiliation, it is problematic rather than heroic.

¹¹⁷ In this regard, Quayson's (1995b: 108) point that Tutùqlá's heroes' "adventures affirm a confidence in the ultimate triumph of the human spirit over the anxiety-generating forces that are seen to abound in the universe" would have to be modified.

3.2. *Nervous conditions*

Collins (1969: 46) has noted, perceptively, that *My Life* represents "a kind of quest in reverse, or West African Odyssey". In a way, the hero-narrator's quest in *My Life* is, quite simply, a quest for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts and back to his home town. Perhaps surprisingly, this idea has never been explored in any detail. Yet, in terms of thematic coherence, it is striking how the hero-narrator's adventures continuously evolve around his being captured by one ghost or another and being confined or otherwise physically restrained, thinking about escape and eventually succeeding in running away and resuming his search for the way home, away from the Bush of Ghosts. In the 8th Town of Ghosts, the first time since the hero-narrator managed to escape from the Smelling Ghost that he is not harassed in one way or another, he explains the nature of his quest to the inhabitants thus: "I mistakenly entered this bush and since that time or year I am trying my best to find out the right way back to my home town" (*ML* 60-1). Leaving the 8th Town of Ghosts, he travels "from bush to bush till a late hour in the night, perhaps I would see the way of my home town" (*ML* 65). Having escaped from the 20th Town of Ghosts, he recalls: "After that I started to wander about searching for the way to my home town as usual" (*ML* 81). Escaping from the Spider's Web Bush, he travels "to the south-east of this bush perhaps I would then see the way to my town" (*ML* 91). When he is fighting in the flash-eyed mother's army, beheaded and mistakenly fitted with another ghost's head, he is concerned that the ghost may give him away: "this head ... was telling out all my secret aims which I was planning in my mind whether to escape from there to another town or to start to find the way to my home town as usual" (*ML* 109); at the end of his stay in the 13th Town of Ghosts he says: "my mind was not at rest to live there any longer except to continue to look for the way to my home town" (*ML* 111); the next chapter opens with the words, "One day, I travelled to every part of this bush if perhaps I might see the way to my town" (*ML* 112). At various points during his quest, the hero-narrator temporarily loses sight of this objective: once because he becomes friends with one of the ghosts (*ML* 56), twice because he falls in love and gets married (*ML* 63-4; 135) and finally for professional reasons, as

having become chief judge in the 10th Town of Ghosts (*ML* 154). But each time he eventually resumes his quest.¹¹⁸ Increasingly, as his status in the Bush of Ghosts improves little by little, he asks other ghosts for directions to his home town or uses tricks to make them show him the way (*ML* 113; 138; 140; 143; 151; 165; 166).

References to the aim of the hero-narrator's quest thus abound in the text. They have a distinct leitmotiv quality; and I would suggest that, symbolically, the hero-narrator is looking for a way out of the essentially nervous condition in which he finds himself. To the extent that this condition is characterised by powerlessness, the hero-narrator's quest also, necessarily, represents a quest for empowerment, or, perhaps, the secret or mystery of power. In the third subchapter, I shall explore this quest in relation to the motif of *àghònrín* as a figure for power. But first, it would be in order to discuss the nature of the hero-narrator's nervous condition, which motivates or necessitates his quest in the first place, and its symbolic referents. If the experiences and challenges of Fágúnwà's hunter heroes generally stand in an allegorical relationship to those of every human being in his or her lifetime on earth (Bámgbóṣé 1974), the scenario in Tutùqlá's *My Life* is not so much a metaphysical one as one that results from concrete traumatic dislocations. In what follows, I shall first examine the hero-narrator's nervous condition in relation to the specific socio-political circumstances of his entry into, as well as his departure from, the Bush of Ghosts. Secondly, I shall suggest that the narrative has a contemporary sub-text beyond both the concrete historical context within which it explicitly situates itself and the more general insight into power relationships it offers, as the hero-narrator's nervous condition is also characteristic, and quite particularly so, of the colonial

¹¹⁸ "So one morning, I told the father of my wife that I want to leave his town for another one, but I did not tell him frankly that I want to continue to find the way to my home town which I left since I was seven years old" (*ML* 63-4); "Having left her and travelled in the bush to a short distance then I remembered to continue to be looking for the way to my home town as I had forgotten that for a while, because of love" (*ML* 135); "Having been educated and become the chief judge my mind was then at rest, I did not feel to go to my town again, even I determined that I should not go for ever" (*ML* 154); "But as I could no longer bear to stay with my cousin expect to go, ... I left them there and started to find the way to my home town as before... I started from there to find the way to my home town as usual" (*ML* 156).

experience in Nigeria – and that it is therefore possible to relate the hero-narrator's quest for a way out of the dilemma in which he is caught to what Owómóyèlà (1999: x) refers to as "the African condition in our time".

3.2.1. *Slave wars*

The hero-narrator's experience in the Bush of Ghosts is predominantly traumatic. As he points out, the territory of the "dreadful" Bush of Ghosts is normally out of bounds for "any earthly person" (ML 22). Geoffrey Parrinder (1954: 10), in his preface to *My Life*, commented on the "nightmarish quality" of Tutùplá's second narrative. Quayson (1997: 49) has observed that, "taken in the generality of their manifestations", the "ghostly incidents" in *My Life* – in contrast to those, for instance, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* – create an "atmosphere ... of extreme anxiety". Anxiety is not limited to the hero-narrator's experience in the Bush of Ghosts but characterises life in the real world too. The hero-narrator vaguely situates the experience of his earlier life before he entered the Bush of Ghosts in the context of what Quayson (1997: 55) refers to as "domestic and social dislocations". On the one hand, he recalls the spirit of hatred inspired by envy and jealousy that governed life in his father's house after his father married three wives, two of whom "bore only daughters" (ML 17) while the hero-narrator's own mother gave birth to two sons expected to become their father's future inheritors. On the other hand, he recalls a time of extreme socio-political anxiety:

In those days of unknown year, because I was too young to keep the number of the year in my mind till this time, so there were many kinds of African wars and some of them are as follows: general wars, tribal wars, burglary wars and the slave wars which were very common in every town and village and particularly in famous markets and on main roads of big towns at any time in the day or night. These slave-wars were causing dead luck to both old and young of those days, because if one is captured, he or she would be sold into slavery for foreigners who would carry him or her to unknown destinations to be killed for the buyer's god or to be working for him. (ML 17-18)

Tutùqlá's reference here would seem to be to what Fúnşó Afqláyan (1998: 415) refers to as the "general state of turmoil in Yorubaland in the 19th century",¹¹⁹ a period that was characterised by intense warfare, or as he would describe it, "armed robbery, brigandage and piracy" (1998: 411): the "pervasive state of insecurity, fear and apprehension" was not so much related to "large scale wars" but rather to a "system of raiding" for slaves; and as "a result of the pervasive state of insecurity, life for ordinary men and women became unsafe and precarious" (*ibid.* 112; compare Akínjóbín 1998).¹²⁰

In Yorùbáland, this period of internal slave-raiding and slavery was unprecedented. Various forms of forced labour had been prevalent in Yorùbá culture before the systematic economic exploitation of slavery during the so-called triangular, trans-Atlantic trade (Abraham 1958; Fádípè 1970; Oroge 1971; Klein 1971; Afqláyan 1998). According to Afqláyan (1998: 407), slaves featured "prominently in the palace organisation of several Yoruba rulers". War captives and criminals could also be turned into slaves. Furthermore, there was a system of indentured labour, according to which people could pawn either their own labour power or, if they were in a position to do so, that of younger relatives to pay off debts (Fádípè 1970). By the 1600s, more than a century after trade relationships between West Africans and Europeans first developed, slaves had become one of the most important commodities along the West African coast.¹²¹ But while the trans-Atlantic slave trade was eventually abolished by the British in 1807,¹²² the institution of slavery and slave-trade in Yorùbáland did not cease until the late

¹¹⁹ *My Life* is not the only one of Tutùqlá's narratives which is located within the historical scenario of nineteenth-century slave-raiding.

¹²⁰ For further information on this period in West African and, more specifically, Yorùbá history, see Àjàyí and Smith 1971, Klein 1971, Isichei 1983.

¹²¹ According to Bernstein (2000: 247), "the first recorded slaves arrived in the New World from West Africa in 1518". According to Curtin (1969), between 1701 and 1810, 6 million slaves left Africa. At no point was the trans-Atlantic trade based solely on slaves (Isichei 1983; Afqláyan 1998).

¹²² In 1807, British nationals were prohibited from trading in slaves, if not from owning them by law (Coleman 1958; Isichei 1983). In the USA, slavery was abolished in 1865.

nineteenth century.¹²³ According to Elizabeth Isichei (1983: 97), in "the eighteenth century, most of Nigeria's Atlantic trade had been with British ships, but it took decades before the slave trade came to an end". Indeed, the slave trade significantly increased after the 1820s.¹²⁴ Slaves, most of them war captives, continued to be sold to Europeans, but more importantly, slavery within Yorùbáland had assumed new proportions.

In the 1830s, the Old Òyó Empire, which had been weakening for some decades, collapsed, leaving behind a "power vacuum" (Afóláyan 1998: 408; Klein 1971). The resulting political instability led to intense warfare within Yorùbáland, as other Yorùbá states and rulers were trying to establish their economic and political supremacy. On the one hand, this development made Yorùbáland more vulnerable to external slave-raiding attacks, especially from the North through rising Hausa and Nupe states (Afóláyan 1998). On the other hand, the North as a source of slaves was now closed to the Yorùbá, who subsequently "descended on themselves for the supply of the slaves":¹²⁵

As the theatre of war spread to different parts of Yorubaland, nearly all Yoruba groups joined in the slave traffic. Every Yoruba man became a possible candidate for enslavement. The situation degenerated to the extent that some rulers started selling their own citizens into slavery. The Yoruba people who had been mainly beneficiaries of the slave trade became its victims. (Afóláyan 1998: 408)

As Afóláyan (1998: 415) has pointed out, while the acquisition of slaves was not the primary objective of warfare in Yorùbáland in the nineteenth century, "the possession of slaves had "become a viable and decisive instrument of economic and political advancement in the

¹²³ Isichei (1983: 247), for instance, reports that as "British power expanded into the Lagos hinterland in the late nineteenth century, many slaves escaped. In 1895, labour was scarce in Abeokuta because slaves were 'running away in great numbers'".

¹²⁴ Klein (1971: 12) gives three reasons: "First, centuries of slave trading have left Africa with social and economic structures adapted to the capture, trade and exploitation of slaves. Second, the demand for tropical products made the exploitation of slave labor within Africa increasingly remunerative. Third, new and more efficient weapons made it easier for small groups of men to impose their will on larger populations and thus facilitated slave raiding".

¹²⁵ Morton-Williams (1964) explores the involvement of the Old Òyó Empire in slave-raiding and slave-trading.

state".¹²⁶ For centuries, slaves had had economic and political value in the eyes of Yorùbá kings; now they became a means to power for "the ambitious and enterprising individual" (Afóláyan 1998: 410). Slaves themselves were made to fight in armies (and were sometimes well-paid); furthermore, they could be traded for horses, firearms and ammunition (Afóláyan 1998; Klein 1971). They were also used for "diplomatic interactions" (Afóláyan 1998: 414). As a consequence of the perpetual state of crisis in Yorùbáland, during which warfare became a "noble and the most engaging pre-occupation", slaves were needed to ensure subsistence (Afóláyan 1998: 413). Moreover, the so-called legitimate trade with European countries (especially Britain) developing in the nineteenth century was based on cheap labour by slaves, both on palm plantations in Yorùbáland and in the transport of produce to the coast (Coleman 1958; Klein 1971; Afóláyan 1998). As Isichei (1983: 106-107) points out:

Essentially, an economy in which labour was exported was replaced by an economy in which slaves were major agents of production, in crafts as well as agriculture, and provided the labour force essential for meeting the demands of the export economy.

In A.G. Hopkins' words (quoted by Klein 1971: 20), the "rise of legitimate commerce, far from bringing about the abolition of internal slavery, increased the demand for cheap labor in Africa itself, and slave raiding continued in order to meet growing domestic needs". According to Afóláyan (1998: 415), "The wars and the needs of the state during the century ensured the large-scale diversion of slaves, hitherto meant for export through the Slave Coast to internal use ... the need for captives made the wars ... more brutal, more devastating and more destructive" as, in several cases, "whole settlements were destroyed and the entire inhabitants taken into slavery". Isichei (1983: 106) argues that "the social mechanisms for obtaining slaves which the external trade had stimulated, if not created, continued to operate, and the continued expansion of domestic slavery ... was the result".

¹²⁶ Compare Klein (1971: 7): "Some of the slaving was incidental to other conflicts. The major wars of the nineteenth century were fought for religious or political reasons and not simply to procure slaves. Even the Yoruba civil wars, the largest single source of slaves during the last brutal decades of the Atlantic trade, were inspired more by political questions than by the potential revenues of selling slaves".

This state of perpetual crisis in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland is the historical backdrop to the experiences related by the hero-narrator in *My Life*. One day, as the hero-narrator's mother, a petty trader, has left the town to go to a market, leaving him and his elder brother at home, enemies approach the town. Hearing the noise of the enemies' gunfire, the two boys are afraid, especially when they discover that everybody else has already left the town, and try to escape. Eventually, the elder brother, who can run faster, is forced to leave the hero-narrator behind (at the latter's own suggestion). While taking off into the bush to hide himself, the hero-narrator overhears how his brother has been captured. He himself keeps running for a long time, driven on by the reverberations of the enemies' gunfire, and inadvertently enters the Bush of Ghosts. Towards the end of the narrative, in turn, when the hero-narrator is helped out of the Bush of Ghosts by a television-handed ghostess, the past catches up with him as he himself is captured by slave-raiders at the very spot where he first ran into the bush, and subsequently sold at a market. As he puts it,

This is a great pity that I was lost in the Bush of Ghosts for twenty-four years with punishments and when I came out of it I am caught and sold again as a slave, and now a rich man buys me and he is going to kill me for his god. This is what I said before I was following him and his follower who followed him to the market was pushing me along the road to the town. Not knowing that this rich man is my brother who left me on the road and ran away before I entered the Bush of Ghosts. Having reached the town which is my town, they put me among his slaves in the yard ... So I was living and working with the rest slaves, but as this slave yard was far from his house he was only coming there occasionally to inspect us. But as he hated me more than the rest slaves ... so he would tell some of the rest slaves to flog me in his presence for many hours as I was not useful and also at that time it was their rule that every useless slave should be severely beaten every day, because every slave buyer recognised slaves as non-living creatures. (*ML* 169-70)

3.2.2. *The colonial experience*

Quayson (1997: 56) has suggested that the Bush of Ghosts is "logically equivalent to" the real world "in terms of the dislocations inherent in both". While the logical equivalence between the human and the spirit world has a great symbolic potential he feels that this is subverted by Tutùqlá's clear demarcation of the boundaries between the two, as it seems to be "the world of spirits that embodies the chaotic and anxiety-generating forces of nature" rather than the real world. Tutùqlá's "dichotomizing gesture" as well as "the fact that much of the narrative focuses on the adventures in the ghost-world" thus preclude the potentialities of social concerns in Tutùqlá's narratives from being more than "glimpsed" (*ibid*). In my view, the hero-narrator's separation from human society and his experience of returning to it are essentially continuous with each other. The boundary between human society and the Bush of Ghosts is invisible and the hero-narrator's experience of disempowerment transcends it. The human and the spirit world are located on a continuum that stretches from the real into the psychological and symbolical. This is how the hero-narrator recalls his entry into the Bush of Ghosts:

After I had travelled sixteen miles and was still running further for the fearful noises, I did not know the time that I entered into a dreadful bush which is called the 'Bush of Ghosts' ... the noises of the enemies' guns drove me very far until I entered into the 'Bush of Ghosts' unnoticed. (*ML* 22)

His re-entry into human society, in turn, is essentially continuous with his nightmarish experience in the Bush of Ghosts:

But as I stood under this fruit tree ... there I saw that two strong men held both my arms at my back unexpectedly and without hesitation they tied me with rope, then one of them put me on his head and both kept going inside the bush at the same time. They were slave-traders because the slave trade was then still existing. (*ML* 167)

Rather than representing a symbolic inversion of life in human society, the hero-narrator's experience in the Bush of Ghosts is symbolically analogous to the experience of his mother and senior brother, both of whom are sold into slavery and suffer immensely. The atmosphere of anxiety which distinguishes the hero-narrator's experience in the Bush of Ghosts is matched

by the level of anxiety in the real world both as he first enters the Bush of Ghosts and as he eventually leaves it and finally achieves the aim of his quest, returning to his home town – ironically having being sold as a slave to his own brother. While the narrative starts with the hero-narrator's escape from slave traders, many of his adventures in the Bush of Ghosts involve being enslaved or otherwise forced to work for different ghosts. His exit from the Bush of Ghosts, which immediately leads to another period of imprisonment, is thus essentially continuous with his experience *inside* it. Rather than a social anti-structure, the Bush of Ghosts represents a symbolic extension of the structure of human society.

I would suggest that on a very general level, Tutùplá's theme in *My Life* is power relations and their effect on the individual. The immediate socio-political context and symbolic referent of Tutùplá's second narrative appears to be the political instability characterising life in Yorùbáland in the nineteenth century. Beyond the concrete scenario of slavery, of which the hero-narrator's experience in the Bush of Ghosts is a symbolic expression, there seems to me to be a further symbolic dimension to the text that arises in relation to a more contemporary socio-political context, namely that of the colonial experience in Nigeria, which was an equally nervous condition that has, in some ways, persisted to this day.¹²⁷ This is not necessarily to suggest that Tutùplá self-consciously added this dimension to the narrative. Nevertheless, his lived experience of colonial power relations in the twentieth century would seem to have generated a powerful contemporary sub-text to the concrete historical background of *My Life*. Insofar as the socio-political disruptions in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland discussed above coincided with the religious and educational activities of missionaries, which represent the prelude to the colonial period in Nigeria and are thus historically directly related to British

¹²⁷ For comparison it is also interesting to recall Bhabha's (1994: 86) reference to Locke's *Second Treatise* and its "double use of the word 'slave': first simply, descriptively as the locus of a legitimate form of ownership, then as the trope for an intolerable, illegitimate exercise of power".

imperialism,¹²⁸ the sub-text of *My Life* arises from a single, comprehensive historical consciousness extending into and embracing the (post-)colonial present. This is underscored by the fact that several of the hero-narrator's experiences in the Bush of Ghosts bespeak or reflect on the activities of Christian missionaries as well as the period of colonial administration (Owómóyèlà 1999).¹²⁹ If they are implicitly situated in the historical context of Yorùbá warfare in the nineteenth-century, they are also informed by and symbolic of the colonial experience. While the two periods overlap in important ways, the latter was the experience of Tutùplá's own life. Tutùplá's development of the theme of power relations and, more specifically, the individual's quest for a way out of a nervous condition resulting from the imbalance of power also represents a comment on the historical reality of his own time.

Tutùplá was born in 1920, at a time when, as Owómóyèlà (1999: x) has pointed out, "colonialism in Nigeria (as in the rest of British West Africa) was at its most confident". After the Yorùbá state of Ìjẹ́bú had dared to oppose the British, opting for military confrontation, and was defeated in 1892, nearly all the other Yorùbá states in Nigeria, including Abẹ̀òkúta, Ìbàdàn, Òyó, Èkítì, and Ìjẹ̀sà, submitted to the colonial regime in order to avoid a similarly disastrous military defeat (Boahen 1987). On the one hand, therefore, the colonial take-over was by force. On the other hand, the ground had been prepared by the activities of Christian missionaries, who had been active in Yorùbáland throughout the nineteenth century. As Boahen (1987: 35-6) points out,

It is quite clear from the available evidence that a majority of the Christians warmly welcomed the encroaching colonial imperialism ... That these educated Christian

¹²⁸ Bernstein (2000: 255) points out that for Europe, "where the often vast profits of slave traders and shippers and plantation owners were directed, slavery contributed to the accumulation of wealth and facilitated the transition to industrial capitalism", which, in turn, is directly related to the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, Boahen (1987: 58) shows that "the most important reasons for the partition and occupation of Africa were the need for raw materials to feed the factories of industrial Europe and the need for markets for the sale of manufactured goods". Both the slave wars and colonialism thus developed in relation to European economic needs.

¹²⁹ British administration in Nigeria began in "1861, the year that Lagos was ceded to the crown" (Coleman 1971 [1958]: 36).

Africans should have reacted in this way should not surprise us. With very few exceptions, they had been made to believe that Africa could be civilized only through "introducing Christianity, education, capitalism, industrialization and the Protestant work ethic", and they saw the colonial conquest and occupation as the most effective way of introducing all these into Africa.

Owómóyèlà (1999: x) argues that the colonial presence in Yorùbáland could build on the ideology of the superiority of European civilisation that was perpetuated especially through the spread of western education:

For such people, the colonialists were persuasive in their prescription for the good, meaningful life: rejection of traditional (African) ways and embrace of the 'modern' European culture. The new schools (missionary for the most part) started their students on the path to Europeanization, with a promise that those of them fortunate enough to contemplate the course would emerge "white", with all the privileges whiteness entailed.

Boahen (1987: 106) comments on the elite produced by colonial educational institutions, who,

with few exceptions ... were alienated from their own society in terms of their dress, outlook, and tastes in food, music, and even dance. They were people who worshiped European culture, equating it with civilization, and looked down upon their own culture.

It is against this backdrop that the colonial experience in Africa has variously been described as a nervous condition.¹³⁰ Margaret Cezair-Thompson (1996: 34), for instance, refers to "the trauma of colonization". Abdul R. JanMohamed (1983: 2) has commented on "the trauma and confusion" of the "rapid social and cultural transformation" of the colonial situation:

The social disruption produced by such rapid and drastic changes and the profoundly antagonistic relations between the colonizers and the colonized cause colonial societies to exist in a state of latent crisis: "they are involved to some extent in a kind of social pathology [...which] is produced by the facts of domination and race. (*ibid.* 3, quoting Balandier 1966, *Social Change: The Colonial Situation* 1966)

¹³⁰ Compare the title of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) which alludes to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Sugnet 1997).

Homi Bhabha (1994: 41), moving within the same semantic field, speaks of the "signs and symptoms of the colonial condition".

Many people felt that the way out of the colonial state of disempowerment was emulation of the colonial culture and assimilation into its structures of power and, simultaneously, alienation from their own culture. The colonial regime itself strategically cultivated among its colonised subjects an educated elite, on which it could rely even after independence. Owómóyèlà (1999: 3) rightly points out that for "the colonized person, the conditions for achieving elite status within this scheme centered on his or her assimilation as far as possible (and permissible) into the culture of the colonizer". JanMohamed (1987: 5) suggests that

For the indigenous person, the colonial situation ... creates a dilemma from which he cannot easily disentangle himself. The superiority complex of the European creates a corresponding sense of inferiority in the native, who attempts to overcome this feeling by espousing Western values and social customs only to discover in the end that although the colonial system offers the European as a model for emulation it also effectively blocks the means to education, assimilation, and equality. Even the very option to emulate the European puts the native in a double bind: if he chooses conservatively and remains loyal to his indigenous culture, then he opts to stay in a calcified society whose developmental momentum has been checked by colonization. If, however, the colonized person chooses assimilation, then he is trapped in a form of historical catalepsy because colonial education severs him from his own past and replaces it with the study of the colonizer's past.

The relationship between slave and slave owner is paralleled by that between colonised and coloniser. While this may suggest an oppressed/oppressor dichotomy, Tutùqlá's narrative focuses on both the desire and the seeming necessity to become like the oppressor; in other words, it thematises the moment/process of transition between the two, who exist on a continuum rather than as a dichotomy: the slave desires to become and, in order to survive, must become, an owner of slaves in the same way that the disempowered colonial subject seeks and achieves empowerment through emulation of the colonial master.

3.3. Improvisations of a playful imagination:

Tutùqlá's variations on the motif of àgbònrín in My Life

Several scholars have, at least in passing, mentioned Tutùqlá's representation of the antelope woman's tale in *My Life* (Collins 1969; Dussutour-Hammer 1976; Belvaude 1989; Quayson 1995b; Owómóyèlà 1999). Having left the flash-eyed mother in the 13th Town of Ghosts, the hero-narrator is still looking for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts when he sees "an antelope" (ML 112) who proceeds to take "away the antelope skin from her body" and hides it "inside a hole which was at the foot of that tree" (ML 113). As I shall demonstrate below, the episode of the hero-narrator's encounter with Super Lady – Tutùqlá's transformation of the antelope woman's tale – represents the moment when the narrative pattern of the topos is employed in its most complete form while simultaneously being symbolically inverted. Yet this episode represents but the culmination of Tutùqlá's improvisations and variations on the motif of *àgbònrín* in *My Life*. Significantly, the episodes preceding the hero-narrator's encounter with Super Lady also relate, in one way or another, to the motif of *àgbònrín*. On the one hand, they are symbolically related to his quest for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts: in different ways, Tutùqlá's improvisations and variations on the motif of *àgbònrín* as the hero-narrator is trying to come to terms with his life in the Bush of Ghosts can symbolically be linked to the colonial experience and, especially, to the desire and/or necessity to emulate the colonial master. On the other hand, they potentially problematise and subvert this quest for power, which is ultimately also a quest for identity. I shall begin by discussing the significance of Tutùqlá's comic impulse and playful writing style in relation to the question of thematic and symbolic coherence in *My Life*. Secondly, I shall propose that *àgbònrín* functions as a figure for power in the Bush of Ghosts. Thirdly, I shall analyse Tutùqlá's improvisations and variations on the motif of *àgbònrín*. Finally, I shall consider the role of comic irony with regard to Tutùqlá's master narrative of the hero-narrator's quest for a way out of the Bush of Ghosts.

3.3.1. Tutùqlá's playful imagination

It has repeatedly been emphasised that Tutùqlá started to write narratives because, as a messenger with the Department of Labour in Lagos in the mid-1940s, he was bored with his job (Collins 1969; Lindfors 1980 [1970]; Ìbítókun 1988; Belvaude 1989; Owómóyèlà 1999). Tutùqlá himself explained that as a messenger there was not always enough work to keep him busy; and it was in this context that he made his oft-quoted comment on *The Wild Hunter of the Bush of Ghosts*, the prototype for *My Life*: "In a day I cannot sit down doing nothing. I was just playing at it. My intention was not to send it to anywhere" (*West Africa* 38 [May 1, 1954]: 389; reprinted in Lindfors 1980: 26¹³¹). Tutùqlá certainly experienced pleasure in writing. His stories, which Quayson (1995b: 104) has described as "a collage of both borrowed and self-created materials put together in an eclectic manner with very interesting imaginative embellishments imposed on the whole", clearly reveal that he delighted in the hilarious and the grotesque. His earlier works are predominantly free of the moral consciousness which weighs down his later narratives.¹³² It was only after the publication of *My Life* that he felt he had to go back to his home-town to do research on further tales he might use in future narratives and that he felt an increasing moral obligation to do justice to his public recognition as a writer and to pass on 'authentic' traditional material, which was a formula that had proved to be successful beyond his expectations. Tutùqlá's earlier work is informed by a particularly strong, spontaneously comic impulse which, I believe, is as central to his mode of composition as it is to an understanding of his texts.

The importance of Tutùqlá's comic impulse, which accounts not only for the spontaneity and playfulness of his narratives with regard to both form and content, but also for the way in which they generate meaning, has not yet been recognised in critical discourse on Tutùqlá's

¹³¹ The anonymous Nigerian correspondent's text is reproduced by Collins 1969 to such a degree that one wonders if the two are not perhaps identical.

¹³² See Lindfors (1975: 252 [1970]) for a discussion of reviews of the later narratives according to which, for instance, "Tutuola's idiom has lost its charm and spontaneity" and "his effects are a good deal more calculated than they used to be".

work, even by critics willing to take him seriously as a writer. While some of Tutùqlá's critics have made admirable and creative attempts to read some kind of intricate architecture into Tutùqlá's literary work, such efforts have been criticised for a tendency to lose sight of Tutùqlá's artistic temperament and writing style, presupposing, as they do, a highly self-conscious approach to literary representation. With regard to Collins' and Moore's interpretations of *My Life*, Lindfors (1980 [1970]: 238), for instance, sceptically noted that they "are apt, but ... presuppose a degree of premeditation, of careful organization and methodical development, which cannot be found in the story".¹³³ Tutùqlá does not appear to have been a writer who would ponder endlessly over his words or who would self-consciously create complex symbolic or narrative structures; nor did he ever claim to be that kind of a writer. Tutùqlá believed that creating works of literature came to him easily, in contrast to other people around him; and he repeatedly claimed to have written his narratives exceptionally fast, usually in just a few days followed by several months of revision (Collins 1969; Owómóyèlâ 1999).

Furthermore, Tutùqlá's spontaneity and playfulness have occasionally been perceived as precluding a symbolic vision that could transcend the merely entertaining. Most recently, this view has been articulated by Owómóyèlâ. Not only was it "by chance, to be sure" that Tutùqlá "embarked on" his "literary career" (Owómóyèlâ 1999: ix), being "motivated by boredom" and having "no intention of publishing his stories, let alone of using them to instruct or edify anyone" (*ibid.*: 153) but also, "Tutuola ... [did] not work according to any plan or blue-print; he was simply playing around, setting materials down as they popped into his head" (*ibid.*: 55) without a conscious literary intention; facts which, in Owómóyèlâ's view, seriously reduce the value of Tutùqlá's work.¹³⁴ According to Owómóyèlâ (1999: 87), the "difficulty with Tutuola's

¹³³ As he points out, Moore himself admitted that "Tutuola does not sustain the idea of the extended Initiation or 'rite of passage' and fails to relate the hero's 'disorganized adventures' to it" (1975 [1970]: 238).

¹³⁴ Moreover, commenting on "those champions of Tutuola who laud him as an exemplar of Yoruba storytelling", he points out that "Yoruba storytellers (and the same goes for African storytellers in general) do not simply play with their materials, and do not engage in storytelling for lack of meaningful employment" (Owómóyèlâ 1999: 55).

unrestricted imagination is that it often lacks discipline, because writing for him, as he himself admitted, is 'just playing' with materials", which precludes any deeper significance and meaning (apart from an extra-literary symbolic significance): "It is the general absence of causative continuity in most of Tutuola's novels that bedevils efforts to derive coherent themes and morals from them" (*ibid.* 72). He concludes that "Tutuola's imagination is, for the most part, subordinated to a sense of fun that places a premium on the sensation of the moment and whatever might maximize it in preference for a grand design from which a moral purpose could be detected" (*ibid.* 97):

his utter obliviousness to the pressing social issues around him, and his childlike and playful fascination with escapism were bound to relegate him in time to irrelevance.
(*ibid.* 152)

Against this backdrop, the question arises whether it would be possible for Tutùqlá's work to be conceived of not only as playful and spontaneous but also as having a symbolic and contemplative dimension; and to what degree it would be legitimate to perceive thematic and symbolic coherence in such a text. Many critics have commented on the apparent randomness of the episodes in *My Life*. Collins (1969: 33-34) noted that

In Tutuola's romances the novel-reader will miss, and probably be uncomfortable in missing, one of several possible orders of progression of the kind we generally call a plot (a chain of incidents linked by consequence, a development of a theme, or a structure of juxtaposed images or symbols) ... The minor adventures are not arranged in a pattern of increasing excitement, or importance, or even of nearer approach to some goal ... most of the episodes could be placed somewhere else in the novel.

Similarly, Lindfors (1980 [1970]: 238), emphasising the "improvisatory nature of Tutùqlá's art" as Tutùqlá "moves from one tale to another not by calculation but by chance", suggested that "the plot [of *My Life*] consists of a string of loosely-connected episodes set down in random order. There is a distinct beginning and a distinct end but the middle is a muddle". But other critics have recognised in Tutùqlá's narratives a kind of intuitive authorial control. According

to Collins (1969: 64), the "adapting, modifying, sophisticating, expanding, and syncretising that Tutuola works upon the Yoruba tales suggests that he knows – perhaps in the unconscious way artists often know such things – exactly what he is doing". Moore (1975: 34) presumed that Tutùplá's "grasp of the basic literary forms" was "apparently intuitive". In his preface to *My Life*, Geoffrey Parrinder (1954: 11) recalled how he asked Tutùplá "the reason for the apparently haphazard order of the towns of ghosts", to which Tutùplá "replied, quite simply, 'That was the order I came to them'". While this statement has been taken either as an indication that Tutuola somewhat naively "lived in his own narrative" (Parrinder 1954: 11), or as evidence of the randomness of the episodes in *My Life* (Owómóyèlà 1999), it would also underscore the idea of intuitive authorial control.

Tutùplá was familiar enough with the motif of transformation in Yorùbá culture and, more specifically, of *àgbònín* to be able to playfully employ it in the form of variations and improvisations. Not only does the motif of *àgbònín* function as a unifying element in this regard but there is also, I would propose, a certain dramatic progression as Tutùplá takes the motif from one level to the next. This throws new light on a number of observations made in previous discussions of *My Life*. Collins (1969: 51), for instance – responding to charges that Tutùplá's narrative was at times tedious – noted "a certain sameness" about many of Tutùplá's "monsters" and the hero-narrator's "encounters with them". With regard to *My Life*, the examples he cites are the flash-eyed mother and the Smelling-Ghost, both of whom represent, as I shall suggest, variations on the motif of *àgbònín*. He noted, for instance, "the magical juju powers, especially the transformations" abounding in *My Life*; in this regard, referring to "Smelling-Ghost, the chief transformation artist in the romance" and "Super Lady, also adept in this technique" (Collins 1969: 71). Quayson (1995b: 107), too, observes "the frequency of character metamorphoses" in *My Life*, of which "the protagonist is both a victim and a spectator". 'Sameness' is bound to seem repetitive and tedious as long as it is not seen in relation to a symbolic process. Only then is it possible to get the "sense of narrative

progression, a firm notion of how an episode contributes to the quest or initiation" that Collins (1969: 51) does "not always" find in a "Tutuola romance". Otherwise, it is by necessity "as though the reader is in one of those nightmares in which the same terrible thing or some version of it is happening over and over and over" (*ibid.*: 51). Ìrèlé (1975: 88-9) has made a very interesting comment in this regard, suggesting that

There is a cumulative effect in Tutuola's way with imagery which is akin to the manner of much of African music, which often progresses by an insistent building up of tension. The inner intensity of seeing in the individual progression of his images derives from the extreme precision with which they reveal themselves, and combine with an outer expansiveness to create that impression of a living variousness that we get from his works. There is at work in the densely packed atmosphere of his narratives an unrestricted play of the imagination and at the same time a strong sense of artistic involvement, a deep identification on the part of the writer with the products of his imagining spirit.

Ìrèlé's musical analogy not only underscores the suggestion that Tutùplá develops his theme through playful improvisation but also immediately brings to mind the mode of jazz, which, no matter how contemplative or serious its theme, is also based on improvisation and playfulness.¹³⁵

3.3.2. The motif of àgbònrín as a figure for power

While I agree with Quayson's (1995b: 107) insight that the "paradigm of metamorphosis" characteristic of *My Life* "embraces some measure of anxiety", I would suggest that the "various metamorphoses" are not just "an important juncture at which the phenomenological

¹³⁵ Owómóyèlà (1999: 86-7), commenting on Ìrèlé's suggestion, writes:

African music does indeed build from the expression of a motif by a single instrument to a cumulation of variations on that motif by the entire ensemble of instruments, but always detectable in the music is the discipline and restraint imposed on each instrument or voice by the need to acknowledge and respond to the others. The difficulty with Tutuola's unrestricted imagination is that it often lacks discipline, because writing for him, as he himself admitted, is 'just playing' with materials.

In the light of the argument presented in this chapter, this point would seem to lose its force.

variety of experience is explored". In my view, *Tutùplá* symbolically conceptualises power in the Bush of Ghosts as the power of transformation, thus linking it to the motif of *àgbònín*, which, in turn, comes to represent a figure for power. In this regard, the figure of the antelope woman not only epitomises the power of transformation but also embodies power itself. In the beginning of the narrative, the hero-narrator essentially represents a negative, disempowered inversion of *àgbònín*. As a boy of seven years, he is as innocent (i.e. unversed in the art of the powerful) as he is powerless; in Quayson's (1997: 51) words, he is "a victim of circumstances, ... at the mercy of the spirits he encounters". The early episodes in *My Life* amply demonstrate this as the hero-narrator is continuously subjected to transformation. As Parrinder (1978: 14) noted in his preface, "The lost boy undergoes more transformations in size and form than Alice in Wonderland". In the course of his life in the Bush of Ghosts, the hero-narrator not only encounters different manifestations of the motif of *àgbònín* but also emulates and eventually becomes *àgbònín* himself, thus overcoming – in relative terms – his initial state of disempowerment. Interestingly, this symbolic process coincides with the hero-narrator's formal qualification as a hunter, which functions as a figure for power in traditional Yorùbá society. In the beginning of the narrative, when he first enters the Bush of Ghosts, he is neither an antelope (woman) nor a hunter (hero), which is why his condition is such a nervous one. But as his power grows, he becomes both: it becomes possible for him to become a hunter (hero) through emulating and symbolically becoming an antelope (woman).

Before moving on to a detailed discussion of the variations of the motif of *àgbònín*, I shall briefly consider the hero-narrator's state of disempowerment in the early episodes of the narrative as a negative inversion of the motif of *àgbònín* in relation to the power of transformation. First of all, when the hero-narrator first enters the Bush of Ghosts, he is not a beautiful woman who knows her way in the bush but a lost male child. Second, unlike either the figure of the antelope woman or that of the hunter hero, he does not use the power of transformation, but is constantly abused by it, as when the Smelling Ghost takes him to the 7th

Town of Ghosts and transforms him into a variety of animals. Third, these transformations become part of a show that the Smelling Ghost puts on to entertain guests, which represents a comic trivialisation or even secularisation of similar scenarios in both the Yorùbá oral tradition and, for instance, Fágúnwà's narratives, where such displays of transformation are dramatised as quasi-metaphysical power contests. Fourth, still in the 7th Town of Ghosts, the hero-narrator is eventually transformed into a "cow or bull with horns on its head" (*ML* 36). Inasmuch as a cow represents a disempowered, domesticated relative of more powerful, forest-dwelling bovids, the hero-narrator's transformation into a cow appears as a comic travesty of *àgbònrín*. Fifth, the hero-narrator's transformation into a cow remains ironically incomplete: while he has the physical appearance of a cow, he can neither behave nor feel like one. Lingered between his human nature and his animal appearance, he suffers all the more intensely, even though his plight is rendered comical throughout. Sixth, his condition is characterised by a lack of control over the power of transformation, even as he tries to take control by stealing the juju which is used to effect his transformation. His attempt to change himself into another animal of his own choice fails as he accidentally transforms into a cow: "And at the moment that I used it, it changed me to a cow with horns on its head instead of a horse" (*ML* 42). Furthermore, while he is now able to escape the ghost who has been pursuing him, he does not know how to turn back into a human being, which he did not consider before he used the juju. The newly acquired power of transformation thus represents an impasse that only gets him into further trouble. Once more, he is caught in a liminal position, being neither fully human nor fully animal. Chased by a lion and eventually caught by cowmen, he encounters the same problems as before as he only looks like a cow but cannot behave like one:

As I was unable to explain to these cow-men that I am not really a cow, so I was showing them in my attitude several times that I am a person, because whenever they were roasting yams in the fire and when eating it I would approach them and start to eat the crumbs of the yams which were falling down by mistake from their hands and whenever they were discussing some important matter with arguments within

themselves I would be giving signs with my head which was showing them the right and wrong points on which they were arguing. (ML 44)

After much suffering, he is sold at a market and taken to a village to be offered as a ritual sacrifice. Again, his attempts at communication with the villagers fail – "because if my heart speaks as a person my mouth would speak out the words in the cow's voice which was fearful to them and also was not clear to them" (ML 47). Finally, he uses his horns to frighten the villagers, manages to escape, and – accidentally once again – effects his own transformation back into a human being – by falling into a pond.

The hero-narrator's quest in *My Life* is a quest for a way out of his dilemma at the beginning of the narrative: the dilemma of being powerful neither as a hunter – in accordance with how power is conceptualised in his own society – nor as an antelope woman – in accordance with how power is conceptualised in the Bush of Ghosts. Necessarily, his quest in this situation is also a quest for power and (heroic) identity. Empowerment represents the key not only to survival in the Bush of Ghosts but also to finding a way out of it. Even in terms of becoming a hunter, in accordance with the norms of the hero-narrator's own society, empowerment seems possible only through assimilation into the structure of power valid in the Bush of Ghosts by emulating and becoming *àgbònrín* and, thus, by moving up the social hierarchy in the Bush of Ghosts. It is in the second half of the narrative, when the hero-narrator has begun to emulate *àgbònrín* and is accordingly (but also paradoxically) becoming more powerful, that he increasingly finds himself in a position to ask for directions for the way out of the bush or to consider tricking ghosts into telling him the way. His desperate attempts to regain control of his life at the beginning of the narrative are an attempt to control the power of transformation and represent his first steps toward becoming *àgbònrín*. All of the aforementioned early episodes play on the motif of *àgbònrín* in relation to power; and in all of them, the hero-narrator, as a negative inversion of *àgbònrín*, is subjected to humiliation, ridicule, and suffering. During his life in the Bush of Ghosts, where his condition is thus as nervous as it is liminal, he

"acquires heroic stature in a process of maturation akin to the structure of an initiation rite" (Quayson 1997: 52).

3.3.3. Improvisations on the motif of *àgbònín*

The early episodes discussed above, in which the hero-narrator is repeatedly subjected to transformations and, in turn, attempts to regain control over his life by transforming himself rather than being transformed – the most persistent manifestation of his general oppression and exploitation at the hands of various spirit beings in the Bush of Ghosts – are followed by more specific variations on the motif of *àgbònín*. In what follows, I shall analyse five episodes in particular as variations on the motif of *àgbònín* and consider their symbolic significance. Each of these episodes recasts and plays on the basic encounter between the hunter and the antelope woman. Yet there is also a sense of dramatic progression or development as in each episode, the hero-narrator seems to be getting closer not only to becoming *àgbònín* but also to assuming the structural function of the figure of the hunter.

In contrast to the episodes described earlier, which play on the hero-narrator's condition of disempowerment when he first enters the Bush of Ghosts, the first of the following five episodes to be discussed in this section creates a link to the motif of animal skin, which is crucial to the motif of *àgbònín*. Having escaped from the ghosts in the 20th Town of Ghosts, the hero-narrator, who has grown up in the meantime, finds that the clothes which he has been wearing have, rather unsurprisingly, become rags. He sees a dead bush animal, which is not further described, and decides to wear the animal's skin by way of clothing himself. This represents his pseudo-transformation into another travesty of *àgbònín*, and it remains a clumsy and humiliating affair. The skin does not belong to a beautiful live antelope woman but to some dead bush animal. The agency required and the danger involved in taking possession of the skin are, therefore, minimal, which corresponds with the fact that the hero-narrator is no

hunter. The hero-narrator takes the skin, but not in order to hide it or to assume control over somebody else, but in order to wear it himself. He finds that the animal skin is "very stiff to wear" (ML 81), so that he has to wash and dry it first, in the meantime timorously hiding himself, as he is still afraid of being "recaptured by the ghosts of the 20th town" (ML 81). Even then, however, the skin does not fit him very well, reaching only from knee to waist. Having suffered abuse through transformation, and emerging from his troubles wearing the skin of a bush animal, the hero-narrator has now acquired that which is most characteristically associated with the antelope woman and which is at the root of her power of transformation. Significantly, the animal skin is the outfit he will be wearing during those episodes in the narrative that most directly and most comprehensively play on the actual encounter between the hunter and the antelope woman. On the one hand, this incident represents a symbolically and structurally important stage in the process of the hero-narrator's (unconscious) emulation and imitation of the condition of *àgbònín*. On the other hand, it once again turns the hero-narrator into an impotent travesty of *àgbònín*, as he is, ironically, in possession of an animal skin that is the external sign of the antelope woman's power but not the secret of her power itself.

The second episode involves the symbolic inversion of the antelope woman's proverbial beauty. Tutùolá's hero-narrator encounters a strange woman in the bush but, in contrast to the traditional encounter between the hunter and the antelope woman, it is not her extraordinary beauty but her extraordinary ugliness that attracts his attention. Ugliness thus takes the place of beauty as the hero-narrator sees "a very young ugly ghostess" and starts chasing her in order, as he puts it, "to see her ugliness clearly to my satisfaction" (ML 86). The hero-narrator in his animal skin outfit, fascinated by the young ghost woman's ugliness, is chasing her, but at the same time, he is, as above, still being chased by some ghosts from whom he had previously escaped. Again, he is situated betwixt and between, chasing somebody else while being chased himself. As yet, he has neither become a hunter nor succeeded in convincingly emulating

àgbònrín. Perhaps this is the reason for his obsessive desire to study the woman he is chasing. He is compelled to discover her secret because his encounter with her represents the unexpected encounter with the other which he unconsciously emulates. This goes on for a protracted length of time. While hiding herself from the hero-narrator's view, the ghostess continuously bursts into laughter at her own ugliness. There is something very disconcerting about her loud, excessive laughter: "if she looked at her ugly body she would burst suddenly into a great laugh which would last more than one hour. ... This ugly ghostess did not allow me to look at her ugliness as she was running and laughing with all her power and full speed" (ML 86-87).¹³⁶ In the end, the hero-narrator has to leave her without having been able to study her entirely to his satisfaction. Whereas the beautiful woman in *àgbònrín*'s story loses her antelope skin to the hunter – the skin that was the secret of her extraordinary beauty as well as of the power of transformation – the ghostess in Tutùplá's variation is able to sustain the mystery of her ugliness. This episode has a subversive potential, as the hero-narrator's perspective is that of the powerless in search of the secret of the other's superior power, even though the other, despite its power, obviously offends the hero-narrator's own socio-cultural sensibilities (in spite of exerting a strong fascination on him at the same time).

The next episode takes both the symbolical inversion of the woman involved and the hero's symbolical transformation into *àgbònrín* one step further. The hero-narrator, who is still wearing his animal skin, is mistaken for a strange animal by some spirits, who capture him and take him to the 13th Town of Ghosts. This incident suggests that the hero-narrator is no longer immediately recognisable as a human being – the ghosts' other – and has, therefore, symbolically become *àgbònrín*. Tutùplá indirectly plays on the ritual aspect of the hero's emulation of the condition of *àgbònrín* when the ghosts' ruler, the famous 'flash-eyed mother', burns the hero-narrator's skin and part of his flesh with the fire of her eyes in order to

¹³⁶ This might, additionally, be read as an indirect allusion to the harnessed antelope, who is renowned for its speed.

establish his identity. This evokes a kind of baptism of fire, which, while establishing the hero-narrator's humanity, asserts that he now formally partakes of the condition of *àgbònín*. The flash-eyed mother is a powerful ghostess, who uses "all kinds of animal skins as clothes", which make "her more fearful, ugly and dreadful to see or look at" (*ML* 100); furthermore, she adds "dirt as her beauty" (*ML* 101). The woman is not only ugly, like the ugly ghostess in the previous incident, but also wears animal skins – and not just one, but many. This is significant as, later, when the hero-narrator encounters the superlady who transforms into an antelope, he initially suspects she might be the flash-eyed mother, which suggestively links the two characters. While the hero-narrator becomes a hunter but enacts the part of *àgbònín* later in the narrative, the flash-eyed mother represents a symbolical inversion of *àgbònín* as a chief huntress, who commands and controls her subjects – all of whom are hunters – with great authority. Incidentally, she is also a rich businesswoman, who sells the flashes of her eyes to other ghosts. Eventually, she plays the role of a powerful war lady, who takes the biggest gun for herself. Her characterisation thus combines different aspects of the concept of power and authority. In the 13th Town of Ghosts, where all the ghosts are hunters of bush animals, Tutùplá's hero-narrator eventually qualifies as a hunter himself. At this point, he has already spent fourteen years in the Bush of Ghosts, which implies that he is now twenty-one years old. The hero-narrator's formal qualification as a hunter not only coincides with his coming of age but also with his symbolical transformation into *àgbònín*. All of these are necessary preconditions for his encounter with the so-called Super Lady in the culminating variation on the motif of *àgbònín*.

Tutùplá's most obvious variation on the motif of *àgbònín* occurs in the episode where the hero-narrator encounters Super Lady in the form of an antelope. This episode represents the culmination and the most complete stage of Tutùplá's symbolical inversion of the motif of *àgbònín*. Although the hero-narrator has qualified as a hunter, he is still wearing his animal skin; and though the woman first appears as an antelope, he initially mistakes her for the flash-eyed

mother, the chief huntress. The fact that he is a hunter and she an antelope woman serves as a formal reminder of the traditional configuration of the encounter but otherwise their relationship to each other is symbolically inverted. First of all, when the hero-narrator sees an antelope in the forest, he refers to it using a masculine personal pronoun, which represents an inversion of gender: "When I was about to shoot him with the gun, he was running away and I myself was chasing him to kill him" (*ML* 112). The antelope runs to a big tree, and is momentarily out of sight; but, the next instant, the hero-narrator sees a very beautiful lady and recognises her as the antelope he wanted to shoot. Second, in Tutùplá's variation, it is the hunter who is afraid, not the beautiful woman:

But as I stood and trembled in the place she was waving her right hand as a signal to throw the gun down and I did so at the same moment because of fear. Although if she did not give such sign I would not be able to shoot her at all as an animal. Though it was clear to me that she was an antelope in form at the first time that I saw her when running to that tree. (*ML* 112)

Third, it does not even occur to the hero-narrator to take away the woman's skin, or to intimidate her in any other way. On the contrary, it is she who approaches him and asks him to marry her, insisting even when he rejects the idea on account of her "wonderful and terrible" (*ML* 113) identity as an antelope woman. Fourth, if he originally chased the antelope, the woman now holds on to his hands so that he may not run away from her: "she told me to follow her and I followed her at a very low walking speed, because she was fearful to me, but she did not leave my hands because perhaps I might run away from her, and it is truth" (*ML* 113). Fifth, she eventually takes him to her house in the nameless town – which, as Collins (1969: 57) observed, is, significantly, "Western-style" – where she takes away *his* animal skin and hides it, rather than vice versa: "Having taken off the animal skin which I wore she took it and hid it in an unknown place" (*ML* 114). Finally, the antelope woman virtually forces the hunter to become her husband, in a scene that has strong overtones of rape. Taking him to her bedroom, she forces the terrified hunter to lie down on the bed, where he, thinking about "how she had been changing herself to various fearful animals" and that she might "change

again to another form and kill" (*ML* 120) him, spends a sleepless night. This scene powerfully evokes the familiar (if problematic) image of the colonial encounter as rape. Furthermore, Tutùqlá, like Fágúnwà, also uses the motif of the power contest, but to a very different effect. When the hero-narrator and the antelope woman reach her house, she tells him that she possesses the power of transformation: "Now, my earthly husband, I have the wonderful power to change to any form of creature" (*ML* 118). Asked to demonstrate this power, she turns into an "antelope with two short horns on its head" (*ML* 118), a lioness, a boa constrictor, and a tigress. In Tutùqlá's narrative, however, the woman's display of power is playful. The hero-narrator clearly acknowledges her power all along: in his own words, "she is a 'super-lady' who has the power to do everything" (*ML* 121).

Eventually, the hero-narrator and the super-lady have a son together, who is half human like his father and half ghost like his mother and who causes disagreement between them, as the former wants him to become more human. When the hero-narrator jokingly claims that "earthly people are superior to the ghosts and ghostesses or all other creatures" his wife is "extremely annoyed", fetches the animal skin he used to wear and which she had hidden in an "unknown place" (*ML* 135), returns it to him in exchange for his ordinary clothing, and throws him out of the house. He, on seeing "her rude attitude", is "greatly annoyed as well" (*ML* 135), but puts on the animal skin and leaves. Ironically, the hero-narrator has by then virtually become a ghost himself. Early in the narrative, he recalled that a young ghost whom he befriended taught him "how to speak some simple ghosts' language" even though he "was unable to speak it fluently at that time" (*ML* 56); his wife continued the language lessons. Shortly after leaving his wife's town, the hero-narrator becomes "a real ghost" (*ML* 157), whereupon he is taught "the art of magic" by a ghost friend in the 18th Town of Ghosts. Soon afterwards, he engages in a classical power contest, commanding, for the first time, the power of transformation himself. Just when he has become a ghost the hero-narrator is, paradoxically, about to re-enter the world of human beings.

In the course of his stay in the Bush of Ghosts, the hero-narrator becomes familiar with the ways of the ghosts, i.e. the ways of his powerful other; a process which begins with acquiring some proficiency in and eventually mastering the ghosts' language, and which culminates when he eventually masters the powers of ghosts, specifically the power of transformation, having virtually become a ghost himself. His assimilation into the world of ghosts is so complete that eventually he does not desire to leave the Bush of Ghosts any more. The moment he has been reunited with his family in the human world, he desires to join the Secret Society of Ghosts at their centennial meeting. It is interesting that Tutùṣá specifically refers to the hero-narrator's mastery of the ghosts' language. As Owómóyèlà (1999: 3) recalls, language played a particularly important role as Europe imposed its own structure of power on Yorùbá society; and whoever wanted to become powerful in this new situation had, first and above all, to master the colonial language:

One of the features of elite preparation was a deliberate process of enforced adherence (in schools especially) to the languages of the colonizers, which rendered those who went through it more or less incompetent users of their native languages. ... Fluency in the colonial tongue was arguably the most persuasive means of demonstrating one's qualification for elite status in the colonial scheme. It also was an emblem that announced one's insider status with regard to the culture of the masters.

The hero-narrator's gradual empowerment in the Bush of Ghosts, through emulating *àgbònrín*, represents, in effect, a process of assimilation which is symbolic of the way in which assimilation into the culture of the colonial power represented the condition for achieving elite status in colonial society. His empowerment is paralleled by that of his brother in the human world, who – since being caught by slave-raiders at age eleven – by the time the hero-narrator leaves the Bush of Ghosts and after having, like his younger brother, "spent many years in various towns" (ML 173), has become a powerful owner of slaves himself. Furthermore, his brother has, like his father, married several wives. The lesson the hero-narrator draws from his

experience in the Bush of Ghosts – as well as from his brother's experience in the real world – is, evidently, that in order to gain power one has to emulate the powerful, and in turn be assimilated by the structures of power oneself. Tutùplá's use of the form of the quest is problematic as it seems to imply that the hero-narrator *has* to assimilate and to emulate the condition of *àgbònrín* to attain maturity in the end; that his experience in the Bush of Ghosts represents a rite of passage, an initiation necessary for the attainment of maturity. It is quite ironic that becoming *àgbònrín* represents, in a way, the most heroic aspect of Tutùplá's hero's quest, as it is only through humiliation, ridicule and suffering that the hero-narrator undergoes the process of initiation, achieves the status and role of *àgbònrín* and eventually becomes a hunter, and is ready to return to human society.¹³⁷

3.3.4. *The subversive potential of Tutùplá's playful improvisations*

The playful spirit of Tutùplá's literary imagination does not preclude but, on the contrary, adds complexity to the thematic and symbolic texture of his narratives, and especially to *My Life*. It is essential not to dissociate the playfulness and spontaneity of Tutùplá's work from meaning and social or moral relevance: it is from them that the subversive potential of *My Life* arises, despite the rather troubling master narrative of the hero-narrator's monomythic quest. As Priebe has suggested, the author "may be having fun, but it in no way undercuts his ultimate seriousness" (1988: 15), which is perhaps reminiscent of certain West African masks who, to the outsider, will appear to be characters playing the fool, talking nonsense and providing comic relief in the context of a bigger festival, but who in reality speak some kind of deeper,

¹³⁷ According to the pattern of the monomythic quest, the experience of being betwixt and between – in between human and animal, male and female, hunter and *àgbònrín*, and human and spirit – represents the necessary precondition for a reaffirmation of traditional values. Interestingly, various incidents suggestively play on the motif of *àgbònrín* as a scapegoat: being sold as a cow early in the narrative, the hero-narrator is literally to be slaughtered as a ritual sacrifice but can flee at the last moment. The flash-eyed mother burns his skin and flesh to establish his identity. When he has just left the Bush of Ghosts, he is captured by native slave-traders and sold to a rich man (who turns out to be his brother) – again intended for a sacrifice to the man's god.

secret language which is only understood by initiated cult members.¹³⁸ Only they will be able to make sense of what the comic mask says. To the uninitiated, its discourse remains unconnected, nonsensical, random and, at best, hilarious, seemingly devoid of deeper meaning or even any meaning at all. Yet the comic mask often plays a vital ritual role, which stands in direct opposition to its comical performance while not negating it or depriving it of its entertainment value.

Tutùqlá's employment of comic irony in *My Life* is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, the liminality of the condition of Tutùqlá's hero-narrator in the Bush of Ghosts serves the formal requirements of a quest narrative. While the quest itself acquires heroic qualities through the humiliation and suffering the hero-narrator continuously undergoes, it also affirms the dynamics of power operating at a fundamental level in human society. In order to become powerful, which seems as desirable as it seems necessary for survival, one has to emulate the powerful, even though that entails exerting power over others and even suppressing them. On the other hand, Tutùqlá's comically ironic representation of the hero-narrator's humiliation and suffering is also instrumental in the deconstruction and/or subversion of the latter's life in the Bush of Ghosts as a master narrative of his successful quest for a way out through assimilation and emulation of the condition of *àgbònín*. This represents perhaps the most fundamental paradox in *My Life*.¹³⁹ Tutùqlá's employment of comic irony generates excess meanings that go beyond the quasi-ritual humiliation of the hero and appears to ridicule the heroic quest itself, disclosing its ultimate absurdity. It is in this sense, I think, that Tutùqlá's concluding sentence, "This is what hatred did", (*ML* 174), achieves a certain contemplative and critical distance from the hero-narrator's concrete adventures as related in *My Life*, pointing to the absurdity and yet seeming inevitability with which systems of oppression perpetuate themselves. If this is what hatred does, then it would be vital to search for new, alternative ways out of the dilemma, as

¹³⁸ The figure of the fool as the wisest of all is a literary commonplace in western traditions as well.

¹³⁹ Priebe (1988: 29) suggested that literary works of a mythic consciousness are "structured around paradox as opposed to analogy".

emulating the powerful and thus perpetuating structures of oppression and injustice cannot be a solution. Tutùqlá ultimately fails to address the important question of how this vicious circle could be broken. While his oppressed emulate the oppressor, the idea that there will always be others to figure as the oppressed represents an underlying assumption which Tutùqlá does not question.

As much as the ironically subversive potential of *My Life* resides in the narrative's sub-text, Tutùqlá himself was writing from a substratum of Nigerian colonial society. In contrast to what JanMohamed (1983) proposes, I do not think that "in the colonial situation the function of class is" always and necessarily "replaced by race". This is to reduce the complexity of the colonial situation to an easy dichotomy between coloniser and colonised, powerful and powerless on the basis of race alone. As Bernstein (2000: 264) points out, "the fundamental racial differentiation of colonial society could obscure the developing social differentiation among the colonized, often abetted, whether intentionally or unintentionally, by the policies and practices of colonial states". Tutùqlá himself is very much aware of class, and if the symbolic significance of *My Life* extends to and embraces 'the African condition' in the twentieth century, he certainly casts it in terms of 'class' relations within Yorùbá society. While JanMohamed (1983: 71) argued that "from the viewpoint of the *lived* experience of colonial society the introduction of class conflict can be misleading", in Tutùqlá's lived experience of Nigerian colonial society class did play a crucial role. Tutùqlá never became part of the new educated African elite created by the colonial power. His attempts to get an education as well as to advance his career were repeatedly curtailed for financial reasons. While he did get some recognition as an artist, until his death he lamented the fact that, in contrast to other Nigerian writers, he was not valued by his own government because, as he suspected, of his lack of education (Ilésanmí 1988, quoted in Owómóyèlà 1999). On the one hand, Tutùqlá clearly partook of 'the African condition'. His work does bespeak fascination with and a certain valorisation of western civilisation. On the other hand, however, and perhaps more

importantly in his own lived experience, his condition was also nervous and especially in relation to the class of the educated elite, to which he gained some access through his literary success (especially in the West) but which never fully recognised him, partly because of his lack of assimilation into the colonial structure of power, which seemed to undermine their traditional power structures. Quayson (1997: 45), among others, has analysed how "the veritable tensions his work generated among his early Nigerian critics relate to the contradictions in identity-formation in the period leading up to self-rule". Tutùplá's position at the margins of colonial society allowed him to portray the desire to emulate and assimilate into this structure in a comic way. At the same time, however, Tutùplá's narrative is characterised by a strong sense of identification, as has variously been recognised (Collins 1969; Ìrèlé 1975). His personal quest for a way out of the dilemma created by the colonial situation was doubly humiliating precisely because he did not command the powers of the educated elite or have easy access to them. While he consciously desired to educate himself further in order to improve the quality of his writing (Owómóyèlà 1999), he also suffered like his hero-narrator, but in a much more literal sense and more directly than the educated elite.

Chapter 4

Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent"

4.0. Introduction

In the early 1980s, Lloyd W. Brown (1981: 3) suggested that the "women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field"; and her study "seeks to draw attention both to what they say, and to how they express themselves" (*ibid.*: 13). Almost a decade later, Adéolá James (1990: 2) still finds reason to observe – in her introduction to *In Their Own Voices*, a collection of interviews with various African women writers – that in African creative writing, "the woman's voice is generally subsumed under the massive humming and bustling of her male counterpart, who has been brought up to take women for granted". According to James (*ibid.*: 6), "Our problem is that we have listened so rarely to women's voices, the noises of men having drowned us out in every sphere of life, including the arts. Yet women too are artists, and are endowed with a special sensitivity and compassion, necessary to creativity". Commenting on the representation of Africa more generally, Mólára Ògúndípè-Leslie (1994: 3) notes that "the black woman's absence is ever central and taken for granted. At the heart of the discursive storms around voices and voicelessness, therefore, are African women".

This kind of discourse on 'the voice' of African women writers represents the backdrop to *Breaking the Silence: An Anthology of Short Stories by the Women Writers of Nigeria* (1996), edited by Tóyìn Adéwálé-Nduka and Ọmówùnmi Şégún, in which "The Importance of Being Prudent"

by Mobólájí Adénúbi first appeared.¹⁴⁰ In her introduction to the anthology, Adéwálé-Nduka (1996: vii) laments: "As I unveil the mysteries of this book, I find it sad and ironic that more than thirty years after Flora Nwapa published *Efuru*, an anthology of short stories by Nigerian women writers must carry the title, *Breaking the Silence*". She observes that while women abound in the imagination of male writers, they are much less visible as creators of their own images (of both men and women and the world in general): "While it appears that women writers have to pass through the needle's eye to literary production, they are vividly represented as images, symbols and signs in male writing" (*ibid.*: viii). *Breaking the Silence* shares with *In Their Own Voices* the purpose "of bringing women's voices to the fore, not as a token concession, but as a moving and determining force" (James 1990: 6).¹⁴¹

Among the texts discussed in this thesis, "The Importance of Being Prudent" stands out as the only one which is authored by a female writer.¹⁴² As far as I know, Adénúbi is the only Yorùbá woman writer who has used the motif of the antelope or buffalo woman in her literary work. The publication of her narrative in an anthology entitled *Breaking the Silence* could therefore hardly be more appropriate. Not only does Adénúbi's literary voice join those of eighteen other contemporary Nigerian women writers, some of whom are heard for the very first time, but also, the heroine Àràkà's first-person narrative voice, which the reader gets to hear at

¹⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the 'invisibility' – another metaphor in this regard – of women in criticism on African literature and theory and post-colonial criticism and theory more generally, see Stratton 1994.

¹⁴¹ However, referring to the work of Liz Gunner, which serves, in her view, as "a necessary reminder of the woman's historical contributions to oral literature in Africa", Brown (1981: 10) concedes that "the voice of the African woman has always been heard in African literature":

The contributions of women to African literature have not been limited to the modern period. Women have always played a considerable role, as story-tellers and performers, in the oral tradition. The tradition always had a significant place for the voice of the woman singing or reciting tales from her own perspective as wife, mother, and housekeeper. ... In some communities, the woman as oral artist has been known to voice her society's experiences as a whole. (*ibid.*: 14)

This point is particularly important with regard to Yorùbá culture, where women often represent the main chanters of *oríkì* (Barber 1991).

¹⁴² I am most grateful to Dr Mary Èbùn Modúpé Kòlówólé at Qbáfěmi Awólówò University in Ilé-Ife, who kindly drew my attention to the existence of "The Importance of Being Prudent".

crucial points in the plot, literally breaks the buffalo woman's silence. In this chapter, I shall argue that this represents a narrative strategy which Adénúbi (1999b: 4) deploys in the service of her declared desire to popularise texts from Ifá divination literature. Like Fágúnwà, Adénúbi relates the motif of the buffalo woman to contemporary marital experience in Yorùbá culture; but, letting the buffalo woman tell her own story, she does so from a female perspective. At the same time, however, she also sustains the plot of the buffalo woman's tale according to Ifá divination literature and its dissemination through the mode of story-telling. This results in interesting ambiguities and incongruities, with the effect that the buffalo woman's tale according to herself – as imagined by a contemporary Yorùbá woman writer – potentially represents a challenge to the account related in Ifá divination literature, which focalises the hunter's experience. In what follows, I shall first provide an overview of Adénúbi's life and literary work. Secondly, I shall introduce a text from C.L. Adéoyè's *Ìgbàgbó àti Èsìn Yorùbá* 'Yorùbá Belief and Religion' (1989), which renarrates Qya's life on earth as a buffalo woman. His synthesis of different Yorùbá tales about Qya into one coherent account may well represent the inspiration for Adénúbi's narrative and functions as a backdrop to my discussion. Thirdly, I shall be exploring Adénúbi's transformation of the figure of the buffalo woman in "The Importance of Being Prudent".

4.1. *Mobóláji Adénúbi*

4.1.1. *Life*

Saliha Mobóláji Adénúbi was born in Lagos in 1942, as the second child and daughter of Şàfú and Amíbáliyù Fólórúnşó Sàláwù. In 1943, Adénúbi was taken to northern Nigeria, where her father took up an appointment as an Assistant Medical Officer and, later, as a Medical Officer. Her father resigned from this appointment with the Government of Nigeria in 1949 because a

less qualified but white Medical Officer was given a promotion that had been due to himself. The family then returned to Lagos, where Adénúbi's father founded Shanu Hospital, a private medical institute, and where he became a famous doctor and a highly respected society man. As the school syllabus in the South was more demanding than in the North, Adénúbi and her sisters were initially taught at home by a private teacher. Adénúbi was admitted into St. Mary's Convent School, Lagos, in 1952 and was sent to St. Teresa's College, Ìbàdàn, one year later, where she passed her West African School Certificate Examinations in 1959.

Afterwards Adénúbi was sent, at her father's expense, to study for her A-Levels at Mingle End in Great Shelford, Cambridge, from 1959-1961. From 1961-1965 she studied at Reading University, Berkshire, for a first degree. In 1963/64, she was awarded a scholarship by the Nigerian government. Her first degree – she was the first university graduate in her family – was followed by a postgraduate diploma in Sociology, which she obtained after two years at Swansea University, Wales. On her return to Nigeria, she began to work in Lagos. In 1966, she married Dèjì Adénúbi, and gave birth to their first child. In 1969, she followed her husband, who was then completing his PhD at Stanford University in California, to the United States and began to study for an M.A., which she obtained in 1972. In 1984, when she already had three children (one of whom was physically handicapped), she went to London for a couple of months to study at the Institute of Education, University of London. At her father's death in 1990, she had retired from her job as Assistant Director of Education in the Federal Ministry of Education to become a full-time writer. Currently, she lives in Surulere, Lagos, where she is actively involved with the Association of Nigerian Writers (ANA) and The Women Writers of Nigeria (WRITA).

By the time Adénúbi decided to become a full-time writer, she had not yet published a single book. She had, however, been writing shorter fiction. As early as October 1965, a story called "Strange Encounter" featured on a BBC broadcast (1999a). Adénúbi's decision, which implied

her retirement from a well-paid, secure position with the government, was met with great scepticism even by her father, who had always admired and encouraged her ability to express herself in writing.¹⁴³ Her father himself was a great reader of English literature and encouraged all his children to read and to express themselves in writing. Adénúbi's first book, *Splendid*, was published in 1995, several years after her decision to become a full-time writer. In the same year, it was awarded the All African Christopher Okigbo Prize for Literature. To Adénúbi's great sorrow, her father did not live to witness her success as a writer.

Starting with the second edition of *Splendid*, Adénúbi has published all her books herself. This also explains why her books are rarely found on the shelves (or display tables) of bookshops even in Nigeria. Hoping to be able to make a living by writing, Adénúbi thought she could not afford to lose any profit her books might make to local publishers. Therefore, she decided to finance the publication of her books herself. The cost of printing is high, however, and she is facing many difficulties trying to sell her books efficiently. Rather than letting herself be distracted from her writing, she keeps piles of boxes full of her unsold books at home. A (woman) writer's dilemma in contemporary Nigeria.

4.1.2. Work

To date, Adénúbi has published five books. At first glance, her books do not seem to have much in common with one another. The first and the last one are non-fictional and (auto)biographical, another two are based on the Yorùbá oral tradition, and one is a novel set in twentieth-century Lagos. Yet, if one examines Adénúbi's books with "The Importance of Being Prudent" in mind, it would seem that quite independently of the genre Adénúbi chooses to write in, a number of themes keep resurfacing in the various texts, which, despite the

¹⁴³ She recalls, for instance, a letter she received from her father when she was thirteen years old, in which he wrote: "I love you for your good habit of reading very voraciously. You have read more fiction than all the others have" (1999a: 40).

obvious diversity in her writing, has a unifying effect. *Splendid* (1995), Adénúbi's first book, is perhaps the only exception in this regard. It relates the life of Wólé, her younger son, who died at the age of ten. The publication of the prize-winning *Splendid* represents the first public recognition of Adénúbi as a full-time writer.

Adénúbi's following two books are based on the Yorùbá oral tradition. *Creation and Other Stories* (1996) is framed by the story of an encounter between Àjàpá 'Tortoise' and Alàngbá 'Lizard', whose respective ancestors were among the earliest created beings and, according to some accounts, instrumental in the creation of the earth. In a number of tales, the two of them jointly recall various Yorùbá myths of origin. As Adénúbi's dedication to the book suggests, *Creation* was written especially for younger readers. *Tales From Times Before* (1997a), in turn, is not primarily addressed to a juvenile readership. It represents a collection of six "popularized" (Adénúbi 1999b: 4) short narratives based on Ifá divination literature. One of these is "The Importance of Being Prudent", which had previously been published in *Breaking the Silence*.

In an interview, Adénúbi told me that in contrast to her other books, *Creation* and *Tales From Times Before* were received much more sceptically by the kind of elite literary context within which she generally operates, i.e. other Nigerian writers many of whom, like Adénúbi herself, are active members of one of the Nigerian literary associations and readers who generally have at least a basic university education (interview November 2000). While *Creation*, the earlier one of the two books, was to some extent able to circumnavigate criticism in this regard, self-consciously approximating the genre of children's literature – thus creating a niche for itself, and defending its right to exist – the reception of *Tales From Times Before* has been rather more doubtful regarding its literary 'legitimacy', 'seriousness' and 'value' as adult literature. Presenting 'popularised' versions of Ifá divination narratives, it hovers uncomfortably between Yorùbá literary texts that are edited and published as 'authentic' manifestations of 'traditional' Yorùbá verbal art on the one hand, and such that are conceived of as manifestations of contemporary

'elite' literature. The implications and ramifications of this will be discussed below in relation to Adénúbi's refocalisation of the figure of the buffalo woman in "The Importance of Being Prudent".

In the same year as *Tales From Times Before*, Adénúbi also published her first novel, *Empty Arms* (1997b), which represents another significant moment in her career as it establishes her as a 'serious' writer of contemporary Nigerian fiction. While *Splendid* is non-fictional, *Creation* is in the introduction to the book described as "not only a story", but a "meta-fiction constructed on folktales, folk narratives, Yoruba creation myths" (Ọ̀ṣúndáre 1996).¹⁴⁴ *Tales From Times Before*, in turn, is announced rather conspicuously as a popularisation of Yorùbá verbal art by the author herself. Unlike *Splendid*, it is clearly not non-fictional, nor is it, unlike *Creation*, meta-fictional. But being, as it is, based on Ifá divination narratives, it is not entirely fictional either, which raises the inevitable question of what precisely it *is*, then.¹⁴⁵ *Empty Arms*, in turn, is a work of fiction.¹⁴⁶ While *Empty Arms* is set in 20th century Lagos and deals with the life of Níkẹ́, a modern young woman of Adénúbi's own generation, whose professional qualification and career closely resemble Adénúbi's own,¹⁴⁷ it reverberates with some aspects of the buffalo woman's story in "The Importance of Being Prudent", to the degree that it may in some ways be seen as a kind of companion piece to the earlier narrative. This will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Most recently, Adénúbi published *FS – The Man and His Times* (1999a), a kind of memoir featuring her father. The book is based on letters exchanged between Adénúbi herself and her father, which are supplemented by (auto-)biographical background information. *FS* provides

¹⁴⁴ The introduction to this book is not paginated.

¹⁴⁵ One might of course argue that religious texts are no less fictional than other texts. However, the vital difference is that within their own cultural contexts, they are not conceived of as fictional.

¹⁴⁶ It is a very well-researched work of fiction, too – the attention given to medical detail, which it shares with *Splendid*, may perhaps be regarded as the legacy of Adénúbi's father.

¹⁴⁷ By this, I do not mean to imply that *Empty Arms* is an autobiographical novel, even though it is clear that Adénúbi draws on first-hand experience in many ways.

many insights not only into the life of Adénúbi's father, Fólórúnşó Sàláwù, but also into that of the various women in his large household, especially that of her mother.¹⁴⁸ The book recalls "The Importance of Being Prudent" in the sense that it focalises Adénúbi's prominent father; yet the voice of Adénúbi's mother is occasionally echoed by the voice of her daughter, the narrator of the (auto-)biographical text. Adénúbi's mother was the first of four wives; but Adénúbi notes that while her father "married four wives in the end ... he always had the maximum of two at a time. Şáfú [her mother] remained the first of the two throughout" (1999a: 29). With the hindsight *FS – The Man and His Times* affords, the manifold experiences of the female members of Fólórúnşó Sàláwù's household, and especially that of her mother's situation in this household, would clearly seem to have sensitised Adénúbi to, and inspired her interest in, a number of the gender-related issues which keep re-surfacing in her work. Again, this will be further examined in relation to Adénúbi's transformation of the buffalo woman's tale later on in this chapter.

4.1.3. "The Importance of Being Prudent"

As the preceding section has suggested, female experience represents an important theme, or sub-theme, in both Adénúbi's fictional and her non-fictional texts. Initially, therefore, I thought I had found the key to reading "The Importance of Being Prudent" in the title of the anthology in which the narrative first appeared.¹⁴⁹ Adénúbi's transformation of the buffalo woman's tale essentially seemed to be about 'breaking the silence': it appeared to be her intention to re-tell the traditional narrative from a female point of view. Indeed, providing the buffalo woman with a first-person narrative voice in order to let her tell her own story seemed a very original and promising thing to do. In a way, it also seemed to be the obvious thing to

¹⁴⁸ Again, note the correspondence between the relationship between Adénúbi and her mother on the one hand and that between Níkèké, the heroine of *Empty Arms*, and the two mother figures in her life on the other.

¹⁴⁹ The two versions of "The Importance of Being Prudent", which are published in *Breaking the Silence* and *Tales From Times Before* respectively, are not quite identical. In this chapter, I quote from the narrative as it appears in *Breaking the Silence*.

do – with hindsight, I was surprised that nobody had thought of it before. This reading, however, posed a number of problems. I found that it resulted in unresolvable incongruities and paradoxes. If the narrative was about refocalising the traditional tale from the buffalo woman's point of view, why would it continue to reiterate some of the old stereotypes about female character, thus frustrating readerly expectations raised by itself? What was the point, furthermore, of deploying a narrative strategy that would enhance the reader's empathy and identification with the buffalo woman, if the narrative as a whole continued to perpetuate the same old moral conclusion, which, more than anything else, seemed to compromise the buffalo woman? If Adénúbi had a feminist agenda, how could she be so innovative on the one hand, and, on the other, not have taken the transformation of the buffalo woman('s tale) any further? Had she not been aware of the implications of giving the buffalo woman a first-person narrative voice, or was I, searching for the meaning of Adénúbi's narrative, on the wrong path entirely?

Looking for alternative clues as to how to read "The Importance of Being Prudent", I went back to the introduction Adénúbi herself wrote to the second edition of *Tales From Times Before*. While I thought I knew what she was generally doing with the figure of the buffalo woman – giving her a first-person narrative voice, thus allowing her to tell her own story, in form of a kind of tale-within-a-tale – I was not sure why she was doing it, or to what (intended) effect. A feminist framework alone seemed to be insufficient to understand the meaning of Adénúbi's narrative. What I needed was, I felt, a different theoretical starting point from which to interpret Adénúbi's transformation of the figure of the buffalo woman.

Adénúbi begins her introduction to *Tales From Times Before* by writing about her own, very limited exposure to both Yorùbá orature and literature in her early childhood. She recalls:

The stories I read when I was growing up were tales, legends and myths of other lands. My own children read them as well! The impression was given that Nigeria, and indeed, Africa, did not have tales, myths and legends worth telling or reading about.

We learnt nursery rhymes and poems of other lands, while indigenous play songs and rhymes were left to illiterate children who were taught them by their own illiterate mothers and other relatives and village story tellers. (1999b: 1)

As she told me in an interview, this situation changed when her family returned to Lagos, where her parents employed several domestic maids and servants. Characteristically, these had come from smaller villages and farms to look for employment in the big city; and it is to them that Adénúbi owes her introduction to Yorùbá oral tradition. She recalls how every night, when the day's work was done, they would tell her and the other children stories, passing on to them a wealth of Yorùbá traditional beliefs and tales (Adénúbi 1999a). Furthermore, as Adénúbi recalls in her introduction to *Tales From Times Before*, her father generously supplied his children with books written both in English and Yorùbá. While she was not taught Yorùbá at school, she learnt to read books written in Yorùbá. Among those books which she particularly enjoyed were, for instance, Fágúnwà's narratives (1999b).

Years later, when Adénúbi was studying in the United Kingdom and reading Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for a course in English Literature, she found, to her great surprise and excitement, that one of Chaucer's tales very closely resembled one of the tales she had been listening to as a child in Lagos. This discovery rekindled her interest in the Yorùbá oral tradition and, for the first time, gave it an academic and literary dimension (interview, November 2000). More recently, as Adénúbi writes in her introduction to *Tales From Times Before*, while she was "recuperating from an accident", she "was able to read more about Ifá [*sic*], a divination system that is also a great authority on Yoruba mythology, history and philosophy" (1999b: 2). She points out that most particularly, she "identified with the stories" (1999b: 2) related in Ifá: "These stories are often simple but contain profound truths, considering serious questions like the origin of all things, the meaning of life, its purpose, destiny, death, and eternity" (1999b: 3). Fascinated by Ifá, "only one of many great African systems that have regulated the ways of thinking, feeling and acting of peoples throughout the ages all over the continent", Adénúbi proposes that "[r]esearchers and writers of all types

should seek to preserve these primary sources of oral literature and popularize them for the benefit of coming generations, so that these will know and be proud of their rich cultural heritage" (1999b: 4). This represents the backdrop against which she defines the project of her own collection: "*Tales From Times Before* is an adaptation of six stories from the Ifá [sic] corpus. It is time that Africans popularize their own tales, legends and myths" (*ibid*).

The key word here is 'popularise'. While "The Importance of Being Prudent" does not actually represent popular fiction, Adénúbi arguably appropriates some of the strategies of popular fiction.¹⁵⁰ If one takes Adénúbi by her own word and starts reading "The Importance of Being Prudent" as a popularised literary text, it becomes possible not to resolve, but to account for the conflicting meanings the narrative seems to be negotiating.¹⁵¹ Above all, Adénúbi's transformation of the buffalo woman becomes meaningful in various ways. Before I shall go on to discuss this in detail, the following subchapter deals with another contemporary text relating the buffalo woman's tale, which shall function as a point of reference for my close analysis of "The Importance of Being Prudent".

4.2. The buffalo woman's tale in Adéoyè's Ìgbàgbó àti Èsìn Yorùbá

Adéoyè's *Ìgbàgbó àti Èsìn Yorùbá* 'Yorùbá Beliefs and Religion' (1989) represents a seminal compilation of Yorùbá religious beliefs, which is based on the author's life-long experience and forty decades of research on Yorùbá culture. The book begins with a few general chapters and

¹⁵⁰ For theoretical introductions to popular culture/fiction see Barber 1987 and 1997.

¹⁵¹ One important precondition for the accessibility Adénúbi desires for *Tales From Times Before* is, of course, its availability in print. On an equally fundamental level, its *inaccessibility* arises from the fact that the kind of readership that easily does have access to it – through knowing Adénúbi in person, or through one of the Nigerian literary organisations – is likely to be more interested in more 'authentic' editions of Ifá divination literature, which are available, for instance, in some Nigerian university bookshops. This was Adénúbi's own approach to Ifá as well, after all. Other readers who might be interested in this kind of fiction are, it must be said, highly unlikely to find the book in the first place. Perhaps more than anything else, this has precluded *Tales From Times Before* from becoming of 'popular' interest.

then presents individual portraits of a selection of fifty Yorùbá *òrìṣà* and *irúnmalẹ̀* (both terms signifying a kind of divine being), who are organised by the day of the Yorùbá week with which they are associated, and similar indigenous criteria. In the introduction, Adéoyè emphasises the pivotal importance of the various genres and modes of Yorùbá verbal art as the prime source of all knowledge about Yorùbá beliefs. Accordingly, the information Adéoyè provides on each divine being is based on the *odù Ifá* associated with it. Furthermore, he draws on traditional sayings about each *òrìṣà* and provides examples of the *òrìṣà's oríkè*. The chapters conclude with specific religious information concerning the *òrìṣà's* symbols, taboos, objects for sacrifice, personal offices, worship, festivals and symbols. *Ìgbàgbọ̀ àti Èsìn Yorùbá* is written in Yorùbá and addressed by the author to students at secondary-school level, students at colleges of education, university students of Yorùbá language, history, tradition and customs, students of Christianity and Islam and, last but not least, everybody who wants to know more about Yorùbá beliefs. The book's intention is to document and pass on traditional Yorùbá cultural knowledge.

While there is, of course, no single authoritative and authentic version of the buffalo woman's tale I have chosen an extract from Adéoyè's text as a point of reference for my discussion of Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent". A non-fictional, informational text about the buffalo woman, it has no literary ambition in its own right while being very well narrated. In its own way, Adéoyè's text also represents a contemporary transformation of the topos of the buffalo (woman). Published in 1989, it responds to an increasing lack of information on *ìyìnṣẹ̀ òrò* 'deep or profound matters' in Yorùbá beliefs and religion and seeks to pass on traditional cultural knowledge. Aiming at comprehensiveness, Adéoyè synthesises different tales associated with particular *òrìṣà* or *irúnmalẹ̀* into coherent accounts of their lives, thus reconciling potential contradictions and incongruities.

While Adéoyè's text differs from Adénúbi's in very important ways, the similarities between the two are quite striking, to the degree that one wonders if Adéoyè's text does not represent one of Adénúbi's sources or even *the* source for "The Importance of Being Prudent". In an interview, Adénúbi (November 2000) said that this was indeed a possibility, as she remembers reading a book like *Ìgbàgbó àti Èsìn Yorùbá* what would now seem a long time ago. She does not, however, recall the title of this book or the author's name. Be that as it may – Adéoyè and Adénúbi may also share a third source text unknown to myself – their two texts have quite a number of things in common. Most importantly, their narratives share a tripartite linear plot which, amalgamating different episodes in Qya's life, relates the *òrìsà*'s marriage first to Ògún, then to Sàngó and finally to an intrepid hunter.¹⁵² The latter is crucial as it links the buffalo woman's tale to the scenario of her assumption of the name of Qya and the religious instruction of her children (the first Olóya) before she returns to the other world as an *òrìsà*. In contrast to my informants' insistence that it was Ògún whom Qya met as a buffalo (woman), in both Adéoyè's text with its underlying desire to synthesise different strands of traditional knowledge about the buffalo (woman) and the *òrìsà* Qya into one coherent account of her life and in Adénúbi's narrative it is only during Qya's last marriage that she transforms into a buffalo (woman). Moreover, many narrative details of Adénúbi's text which I haven't found anywhere else recall Adéoyè's account. Perhaps most importantly, the buffalo skin is represented as a kind of costume given to the female protagonist by her heavenly companions for protection in the forest. Furthermore, while the characters of hunter and buffalo woman as well as the town where the story takes place have identical names in both texts, none of my informants were familiar with them, which underscores the impression that if they are not drawing from other sources unknown to myself, Adéoyè's narrative represents the source for that of Adénúbi. Read against the backdrop of Adéoyè's text, Adénúbi's own achievement and

¹⁵² Adéoyè's chapters on Ògún and Sàngó contain further episodes featuring Qya, which are not related to the buffalo woman's tale but which could be accommodated by his account of Qya's marriage with Ògún and Sàngó.

specifically her transformation of the figure of the buffalo woman are thrown into particularly sharp relief.

In what follows, I have decided to quote from Adéoyè's chapter on Qya at some length, as the text is written in Yorùbá and published in Nigeria and may otherwise not be readily available for comparison. While echoing some of the elements of the buffalo woman's tale as related in Chapter 1 (1.2.2.), it conveniently provides a summary of the same tripartite plot (structure) that also underlies Adénúbi's narrative, even though the latter chooses a different narrative strategy to develop and represent it. The extract from Adéoyè's text quoted below covers, in chronological order, exactly the same elements of the buffalo woman's tale that also feature in Adénúbi's narrative. The chapter begins with an introductory paragraph about the significance of Qya as one of those *òrìṣà* who had a divine existence in heaven before spending a human life-time on earth. Adéoyè points out that even as a young woman, Qya was highly respected among her peers, just as she is today as an *òrìṣà*, and quotes a saying used by the elders indicating that their respect for Qya exceeds their respect for Ògún, Deity of Hunting, Iron and Warfare. He then proceeds to explain why the names of these two *òrìṣà* are used in relation to each other in this way, pointing out that Ògún used to be Qya's husband in heaven, which represents the beginning of a narrative about Qya's life on earth:

... ní àjùlé ọrun, Ògún ni ọkọ Qya, ibi tí òde ... Ògún was Qya's husband in heaven, a place
 ọrun sì rọ Qya lórùn dé, kì bá tí bá àwọn that was very convenient for Qya; and she
 àgbààgbà ọrun rọ bí kò bá ẹ ti Ògún tí ó jẹ ọkọ should not have come down from heaven with
 rẹ. Ifẹ ọkọ ni ó mú Qya kúrò lóde ọrun. the elders if it had not been for Ògún, who was
 her husband. It was love of her husband that
 motivated Qya to leave heaven.

Léyìn tí àwọn Irúnmọlẹ ti rọ sí òde ayé, ọkan [*sic*] After the *irúnmalẹ* 'divine beings' had come down
 Qya kò kúrò lódò àwọn ẹgbẹ rẹ tí ó wà lóde to earth, Qya's heart did not leave her
 ọrun, igbà tí ara Qya kò gba ọrọ yí mọ, ó wá companions who were in heaven; when Qya
 àyè, ó bèrẹ sí í pàdẹ àwọn ẹgbẹ ọrun rẹ nínú igbó could not bear this matter any longer, she looked
 kan tí ó wà léyìn odi Ifẹ Oòyè. for an opportunity, she began to meet her
 heavenly companions in a certain forest that was
 beyond the boundaries of Ifẹ Oòyè.

Ilé Ògún ní Qya wà ní àsikò yí, nítorí pé kò pé púpò tí wọn dé Ifẹ̀ Oòyè tí Ògún àti Qya fi ní gbé pò bíi tókò, taya tí wọn jẹ látì òde ọ̀run.

Bí ó tilẹ̀ jẹ pé Ògún mò nípa àwọn ẹgbé ọ̀run tí Qya ní, Qya kò fi àsírí rírí tí ó tún ní rí wọn nínú igbó yí hàn án. Kíkúrò ní ilé lálà dágbére nígbàkugbà tí ó bá ní lọ pàdé ẹgbé ọ̀run ló kó bá Qya.

Ògún bèrẹ̀ sí í fura sí í, kò sì pé tí Èṣù fi tapo sí ọ̀rọ̀ nàà. Ògún na Qya, Qya sì kò ọ̀ sílẹ̀, ó lọ fẹ̀ Sàngó.

Bí ó tilẹ̀ jẹ pé ifẹ̀ gbígboná wà láàrín Qya àti Sàngó ní gbòdògbòdò igbà tí wọn ṣèsè fẹ̀ ara wọn, iwà kí á máa fi gbogbo igbà jáde kúrò ní ilé látì lọ pàdé ẹgbé ọ̀run lálà dágbére yí nàà ní ó tú wọn ká ní ikẹyìn.

Kí àyè lè wà fún un látì máa rí àwọn ẹgbé ọ̀run rẹ, Qya kọ Sàngó sílẹ̀, ó sì ní dá gbé fún ara rẹ. Òmìnira tí ó fún ara rẹ yí mú kí ó lè máa rí àwọn ẹgbé ọ̀run rẹ ní ígbàkugbà tí ó bá wù ú.

Látì túbò mú kí nńkan rọ̀rùn fún Qya, àwọn ẹgbé rẹ ọ̀run nàà wá dá agò fún un. Bí ẹkú Egúngún ní agò yí rí. Agò yí ní ojú, ó sì ní iwo ẹfọn méjì ní òkè, níbí tí wọn fi bo orí. Nínú ihò yàà tí ó wà ní idí igi ọ̀bọ̀bọ̀ kan ní Àràká máa ní gbé agò yí pamọ̀ sí, ibẹ̀ ní í tí í wọ agò nàà bí ó bá tó àsikò tí ó fẹ̀ rí àwọn ẹgbé ọ̀run rẹ.

At this time, Qya was in the house of Ògún, since not very long after they had arrived in Ifẹ̀ Oòyè, Ògún and Qya had taken to living together as husband and wife, which they had been since [their time in] heaven.

Even though Ògún knew about Qya's heavenly companions, Qya did not reveal the secret that she continued to see them in the forest to him. Leaving the house without saying goodbye whenever she would go to meet those heavenly companions got her into trouble.

Ògún began to suspect her; and before long, Èṣù interfered in the matter. Ògún beat Qya, and Qya divorced him; she went to marry Sàngó.

Even though there was always hot love between Qya and Sàngó when they had just married each other, what separated them in the end was this habit that she would always leave the house in order to go and meet the heavenly companions without saying goodbye.

Qya divorced Sàngó in order to have the opportunity to see her heavenly companions, and she lived alone by herself. The independence she had given herself enabled her to go and see her heavenly companions whenever she pleased.

In order to make things still easier for Qya, these heavenly companions of hers then provided a costume for her. This costume looked like the costume of an *egúngún* 'ancestral masquerade'. This costume had a face and on top, where they would cover the head, it had two buffalo horns. Àràká used to carry this costume to a deep hole that was at the bottom of a certain *ọ̀bọ̀bọ̀* tree to hide it; there, she would put on the costume before she wanted to see her heavenly companions the next time.

Ní àkókò yí, bàbá ọ̀ḍẹ kan wà ní Ifẹ̀ Oòyè, orúkọ rẹ̀ ní jẹ́ Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀, èniyàn nílá nì, ó sì tún jẹ́ onínúrerere ní ilú.

Ọ̀ḍẹ yí lọ sí ọ̀ḍọ Ọ̀rúnmilà látí dífá ọ̀ḥódún, Odù tí ó jáde ní Ọ̀ságúndá. Odù yí nì Odù Ọ̀ya di òní olóníí.

Ọ̀ságúndá

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Ó sá gbúnúndá

Ó rìn gbúnúndá

A dífá fún Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀

Tí yóò lọ sí oko ọ̀ḍẹ

Tí yóò pàdé Àràkà

Dandan, yóò fẹ́ obìnrin

Kà sàl fẹ́ obìnrin abàmi

Ọ̀rúnmilà ní kí ó rú ọ̀ḥọ ẹ̀ḥọ

Rírú ẹ̀ḥọ ní í gbe nì

Àìrú ẹ̀ḥọ kí í gbe èniyàn

Kòì pẹ́ kòì jìnnà

Tí Ifá fí nì sẹ́ bí àlálá.

Ọ̀rúnmilà kilọ́ fún Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀ pé kí ó rúbọ́, kí ó má baà fí ika [sì] àbámọ́ ọ̀ḥọ ẹ̀nu, nítorí obìnrin abàmi tí yóò kó tò ọ́ wá.

Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀ gbọ́, ó rúbọ́. Ìgbà tí ó di ọ̀jọ́ keje léyìn tí ó rúbọ́, ó lọ sí ìgbẹ́ ọ̀ḍẹ. Bí ó ti dé ìdí ọ̀ḥọ ọ̀ḥọ kan, ó pinnu àti gègùn lórí ọ̀ḥọ yí. Kò pẹ́ tí ó gègùn, tí ó fí rí obìnrin abàmi kan lábẹ́ ọ̀ḥọ yí. Ó pìrọ́rọ́, ó nì wòye ohun tí yóò sẹ́lẹ́.

At this time, there was a certain distinguished hunter in Ifẹ̀ Oòyè; his name was Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀; he was a great person, and he was also a kindhearted person in the town.

Every year, this hunter went to Ọ̀rúnmilà in order to consult Ifá; the *odù* that came out was Ọ̀ságúndá. Today, this *odù* has become the *odù* of Ọ̀ya.

Ọ̀ságúndá

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He ran crookedly

He walked crookedly

Divination was performed for Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀

Who would go hunting

Who would meet Àràkà

Surely, he would marry a woman

Indeed, he would marry a strange woman

Ọ̀rúnmilà said he should make many offerings

Making an offering will benefit a person

Not making an offering will not benefit a person

It was not yet long, it was not yet far

When Ifá's prediction came to pass like a dream.

Ọ̀rúnmilà cautioned Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀ that he should make an offering, that he would not regret it, because of a strange woman who would come and follow him.

Olúkòsì Èpẹ̀ obeyed, he made an offering. On the seventh day after he had made an offering, he went hunting. When he arrived at the bottom of a certain *òḥọḥọ* tree, he decided to climb up to the hunting-platform on top of the tree. Not long after he had climbed up to the hunting-platform, he saw an extraordinary woman underneath the tree. He pretended to be asleep; he was alert to what would happen.

Sí ìyàlènu rẹ, obìnrin yíí tú gèlè rẹ lélẹ̀, ó nawọ sí ihò tí ó wà lábẹ̀ odi yàyà tí ó wá ní ìdì igi ọ̀bọ̀bọ̀ yíí, ó sì gbé agọ́ jáde. Obìnrin yíí kó sí inú agọ́ yíí bí Egúngún, ó sì ní wọ ààrin igbó lọ.

Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ n fí ojú sin obìnrin yíí lọ bí ó tí n lọ. Ìgbà tí ó dé ìdì ọ̀gán kan, ó bọ́ agọ́ sílẹ̀ ó rìn sí iwájú tíí tí ó fí pàdẹ̀ àwọn egbé ọ̀run rẹ. Ohun tí ó ẹ̀lẹ̀ yíí da wàriwàri bo Olúkòsì Èpẹ́, ojora mú un, ẹ̀rù bà á.

Şé àgbà ọ̀dẹ̀ kúkú sì ni òun náà, ìwọ̀nba ni ó jáyà mọ, ó bọ́ sílẹ̀ láti orí ẹ̀gún [sì], ó gbé agọ́ tí obìnrin yíí gbé ka orí ọ̀gán, ó kọ́rí sí ilẹ̀ rẹ̀ pẹ̀lú oonú-fu-u-àyà-fu-u [sì].

Bí ó tí dé ilẹ̀, ó ẹ̀ agọ́ yíí lójọ́ sí inú àkà tí ó wà ní àjà ilẹ̀ rẹ. Gbogbo bí ó ẹ̀ gbé agọ́ yíí wọ́lé, àti bí ó ẹ̀ gbé e pamọ́ sí inú àkà lájà ni ìyàwó rẹ̀ rí, şùgbọ́n ìyàwó kò ẹ̀ bí ẹ̀ni pé òun rí i. Ìgbà tí ó palẹ̀ agọ́ yíí mọ́ tán, ó bọ́ sí ita, ó bèrẹ̀ sí í najú.

Nígbà tí ó di àşáálẹ̀, Àràkà dá gbére fún àwọn egbé ọ̀run rẹ, ó ní padà bọ́ wálẹ̀. Ó dé ìdì ọ̀gán, kò bá agọ́ tí ó gbé lé orí Ọ̀gán [sì], ohun àrà nílá ni èyí jẹ. Ó wo òkè, ó wo ilẹ̀, omi bọ́ lójú rẹ, kò sì mọ́ èyí tí òun lẹ̀ ẹ̀.

Ọ̀jọ́ nílá kan rọ́ mọ́jú ọ́jọ́ یشه́lẹ̀ yíí èyí tí ó mú kí ilẹ̀ tutù.

To his surprise, this woman untied her headtie and put it down, she extended her hand to a hole that was underneath the wall that was at the bottom of the ọ̀bọ̀bọ̀ tree, and she brought out a costume. The woman rushed into this costume like an *egúngún*, and she went into the middle of the forest.

Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ followed the woman with his eyes as she was going. When she reached the bottom of a termitarium, she took off the costume; she walked on until she met her heavenly companions. What was happening here frightened Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ greatly, fear gripped him, he was afraid.

And as he was indeed an experienced hunter himself, there was a limit to his fear, he came down from the top of the hunting-platform, he managed to get hold of the costume that this woman had put on the termitarium; he turned homewards with great trepidation.

When he arrived home, he put the costume away into the granary that was in the loft of his house. His wife had seen everything, how he had carried the costume into the house and how he had hidden it in the granary in the loft, but the wife did nothing to suggest that she had seen him. When he had hidden away the costume, he went outside; he began to enjoy leisure.

When it became dusk, Àràkà said goodbye to her heavenly companions; she was returning home. She reached the bottom of the termitarium; she did not find the costume that she had put upon the termitarium; this was very bad news. She looked above, she looked at the ground, tears came to her eyes, and she did not know what she could do.

On the day this was happening, heavy rain had fallen at dawn, as a result of which the ground was wet.

Ilẹ́ tí ó tutù yí mú kí Àràkà rí ojú ẹ̀sẹ̀ ènìyàn tí ó tò dé ìdí ògán tí ó gbé agò lé.

Because of this wet ground, Àràkà saw the footprints of a person who had followed [her] to the bottom of the termitarium upon which she had put her costume.

Àràkà wá tò ojú ẹ̀sẹ̀ ènìyàn tí ó rí yí títí tí ó fí tò ọ̀ délé ọ̀ḍẹ̀ Olúkòsì Èpẹ́. Ó bá ọ̀ḍẹ̀ ní ojúde rẹ̀ tí ó jókòó tí ó nà ojú. Ó kí ọ̀ḍẹ̀, ọ̀ḍẹ̀ jẹ́ ẹ, obìnrin yí sì jókòó ti bàbá ọ̀ḍẹ̀.

Àràkà then followed the human footprints which she saw here until she had followed them to the house of the hunter Olúkòsì Èpẹ́. She met the hunter outside the house, where he was sitting and enjoying leisure. She greeted the hunter; the hunter answered her; and the woman sat down with Bàbá hunter.

Ìgbà tí ilẹ̀ sù pátápátá, bàbá ọ̀ḍẹ̀ bi obìnrin yí lèèrè ohun tí nà wá, obìnrin yí ní ọ̀ḍẹ̀ ọ̀ḍẹ̀ ní òun wá àti pé ọ̀ḍẹ̀ rẹ̀ ní òun yóò sùn. Bá yí ni Àràkà ẹ̀ di ìyàwó bàbá ọ̀ḍẹ̀, tí ó sì bí ọ̀mọ̀ mèsàn-án fún un.

When it had become completely dark, Bàbá hunter asked the woman what she was looking for; this woman said she was looking for the hunter's place and that she would sleep in his place. In this way, Àràkà became the wife of Bàbá hunter and bore him nine children.

Lọ́jọ̀ kan, Àràkà pèlú ọ̀kọ̀ rẹ̀ jókòó lóde, wọn nà ta òkurò sọ. Ibi tí wọn ti nà sọ̀rọ̀ ni Àràkà ti bi ọ̀kọ̀ rẹ̀ lèèrè pé bí ó bá lọ sí ẹ̀gùn, bí ilẹ̀ bá di aásà mọ̀ ọ̀n lẹ̀wọ̀, irú itú wo ni yóò pa, Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ dá a lóhùn pé oríṣíṣí nńkan ni òun lè dà. Ó ní òun lè di ọ̀gán, òun lè di ẹ̀ṣínṣín bákan náà ni òun lè di 'ìrò...'.

One day, Àràkà was sitting outside with her husband, they were chatting. Where they had been talking, Àràkà had already asked her husband what sort of miracles of skill he would perform when he went hunting, when there seemed to be no escape from a situation; Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ answered her that he could transform into various kinds of things. He said he could become a termitarium, he could become a fly, and just like that he also said he could become an 'ìrò...'.

Kí ó tó sọ ọ̀rọ̀ yí jálẹ̀, ìyá rẹ̀ dá a lẹ̀kun, ó ní kò yẹ́ kí ènìyàn fí gbogbo àṣírí hàn fún obìnrin. Bí Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ ti gbọ̀ ìmọ̀ràn ìyá rẹ̀ yí, kò parí ọ̀rọ̀ tí ó fẹ́ pè mọ̀, orí 'ìrò...' ni ó ti dá ẹ̀nu dúró, bẹ̀ ni 'ìròmi' ni ó fẹ́ pè. Ibi ni ọ̀rọ̀ dé dúró tí egbé fí re Egbé, tí egbé fí re Egbé.

Before he finished saying this word, his mother forbade him to do so; she said it was not proper that a person reveal all secrets to a woman. When Olúkòsì Èpẹ́ had heard this advice of his mother, he did not finish the word he had wanted to say any more; at 'ìrò...', he stopped [his] mouth, while he had wanted to say 'ìròmi' 'tiny water-insect'. Here, the word came to a halt and everybody forgot about it.

Àràkà àti iyálé rẹ jọ gbé pọ́ fún ìgbà pípẹ́ láísí ìjà láísí ita, ẹ̀gbón ní ọjọ́ kan, aáwọ́ kan bé sílẹ̀ láàrin wọn, kò sí ọkọ́ wọn ní ilé, àwọn ará ilé pe ọrọ́ yí ní òwè ó ní aró nínú. Ọrọ́ yí di ọ̀su-ata-yán-an-yán-an. Wọn bèrẹ́ sí í dímú wọn sì ní bú ara wọn.

Àràkà and her senior wife lived together in co-operation for a long time without fighting, without hostility and strife, but one day, a quarrel broke out between them; their husband was not at home; the members of the household used an idiomatic expression/image for this matter, [they said] it had indigo-dye in it. This matter became like yam and pepper all messed up. They began to wrestle and they abused each other.

Pẹ́rẹ́ tí iyálé Àràkà yóò ta ẹnu, ọrọ́ tí ó jáde ní pé kí Àràkà máa je, kí ó máa mu, àwọ́ rẹ wà nínú àkà lókè àjà. Háà! àṣírí nílá ní iyálé tú síta yí! Àràkà gbàgbọ́ pé ọkọ́ òun ní ó sọ ọrọ́ yí fún iyálé òun. Àràkà kò ẹ́ méní, kò ẹ́ méjì, ó pa ìjà tì, ó gbé àkà sọkalẹ̀ látí àjà, ó bèrẹ́ sí í rọ́ omi lé e lórí, kí awo ẹfọ́n tí wọn fí ẹ́ agò lè rọ́, kí ó lè ẹ́ wọ́. Ní òwúrọ́ kùtù kùtù ọjọ́ kejì, Àràkà da agò borí, ó di ẹfọ́n, ó sì pa iyálé rẹ́ tí ó bú u àti gbogbo ọmọ́ rẹ́.

The moment Àràkà's senior wife would open her mouth, the word that came out was that Àràkà be eating, that she be drinking, her skin/true nature was in the granary up in the loft. Ha! The senior wife had leaked a great secret here! Àràkà believed that it was her husband who had told her senior wife about this matter. Àràkà did not waste any time, she forgot about the fight, she brought the granary down from the loft, she began to splash water on it in order to soften the buffalo skin they had used to make the costume, so that she could put it on. Very early the next morning, Àràkà put the costume over her head, she became a buffalo, and she killed the senior wife, who had abused her, and all her [the senior wife's] children.

Lẹ́yìn tí ó ẹ́ èyí tán, ó gbàrí mọ́ ọ̀nà oko ọdẹ́ tí ọkọ́ rẹ́ lẹ́. Orí ẹ̀gùn ìjọ́sí ní ọkọ́ wà tí ó fí rí ẹfọ́n tí ní fí ìwọ́ jà bọ́. Ará fu ọkọ́, ó tì mọ́ ní ọkàn rẹ́ pé iyàwó òun ní ó di ẹfọ́n tí ní bọ́ wá pa òun, sí oko ọdẹ́.

When she had finished, she set out on the way her husband had taken to the place where he was hunting. Her husband was on top of the same hunting-platform as previously when he saw a buffalo approaching that was using its horns to attack. The hunter was suspicious, in his heart he already knew that it was his wife, she had become a buffalo that was now coming to where he was hunting to kill him.

Bí ẹfọn yí tí dé ìdí igi ọbọbọ tí ọdẹ yí gùn, ó bẹrẹ sí í kan igi ní ìgbò, bí ó tí n kan ìgbò, ní ó n fọn ikun gbígbóná jó ara igi yí, tí ó sì n fí ẹnu bó èpeo igi.

When the buffalo (woman) had reached the bottom of the ọbọbọ tree which this hunter had climbed, she began to butt the tree; as she was butting the tree, she spattered it with snot, and she also used her mouth to peel off the tree's bark.

Nígbà tí ìgbò kíkàn yí pọ, ọdẹ bẹ sílẹ láti orí igi, ó kí aré mọlẹ.

When this butting became very much, the hunter jumped down from the top of the tree; he took to his heels.

Bí ọdẹ tí hẹ, ẹfọn gbá tí í, ó n lé e lọ rẹrẹ. Bí ó tí kù dẹdẹ kí ó bá ọkọ rẹ, kí ó sì fí ìwo kàn án pa, ọkọ di 'ìròmi', ó bà lé ojú omi.

When the hunter had fled, the buffalo (woman) ran after him, she was chasing after him. When she had almost caught up with her husband in order to use her horns to knock him dead, the husband became an 'ìròmi'; he settled on the water surface.

Ẹfọn bẹrẹ sí í wá a kiri létí odò, láì mọ pé ọkọ òun tí òún n wá ní ó di ìròmi.

The buffalo (woman) began to look around for him at the riverbank, not knowing that her husband, whom she was looking for, had become an *ìròmi*.

Ìgbà tí ó wá ọkọ tí, tí kò rí i mọ, ó tún kí aré mọlẹ, ó sáré lọ sí ilé ọkọ rẹ. Bí àwọn ọmọ Àràkà tí tún rí ẹfọn tí iyá wọn dà, tí n sáré bọ, jinnijinni dà bọ wọn, wọn sì fẹ máa sá lọ. Ẹfọn yí bọ agò sílẹ, ó di ènìyàn padà. Ó pe àwọn ọmọ rẹ wọlé, ó sọ ìdí abájọ fún wọn.

When she had been looking for the husband for a long time, not seeing him any more, she again took to her heels; she ran to her husband's house. When Àràkà's children saw the buffalo into which their mother had transformed fast approaching again, they began to shiver with fear and they wanted to be running away. This buffalo (woman) took off her costume, she turned back into a human being. She called her children into the house, she told them the reason.

Léyìn èyí, ó ẹ àdúrà fún wọn. Ó yọ ìwo ẹfọn méjèjè tí ó wá lórí agò rẹ, ó pa á ní àşẹ pé kí wọn máa bọ [síc] ìwo ẹfọn méjì yí bí òrìşà ní ìrán tí òun.

Afterwards, she prayed for them. She pulled off both buffalo horns that were on top of her costume, she imbued it with *àşẹ* 'the power to make things happen' so that they would worship these two buffalo horns like an *òrìşà* in remembrance of her.

Ó tún sọ fún wọn pé láti ojọ idágbére yíi 'Qya' ni She also told them that as of this day of leave-
 kí wọn ó máa pe Òrìṣà [yí] yí. Ojọ yí ni Àràkà taking they should call this *òrìṣà* 'Qya'. On this
 gba orúkọ tuntun tí a mọ sí 'Qya' yí. Àwọn ọmọ day, Àràkà assumed this new name 'Qya' which
 mèsàn-án tí Àràkà bí fún ọdẹ ni ó tún di orúkọ we now know. The nine children whom Àràkà
 àdàpè Qya, tí ní jẹ 'Ìyásan' [yí]. bore the hunter also became Qya's cognomen,
 which is 'Mother of Nine'.

Léyìn tí Àràkà ti pòórà mọ àwọn ọmọ rẹ lójú, When Àràkà had vanished from the
 bàbá wọn wọlé, àwọn ọmọ sì ròyìn gbogbo ohun eyes/presence of her children, their father
 tí ojú wọn rí. entered the house, and the children broke the
 news of everything they had seen to him.

(Adéoyè 1989: 303-307)

(my translation)

Adéoyè concludes by interweaving details of the worship of Qya with the narrative as the buffalo woman's children advise their father, the hunter, of her instructions regarding future offerings, taboos, etc; and as they sing a particular song dancing around in the house when Qya has accepted the hunter's offering intended to appease her. Furthermore, Adéoyè points to the meaningful relationship between details of the narrative and some of the following religious instructions; for instance, one of the taboos to be observed by Qya's children is ram meat as this is what caused the quarrel between the buffalo woman and the hunter's senior wife. While the first part of Adéoyè's subchapter on Qya is essentially presented in form of a narrative, the second part provides a more systematic overview of Qya's symbols, shrine, priests, taboos, items to be used for offerings, how the worship of Qya is organised, festivals to be held for Qya, a song about Qya, and, finally, an example of Qya's *oríkè*.

4.3. The figure of the buffalo woman in "The Importance of Being Prudent"

As I have suggested earlier, "The Importance of Being Prudent" was published in two different contexts, each of which reflects a distinct literary agenda. On the one hand, the narrative forms a part in Adénúbi's project of popularising stories adapted from Ifá divination literature. On

the other hand, however, it also assumes a role in the project of 'breaking the silence', as suggested by its publication in the anthology of the same title. I would argue that on different levels, both projects are pertinent to an understanding of "The Importance of Being Prudent". While Adénúbi's general project in *Tales From Times Before* is to popularise Ifá narratives, her transformation of the figure of the buffalo woman plays a pivotal role in this regard. By giving the buffalo woman a first-person narrative voice at crucial points in the plot, she revitalises the traditional narrative as known in the context of Ifá divination literature, making it more accessible to a contemporary urban and possibly multi-ethnic readership. Through her approach, and specifically through her narrative strategy, she supplements the tale with new layers of meaning, which are informed by her own experience of living in contemporary Nigerian society. This subchapter begins by examining the relationship between Adénúbi's attempt to popularise the buffalo woman's tale and the narrative strategy she deploys in "The Importance of Being Prudent". Secondly, it investigates the way in which Adénúbi, perhaps inadvertently, overlays the plot of the buffalo woman's tale according to Ifá with new meanings, which raises several important questions.

4.3.1. To 'popularise' Ifá divination literature: breaking the buffalo woman's silence

Adénúbi deploys several strategies to make her narrative more accessible to a contemporary urban and possibly multi-ethnic readership while sustaining its 'traditional' flair. Her diction is contemporary and lively and does not require much culturally specific insider knowledge apart from what most Nigerians and especially Lagosians would be familiar with independently of their ethnic identity.¹⁵³ In her choice of vocabulary Adénúbi does, on the one hand, not appear to be too concerned about authenticity as long as a word has illustrative value. It does not matter, for instance, that a dane gun would seem a rather modern weapon for a hunter from

¹⁵³ In this regard, it is instructive to compare the texts of the two versions of "The Importance of Being Prudent". The earlier one is culturally slightly more specific, presuming more background knowledge of Yorùbá customs than the one published in *Tales From Times Before*, which is both culturally and stylistically slightly more simple.

Ifẹ̀ Oòyẹ̀, that mythic location,¹⁵⁴ or that the buffalo woman 'wriggles' into her animal skin rather like one would wriggle into a tight dress or pair of trousers, but not into any kind of traditional clothing. On the other hand, she borrows some well-known formulae to create an air of authenticity. Her hunter character Olúkòsì's nickname is "AKARA OGUN" (IBP 70), which, of course, echoes the name of Fágúnwà's hunter hero Àkàrà-oògùn. Similarly, Olúkòsì's mother, like Àkàrà-oògùn's mother in Sọyínká's English translation of *Ògbójú Ọḍẹ*, is referred to as a "consummate witch" (IBP 65). By evoking the tradition of hunters' narratives, these allusions – as cultural or literary signifiers which are resonant beyond the boundaries of Yorùbá culture – have an authenticating effect on the narrative, create atmosphere, and place it within a literary context without making it inaccessible. Perhaps most importantly, however, Adénúbi provides her narrative with a strong female identification figure. This alone represents a remarkable innovation within the tradition of transformations of the buffalo/antelope woman's tale.

"The Importance of Being Prudent" opens rather conventionally, which serves to anchor it firmly in the tradition of Ifá divination literature or, even more generally, the Yorùbá oral tradition at large. Adénúbi wants to popularise individual narratives from Ifá divination literature, not to dissociate them from Ifá. "The Importance of Being Prudent" is framed by verses evoking the scenario of Ifá divination literature, but also of story-telling more generally. A characteristic traditional framing device, such verses usually prepare the audience for a cautionary or instructive tale to follow, previewing the plot and its moral conclusion. Adénúbi substitutes the 'voice' of the oracle by that of what seems to be a town-crier, which is in line with her intention to popularise the tale; to make it, in other words, accessible to a contemporary readership that is addressed as "visitors" to Ifẹ̀ Oòyẹ̀:

¹⁵⁴ Mr Sọlá Ajíbádé of Qbáfẹmi Awólówọ University in Ilẹ̀-Ifẹ̀ explained that Ifẹ̀ Oòyẹ̀ refers to a mythic location, the place on earth where human life began. Ifẹ̀ is, of course, regarded as the cradle of Yorùbá culture. *Oòyẹ̀*, in turn, derives from *yẹ̀* 'to survive, remain alive'. *Ìyẹ̀* means 'life', *ààyẹ̀* is 'the fact of being alive' (Abraham 1958). This is the semantic field within which *oòyẹ̀* becomes meaningful as well.

Kere o! Kere o!
 Residents and visitors in Ife Ooye,
 Heed the advice of Olukosi's mother,
 Who told her son [the hunter] to keep some of his secrets to himself.
 He heeded her advice which saved his life.
 Restrain your tongues, residents and visitors in Ife Ooye;
 Be prudent!
 Kere o! Kere o! (*IBP* 65; 74)

Initially, "The Importance of Being Prudent" thus focalises not the figure of the buffalo woman, but rather that of the hunter, which is in accordance with the Ifá verses quoted in Adéoyè's text. More generally, the narrative point of view of Adénúbi's short narrative shifts back and forth between Olúkòsì and Àràká. The period Àràká and Olúkòsì spend together is rendered from an omniscient narrative perspective, including direct dialogue between Àràká and Olúkòsì, Olúkòsì and his mother, and Àràká and the senior wife. When Àràká leaves her husband's house, the narrative turns back to third-person narration until Àràká meets her children and addresses a monologue to them. Almost immediately afterwards, when Àràká has disappeared and Olúkòsì come home, the latter addresses a monologue to his wife. The narrative ends with an omniscient narrator formulating the moral conclusion and, finally, with the town-crier's words, which now function as a review of the narrative's plot and moral conclusion.

In the manner of a typical hunter's tale, Olúkòsì is introduced as "a formidable hunter from Ife Ooye, who always took care to fortify himself with potent medicines", who has "dozens of gourdlets filled with powerful powders and herbs, scores of magical amulets with which he cast[s] spells to protect himself from every kind of danger" (*IBP* 65). His characterisation confirms the stereotypical image of a competent and bold hunter: "Olukosi was never known to miss a shot. He regularly brought down elephants and lions" (*IBP* 65-66). Routinely consulting Ifá a week before a planned hunt, Olúkòsì is warned that his hunt will be successful but that he will meet a "supernatural stranger" (*IBP* 65). He is told to bring a sacrifice for

"good luck", which he does, and is ready to go: "Seven days later he took his hunting bag, his lamp and his dane gun and set off for the forest" (*IBP* 65). This is the conventional opening of a male adventure story.

In the same vein, the reader first perceives the buffalo woman through Olúkòsì's eyes. As he sitting on a hunting-platform on top of a tree, waiting for big game to shoot, he notices a strange and fearless woman moving about in the forest:

As he sat there astounded, the woman moved closer. Indeed, she stopped at the foot of the *obobo* tree on which Olukosi was perched. Without looking around or above her, she removed her head-tie, folded it neatly and placed it on the ground in front of her. Then, she uncovered a hole by the *obobo* tree and produced a buffalo skin with horns. She picked up her folded headtie and laid it inside the hole and covered it. She then put the buffalo skin over her head, wriggled into it and then turned and walked away on all fours. Olukosi was stunned at the sight of a strange, fearless woman walking away disguised as a buffalo! In his astonishment, he almost toppled from his perch, but he kept his eye on that buffalo. At length, he saw her stop and take off the buffalo skin. She folded it neatly, and hid it inside a clump of bushes nearby. Then she walked through some trees and was soon out of sight! (*IBP* 66)¹⁵⁵

In due course, Olúkòsì the hunter seizes the skin and returns home, pondering "over the events of the day" (*IBP* 67). Initially, his thoughts are rendered through third-person narration. Then, however, the text switches, without transition, to interior monologue. This is the only time in the narrative that the hunter's thoughts are revealed to the reader in such a direct way, and what he articulates in his mind is a stereotypical, male perspective on marriage, which reverberates with male discourse on the issue of wives.¹⁵⁶ His approach to making sense of the

¹⁵⁵ It is interesting to note how the hunter conceives of the buffalo woman when he first discovers her. His surprise is threefold. First of all, he is surprised to see "not an animal at all" but "another human being!" (*IBP* 66). While his surprise is enhanced by the fact that the person he sees is a "female human being" (*IBP* 66), it culminates when he observes that the strange woman is female but fearless. The woman's fearlessness in the middle of a deep forest – the realm of formidable hunters – makes her suspicious in Olúkòsì's eyes, as he wonders "What nature of woman can be walking fearlessly in the deep forest like this?" (*IBP* 66).

¹⁵⁶ In the ending of the narrative he addresses the buffalo woman in another stretch of first-person discourse, which will be discussed below.

encounter not only reflects a paradigm in which women are, above all, regarded as potential wives, but also summarises male expectations of a good wife:

Was that the stranger Ifa spoke of? She is supernatural all right. She is a spirit, a sorcerer! But, what is the significance of my meeting her? I already have a wife, who is now preparing my meal. She has borne me many children and she is not troublesome. Besides, I [w]as not planning to take another wife just yet. (*IBP* 67)

The hunter's interior monologue serves as a foil to the buffalo woman's discourse on marital relationships, which occupies significantly more space in the narrative. Nevertheless, with retrospect, this allows – to appropriate Wendy Griswold's (2000: 170) words – "a consideration of how authors of both sexes depict gender, sex roles, and relationships between men and women".

The narrative point of view of "The Importance of Being Prudent" first shifts to the figure of the buffalo woman after the hunter has taken away her skin and fled home:

On returning to where she had kept her buffalo skin, Araka, for that was the mysterious woman's name, put her hand into the clump of bushes to recover it. It was not there! Alarmed, she searched frantically, then more systematically, neither method produced the skin. She was frantic and cried bitterly, Her [*sic*] friends had all gone and she was now all alone in the deep forest. (*IBP* 67)

This is very unlike Adéoyè's account, which is emotionally much more economical and detached. Here, in contrast, the buffalo woman's emotions range from alarm to absolute desperation. She is "[p]erturbed in mind and spirit" (*IBP* 68). It is with regard to the buffalo woman in particular that Adénúbi becomes emotionally very specific, which represents an extremely effective device to popularise the buffalo woman's tale. This specificity becomes even more elaborate and emphasised as the buffalo woman's emotions are made accessible through her own words. Through her monologues, but also through third person indirect discourse the reader gets involved in her story, as she reflects her motives, desires, hopes, and frustrations and experiences human emotions such as resentment and desperation, loneliness

and boredom, disappointment, shame and anger, and, very importantly, love for and happiness through children. The buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse thus represents, on one level, a device to make her psychologically convincing and to invite the reader's empathy and identification with her. In this way, she transcends a merely allegorical or symbolic function in the text and becomes a woman of flesh and blood, who would have a lot in common with many of her readers; especially, perhaps, in terms of moments of frustration and disappointment in her relationships with men (and, perhaps, their other wives or lovers) as well as a profound love for her children. The buffalo woman is humanised and transformed into a woman of our times; she becomes, in a way, Everywoman.

While Ifá divination literature has a deeply philosophical outlook, it is also very much a religious text. The religious dimension of the buffalo woman's tale becomes very obvious in Adéoyè's text, where the figure of the buffalo woman is clearly related to and relevant for religious agency. As Adénúbi uses the same figure to popularise Ifá divination literature, she humanises and thereby secularises her. Only at the very end does Àràkà become an *òrìṣà* again. Her biographical details may strike one as rather extraordinary – she is "one of Olodumare's earliest created beings" (*IBP* 72), she was married to two other *òrìṣà*, Ògún and Şàngó, she has spirit friends in heaven, who have provided her with a buffalo skin as a disguise so that she can meet them in the forest, and in the end, when she feels she cannot stay on earth any longer, she simply disappears before her children's eyes. This does not, however, affect her accessibility to the modern reader. Even though she retains a certain mythic flair, she becomes a woman as you and I, an identification figure. Indeed, her timelessness as a mythic character matches the apparent timelessness of the experiences and issues she raises. Ifè Oòyè is everywhere.

More specifically, the buffalo woman assumes a first-person narrative voice at two critical moments in the plot. The first time, she has just realised that her buffalo skin was stolen and is

on her way to the hunter's place. Through interior monologue, she reflects on two previous marital relationships with Ògún, "the Orisa of war and all iron implements", and Şàngó, "the Orisa of thunder and lightning", respectively:

If it had not been for Ogun I would not have left heaven at all ... When he decided to come down to earth, I begged him to let us remain in heaven where everything was sublime and where I had all my friends. But he said that he had given his word to Olodumare that he would come down to earth with Orunmila, Obatala and Sango. What was a wife to do? So I followed him down there. How has that profited me? Hhen? After we set up house on earth he was seldom home. When he was not fighting in one battle or another coming home blood-soaked, he was cutting a path to yet another farm with his implements. When I complained of loneliness to him, letting him know that I missed my spirit friends, he reprimanded me and forbade me to even think of them. I could not very well tell him that they were already visiting me here on earth. ... Why, if it had not been for them, I would have since died of boredom. In the end, it was because Ogun caught me sneaking out from time to time that we quarrelled. He accused me of seeing another man and, in his fury, he beat me mercilessly. If Sango had not called on us at the time and come to my rescue, I wonder what would have happened to me.

I went home with Sango, to escape the wrath of Ogun, and stayed with him for some time to recover. Then, he asked me to be his wife, and I agreed. At least he was kind. His kindness was not enough as I still felt the need to meet with my spirit friends. Eventually, he too found out about my leaving the house from time to time, and when he confronted me with his discovery, I decided not to quarrel over it. I simply packed my belongings and left him to set up house on my own. I decided that I could live without these men. My friends were more important to me. It was just as well that I had borne neither of them children, because then I would have been forced to remain with them. (*IBP* 67-68)

The buffalo woman's second monologue is situated in the plot at the end of her third marriage, which lasted twenty years and during which she gave birth to nine sons. Believing that Olúkòsì has leaked her secret, she has just unsuccessfully attempted to kill him and is trying to reassure her sons of her love for them:

Sit around me while I tell you my story. I am Araka, one of Olodumare's earliest created beings. My first husband was Ogun, the Orisa of war and all iron implements. My second husband was Sango, the Orisa of thunder and lightning, but I was not

happy as the wife of either of them. I was, however, able to persuade my spirit friends from the spirit world to come down here to play with me and relieve my boring earth[ly] existence. My relationship with them gave me the greatest pleasure. Then I met your father. Really, I pursued him here because he seized my buffalo skin. This had been given to me by my spirit friends for protection when I walked through the forest to meet with them. Because he had seized and kept my buffalo skin well hidden, I was forced to remain with him. When you boys arrived, one after the other, I began to experience happiness as human. You gave me such fulfillment that I was even able to do without the company of my spirit friends. You made life here on earth worthwhile and gave me a purpose for staying on with Olukosi, your father. I would have lived the rest of my life like that but for recent events. Now that everybody knows that I am not really human, I must leave you; but don't worry, I will never be far from you. (IBP 72-73)

Both times, the buffalo woman gives an account of the story of her life on earth, which, in each case, represents a kind of tale-within-a-tale. While Adéoyè narrates the sequence of events chronologically from an omniscient point of view, Adénúbi chooses to represent the buffalo woman's marital relationships not only through flashbacks, but also from the buffalo woman's own point of view. In a nutshell, the buffalo woman's two tales-within-a-tale comment on the two most important social roles of a woman in Yorùbá culture, i.e. wife and mother. While these roles are not postulated as an ideal, as in *Fágúnwà*, they are seen as the two basic coordinates of an adult woman's life.¹⁵⁷ Traditional tales may become inaccessible to a modern readership not only because they are represented in a kind of idiom which has become unfashionable or which is, by many people today, associated with childhood, but also because their subject matter may appear remote and of little consequence for a contemporary adult reader. Adénúbi, in turn, invests the buffalo woman in her narrative with a modern mind. Even though the buffalo woman's life is set in mythic time, her views and experiences are

¹⁵⁷ Compare Adeghe (1995: 119), who comments on traditional African "cultural expectations for women to be primarily mothers and wives. Women depended, and to a large extent still depend on men for status and respectability, their fate being defined and determined by their relationship with men. Traditional expectations are such that African women are supposed to achieve lasting contentment only when they marry and their needs and aspirations are gladly subsumed to those of their husbands".

rendered in a way that makes them representative of how many Yorùbá women feel in the present. Her tale becomes, in this sense, every woman's tale. The buffalo-woman's first-person narrative discourse thus plays a vital role in Adénúbi's scheme to popularise the account given in Ifá divination literature. By making the buffalo woman's experience emotionally and intellectually understandable and relevant, through the buffalo woman's own words, Adénúbi gives the narrative a dimension that makes it interesting and accessible to a contemporary Nigerian readership.

The gender-related themes surfacing in the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse are manifold. Many of them are characteristic of what Griswold (2000: 168), in a recent sociological study of Nigerian novels, calls "the women-and-men novel". Such novels, which may be written by either men or women, "usually have a woman protagonist" (*ibid.*: 168) and "are firmly centered on issues involving gender" (*ibid.*: 170).¹⁵⁸ In her first marriage, the buffalo woman aims to fulfil gender expectations.¹⁵⁹ Her attitude is characteristic of many contemporary Nigerian women at the beginning of their married life. She embodies the idea of a dutiful and accommodating wife who puts commitment to her husband and her marriage first and who, somewhat reluctantly yet resigned to her fate, adjusts to the demands of her husband's career. With hindsight, however, the buffalo woman realises that by giving up herself she has ultimately lost out. Her self-denial has not paid off; her husband has not proven worthy of it. Another theme is the issue of female agency. Adénúbi's buffalo woman is a woman who stays at home while her husband pursues his breadwinning activities outside the home.¹⁶⁰ Eventually, she becomes unsatisfied and bored with her life. A third theme is that of a

¹⁵⁸ Perhaps untypically, society as a factor in gender relationships is conspicuously absent in "The Importance of Being Prudent". The characters are very isolated from the rest of the world. Only Olúkòsì's mother is mentioned in the text.

¹⁵⁹ As Griswold (2000: 173) suggests, this is characteristic of the introductory stage of women-and-men novels: "At the start ... the women and men understand and intend to follow the social rules of gender as they have interpreted them in their particular relationship".

¹⁶⁰ The buffalo woman's situation is uncharacteristic of Yorùbá women in general in the sense that she does not seem to be engaged in any industry or trade, as most Yorùbá women would. In turn, it is similar to the situation Adénúbi's father's wives found themselves in.

husband who watches jealously over his wife, who seeks to monopolise her attention and immediately suspects there to be a male rival when he realises that his wife has a life outside the home. A woman's susceptibility to wife battering represents yet another theme in this context. Another one is that of a woman who has become exasperated with men and their demands and expectations in general and who consequently decides to live on her own, independently and self-sufficiently. Finally, the issue of breaking up a marriage is thematised, especially with regard to the question of children. Most Nigerian readers, including female readers, would have a hard time approving of the buffalo woman's decision to set up house on her own if there were children; and Adénúbi seems to be concerned not to impede the reader's identification with the buffalo woman in this regard.¹⁶¹ The absence of children could, in turn, be seen as a legitimate reason to leave a husband (M. Drewal 1992). Perhaps most importantly, the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse thematises love for children and children as a key to human and especially a woman's fulfilment in life. The buffalo woman's love for her children is particularly significant in this context, because it is something Adénúbi's readers will identify with very strongly in a positive way. Furthermore, it makes her prolonged stay with the hunter – without any prospect of retrieving her buffalo skin and thus being unable to meet her spirit friends as before – psychologically convincing.

Through the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse, the reader is afforded a kind of autobiographical insight into her life. Through the buffalo woman's monologues, Adénúbi adds a new dimension that is not religious or mythic but personal and profane to the Ifá divination narrative she seeks to popularise. Furthermore, she transforms the tale into a narrative characteristic of the contemporary Nigerian women-and-men novel, focusing on issues evolving around gender. While she presents both a male and a female perspective on gender relationships, she privileges the latter one. While Adénúbi's narrative begins in the

¹⁶¹ Today, it is often for the children's sake that women decide to stay with their husbands, if no longer because the children 'belong' to the husband then in order to keep up appearances and spare them the experience of a divorce. What keeps many unhappily married women from divorcing their husbands is loyalty to their children.

fashion of a male adventure story, focalising the figure of the hunter, and while the plot of "The Importance of Being Prudent" follows the traditional plot very closely, the narrative's emphasis shifts to the figure of the buffalo woman, who becomes the main focus of interest and towards whom the reader's empathy is directed. The buffalo woman's tales-within-a-tale come to displace the plot focalising the hunter's story. "The Importance of Being Prudent" would still be a coherent narrative if one ignored the buffalo woman's monologues. Or indeed, in some ways the narrative would be more coherent without them. The narrative strategy Adénúbi deploys – her idea to give the buffalo woman a first-person voice – introduces a disruptive, subversive element: the buffalo woman's tales-within-a-tale break up the narrative at large, like a sub-text has been there all along and that suddenly surfaces.

4.3.2. Adénúbi's new buffalo woman – confined in the old plot, or breaking out of it?

The fracture in "The Importance of Being Prudent" seems to result from a conflict between Adénúbi's efforts to popularise a particular tale from Ifá divination literature and the implications and ramifications of the strategy she deploys to this effect. While she wants to popularise the traditional tale, and does so quite successfully, she does not actually want to go so far as to alter the plot or even its moral conclusion; in other words, she does not want to rewrite the tale altogether. With slight modifications, she sticks to the old plot (following, consciously or not, Adéoyè's chronologically synthesised, linear version of the tale and its moral conclusion). In some respects, Adénúbi's characters and especially the buffalo woman herself appear caught up in the narrative's structural and conceptual framework. There is a limitation to transforming female agency within the confines of an old plot and moral conclusion, which frustrates expectations raised by Adénúbi's narrative strategy. In a number of ways, "The Importance of Being Prudent" seems to underscore and reiterate gender stereotypes rather than challenge them. The buffalo woman's first-person discourse does, however, develop a certain dynamic of its own. Once her tales-within-a-tale have opened such

a wide window onto her self, the reader's perspective on the narrative as a whole is irrevocably changed. Once the buffalo woman has spoken, it is impossible to call back the echo of her voice. While Adénúbi herself may not actually intend to alter the plot or challenge its moral conclusion, the effect of the narrative strategy she deploys has a subversive potential that goes beyond mere popularisation. As Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1997: 13) has put it, "critical reading can actually construct new meanings from a text by distancing itself from its assumed coherence and discovering the process of its production; it can create meanings from the contradictions which, perhaps unknown to the author, the text continually reveals".

In Adéoyè's text, for instance, the buffalo woman's decision to follow Ògún is based on her love for her husband. Adénúbi's narrative strategy, in turn, undermines this rather romantic (male?) interpretation¹⁶² with the buffalo woman's rhetorical question, "What was a wife to do?" (*IBP* 67). Furthermore, Adénúbi takes great care to elaborate on the point in the narrative when the buffalo woman tries to elicit supposedly secret information about her husband Olúkòsì's power in general and, more specifically, about his powers of transformation. She flatters him, admiring his "dare-devilry in the forest" and his success and reputation as a formidable hunter, to which he eagerly and quite innocently responds. She calls him "spouse of my heart" and "dear heart" (*IBP* 70), thus deliberately lulling him into sharing information with her which she might, at some point, use against him (to destroy him?), until her mother-in-law, the consummate witch, stops her.¹⁶³ Her flattery appears false, her motives are insincere; and it is hard to accept that this is the same woman whom the reader thought s/he knew better through her first-person narrative discourse, and who has been happily married for twenty years, having given birth to nine sons. Why this ruse, suddenly? More importantly, however,

¹⁶² It is interesting that in contemporary Nigerian society, it is predominantly men who read popular fiction featuring romantic gender relationships (Bryce 1997; Griswold 2000). Many young Yorùbá men express great disillusionment with female pragmatism regarding love relationships. Compare the film *Ẹ̀àngó*, which also portrays Qya as the love of Ẹ̀àngó's life, i.e. as the heroine of one of the greatest divine love stories.

¹⁶³ The motif of female cunning with regard to their husbands is familiar from many other mythic/religious texts all over the world.

the hunter is made to seem naive, needing to be cautioned by his mother that "it is not everything about oneself that one tells another". While this cautioning is actually not gender-specific, its relevance at this particular moment would seem to underscore the legitimacy of traditional anxieties regarding female cunning, and other stereotypes regarding female agency. The warning delivered by Àkàrà-oògùn at the beginning of *Ògbójú Qdẹ* immediately comes to mind. Here, the buffalo woman acts in perfect accordance with those anxieties. The moral conclusion of "The Importance of Being Prudent" becomes meaningful in relation to the buffalo woman's cunning. There is an unresolvable contradiction between the manner in which Adénúbi sustains the traditional plot by exploiting the buffalo woman's ruse for narrative purposes, and the manner in which the buffalo woman has earlier been transformed into an identification figure through her own first-person discourse.

Furthermore, the plot eventually justifies the hunter's mother's cautioning. If the buffalo woman had known precisely what the hunter had transformed himself into in the attempt to escape her wrath, she would have killed him. As it turns out, the hunter is not even guilty of having leaked the buffalo woman's secret and accordingly does not deserve to be killed. His mother's prudence therefore appears to have saved everybody from the buffalo woman's rash and passionate action. This turn of the narrative seems to problematise the potentially destructive and violent power of female agency in particular; and more specifically, once again, that of wives, as the hunter's mother acts as the agent of prudence. Unlike in Adéoyè's text, where the buffalo woman retains a kind of divine licence and her anger is taken very seriously by the hunter who diligently makes the offerings required for her appeasement, the problem in Adénúbi's narrative partly arises largely because the buffalo woman has become so human. For a human being her lethal passion may seem disproportionately violent and dangerous; especially since not much later, when she has returned to heaven and overhears her husband telling his sons how he was able to escape the buffalo woman's wrath, she – apparently having calmed down and become her usual gentle self again – seems greatly amused about what has

happened. Since the buffalo woman represents an identification figure, the reader seems to be expected to identify with her stereotypically destructive and therefore dangerous potential as well. Are women in particular supposed to recognise their own potential for rash action in the buffalo woman, and therefore agree that they have to be protected from the power of their own destructive energy? Again, the buffalo woman's own narrative discourse serves to undermine such meanings suggested by the narrative at large.

One might, perhaps, argue that the narrative's title, "The Importance of Being Prudent", does not simply underscore the moral conclusion but is, in fact, quite ambivalent, or even has ironic overtones.¹⁶⁴ The buffalo woman's own prudence, for instance – on which she elaborates in her monologues – does not seem to help her at all. While she was prudent enough to conform with social norms as a young woman, she has since realised that it did not get her anywhere. She is prudent enough to hide her buffalo costume, yet it is stolen. The relationship between a person's prudence and what happens to this person seems rather arbitrary. Furthermore, while the narrative's moral conclusion cautions the reader to keep silent, Adénúbi's narrative strategy of providing the buffalo woman with a voice of her own would seem to counteract this moral conclusion. On the one hand, a moral conclusion which reiterates stereotypes regarding female character does not seem to fit a narrative which thematises gender relationships and marital experience from a predominantly female point of view. On the other hand, Adénúbi's agenda requires that the traditional plot must go on, so her alternatives are, perhaps, limited. By their mere presence in the text, however, the buffalo woman's tales-within-a-tale challenge or even subvert the traditional moral conclusion, indicating that the whole issue of gender relationships and marital experience is more complex than the plot alone would suggest.

¹⁶⁴ The title of Adénúbi's tale suggestively echoes Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* with its marriage games and hidden identities.

Another problem that arises from Adénúbi's narrative is the paradox of the buffalo woman's feeling of disgrace at being exposed by the senior wife. The disclosure of the buffalo woman's secret through the senior wife is a requirement of the traditional plot. But before, the skin is represented as a protective device rather than something to be ashamed of. Why would the senior wife's suggestion that the buffalo woman is "a wild animal in human form" (*IBP* 71) amount, in the buffalo woman's view, to "public exposure" (*IBP* 71)? Why would the buffalo woman feel humiliated by the senior wife's threat to "go to the loft and bring down" her "true skin for all to see" (*IBP* 71)? In Adéoyè's account, the buffalo woman, without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment, retrieves her costume from the granary in the loft of the hunters house, restores it and, the following morning, proceeds to kill her adversary and the latter's offspring, before leaving for the forest to take revenge on her husband as well. Adénúbi, in turn, elaborates on the buffalo woman's emotions. Initially, the buffalo woman – "[t]earfully" (*IBP* 71) – feels intense shame and humiliation. Only gradually, as she becomes convinced of Olúkòsì's betrayal, her feelings change to anger and wanting "to make Olukosi pay for his breach of trust" (*IBP* 71). The next morning, she puts on her old buffalo skin and sets "off furiously, on all fours", to "do battle with the man who had caused her humiliation" (*IBP* 71). While the buffalo woman's anger is required for the logical development of the plot, her shame seems to be a function of Adénúbi's attempt to make her more convincing as a human character. Also, her violent intention to kill her husband may have seemed to her to be in urgent need of explanation and justification; with hindsight, it attains some excusability as a merely attempted crime of passion. Beyond that, one could also argue that the buffalo woman's sense of disgrace represents the function of an underlying conflict between her and the senior wife. Earlier, the reader has been informed that the "relationship between Olukosi's senior wife and Araka was cordial, particularly because Araka acknowledged the other's high rank and showed her proper respect" (*IBP* 70). This already indicates the potential for tension in their relationship and points to the tangibility of the "perfect harmony" (*IBP* 71) existing between the junior and the senior wife. The underlying tension suddenly escalates into a

serious crisis when the senior wife starts to abuse the buffalo woman and the latter, against all reason and evidence, reacts as if, indeed, the lie of her life has just been exposed. For a moment, the senior wife's view of the buffalo woman as a husband-snatcher in disguise of an animal gives her anger a righteous dimension that disrupts the emotional balance of Olúkòsì's household suggested by the narrative at large.

The ending of "The Importance of Being Prudent" is reconciliatory. As in Adéoyè's text, the buffalo woman removes the horns from her animal skin which she gives to her children for protection in the future, as she – now that her status as a non-human being has been disclosed – cannot stay on earth with them any longer. The two buffalo horns metonymically come to represent the buffalo woman herself. In Adénúbi's narrative, they still represent the buffalo woman's power, but the latter does not, as in Adéoyè's text, become significant on a larger cultural or religious scale. Above all, the buffalo remains the mother of the hunter's children even in heaven; and through the buffalo horns, she remains accessible to them. Adénúbi's narrative significantly shifts the meaning of the buffalo horns as they come to symbolise not so much the divine power of the traditional buffalo-woman-turned-Qya, who is from then on to be worshipped as an *òrìṣà*, but the eternal power of motherly love. In Adéoyè's text, Olúkòsì can only hope to appease Qya by making substantial offerings. In Adénúbi's narrative, he uses the buffalo horns to call the buffalo woman, to explain himself and appeal to her as the mother of his children, pleading for mutual forgiveness (reminding her of the 'crime of passion' she has luckily been prevented from committing):

Oya o! Oya o! My beloved wife! I wondered what had brought about that deadly encounter we had out there in the forest. I could not account for what had caused it. Now that I have learnt how my senior wife had belittled you, I am saddened. Please, believe me when I tell you that I do not know how she found out about the buffalo skin. I never discussed it with her. Why, I did not even discuss it with you throughout the time you were here with me. All the same, I beg you to forgive me and my household for anything we have done to cause you this humiliation. I beg this in the names of our nine sons who are very precious to you. I am sorry that you have to leave us. As you have given us a means of communicating with you, we do not feel

abandoned. My Araka! Mother of nine sons! You know that you could have killed me today had I not had the presence of mind to turn into an *ironi* just in time. Our children would have suddenly lost both their father and their mother on the same day!
(IBP 73-74)

Then, suddenly, Olúkòsì and his sons hear a voice exclaiming '*ìròmi*', and the room is "suddenly filled with laughter" that is "distinctly Araka's" (IBP 74). Olúkòsì quickly briefs his sons as to what happened in the forest, and everyone joins in the buffalo woman's laughter: "They all felt satisfied that Araka was now at peace with them" (IBP 74). Only a few hours after a totally unexpected and most dramatic turn of events, the whole matter has become a family anecdote. The buffalo woman's laughter is taken to indicate her acceptance of her husband's plea for forgiveness. Their joint laughter bespeaks the general relief as all tension and terror have been resolved into renewed love for each other. In contrast to the traditional plot, the buffalo woman relaxes and laughs, which may seem more satisfactory in terms of a happy ending. The guilty senior wife and her children are conspicuously absent from this ending; Adénúbi's narrative does not speak of bloody revenge. This is a significant omission: if the text had referred to the buffalo woman's killing of the senior wife and her children, it would not be so easy for the hunter and his sons to laugh it all off.

The happy ending of Adénúbi's narrative celebrates the possibility of forgiveness and, through forgiveness, the possibility of resolving crises in gender relationships and of 'togetherness' rather than 'separateness'; and it is the husband who makes the first step to resolve the misunderstanding that lies at the root of the problem. While Adénúbi takes considerable delight in portraying the buffalo woman's earlier fury, she also makes her a part of this hearty family reunion. Àràká having taken off to heaven, the narrative thus asserts that she is, after all, a good woman and a loving mother. She has regained her independence without having completely had to abandon her family. It is in this sense that she becomes larger than life, not so much as an *òrìṣà* and founder of a religious cult. Adénúbi's ending caters to the reader's desire for the possibility of resolving crises in marital relationships, or the relationship between

women and men more generally. The solution it proposes is in accordance with African womanism, which, in contrast to the direction some western feminist discourses have taken, does not reject but "embraces men" (Griswold 2000: 170). It would seem problematic, however, that the crisis is only resolved once the buffalo woman has disappeared to heaven; but Griswold (2000: 176) suggests that most "writers of the women-and-men-novels are content to document difficulties between the sexes but then offer distinctly nonpolitical resolutions". While the buffalo woman functions as a figure of identification, her potential significance as a female role model is impaired by her status as an *òrìsà*. The solution Adénúbi's narrative presents is not an option for contemporary readers.

On the one hand, the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse appears, by its very existence, to subvert the traditional plot and the moral conclusion it suggests. On the other hand, it also appears confined in the traditional plot and its moral conclusion. Yet, the problem goes deeper than that. Above, I have commented on the apparent timelessness of the buffalo woman's experiences. But are these experiences really as timeless as they would seem, or do they in fact reflect what is essentially a twentieth-century kind of experience? It would seem not only that Adénúbi, for the first time in the tradition of the buffalo woman's tale, points to its 'other' side but also that she overlays it with meanings arising from the 20th-century socio-cultural framework within which she herself exists and writes. In other words, her interpretation of this 'other' side very much appears to be informed by her own experience of contemporary Nigerian society. In some ways, Adénúbi's buffalo woman, as well as the reader's direct view of her, may appear 'new'. Her bold assertion that she "could live without these men" and that her "friends were more important" (*IBP* 68) to her seems to reverberate with the notion of contemporary women's liberation. If, however, one looks at Adéoyè's version of the buffalo woman's tale one finds that – in accordance with beliefs about the *òrìsà* Qya¹⁶⁵ – the 'old' buffalo woman is, in fact, very self-assertive; and, what is more, that her self-

¹⁶⁵ Compare Chapter 1.2.2.

assertiveness, independent spirit and power seem to be taken for granted by the narrative. The voice of Adénúbi's buffalo woman is fresh and new indeed; but its modernity resides, sadly, in the somewhat more limited, or limiting, roles of women in contemporary Nigerian society, whose understanding of female agency is, in many ways, narrower than that of traditional Yorùbá society. On the one hand, the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse has, as I have argued, a subversive potential. Adénúbi allows the buffalo woman to break out of the confines of a narrative whose plot makes her instrumental in the construction of a negative image of female agency which, in turn, inspires a moral that would seem to compromise her. This represents an important achievement. On the other hand, however, the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse is symptomatic of what has happened to the self-perception of many women in 20th-century Nigeria. From this vantage point, Adénúbi's buffalo woman, in addition to being the heroine in a predetermined plot that does not leave her too many options, appears strangely domesticated and disempowered or even victimised, caught up in her internalisation of certain stereotypes about women as well as in society's notion of gender roles. The new meanings with which Adénúbi overlays the buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse reveal her as a modern woman who is caught up in social roles and stereotypes to a much greater extent than the traditional buffalo woman. Ultimately, the question that arises from Adénúbi's transformation of the buffalo woman's tale is whether and to what degree women in contemporary Nigerian society more generally are able to break out of what have become the familiar plots of their lives.

In both her auto-biographical and fictional works, Adénúbi also deals with what one may call 'traditional', all-too-familiar plots of women's lives and, to varying degrees, explores possibilities for breaking out of their confines. In *FS – The Man and His Times*, she 'officially' sets out to recall her father's life. Very interestingly, she aims to present her father's life through his own letters written to her, which record and document his way of thinking and his view of the world in a first-person voice. Yet, at the same time, Adénúbi also seems to be

searching for the lost voice of her illiterate mother, Şàfú Sàláwù, to whom, significantly, the book is dedicated. According to *FS – The Man and His Times*, before marrying Adénúbi's father, Adénúbi's mother had been the youngest wife of Adénúbi's father's paternal uncle, who died when Şàfú was only 25 years old. The young widow's in-laws suggested that she marry her late husband's nephew, the 23-year-old Fólórúnşó Sàláwù, a medical student. While her paternal uncle as the family head accepted this proposal without consulting either the young woman or her parents, Şàfú and her mother were not happy with that choice of a husband. Fólórúnşó would not only be younger than his wife-to-be but he had also been paying her considerable respect as his uncle's wife before, which seemed to be at odds with his proposed new role as her husband. When Şàfú's father eventually threatened that both Şàfú, the first of his 32 children, and her mother, his first wife, would have to leave his house if Şàfú did not accept the arrangement, she had to yield to the decision. Thus, Şàfú became the first wife of Fólórúnşó Sàláwù. In 1939, one year after Şàfú and Fólórúnşó got married, Şàfú's first child with Fólórúnşó – Adénúbi's elder sister – was born. Three years later, one year after Fólórúnşó qualified as a medical doctor, their second child, Adénúbi herself, followed. In total, Şàfú and Fólórúnşó had five children, the last but one being a boy.

Between 1945 and 1961, Fólórúnşó married three further wives, all of whom were much younger than himself, and two of whom eventually left him, perhaps not being as accommodating as Şàfú. Unlike Şàfú, Fólórúnşó's other wives were not Muslim, which also accounted for difficulties. Furthermore, Adénúbi (1999a: 31) remembers that Fólórúnşó "never allowed his wives to work". Some of them were young, educated professionals, however, who could not, and probably did not want to, adjust to a domestic life alone. After Şàfú's death, Fólórúnşó was left with only his most junior wife, with whom he had more children – and more sons, which was important – than with any other wife before. While

Adénúbi (1999a: 38) admits that Fólórúnṣọ́ was "most certainly ... an exceptional father",¹⁶⁶ she also emphasises that he "was not an outstanding husband". Even though, as a Muslim, Ṣàfú was "brought up in the faith not to expect to be the one and only wife of her husband", Adénúbi suggests that her mother must have felt somewhat put off when Fólórúnṣọ́ "simply informed Safu one day that he was going to Ijebu Ode [his home-town] to marry a new wife and to bring her home" (1999a: 30). Adénúbi (1999a: 31) remembers that she and her sisters did notice a difference in their father's treatment of his wives, as he "obviously made more money available to his beautiful, educated wife, who also knew how to spend it". Ṣàfú herself was illiterate and not a wife Fólórúnṣọ́ had chosen himself, even though they developed affection for each other. Fólórúnṣọ́ seems, as Adénúbi notes, later to have come to regret his neglect of and attitude towards his first wife. On the first anniversary of her death, he set up a tombstone for Ṣàfú on which was written: "I took you for granted too much for too long. Forgive me, Alhaja. Please, forgive your sorrowing husband" (Adénúbi 1999a: 31).

In *Empty Arms*, Adénúbi once again examines characteristic plots of women's lives in Yorùbá society. It is not so much the heroine Nike (Níkẹ̀ẹ̀) whose experiences seem to strike a chord with those of the buffalo woman, but women who are one generation older than she herself. More specifically, there are two women, Auntie Pat and Mrs Lawal, the heroine's foster mother (the heroine's own parents died in a car accident when she was a child) and her mother-in-law respectively, both of whom went through very unhappy marriages before leaving their husbands for good. The themes of wife battering, childlessness, polygamy, and in-laws who turn the lives of childless wives into hell are very prominent in this regard. Níkẹ̀ẹ̀' own story, in turn, opens up a new perspective on the possibility of breaking out of the confines of such plots. Very interestingly, the way in which those older, often rather hopeless plots of contemporary Yorùbá women's life-stories are related to the reader is very similar to the way in

¹⁶⁶ All of Fólórúnṣọ́'s eighteen children, regardless of their sex, were encouraged to realise their individual potential to the fullest, all of them were sent to schools and universities both in Nigeria and abroad, and all of them were supported emotionally, morally and financially throughout their education (Adénúbi 1999a).

which the buffalo woman gets to tell her own story in "The Importance of Being Prudent", as their two protagonists, Auntie Pat and Mrs Lawal, both relate their life-stories to their foster daughter and son respectively through a longer stretch of first-person narrative discourse.

Furthermore, numerous other characters in *Empty Arms* comment on gender and marital relationships in contemporary Nigeria, especially in Lagos. All of these comments are made by friends, colleagues and members of the family as the heroine Níkèṣé and her husband are facing a crisis in their marital relationship, which, until then, was conceived of in extremely positive terms (but also as rather unusual in this regard). Adénúbi elaborates on many details of the young couple's early married life, which is perfect and ideal in every respect. The problems Níkèṣé and her husband are facing in their married life are exactly the same that usually arise in gender-relationships in contemporary Nigerian fiction.¹⁶⁷ Níkèṣé 'fails' to give birth for years after the wedding. To everybody's shock and surprise, her husband eventually has a one-night-stand with a young secretary in his office, even though he "hardly looks the type" (*EA* 211) and is, in his own words, "not really a ladies man" (*EA* 136). The life-stories of the two mother figures who, like Níkèṣé, experienced difficulties in relation to childlessness, thus initially seem to repeat themselves in Níkèṣé's life. On the one hand, the two older women are very understanding and unusually supportive in every respect. On the other hand, they naturally desire Níkèṣé to give them many grandchildren which, in Yorùbá culture, is regarded as perhaps the most important thing in a person's life.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to see how, as the plot of Níkèṣé's life unfolds, Adénúbi not only breaks up and subverts the 'traditional' plot of women's life-stories but rewrites it entirely. It turns out that Níkèṣé has not been able to conceive because her husband is sterile, a possibility that is usually blended out in fiction as well as in real life – generally, society assumes that childlessness must be the wife's failure. Níkèṣé's husband himself deeply regrets

¹⁶⁷ Compare Griswold 2000.

his brief affair. The mother-in-law, Mrs Lawal, is very supportive as she went through the same experience as Níkèḗ and knows the problems that can arise from it all too well. Níkèḗ and her husband are able to continue with their lives, even though this accomplishment is hard-won. In the end, Níkèḗ agrees to adopt the child who was not even conceived during the brief sexual encounter between her husband and the secretary, and her husband comes to terms with his own sterility and supports Níkèḗ's wish to undergo artificial fertilisation. The mother-in-law, who remains mercifully ignorant of the origin of Níkèḗ's pregnancies, is rewarded with the fulfilment of her private vision (supported by the promise of Ifá) – Níkèḗ will indeed be blessed with many children, who assemble around their grandmother.

Unlike both Adénúbi's (auto-)biographical texts and her popularising adaptations of Ifá divination narratives, her novel opens up new perspectives on the possibilities for change, for finding ways out of seemingly predetermined and unresolvable problems arising in contemporary Nigerian women's lives and their relationships with men. While the buffalo woman in "The Importance of Being Prudent" ultimately remains bounded in the traditional plot and its moral conclusion, Adénúbi's narrative strategy does undermine the apparent coherence of her narrative as a whole. In this regard, it represents an example of what Wilson-Tagoe (1997: 14) describes as a "first departure from male traditions of inscription and representation", which occurs "through the very centrality given to women as characters, the reflection of their sensibilities, the opening up of their consciousness, in effect, the privileging of the female voice and world". What is most remarkable is the way in which Adénúbi achieves this 'first departure' in "The Importance of Being Prudent". The buffalo woman's two tales-within-a-tale implicitly problematise aspects of the narrative which are usually blended out or taken for granted. The insertion of such 'counter-tales' inevitably gives rise to contradictions, incoherences and internal conflicts, thus having a destabilising effect on the narrative as a whole and generating new, important questions. Yet, even though her first-person narrative discourse opens up new perspectives, the buffalo woman ultimately and perhaps inevitably

remains – like Adénúbi's mother Şâfú in *FS – The Man and His Times* – confined in the plot of a tale, which, more often than not, is not her, but *his* story. Even though their experiences may strike the reader as very contemporary, both the buffalo woman's tales-within-a-tale and Şâfú's tale-between-the-lines belong, as Adénúbi's novel seems to suggest, to the past. In *Empty Arms* – which is a remarkable novel in many ways – Adénúbi demonstrates that the plots of contemporary women's lives are not infinitely unalterable. As she seems to suggest, it is up to the generation of the buffalo woman's grandchildren to negotiate any changes they may desire.

Chapter 5

Okri's *àbíkéú* narratives: *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment*, and *Infinite Riches***5.0. Introduction**

In an interview, Ben Okri (Deandrea 1994: 61) explained the "artist's job" as "the opposition of the establishment's reality, of orthodox reality". The artist is "a questioner, a destabilizer of consciousness, an expander of perception" (*ibid.*: 61), who constantly aims "to decode reality better" (*ibid.*: 63). In one of his essays, he proposes, more generally, that it is "our task, as creative participants in the universe, to redream our world. The fact of possessing imagination means that everything can be redreamed. Each reality can have its alternative possibilities" (1997: 49). In Okri's philosophy of art and life, the necessity of transformation represents a major challenge, especially in an imperfect world that is characterised by political (and other) power struggles, economic imbalance, corruption and injustice. The assumption of transformative agency is, in his view, fundamentally linked to the power of vision, presupposing fresh, if often painful and disconcerting, insight into the 'real' nature of the present condition – the ability to perceive things differently, in a way that complements but also subverts mainstream vision – as well as the readiness to envision alternatives, and alternative realities, for the future.

Okri's three *àbíkéú* narratives – *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998)¹⁶⁸ – explore the theme of socio-economic and political change and its effects on society at large as well as the question of what the role and responsibility of society and each

¹⁶⁸ In page references for quotations from these narratives, I abbreviate them as *FR*, *SE*, and *IR* respectively. *Mental Fight* (1997) is abbreviated as *MF*.

individual are in this regard. The phenomenon of change often seems beyond people's control, threatening their existence and generating unprecedented anxieties. Many of these anxieties are related to pre-independence politics in Nigeria, but at the same time, they are inspired and informed by the long history of oppression and suffering that followed independence. The *àbíkéú* narratives suggest that change as such is as natural as inevitable, and even desirable. Okri's recurrent employment of the image of seasonal change as a metaphor in relation to socio-economic and political change underscores this idea. At the same time, however, Okri highlights the fact that change is effected and determined by human agents and their hidden agendas. Not only can it therefore be challenged but it can also be shaped and transformed by the people themselves, which represents a necessity as well as a moral obligation.

In this chapter I shall argue that in the *àbíkéú* narratives, Okri draws upon the antelope woman's tale and, more generally, variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efón* to explore society's potential and responsibility for transformative vision and agency. In Okri's view, the realisation of this potential begins – contrary to popular mythology and what may, perhaps, seem common sense – neither with an affirmation or display of conventional power nor with the usurpation of power or the emulation of the powerful by the oppressed, but with the rediscovery and re-evaluation of the cultural and personal resources of those who are suffering. In the course of this process, the notion of power itself is redefined. I shall begin by situating my discussion of Okri's transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* in the context of his life and literary work, relating it to issues central to his work as a whole and, most particularly, the *àbíkéú* narratives. Second, I shall suggest that in Okri's literary universe, the transformation of the forest itself serves as an image for the magnitude and fundamental nature of the changes confronting society, and I shall discuss this idea in relation to the narratives' immediate and implied historical context. Third, I shall explore the various ways in which Okri deploys and transforms the motif of *àgbònrín* in the *àbíkéú* narratives as a metaphor in relation to the notion of transformative vision and agency.

5.1. *Ben Okri*

5.1.1. *Life*

Ben Okri was born in Minna, central Nigeria, in March 1959. His mother and father, Grace and Silver, were Igbo and Urhobo respectively. As Okri told Deandrea (1994: 55), his mother worked as a restaurant caterer; his father was a lawyer. In 1961, when Okri was eighteen months old, his mother brought him, along with his siblings, to London, where his father was studying. Okri started school in London but, at the age of seven, followed his parents back to Nigeria, where he received most of his primary and secondary education. He took his O-levels at Urhobo College in Warri but went to Lagos for his A-levels. His father had brought a collection of books back from London, which provided young Okri with access to a wide range of world literature. Okri started writing poetry when, as he told Jean Ross (1993: 338) in an interview, "[t]hings had taken a tumble" in the family's lives and he and his siblings were living with their father "in the ghetto in Lagos". Still in his teens, he got a job in a paint company and began to write articles and reportages, which he submitted to various newspapers in Nigeria. As he told Rob Hattersley (1999: 7): "My journalism came out of outrage, the poverty all around me and the government's indifference to the suffering. It was a time of great corruption in Nigeria".

Okri has repeatedly told the story of how he became a creative writer. He started writing at secondary school when he was twelve years old but his efforts became more serious when he failed to obtain a place at a university in Nigeria. He remembers that while he was "waiting", he "wrote stories and poems ... a play and a novel" (Deandrea 1994: 78). In 1976, his first journalistic article was published, and he remembers how he felt at that moment: "I knew I was going to be a writer. I was seventeen" (Deandrea 1994: 78). As he told Jean Ross (1993: 338-339),

I wrote about social problems like rent tribunals and excessive rent charged to poor people, vicious landlords, water tanks, bad roads, disease in the ghetto, and so on. One

or two of those were published. I was very encouraged, and I wrote some more. I could have spent all my life just doing that sort of thing, but the editors got bored with my social reportage and they didn't publish any more of it. ... I decided to write short stories. Bit by bit some of the same concerns leapt into those, and over a period of time I realized that stories are their own particular song, and that they too can affect the world. Then one of my stories grew longer and longer... It became *Flowers and Shadows*.

Some of the stories Okri wrote at this time were published in Nigerian women's journals and evening papers. Having completed the manuscript of *Flowers and Shadows* when he was eighteen (he began writing it one year earlier, at seventeen), Okri took it along when he returned to England in 1978, hoping to find a publisher there.

Having failed to obtain a place at a Nigerian university to study natural science, Okri was awarded a Nigerian government scholarship to study comparative literature at the University of Essex in England. Before he could complete his degree, however, his grant was cancelled because Nigeria suffered a financial crisis. He remembers the "non-stop financial problems" (Deandrea 1994: 55) he was facing at the time. Trying to make a living by writing, Okri combined freelance journalistic work with creative writing. He initially lived with his uncle in South London but at some point, they both had to move out. As he recalls: "I found myself sleeping on streets, homeless, all of that" (Deandrea 1994: 55). Bíódún Jéyífò (1988: 278) recalls that Okri's "circumstances as a full-time writer have been often desperate, especially between 1983 and 1984 when he was literally 'down and out' in London", before a "timely award of a grant from the Arts Council of Britain in mid-1984 came to the rescue". Okri (Hattersley 1999: 7) has suggested that this experience was crucial to his literary work: "I needed to experience suffering if I was to write ... truthfully". In the meantime, he continued to freelance as a journalist, working for *Afroscope* (1978) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (1983-5), as well as acting as poetry editor for *West Africa* (1983-6). Just before he won the Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* in 1991, Okri was appointed Visiting Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts at Trinity College, Cambridge (1991-3).

5.1.2. Work

Okri's literary career abroad began in the early 1980s with the publication of *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and, only one year later, *The Landscapes Within* (1981). The latter was so important to him that, fifteen years after its original publication, he decided to rewrite and expand it into *Dangerous Love* (1996). Okri's experimentation with narrative form and style in two volumes of shorter fiction, *Incidents at the Shrine* (1986) and *Stars of the New Curfew* (1988), anticipates his *opus magnum*, *The Famished Road* (1991), which established him as one of the most innovative and interesting contemporary Nigerian writers. *The Famished Road*, the first of Okri's *àbíkú* narratives, was followed by *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998). *Astonishing the Gods* (1995) represents a step in the direction of mystical fiction. Apart from prose fiction, Okri has also published two volumes of poetry, *An African Elegy* (1992) and *Mental Fight* (1999), as well as two books of essays, *Birds of Heaven* (1996) and *A Way of Being Free* (1997). In addition to the Booker Prize, Okri's literary awards include the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa, the *Paris Review* Aga Khan prize for Fiction, the Chianti Rufino-Antico Fattore International Literary Prize and the Premio Grinzane Cavour Prize.

Okri is, in Derek Wright's (1997a: 156) words, "widely regarded as one of the most multicultural and cosmopolitan of the younger generation of African novelists". Part of the fascination with his literary work derives from its hybridity and the ways in which Okri, as a contemporary Nigerian author living abroad, draws on aspects of West African and, more specifically, Yorùbá culture. Chidi Okonkwo (1991: 50) has noted, for instance, that Okri's work is "surprisingly local and cosmopolitan at one and the same time". Most recently, Jo Dandy (2000: 61) has stressed the status of the "'indigenous conceptual resource-base' amongst others":

Okri's liminal position on the threshold of nations and continents, and the transference of this experience onto the style and structure of his narrative, necessitates the broadening of the critical contextualizing of Okri's novels to fully

account for the plurality of influences on the authorial consciousness and condition of writing.

In critical discussions of Okri's work, and most particularly the *àbíkéú* narratives, there have, very broadly, emerged two distinct approaches. On the one hand, the hybridity of Okri's literary discourse has been identified with and explored as a manifestation of magical realism (Aizenberg 1995; Cooper 1996, 1998; Durix 1998), which, according to Homi Bhabha (1990: 7), has become "the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world".¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, critics have examined the relationship between Okri's work and traditional Yorùbá cultural beliefs as well as the work of contemporary Yorùbá writers (Quayson 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997a). Since Okri is not Yorùbá himself, his choice, in Quayson's (1997a: 101) words, to articulate not only a Yorùbá "conceptual resource-base but, indeed, various aspects of what might be seen as a Yoruba belief system", is obviously deliberate and determined by a number of factors, which have been discussed by Quayson in some detail. Quayson (1997: 101) suggests, for instance, that it is to do with the "development of a broadly Nigerian consciousness in the eyes of the younger generation of Nigerians" and functions "perhaps ... as a means of negotiating a sense of identity in a metropolitan diasporic environment". Taking a more global perspective, Wright (1997a: 156) has suggested that the "Yoruba paradigm, although culturally encoded, includes interethnically, in its use by a non-Yoruba author, the whole of Africa's and (by implication) the world's people in an ethic of resilient hope and renaissance".

These two general approaches have yielded many valuable insights into the *àbíkéú* narratives, analysing some of Okri's literary strategies as well as relating them to his historical and socio-political situation as a writer. They are, however, somewhat limited in their applicability to his work as a whole and fail to address or account for the underlying unity and continuity of Okri's work in all its diversity. It would seem to me that, while some of Okri's narrative strategies may

¹⁶⁹ Compare my MA dissertation, "The Ragged Edges of the Real: A Study of Selected Novels by Ben Okri" (1996).

remind one of magical realist fiction indeed, his general creative impulse fundamentally differs from that of the magical realists. His overall project of alerting his readers and fellow human beings to the political potential and necessity of transformative vision and agency in contemporary Nigeria and beyond, as well as his philosophical mysticism cannot be fully appreciated in terms of magical realism *per se*. This becomes, perhaps, most obvious with regard to irony, which Brenda Cooper (1996, 1998) considers, apart from hybridity, the distinguishing feature of magical realism. While the *àbíkú* narratives are full of humour and numerous little 'ironies' in the plural, the notion of 'irony' (as used in the singular) fails to capture the essence of what Okri is striving to do in his work.

In my view, it would be most productive to relocate Okri's literary work within the tradition of 'visionary fictions' as defined by Edward Ahearn (1996), or, in Kathryn Hume's (1984) terminology, to understand it as 'literature of vision' (which is also referred to as 'expressive literature') or, at times, 'literature of revision'. Okri's essays recurrently suggest that he conceives of his own role as that of a poet-prophet.¹⁷⁰

Poets are set against the world because they cannot accept that what there seems to be is all there is. ... They speak to us. Creation speaks to them. They listen. They remake the world in words, from dreams. Intuitions which could only come from the secret mouths of gods whisper to them through all of life, of nature, of visible and invisible agencies. Storms speak to them. Thunder breathes on them. Human suffering drives them. Words themselves speak to them and bring forth new words. The poet is the widener of consciousness. The poet suffers our agonies as well and combines them with all the forgotten waves of childhood. Out of the mouths of poets speak the yearnings of our lives. ... Politicians, heads of state, kings, religious leaders, soldiers, the rich, the powerful – they all fancy themselves the masters of this earthly kingdom. ... But the dreams of the people are beyond them, and would trouble them. The hard realities of people would alarm them. It is they who curb the poet's vision of reality. (1997: 3-4)

¹⁷⁰ Compare Roston 1965, Hill 1979 and Watson 1992 for the notion of the poet-prophet.

Poets need to be kept alive and awake. We should beware the hardening arteries of our lives. That is perhaps why prophets speak out with such incandescent, irrepressible concern at what we are doing to ourselves. In that sense all prophets have something of the poet, though not all poets are prophets. (*ibid*: 6)

Okri's narratorial concern with vision as well as the significance he ascribes to the transformative power of vision are crucial to an understanding of his literary work as a whole.¹⁷¹ As he himself describes his concern with vision, "It's a kind of realism, but a realism with many more dimensions" (Ross 1992: 338). As I will demonstrate below, his transformation of the motif of the antelope woman also becomes meaningful in this context.

5.1.3. *The àbíkú narratives*

Together, the three *àbíkú* narratives constitute an impressive if, in some respects, controversial portion of Okri's literary work. Reviewer and critics have been particularly fascinated with Okri's choice of an *àbíkú* child for a narrator. *Àbíkú*, literally 'someone born-to-die or characterised by death', are (spirit) children believed to be repeatedly born to the same mother without ever surviving to adulthood. Through ritual offerings and traditional medicine, an *àbíkú* child can possibly be induced to stay alive and spend a full human lifetime on earth. Azaro, Okri's narrator, who recalls growing up as an *àbíkú* child in pre-independence Nigeria and whose *àbíkú* identity represents – as suggested by various characters in the narratives themselves – an allegory for the condition of the modern Nigerian nation (state), has attracted much critical attention. As Okonkwo (1991: 43) has noted, a "common theme in post-colonial African literature ... is the theme of change that does not lead to new beginnings or real rebirth". In this regard, Okri's transformation of the motif of *àbíkú* would seem to imply hope. As an *àbíkú* child, trapped in cycles of life and death, Azaro's most heroic act, which remains a

¹⁷¹ I have discussed this in greater detail elsewhere (1998a and 1998b). It is significant, for instance, that Okri's six book-length narratives as well as a significant number of the shorter ones have protagonists or narrators who, in one way or another, are characterised as visionaries and whose existence or powers as visionaries qualify them as (potentially) heroic.

challenge throughout, is his decision to stay in this world rather than join his spirit companions in the other world. By breaking "the universal cycle of repetition" (Cooper 1998: 91), he counteracts the seeming impossibility of real change, transforming his fate against the odds. In Margaret Cezair-Thompson's (1996: 43) words, "Azaro resolves his own inherent duality, and in doing so he represents the ability to overcome a seemingly interminable cycle of instability". Or, as Wright (1997a: 154) has put it,

Azaro's commitment to the living seems to Okri to signify a defiant assertion of faith in Africa's material survival and betterment, no matter how difficult the circumstances and how great the suffering ... Through the device of the spirit child, postcolonial Africa appears to be envisaged as a resilient survivalist...

Another important aspect of Okri's choice of an *àbíkú* child for a first-person narrator is Azaro's "visionary abiku-consciousness" (Wright 1997a: 151), which accounts for the overall extraordinariness and fascination of the *àbíkú* narratives. This ability, which distinguishes the narrator from most of his fellow "human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see" (FR 3), is explained in terms of and relies on Azaro's *àbíkú* identity. In Okri's (Deandrea 1994: 80) own words, whenever Azaro "looks at reality, he does it through the eyes of a spirit as well as through those of a human being, so everything is both ordinary and transfigured, simultaneously". Azaro's supernatural, prism-like *àbíkú* vision qualifies him to see beyond what is ordinarily visible, thus continuously subverting the appearance of reality, giving it a multiplicity of dimensions and opening up fresh perspectives. Moreover, especially in *The*

Famished Road, it combines with the innocent, unbiased objectivity of a child's vision, which lends it additional credibility and strength.¹⁷²

Both *àbíkéú* as part human, part spirit and *àgbònrín* as part human, part antelope are hybrid forms of being. In Azaro's words: "We are the strange ones, with half of our beings always in the spirit world ... It is terrible to forever remain in-between" (FR 4-5). In Okri's work, the two, *àbíkéú* and *àgbònrín*, are linked together in the concept of transformative vision and agency that is so fundamental to Okri's overall creative mission. Okri explicitly relates the notion of *àbíkéú* to, and even defines it in terms of, visionary power. Similarly, he suggests that a group of mysterious antelope women in the forest has visionary powers. For Okri's spirit-child and his companions in heaven, transformation represents a state of being – "We could assume numerous forms" (FR 3) – which is epitomised by the elusive figure of their king, of whom Azaro says that the "essence of his genius ... might well be the love of transformation, and the transformation of love into higher realities" (FR 3-4). Furthermore, spirit-children "all carry strange gifts in their souls. ... They all yearn to make of themselves a beautiful sacrifice, a difficult sacrifice, to bring transformation, and to die shedding light within this life" (FR 487). However, by "rebell[ing] against the spirits" and choosing "the liberties of limitations" rather "than to be free in infinity" (FR 487), Azaro has retained his visionary consciousness but lost

¹⁷² In various ways, Azaro's *àbíkéú* vision compares with that of the protagonist of *The Landscapes Within* and *Dangerous Love*, whom Okri (Wilkinson 1992: 81) has described as "an ideal artist":

...what you *should* be, on a higher level, as you get older: seeing experience *pure*, seeing without preconceptions. The elucidation of what you see depends on how clearly you see it. ... He's an ideal filter, a prism: in that sense he's an ideal artist. He's a complete contrast from the artists who have ideas, distort the world in terms of their ideas, and then reflect an idea-distorted universe. So it's not the world they're really writing about but something produced from a refusal to see. ... Now think of the fact that for anything new, for something good to come about, for it to reach a level of art, you have to liberate it from old kinds of perception, which is a kind of destruction. An old way of seeing things has to be destroyed for the new to be born.

It is interesting to note, moreover, that Azaro's narratorial self-reflection occasionally has biographical overtones. In *Infinite Riches*, he speaks of "an island, across the ocean, where many of our troubles began, and on whose roads, in a future life, I would wander and suffer and find a new kind of light" (IR 12). His father once prophesies his future literary career: "One day, my son, you will make some of those invisible books visible" (IR 149).

his powers of transformation in a constantly changing world. While Azaro has to give up his spirit-child powers of transformation in order to embody the possibility of real change, some of the women in the ghetto, in turn, assume secret antelope identities, which is suggestive of their endowment with powers of transformation that have, in Okri's view, the potential to effect real change.

5.2. Life in the forest of the city: the challenge of change

In the *àbíkéú* narratives, transformation is not limited to the ability of men or women to literally turn into other beings although for Okri, that is one way of talking about change and its concomitant instabilities and anxieties. At a much more fundamental level, Okri's literary universe itself continuously undergoes change. The texts of all three *àbíkéú* narratives abound with references to change on various levels, e.g. in Azaro's perception or *àbíkéú* consciousness (which, in turn, directly affects his narrative representation of reality as perpetually changing), in the physical environment, of specific locations, people's appearances, moods or the general atmosphere. Seasonal climatic change or weather conditions such as heavy rain and storms are metaphorically and symbolically linked to political change and turmoil; the two forces coincide to such a degree that it is sometimes hard to determine which of them has unleashed greater chaos in the area. Okri's recurrent references to change account for the overall sense of restlessness, instability and anxiety that permeates the *àbíkéú* narratives. In what follows, I would suggest that the magnitude and fundamental nature of the changes and the resulting instability confronting society is evoked by the fact that the forest itself, rather than merely its various spirit occupants and human visitors, undergoes a process of transformation, a situation that is completely inconceivable in the fictional worlds of the authors discussed in the previous chapters. Furthermore, I shall argue that the scenario of the rapidly changing forest in whose

(former) territory the *àbíkéú* narratives are set represents the backcloth for Okri's deployment of the motif of *àgbònín*.

5.2.1. People's marginal existence in the urban ghetto

The transformation of the forest represents a recurrent image in all three *àbíkéú* narratives. Most particularly, it is associated with processes of modernisation and the rapid expansion of the city. Azaro observes, for instance, that the "area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand. ... Each day the area seemed different. ... The world was changing... (FR 104). As Coleman (1971 [1958]: 73) rightly emphasises, "the existence of urban centers in Yorubaland has not been the direct result of Western acculturation" but "is a traditional Yoruba pattern antedating British control". However, in the cosmopolitan new cities in eastern Nigeria as well as "those traditional cities that became principal centers of trade, administration, or transportation, and, *pari passu*, more ethnically heterogeneous in character", of which Lagos is a good example, the "unsettling and disorganizing effects of urbanization" (*ibid.*: 77) are evident. As more and more people leave their villages to receive their education and training or try and eke out a living in the city, what used to be the terrain of the forest is turned into a major construction site and invaded by human society. Early in *The Famished Road*, Azaro notes that while his family's compound is (still) "surrounded by a great forest. There were thick bushes and low trees between the houses" (FR 34), roads and houses are being built everywhere. Azaro's father, showing his son the surroundings of their new compound, predicts that "sooner than you think there won't be one tree standing. There will be no forest left at all. And there will be wretched houses all over the place. This is where the poor people will live" (FR 34). In short, the forest gradually turns into a modern urban ghetto.

The fact that Okri specifically associates the former terrain of the forest with the wretched living conditions and suffering of a majority of contemporary society has important repercussions for the argument presented in this chapter. In *Infinite Riches*, the photographer aptly refers to "the forest of the city" (IR 79). Quayson (1995b: 111) has noted that "the anxiety-generating forces, which in the Tutuolan narratives were encoded as grotesque monsters in the special arena of the liminal space, are now a component of the real world" and concludes that in *The Famished Road*, there is the subtle suggestion that it is the experiences of the real world itself that constitute the rite of passage" (*ibid.* 112). But while the rapidly disappearing forest as the setting of the *àbíkéú* narratives suggestively links them to the literary paradigm of Yorùbá hunters' tales, it is no longer intrepid hunters who sporadically venture into the bush, well-equipped with potent charms and ritually prepared for the existential challenge it represents. Rather, the challenge is extended to the people more generally, who are, moreover, infinitely more vulnerable than the traditional hunter. Furthermore, while the hunter's condition is liminal throughout his sojourn in the bush, the instability and anxiety associated with it end with his successful return to human society. But for Azaro's family and the other people of the road, the (former) terrain of the forest has become their habitat, the site of their marginal existence.¹⁷³

The challenge posed by life in the urban ghetto is, beyond sheer daily survival, defined against the backdrop of the *àbíkéú* narratives' larger geographical and historical setting, which is Nigeria during the period preceding Independence. While Okri avoids specific geographical and historical references, which lends the *àbíkéú* narratives a certain representativeness, the forest of the city is increasingly affected by a climate of political unrest and instability, entailing great hope and economic development on the one hand, and suffering and growing oppression on the other. Early in *The Famished Road*, Azaro's mother alerts him to the fact that "This is a new

¹⁷³ Victor Turner (1969) distinguishes between 'liminality', which is temporary, and 'marginality', which is a liminal state that has become a more permanent condition, e.g. in situations where whole groups of people are marginalised within a society.

age. Independence is coming" (FR 93). One memorable "Saturday", politics makes "its first public appearance" (FR 127) in people's lives when the Party of the Rich campaigns in the ghetto. As Mum points out, "Election time is near" (FR 279). References to periods of intense political confrontation between the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor dominate large stretches of all three *àbíkú* narratives. In *Infinite Riches*, Azaro still comments on the approach of "Independence ... with all its signs and cross-currents" (IR 90); furthermore, preparations for a "great rally preceding the elections", which has "been set for September" (IR 145) continue to take their toll.¹⁷⁴

The problem is that politics seems far removed from the concerns of the people in the ghetto, the majority of whom are interested in politics only inasmuch as it immediately and directly affects their lives. As Azaro puts it: "The political parties waged their battles in the spirit spaces, beyond the realm of our earthly worries" (FR 495). The narrator's retrospective comments forebode the suffering that will represent a political leitmotif for decades to come:

we didn't sense the upheavals to come, upheavals that were in fact already in our midst, waiting to burst into flames. We didn't see the chaos growing; and when its advancing waves found us we were unprepared for its feverish narratives and wild manifestations. We were unprepared for an era twisted out of natural proportions, unprepared when our road began to speak in the bizarre languages of violence and transformation. The world broke up into unimaginable forms, and only the circling spirits of the age saw what was happening with any clarity. (SE 3)

People's political ignorance and short-sightedness render them vulnerable and susceptible to recurrent waves of oppression:

And the days that were joyful dreams changed imperceptibly and turned unpleasant when the first blood of fighting was spilled. We lingered too long in the holiday of our spirit and in the lovely music of our days. And we didn't notice when it all changed.

¹⁷⁴ While there initially was a two-party system in pre-independence Nigeria indeed Okri recasts the actual historical scenario, where party membership and affiliation were predominantly related to ethnic or regional identity rather than class (Sklar 1963), as a conflict between the different classes – the rich and the poor – and their respective interests, which gives it a more universal if stereotypical pertinence.

We didn't notice when the dance became a stampede, when the peaceful songs turned rousing, when the musical instruments spoke a different language, issuing crude commandments to the brain and hands. We didn't notice when the mood darkened, obscuring the profound joys that were intended to outlast all the suffering that was to come. (*IR* 194)

The narrator's frustration and incredulity with regard to people's failure to overcome or even perceive the challenge of their historical situation is informed by a sense of disillusionment which, in turn, seems to be inspired by Okri's experience of the decades following Independence, when short periods of peace and economic and national development alternated with years of political turmoil, civil war and military rule.

Once, for instance, Azaro's spirit-child companion Adé prophesies "changes. Coups. Soldiers everywhere. Ugliness. Blindness" (*FR* 478). Azaro himself has a dream in which "the future burst[s] on" him: "I saw tanks rolling over the wounded roads; I saw armoured trucks and jeeps and great military lorries, and I saw swarms of soldiers in dark places of the country, while the rest of us dreamt of a new domination"; and he associates this vision with "all the seasons of our future in advance" (*SE* 138). As Quayson (1997: 131) has suggested, it "is as if the mood of post-Independence disillusionment is transferred onto the period before Independence when the mood was supposedly more euphoric and hopeful":

For Okri and his generation, growing up in a post-independence Nigeria, the euphoria of decolonisation was not available to fall back on. All that they inherited was a bewildering sense of absent opportunities. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of corruption and graft in social and political life deepened the sense of disillusionment further. (Quayson 1995a: 154)

It is against this backdrop that Okri deploys and transforms not only the topos of the spirit-child but also that of the antelope woman in order to highlight the necessity and moral obligation of transformative vision and agency.

5.2.2. Deforestation and the quest for national and cultural identity

On a different level, the image of the forest's transformation is linked to the theme of cultural change, progress and development and deployed by Okri to raise issues such as a growing awareness of and positive attitude towards indigenous beliefs and traditions, the project of cultural decolonisation with its pitfalls of cultural nostalgia and an idealisation of the past and, more generally, the post-colonial quest for cultural and national identity. The narrator's references to the process of deforestation are impressionistic and often made in passing: "While all this was happening the trees were being felled every day in the forest" (*SE* 68). Yet, they serve to negotiate serious thematic concerns. Azaro's imagery has, in this regard, increasingly negative overtones, which problematises the phenomenon of deforestation. He notes, for instance, that it "took longer to get far into the forest. ... It seemed that the trees, feeling that they were losing the argument with human beings, had simply walked deeper into the forest" (*FR* 104). Similarly, he once observes: "We ran deeper into the forest, astonished to find that it had grown smaller, amazed that while we had been living within the closed circle of our lives the forest was being turned into a graveyard of trees" (*SE* 284).

The process of deforestation involves lasting environmental damage. On a more figurative and more existential level, Okri suggests that the ongoing transformation of the forest causes what may be described as serious spiritual damage; the loss, in other words, of a sense of cultural identity and a traditional value and belief system. In this regard, the forest symbolises a spiritual richness and, above all, a density of meaning and mythic or visionary possibilities that are associated with the past and are fast becoming devoid of meaning. Like the forest, the people's world-view is being cleared of its signs and symbols. In *Infinite Riches*, Azaro laments that

The forest once represented the beginnings of dreams, the boundary of our visible community, the dreaming place of spirits, the dwelling place of mysteries and innumerable old stories that reincarnate in the diverse minds of human beings. The forest was once a place where we saw the dreams of our ancestors take form. It was a

place where antelopes roamed with crowns on their heads. It was a rich homeland of the spirit. Its nocturnal darkness was the crucible of all our experiments in imagination. The darkness there had always been a spell, a hallucination, a benign god. In its silence old herbs kept their secrets of future cures. The trees stored the stories of our lives on their gnarled and intelligent faces. ... The forest was once a place where the spirits and elves came awake at night and played and wove their spells of mischief and delight. This forest of dreams and nightmares, dense like all the suffering of our unrecorded days, was being altered forever. This forest of our living souls was beginning to show gaps. We saw the sky beyond. ... The destruction of the forest, the unfamiliar gaping holes, the great wound of it, seemed to our horror like a veil rent asunder, cut through with flashing knives, to reveal not mysteries, but nothingness. It was as if the veil itself were the mystery. At first the gaps in the forest were not noticeable. The rent in the trees had not yet begun to eat away at our psyches. But the forest dwellers compacted their living spaces. The spirits and tangential beings fled from the exposure, from the shallow reality of daylight. ... At first we humans didn't notice the great trees dying, crying out as they fell in the agonized voices of slain benign giants. At first the falling trees, crashing down on their mortally wounded colleagues, didn't alter the stories of our lives. We still had our spectacles, and our daily dramas to divert us. (IR 83-84)

Deforestation is thus associated with the disappearance of the oral tradition, herbal lore, and, ultimately, a whole belief system and spiritually oriented world-view, which leaves behind a gap not only in the landscape but also in people's psyches.

In *The Famished Road*, the people of Azaro's compound once, in "their poor clothes, with their hunger, their pain, their faces stark with the facts of their lives", stand outside Madame Koto's bar, staring "at the forest as though it were about to release an ominous sign, or sound, or yield its awesome secrets" (FR 218). While something very important seems to depend on this revelation, it is left open what kind of a sign or secret it is they are, perhaps even unconsciously, hoping to receive – a prophecy regarding a better future, a cure for their manifold daily problems, some sort of verdict, or merely an explanation – or whether they will ever get an answer. Furthermore, it remains ambiguous if the people are right to turn to the forest – to what, in other words, there remains of their spiritual past – for a sign, or if this is problematised. Cooper (1998) has commented on the problematic tendency of magical realist

writing to revert to myths of national healing through a return to cultural origins in this regard; but – especially in *The Famished Road* – Okri does not equate positive transformative vision and agency with recreating the past or with conserving its signs or symbols in order to live by them for ever. In *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*, as his sense of disillusionment with the present intensifies, the need to search for alternative modes of wisdom and vision in the past seems to become stronger. Nevertheless, Okri's notion of transforming and re-envisioning the world is not opposed to relating to and learning from the past, although today, some of the old signs and symbols may require new interpretations.

In an interview, Okri has suggested that people have lost "connection with their past" and that "spiritual continuity is very poor" (Deandrea 1994: 72). Asked if he thought that "Africans should try to get back to their ancestral religions", he replied:

No, all I'm saying is that we should carry our history with us, into our future. ... You can't go back. What is bad and what is good: carry it, deal with it, take the best from it and move into the future. Going back would mean being subverted by our past. ... None of us can afford to be blind to his history or to his past. That's why these things move in my work: we're forgetting. We're forgetting whole ways of thinking, the good things that came with it as well as the bad things that came with it. (*ibid.* 72-73)

...basically I'm talking of certain primeval values: the past must be always kept alive, carried with us, but kept new. I suppose I tried to do that in *The Famished Road*... (*ibid.* 81)

As Cooper (1998: 92) has suggested, the way in which Azaro continuously explores the forest demonstrates his determination "to find or create new roads" (*FR* 487), which represents a passionate assertion of "the possibility of change, the condition for which is not solely, or even primarily, the mythical past". Like Azaro, people in the urban ghetto have to follow "the edge of the forest" (*FR* 277) and explore new paths that have "completed their transformation into streets" (*ibid.*). Like him (and, by way of allegory, the nation at large), they may be in constant danger of getting lost along a labyrinthine road "with too many signs, and no directions" (*FR* 115) and share his occasional bewilderment: "The trails multiplied. Many paths intersected. ...

The paths confused me" (IR 96). The forest of the city with its multifarious new roads represents the scenario within which people have to (re-)define their roles in and their responsibility towards society.

5.3. Okri's deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* in the *àbíkú* narratives

In the present subchapter, I shall explore the ways in which Okri deploys and transforms the antelope woman's tale and, more generally, the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfọn* in the *àbíkú* narratives as a metaphor in relation to his notion of transformative vision and agency. Early in *Songs of Enchantment*, Azaro, attempting to apprehend the figures of white antelopes which he encounters in the forest, observes:

Everywhere I looked white flashes kept disappearing from view. When I stopped trying to look, I saw white antelopes out of the corners of my eyes. They were like beings that existed only in glimpses, creatures that were real only in the margins and tangents of vision. (SE 85)

I would like to adapt Azaro's words for an introductory comment on Okri's deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* in the *àbíkú* narratives: while references to antelopes abound in the texts, these are ephemeral and elusive. If they represent a sign or a riddle, as suggested by titles of chapters in *Songs of Enchantment* – "Of Signs and White Antelopes" (SE 70) and "Riddle of the White Antelopes" (SE 83) – it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to get hold of their meaning.¹⁷⁵ They escape ultimate definition or signification. In this regard, their meaning resembles the "white flashes" described by Azaro, appearing and "disappearing from view", to be seen merely "out of the corners" of the reader's eyes, existing "only in glimpses" and being "real only in the margins and tangents of vision", never to be grasped conclusively. As Wright

¹⁷⁵ In this regard, the reader shares Azaro's own occasional confusion. While everything is potentially fraught with meaning, it is impossible to be sure. As Azaro once puts it regarding Madame Koto's mysterious round white stones: "I did not know their significance or even if they had any" (FR 75).

(1997a: 140) has noted, in Okri's narratives there is a puzzling "indeterminacy with regard to where literal reality ends and metaphor begins". Maggi Phillips (1997: 174), similarly, comments on the way in which common nouns in the *àbíkú* narratives absorb "multiple meanings and resonances". Forever changing shape, Okri's sign of the antelope remains ambiguous until the end. His general rhetorical preference for paradox is obvious, and perhaps it is part of his point that everything also contains its opposite. Nothing, and nobody, is either one thing or the other.¹⁷⁶ Everything depends on how one looks at it, which, in Okri's view, is where transformation – including his own transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* – begins. If one wants to begin to understand the latter, it is essential to take this into account.

The Famished Road contains several brief allusions to the traditional encounter between the hunter and the antelope woman. While these are generally fleeting and may appear quite marginal to the plot – even though the *àbíkú* narratives can hardly be said to have a conventional plot anyway – I would suggest that they serve to establish the topos of the antelope woman as a loose intertextual frame of reference for Okri's exploration of his overall theme of change and the threat and challenge it constitutes. In *Songs of Enchantment*, references to antelopes are more frequent and appear, in an increasingly suggestive yet ambivalent way, to be functioning as signs or symbols of one kind or another; but it is not until well into the second half of the narrative that a variant of the antelope woman's tale as a whole is narrated by Azaro's father. Dad's version of the antelope woman's tale not only represents an interesting transformation and reinterpretation of the familiar topos but also suggests an interpretative framework for Okri's deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* more generally.

In what follows, I shall argue that Okri deploys the encounter of the antelope woman and the hunter as a metaphorical framework in relation to the question of change and transformative

¹⁷⁶ This idea is well expressed by the three-headed spirit in *The Famished Road*: "From a certain point of view the universe seems to be composed of paradoxes. But everything resolves. That is the function of contradiction ... When you can see everything from every imaginable point of view you might begin to understand" (FR 327).

vision and agency. Most generally, the motif of the antelope woman is associated with the power of transformation. The power of transformation, in turn, is also what is needed to effect change, which can take negative or positive forms. I shall begin by suggesting that Okri draws on variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* or images of transformation more generally as a metaphor in relation to agents of oppression and negative change. Secondly, I shall propose that he associates three important (male) characters with the figure of the hunter – as the antelope woman's other – in order to review different ways of challenging or counteracting oppression and negative transformative agency. However, Okri does not stop there. As I shall argue thirdly, in opposition to his deployment of variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* suggested above, he increasingly draws upon the figure of the antelope (woman) to explore people's potential for positive transformative vision and agency. In Yorùbá culture, the figure of the hunter traditionally embodies heroic agency. By shifting the potential for heroic agency to the figure of the antelope (woman), whom he associates with the suffering margins of society and most particularly women, Okri significantly goes beyond a mere inversion of oppressive power relations, renegotiating the terms on which power relations are based and, ultimately, redefining the notion of power itself. Finally, I shall discuss Okri's ideal of transformative vision and agency in relation to his philosophy of life and art, which, again, is metaphorically linked to the motif of *àgbònrín*.

5.3.1. Animals in human disguise and political masquerades:

variants of the motif of àgbònrín and ẹfòn as metaphors in relation to oppressive, exploitative agents of change

The Famished Road begins by evoking an image of transformation, thus setting the tone for the general atmosphere of change in the *àbíkéú* narratives: "In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry" (FR 3). On the one hand, change may thus be conceived of

passively, as something that affects people, to the degree that it appears as a kind of recurrent, mythic force. On the other hand, it may be conceived of actively as transformation, as something that is effected by specific agents. Much of the growing political and economic oppression experienced by the people in the urban ghetto is caused by the privileged group of party politicians, especially those associated with the Party of the Rich, and their thugs, who are notorious for being supported by 'the rich' with whom they form a symbiotic relationship. In what follows, I would suggest that, in various ways, Okri draws on variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* and other images of transformation as a metaphor in relation to agents instrumental in bringing about negative, destructive change in the form of political and economic oppression. I shall begin by examining different ways in which politicians are, metaphorically as well as literally, associated with the image of masking or masquerades. Secondly, I shall show how they as well as their various supporters are construed as part human, part animal, with their secret animal identities becoming visible only to the *àbíkéú* narrator's eyes in moments of special insight.

In *Songs of Enchantment*, Azaro notes that "[e]verything was changing, the face of the world seemed an endless series of masks, and we did not know what to believe" (*SE* 171), which attests to the difficulty, especially in times of socio-political instability and unrest, of asserting what is real or true, and what illusory or false; what promises hope and what harbours destruction. Okri deploys masks and masquerades as an image for the way in which people in general and political ideologists in particular mask their real character and intentions. Early in *The Famished Road*, for instance, politicians of the Party of the Rich loudly proclaim, supported by a megaphone but with a conspicuously "crackling voice" (*FR* 122), their intention to assume positive transformative agency, which is presumably in the interest of the population:

WE ARE THE PARTY OF THE RICH, FRIENDS OF THE POOR ... IF YOU
VOTE FOR US ... WE WILL FEED YOUR CHILDREN ... AND WE WILL
BRING YOU GOOD ROADS ... AND WE WILL BRING ELECTRICITY ...
AND WE WILL BUILD SCHOOLS ... AND HOSPITALS. WE WILL MAKE

YOU RICH LIKE US. THERE IS PLENTY FOR EVERYBODY. PLENTY OF FOOD. PLENTY OF POWER. VOTE FOR UNITY AND POWER! (FR 123)

It soon becomes obvious that the Party of the Rich is most unlikely to use its powers of political transformation to change people's lives for the better. Very subversively but appropriately, the way in which its followers aim to underscore their supposed generosity by dishing out free powdered milk to the poor inhabitants of the area turns into evidence of the opposite, as the actual changes they are going to bring about are heralded by food-poisoning. As the emptiness of the politicians' promises and gestures is thus exposed and their real intentions become disturbingly clear, Azaro metaphorically speaks of "the secret faces of politics" (FR 128). Their self-transformation into society's potent benefactors is disclosed as a bad disguise for their underlying evil natures and designs.

Furthermore, not only is the politicians' pretence of positive transformative agency metaphorically conceived of as a masquerade but also, ironically, the image of the political masquerade is literalised into an agent of terror and destruction as the politicians resort, in Azaro's words,

to using a perversion of traditional masqueraders to scare us into voting for them. At night the masquerades of both parties bounded up and down the streets with whips and sticks, pikes and machetes. Terrorising us, banging on our doors, they shouted our names in guttural voices. ... The political masquerades, the thugs and the supporters invaded our lives and changed the air of the street. (SE 70-71)

A "weird towering structure" (SE 97) is set up in front of Madame Koto's bar, which represents "a gigantic red Masquerade, bristling with raffia and rags and nails. It had long stilts for legs and two twisted horns at the sides of a wild jackal's head. The red Masquerade held aloft a shining machete in one hand and a white flag, emblem of their party, in the other" (SE 98). Not only does this Masquerade become increasingly fearful to look at as it is furbished up with parts from a growing number of animals and stained with blood but it also comes alive

through human agency, merging with the spirits of politicians. Azaro recalls how, during "the worst night of the political Masquerades" (SE 139),

the Jackal-headed Masquerade, surrounded by its multiples and companions of hyenas and panthers, chanting with the voices of possessed men wreaked an incredible violence on the forces of wind and forest, slaughtering the spirits and the insurgent women, murdering the trees and our silent protectors, the dormant gods sleeping in our dreams. (SE 138)

Furthermore, beyond its local signification, in a dream in which Azaro enters the Masquerade's mind, it becomes emblematic of oppressive regimes and ideologies struggling to take over and rule the world in general:

I saw through the terrible eyes of the Masquerade and I realised that it was merely one of a thousand universal manifestations: each land has its own kind of Masquerade, some more refined than others, the principle the same. ... For in the chaos of nations and historical periods ... lie power and wealth for the supporters of the Masquerade. ... I saw the invisible Masquerade of the western world, saw their worshippers of order, money, desire, power, and world domination. I saw the great white Masquerades of the eastern nights... (SE 112-115)

Another image Okri draws upon with regard to politicians of the Party of the Rich and their thugs and supporters as well as other characters who, in one way or another, come to be associated with economic, political or spiritual powers is related to the motif of *àgbònín* and *efón* and involves secret spirit and, more specifically, animal identities underneath the appearance of human nature. These animal identities are hidden and disclosed only momentarily through the *àbíkú* narrator's marvelous power of vision. Not surprisingly, Azaro has most of his visions of human beings with animal natures in Madame Koto's bar which, like its owner, is itself particularly hybrid and ambivalent and becomes increasingly popular with spirit beings and followers of the Party of the Rich alike. Early in *The Famished Road*, Azaro dreams that "The bar had moved deep into the forest and all her customers were animals and birds" (FR 59), which already suggests an ominous connection between Madame Koto's

customers and the local fauna. The "smell of animal skin" (*FR* 133), which Azaro occasionally discerns in the bar with its sweating customers, has a similar effect. As Madame Koto's bar metamorphoses into a flashy, favourite meeting-place of the Party of the Rich, Azaro notices "odd-looking calendars with goats in transformations into human beings, fishes with heads of birds, birds with the bodies of women" (*FR* 271) on its walls. In the bar, Azaro hears the voices not only of human beings, but also of "[a]nimal voices. Voices of the dead ... the nasal voices of spirits" (*IR* 223).

Madame Koto herself, whose own continuous transformation – as she keeps becoming bigger, more prosperous, more resplendent, and more powerful and fearsome – generally suggests the use of evil powers and black magic, once appears to Azaro

revealed in the full splendour of her ritual power. For a moment, unveiled, she seemed like someone else, like a secret self that we had never suspected was there, something quite monstrous, part-bull, part-woman, with black lips... (*SE* 184; compare *SE* 246-7).

Similarly, she is once described as speaking "in the voice of an old bull" (*FR* 432). Moreover, the *àbíkú* narrator has momentary insights into the hidden 'real' nature of some of her customers, whose otherworldly identities are associated with oppressive, exploitative power. Joining a ravishing party thrown by Madame Koto, which is attended by many politicians, Azaro has a sudden vision revealing to him

that some of the prostitutes, who would be future brides of decadent power, had legs of goats. Some of the women, who were chimeras and sirens and broken courtesans, had legs of spiders and birds. Some of the politicians and power merchants, the chiefs and innocent-looking men, who were satyrs and minotaurs and satanists, had the cloven hoofs of bulls. Their hoofs and bony legs were deftly covered with furry skin. Fully clothed, they danced as men and women when in fact they were the dead, spirits, and animals in disguise, part-time human beings dancing to the music of ascendant power. Everything around me seemed to be changing and yielding its form. (*FR* 459-60)

In the same vein Dad – with the peculiar clairvoyance his drunkenness occasionally inspires and in a fighting mood – addresses thugs present in the bar as "animals in disguise. 'Monsters!' he shouted. 'You are all draining our people of sleep. You are stealing our powers, taking over our lives'" (*SE* 209). When some of the ordinary people from the ghetto become supporters of the Party of the Rich and begin to partake of the politicians' power and prosperity, they too appear transformed into beastly creatures:

I slowly began to recognise them beneath their transformation ... There were animals that had turned into men, and walked uncomfortably with their hoofs in big boots. I saw them all. Contact with Madame Koto had transformed them into individuals with influence in many spheres, transformed them into spies for the dominant powers. All levels of society were represented. ... I saw them all, the early denizens of Madame Koto's bar. They had all changed. (*IR* 217-218).

The outer, human form of these characters is thus construed as another kind of deceitful masquerade which, again, represents a disguise hiding their oppressive, exploitative 'real' nature: their humanity and, by metaphorical extension, their humaneness, are conceived of as a mask while their animal identity is suggestive of their metaphorical beastly nature and/or moral perversion. Furthermore, their association with the motif of hybrid beings who are partly animal and partly human links these characters' oppressive and exploitative agency to mythic powers of transformation with an immense evil potential. In an interview, Okri has expressed his concern as a writer with affecting "the way people perceive reality" and making "people see more clearly" so as to enable them "to understand how these people in power, these ideologues, manipulate reality" (Deandrea 1994: 59). His deployment of variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* and other metaphors of transformation serves to unmask political and/or economic oppression and to characterise the challenge and threat represented by the oppressive, exploitative agents of change that dominate contemporary Nigerian society.

5.3.2. *Alternative responses to the challenge and threat of change:*

Azaro, Dad and the photographer as hunter-figures in the forest of the city

In turn, Okri associates three of his most prominent (male) characters – the first-person narrator Azaro himself, Azaro's father Dad, and Jeremiah, the ubiquitous photographer – with the figure of the hunter as the antelope woman's other and a traditional model of heroic agency. As alternative, potentially heroic derivatives of the figure of the hunter, these characters are used to examine ways of challenging or counteracting oppression, exploitation and negative transformative agency. First of all, all three of them are associated with the figure of the hunter through references to sojourns in the forest or to hunting itself. Azaro's notorious ventures into the forest lead to numerous strange encounters and experiences. Dad occasionally goes to the forest to hunt. Early in *The Famished Road*, he leads Azaro "through the bushpaths and into the forest" (FR 38), leaving his son behind in a clearing before venturing deeper into the forest in search of game. When he re-emerges "from the forest with a great sack on his shoulder", he looks "exhausted, as if he had been wrestling with demons ... Blood dripped from the sack on Dad's shoulder" (FR 39-40). He boasts about catching a wild boar in a trap and having had to struggle with "the fierce-looking animal" (FR 40) before killing it with his hands. Dad's quasi-mythic strength and "titanic stature" (Quayson 1997: 140) as well as his capacity for uncontrolled anger evoke Ògún, God of Hunting, Iron, and Warfare. Resuming his career as a boxer, he regularly jogs "off towards the forest, to a place no one knew" (FR 386), in order to train and, in due course, he beats the most famous (spirit) boxers around. The photographer, in turn, after examining the door of Azaro's family's room which has been marked with animal blood identifies the latter as originating from "a wild boar" and, asked how he can tell, claims: "I used to be a hunter. ... I have a lot of powers" (FR 232).

Furthermore, both Azaro and Dad have real or imaginary encounters with antelopes or antelope women. Early in *The Famished Road*, Azaro, waiting in a clearing, sees an antelope: "It came up to me, stopped ... and stared at me. Then it came closer and licked my feet. When a

branch cracked amongst the trees, the antelope started and ran off" (FR 38). The very next instant, he notices that a "woman stepped out of a tree... She had on a white robe" (*ibid*). Another time, Azaro watches as an "antelope ran past with her little ones" (FR 104). Once, lost in the forest, he encounters yet another antelope: "An antelope with the face of a chaste woman stopped and stared at me and when I moved it disappeared among the luxuriant bushes" (FR 243). In *Songs of Enchantment*, Azaro sees "white antelopes out of the corners of" (SE 85) his eyes. Through a dream of Mum, in which she is "changing from a woman full of love and suffering into a half-woman half-antelope, her milk turning sour, her body wrinkling under the force of the night" (SE 43), he rediscovers, for an instant, his own *àbikú* powers of transformation, and begins to mutate into a fish, a butterfly, and a lizard. In *Infinite Riches*, discovering "parts of the forest" he has "never seen before", he observes antelopes fleeing "into green wastes" (IR 96); and shortly afterwards, he sees figures "with the faces of antelopes ... disappearing into the trees" and "pausing to stare" (IR 98) in his direction.

While Azaro is still a child and his encounters with antelopes in the forest are brief and fleeting (if suggestive enough), Dad's romance with Helen, the beautiful beggar girl, more specifically alludes to the hunter's encounter with the antelope woman. Helen is variously described as "a hypnotically beautiful young girl" (FR 416). Dad once praises "her limbs of a blue gazelle" and "her eyes of a sad and sacred antelope" (SE 15). Towards the end of *The Famished Road*, Dad playfully addresses her as "my wife" (FR 469); later, like the figure of the traditional hunter, he proposes to her, asking her to become his second wife. Eventually, Helen leads her beggar companions back "into the deep mysteries of the forest" (SE 21) from where they originally came. Moreover, Dad is associated with dreams of himself being pampered by beautiful women with supernatural identities. In one of Azaro's dreams, Mum attempts to draw Dad's spirit back from a dream in which a maiden of the water with Helen's face takes him down to her emerald palace at the bottom of a river, where antelopes "with flowers round their necks" (FR 479) come and sit at Dad's feet while the maiden with Helen's face takes care of Dad.

Another time, Dad fantasises about a kingdom where he is a prince with many handmaidens, who bathe "him with milk and saffron" and whose beauty causes Dad to become "suspicious of them", so that he decides to investigate their secret:

he followed them in his mind as they went out for the afternoon. He noticed that as soon as they entered the forest they turned into wonderful antelopes. Dad spoke of the rich gift of songs they brought back to him from their other kingdom. (*SE* 220)¹⁷⁷

While Azaro's and Dad's 'encounters' with antelopes or antelope women are fleeting and/or imaginary, they are significant in terms of the metaphorical structure of Okri's deployment of the motif of *àgbònín* in the *àbíkéú* narratives. As I have suggested above, variants of the motif of *àgbònín* and *ẹfón* and other images of transformation are used as metaphors in relation to oppressive, exploitative agency. The figure of the hunter, in turn, would traditionally be in a position to challenge and counteract negative powers of transformation. The encounters of characters which are associated with the figure of the hunter with antelopes serve as a reminder of the hunter's heroic potential in existentially threatening situations. In the remaining part of the present section, I shall examine the ways in which the photographer, Azaro and Dad – as derivatives of the traditional figure of the hunter – respond to the challenge represented by negative agents of change, who use their powers of transformation to oppress and exploit the people. Most importantly and in accordance with the significance Okri ascribes to the power of vision all three characters are, in different ways, characterised by visionary powers.

When Azaro's family's room is invaded by rats, the photographer and former hunter of bush animals becomes a hunter of a different kind, which is symbolic of the way in which his photographic work undermines the agency and false appearance of politicians and their

¹⁷⁷ The coincidences between Dad's, Mum's and Azaro's dreams of Dad in relation to antelope women are very interesting in this regard, as they express their various anxieties and/or desires in relation to the same image.

powerful allies. The latter are repeatedly associated with rats. Azaro observes, for instance, that his family's landlord has "the eyes of a rat" (FR 240). The photographer once compares rats and the way in which "they are never satisfied" with "bad politicians and imperialists and rich people. ... They eat up property. They eat up everything in sight. And one day when they are very hungry they will eat us up" (FR 233). In words that evoke the figure of the intrepid hunter, he promises Azaro to "finish them off": "I will use my powerful medicine and my secret charms" (FR 233). Similarly, he once explains that he uses a particular perfume for "protection ... Protection from my enemies" (FR 264); and Azaro notes that he "seemed pleased with his charm's efficacy" (*ibid*).

The photographer's discourse on rats and the role he offers to play in killing them acquires a distinct political subtext, which is symbolic of the subversive potential of his photographic work. Cooper (1998) has suggested that, in his yellow shirt stained with dried blood, he represents a West African relative of the Pied Piper. This image effectively links his rat-hunting activities with the political persecution the photographer suffers as politicians feel increasingly threatened by his work: the secret of his power resides, most importantly, in his camera and the way in which the latter can be used to expose underlying, hidden realities, thus complementing and/or subverting the version of reality, or history, manufactured, as Okri repeatedly puts it, by those in power. The photographer, whom Phillips (1997: 170) has described as "the ghetto's singular artist of social realism", once sums up his activities during one day: "I took photographs of women at the market being attacked by thugs. The women fought them back. I took pictures of riots against our white rulers. I took pictures of a policeman taking bribes" (FR 232). The subversive power of his photographic vision resembles that of Azaro's *àbíkú* vision,¹⁷⁸ which enables him to see beyond what is ordinarily visible, thus similarly disclosing (often deliberately) hidden aspects of (manufactured) reality.

¹⁷⁸ Azaro's power of vision has already been discussed (see 5.1.3.).

Dad, in turn, gradually turns into a utopian visionary who dreams of transforming the world for the better, his voice variously assimilating that of a prophet, philosopher, and politician:¹⁷⁹

We have entered a new age ... People who look like human beings are not human beings. Strange people are amongst us. We must be careful. Our lives are changing. ... We must look at the world with new eyes. We must look at ourselves differently. We are freer than we think. We haven't begun to live yet. ... We can redream this world and make the dream real ... our hunger can change the world, make it better, sweeter. People who use only their eyes do not SEE. People who use only their ears do not HEAR.... (FR 498)

'Why don't we use our powers wisely? ... We can use our dark and our magical powers to create good life for our people instead of oppressing them, starving them, or killing them, don't you think? ... We must use our deep powers to get rid of poverty, not to create it. Poverty makes people strange, it makes their eyes bitter, it turns good people into witches and wizards'. (SE 121)

'THINK DIFFERENTLY,' he shouted, 'AND YOU WILL CHANGE THE WORLD'. ... 'REMEMBER HOW FREE YOU ARE ... AND YOU WILL TRANSFORM YOUR HUNGER INTO POWER!' (FR 419-420; compare FR 451).

Identifying himself with the Party of the Poor, Dad raises pertinent questions and draws attention to fundamental problems. He has bold visions of "the laws he would create in his country" (SE 122) to tackle injustice as well as of building a university for beggars and improving their standards of living. He addresses the issue of African unity, saying that "the whole continent should be one great country" (SE 123), and envisions "an African utopia, in which we would pool all our secret wisdom, distil our philosophies, conquer our bad history, and make our people glorious in the world of continents" (SE 123). Furthermore, denouncing oppression and criticising political strategies, he suggests that "power should be about freedom and food, not about frightening people into voting for one side or another" (SE 123):

He lashed out at the political party for filling the people's minds with too many ambitions, with greed and selfishness, promising them land and cars and government jobs if they voted for them, instead of filling their minds with self-respect and regard

¹⁷⁹ Dad's temporary blindness in *Songs of Enchantment* links him to the familiar topos of the blind poet or prophet.

for hard work and service and love, and with thoughts of how to make the people strong, healthy and well-fed. (*SE* 125)

To set a good example he begins, moreover, to act according to his own words: he collects, for instance, garbage in the area, accommodates a large group of beggars in his family's small room and helps Mum in the kitchen.

While the photographer, Azaro, and Dad all have visionary powers with a great subversive and transformative potential, the extent to which they partake of the heroic stature of the traditional figure of the hunter is limited. Unlike the traditional hunter, Azaro ventures into the forest either compulsively, driven by wanderlust – often at the risk of getting lost – or very casually, as he goes there to play: "Sometimes I played in the forest. My favourite place was the clearing. In the afternoons the forest wasn't frightening" (*FR* 143; compare 142). His special *àbikú* powers do not enable him to exert much control over his life or environment. His ability to interfere with processes of change and transformation is severely limited indeed. As Wright (1997a: 155) has noted, he is "a peculiarly passive and powerless character who performs very few actions"; he is "chiefly ... an awareness and a mode of perception ... a presence rather than an agent". Or, in Quayson's (1995b: 112) words, "Azaro's is not a heroism that involves combat with elemental forces; his condition is to *Be*, to exist the essence of an *abiku* [*sic*], comprehending different realms simultaneously and utterly powerless to change the order of things". The photographer, in turn, who is initially a comical figure, gradually assumes prophetic and even Christ-like features – his name is, after all, Jeremiah. But the subversiveness of his vision depends to some extent on and is inspired by the liminality of his position, which makes him vulnerable to censorship and persecution. Eventually, as his fame as an International Photographer increases, he gains professional prestige but loses his liminal status and, along with it, part of his subversive power. In *Infinite Riches*, when he is commissioned by politicians to write the official cover story of their rally, he seems to have lost this power altogether, having become one of the manufacturers of reality and history himself.

While Dad is a visionary character, who gets to voice many of the points crucial to Okri's notion of positive transformative vision and agency, many of his wildly ambitious, utopian schemes to improve the world are unrealistic; all too often, his visionary discourse is inspired by too much palm wine or *ògógóró* 'locally brewed dry gin' and turns incoherent or delirious after a while. Furthermore, his visions cause him to lose sight of his own family's basic needs and even add to their problems. His laudable attempts to effect concrete changes in the neighbourhood are generally short-lived even though often, they fail simply because people are not ready for them. As Quayson (1995a: 153) puts it, "the mode of social action he aspires to is shown to be severely limited in the light of the conditions of squalor and dispossession within which he has to exercise his visions". In *Infinite Riches*, Azaro once captures Dad's growing awareness of the limitations of the changes he himself will be able to bring about: "When I lit a candle there was a sweet sadness on Dad's face. I knew he was thinking that he might not live to see the day when we would be free enough to join the great transforming men and women of the earth" (IR 232).

It becomes clear that while Okri associates the photographer, Azaro, and Dad with the figure of the hunter, thus reviewing different ways of responding to the challenge and threat of change and its agents, whatever potential they have for visionary and transformative agency fundamentally differs from that of the traditional hunter. Okri thus dissociates the notion of positive transformative agency from conventional models of heroic agency. This point is highlighted by two short scenes playfully evoking the scenario of the traditional power contest of transformation between the figure of the hunter and some supernatural force. The first is Dad's account of what happened, as he comes home soaked in mud:

I was coming down the road, drinking, singing, and then the road said to me: 'Watch yourself'. So I abused the road. Then it turned into a river, and I swam. It changed into fire and I sweated. It transformed into a tiger, and I killed it with one blow. And then it shrunk into a big rat and I shouted at it and it ran ... And then it dissolved into mud, and I lost my shoe. If I had money I would be a great man. (FR 94)

While Dad's 'transformation contest' bespeaks his defiant will to survive against the odds it also shows the limitations not only of his powers, but also of the approach he takes, which is based on verbal abuse and physical prowess. The second scene is a dialogue between Madame Koto and Azaro:

She said: 'If you misbehave the same thing will happen to you'.
 'What?'
 'The forest will swallow you'.
 'Then I will become a tree,' I said.
 'Then they will cut you down because of a road'.
 'Then I will turn into the road'.
 'Cars will ride on you, cows will shit on you, people will perform sacrifices on your face'.
 'And I will cry at night. And then people will remember the forest' (FR 219).

Azaro displays, in Cezair-Thompson's (1996:42) words, "a surprising imperviousness to acts of violence and betrayal ... constructing an inviolable identity" for himself. His powerlessness is turned into an asset as he transforms the scenario of ultimate humiliation and suffering evoked by Madame Koto into an opportunity for alerting people to what is going wrong with the world. His nocturnal outcry thus assumes a prophetic dimension, which is characteristic of Okri's conceptualisation and valuation of positive transformative vision and agency.

5.3.3. The suffering of society and what antelopes have got to do with it

In opposition to his deployment of variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efèrè* as metaphors in relation to negative transformative agency, Okri simultaneously draws upon the figure of the antelope (woman) proper to thematise society's potential for positive transformative vision and agency. This may appear contradictory but is in line with Okri's love for paradox and his view that, as stated above, nothing is either one thing or the other; accordingly, transformative agency as such is not inherently good or bad, it all depends. In the previous section, I have suggested that Okri associates his major male characters with the figure of the hunter – as the

antelope woman's other – in order to (re-)examine ways of challenging or counteracting oppression and exploitation by negative agents of change. However, contrary to common sense, perhaps, these characters' potential to assume positive transformative agency arises out of their liminal and/or marginal condition, their powerlessness and suffering; and it is based on their various visionary powers, which are vital to both a deeper understanding of 'reality' and to redreaming and transforming the world. In what follows, I shall analyse how Okri, in turn, links the potential for positive transformative agency with the figure of the antelope (woman), whom he associates with the suffering of women and the disprivileged margins of society more generally. The secret antelope identities assumed by women in the ghetto are, in this regard, connected with 'forgotten' powers of transformation.

Towards the end of *Songs of Enchantment*, Dad renders his own, beautifully told version of the antelope woman's tale, which may be regarded as an interpretative point of reference for Okri's deployment and transformation of the motif of the antelope (woman) proper in the *àbíkú* narratives. Dad's tale-within-a-tale stages the encounter between hunter and antelope woman as a kind of revenge drama, in which the hunter is represented as a cunning character whose success is based on his beautiful voice, which he (mis-)uses to trick innocent game, "killing off all the beautiful animals who hadn't harmed him in any way" (SE 266). The antelope woman, in turn, plays the role of the forest's avenging angel. One day, the cunning hunter's luck changes because the animals have "begun to understand his tricks" (SE 266). After seven unsuccessful days, he falls asleep at the foot of a tree and hears "the forest talking about him, planning the dreadful things they would do to him" (SE 266), thus indirectly receiving a warning. If the hunter used to trick unsuspecting animals with the power of his voice, the forest now undoes him with its own powers: woken up by a strange light flashing past him, he sees "a woman standing in front of a mighty anthill" (SE 266), into which, to his surprise, she disappears after having turned into an antelope. The following day, at the same time, the hunter returns and pretends "to be asleep against the same tree" (SE 266). Once again, he

hears the forest talking about him, "planning something cunning and terrible to do to him" (*SE* 266); and once more, he sees the light flashing past him, whereupon he opens his eyes and, as before, sees a beautiful woman: "She was naked and her skin shone like polished bronze and she was covered in golden bangles round her neck and ankles and up her arms. Beads of precious stones gave off wonderful lights about her slender waist" (*SE* 267). He falls in love with her "instantly", but once more, she turns into an antelope and disappears "into the secret palace of the anthill" (*SE* 267). The hunter cannot forget her and resolves to marry her "even if it was the last thing he did on earth" (*SE* 267).

On the third day, the hunter behaves as before, but has to wait longer. When night has fallen, the forest begins to laugh conspicuously but the unsuspecting hunter keeps pretending to be asleep at the foot of the tree. When it has become very dark, he, again, sees a big light flashing past him, but this time, the "light was so big that he jumped up, with his heart beating very fast" (*SE* 268). Before the woman, whose "golden bangles glittered around her in the moonlight of her mystery", can change into an antelope, the hunter starts to sing "in the most enchanting voice he had ever managed", begging her "to accept him as a husband, swearing that if she refused he would kill himself at the very door of the anthill" (*SE* 268). As he sings "with all his soul, all his love" and goes "down on his knees" before her, the woman is moved and agrees to marry him on the condition "that he must keep what she is a secret for ever, he must never reveal to anyone or anything the mystery of her origin" (*SE* 268). He agrees and swears "that he wouldn't, and that if he did he deserved just punishment" (*SE* 269). The following day, she becomes the hunter's first wife and remains "special" (*SE* 269) even when he marries five other women. They have six children together, and she brings him "incredible good luck" (*SE* 269). Significantly, he stops hunting and becomes a successful businessman.

Eventually, however, the former hunter becomes proud and arrogant and forgets "the secret origins of his success" (*SE* 269). One day, the king announces that the person who kills a

particular "black antelope with a special jewel in its forehead" will marry his daughter and "inherit the kingdom" (*SE* 269), whereupon the hunter, unable to contain his desire for greater power and wealth, decides to go to the forest and kill the black antelope. The following night the hunter and his antelope wife argue, with him suggesting that it is because she is an antelope herself that she does not want him to go and kill the black antelope. She falls silent, and the following morning, the hunter wakes up "to hear his other wives singing about his first wife, mocking her for being an antelope" (*SE* 269). Realising what he has done, he finds that she has left together with her six children, whereupon he changes into his old hunter's clothes and goes back to the forest as he used to before he married her. Once more, he pretends to be asleep at the foot of the old tree and listens "to the forest talking about him" (*SE* 270) but he does not understand "the riddle of their speech" (*SE* 270).

Finally, the strange light flashes past him and his wife appears. Singing "in his most sorrowful voice" he begs her forgiveness" (*SE* 270) but she interrupts him, explaining that the black antelope he had wanted to kill is her own mother, who is a queen, and she accuses him of having betrayed her secret. She laughs at his suggestion to forgive him, changes not into an antelope but a leopard, and, "with a great roar of anger", pounces on the hunter, tears him to pieces and devours him (*SE* 270). Her violent reaction is triggered by the hunter's inadvertent betrayal of her secret. Moreover, the hunter's death also represents the fulfilment of the forest's scheme of punishing him for tricking and killing so many innocent animals. Furthermore, her reaction represents an expression of her anger at his decision to resume hunting in order to kill an antelope – despite her own origin – who, moreover, turns out to be her mother. While the hunter was given a fair chance to change his ways he ultimately proves unregenerate and succumbs to his deep-seated greed and lust for power and wealth. In Dad's tale-within-a-tale, the moral significations in the hunter/antelope woman relationship are, in a way, inverted, as it is the figure of the deceptively melodious hunter that is problematised while that of the antelope woman as the forest's avenging angel is legitimised. More generally, the

antelope woman's tale according to Dad problematises the oppression and exploitation of innocent victims through a deceitful (mis-)use of power.

Before returning to Dad's version of the antelope's tale to conclude the present section, I shall examine the ways in which Okri deploys the figure of the antelope (woman) in the *àbíkéú* narratives more generally in order to underscore the idea that positive transformative vision and agency arise out of the experience of suffering. In this regard, the story of Mum's life represents an ironic counter-narrative to D.O. Fágúnwà's cautionary tale of Olówó-Ayé's marriage with an antelope woman and its problematisation of female beauty with regard to the issue of choosing a wife. Moreover, Mum's story, which illuminates the 'other' side of marriage by providing a female perspective, recalls the way in which Mobólájí Adénúbi's buffalo woman renders her own tale, breaking up the plot of the hunter's master narrative. As a beautiful young girl, Mum got married to Dad, and her account of their life together may well be regarded as a cautionary tale for beautiful women. Significantly, Mum's beauty is not seen as the origin of Dad's problems but rather as that of her own misery:

My life is a pit. I dig it and it stays the same. I fill it and it empties. Look at us. All of us in one room. I walk from morning till night, selling things, praying with my feet. God smiles at me and my face goes raw. Sometimes I cannot speak. My mouth is full of bad living. I was the most beautiful girl in my village and I married this madman and I feel as if I have given birth to this same child five times. I must have done someone a great wrong to suffer like this. (FR 443; compare FR 477)

In *Songs of Enchantment*, Mum once cries

bitterly, cursing all the years of her privation and suffering, cursing the day she set eyes on dad in the village, during the most beautiful years of her life, swearing at dad for having drained the life out of her in so profitless a marriage. (SE 17; compare FR 228; IR 208)

While Okri is concerned with the condition of society as a whole, the suffering of women seems, in many ways, to epitomise the suffering of society more generally. Throughout the

àbíkú narratives, the character of Mum illustrates the desperate but also heroic aspects of female agency in a modern impoverished urban setting. On the one hand, while Mum does not seem to have any powers of transformation, she appears to be perpetually changing as she becomes leaner, sadder, more haggard, bonier, and so on. The narrator's abundant references to the negative transformation of Mum's appearance serve as an indicator of her hardship and suffering and form a contrast to the transformative power of the antelope woman with which she is later associated; moreover, her condition is representative of that of most women living in the area. As Azaro comes to realise, "her tiredness and sacrifice were not hers alone but were suffered by all women, all women of the marketplace" (FR 162; compare FR 238). In *Infinite Riches*, one of Dad's newly gained insights is that "[w]e are destroying our women" (IR 201).

On the other hand, it is Mum's petty business and her personal resourcefulness that Azaro and Dad rely on for their daily subsistence and survival. Azaro once notes:

She sighed and I knew that in spite of everything she would carry on hawking. Her sigh was full of despair, but at the bottom of her lungs, at the depth of her breath's expulsion, there was also hope, waiting like sleep at the end of even the most torrid day. (JE 93)

Whereas Azaro's father offers one lofty scheme after the other for the development of society at large, his mother ensures the family's survival from one day to the next, holds the family together and, more than once, gets both Dad and Azaro out of trouble. In the beginning of *The Famished Road*, for instance, after the great riot, she exerts herself in using spiritual and other powers to find and set free both her son and her husband, so that Azaro is "filled ... with wonder about her" (FR 29). The way in which Dad repeatedly berates Mum for neglecting the family and, most particularly, himself when, in fact, she has been working extremely hard all day, is highly ironical and reflects his own characteristic self-centredness. In one of his essays Okri (1997: 106) calls for "[l]ove for women who bear all the suffering and wend their ways to deserted marketplaces and who create such small miracles of survival out

of the bitter dust of the dying age". His insistence on the heroic side of suffering and the potential for positive transformative agency arising out of it is symbolically thrown into relief by the way in which the women in the ghetto, among them Mum, appear to assume secret antelope identities.

Early in *Songs of Enchantment*, Azaro and Dad witness an "enigmatic transformation" (SE 73) in Mum, who, in her sleep, seems to be "in two places at the same time, her body here, her spirit somewhere else" (SE 70). Azaro notes: "Something new had entered mum's spirit and because we couldn't comprehend it we were a little afraid of her" (SE 73). Mum becomes "more beautiful, more aloof, like a seraphic priestess" (SE 80). Azaro observes that she leaves the house at night (SE 184) and smells "the forest on her clothes" (SE 231; compare SE 239), or even "the smell of antelopes soaked by rain" (IR 135) when she comes back. While Mum ignores questions about her nightly activities in the forest, she appears "transformed" (SE 240) whenever she returns. Whenever she ceases to disappear, however, her mysterious powers diminish. The instability of her identity is linked to rumours regarding a secret cult of (antelope) women in the forest, which also represents an explanation for the (nightly) disappearance of other women in the ghetto. Moreover, Dad suggestively dreams of Mum "covered in jewels and ... dancing in the forest with white antelopes surrounding her" (SE 131).

Beginning in the last third of *The Famished Road* and throughout its two sequels, a series of cryptic occurrences takes place in the ghetto. Azaro recalls that signs "multiplied all over our area" (SE 70) and refers to "bizarre omens populating our lives" (SE 80). People have strange dream visions of "birds and butterflies, of hybrid animals, of antelopes with jewelled necklaces, of beggars who were princesses" (FR 344-345). In *Songs of Enchantment*, the appearance of strange (white) antelopes – among other phenomena, references to which are closely

interwoven — is linked to the transformation of the forest and, in turn, the suffering of society and women in particular:

The forest became dangerous. It became another country, ... a place with fleeting visions of silver elephants and white antelopes ... And because the forest gradually became alien to us, because we feared the bristling potency of its new empty spaces, we all became a little twisted. (*SE* 68)

Women and young girls disappear from their husbands' houses and people hear the haunting sound of multiplying female voices (*SE* 68, 69, 70) coming from the forest at night.¹⁸⁰ Azaro notes that

The women who disappeared into the forest... grew greater in number ... Those who were out late at night, who suffered the agony of the women's piercing melodies, said that sometimes they had caught fleeting glimpses of white antelopes with glittering eyes in the forest. The antelopes were ghostly and splendid and when they saw human beings they vanished into the trees. No one had caught any of the antelopes. The trees went on being felled and the women's voices became more painful in their beauty. (*SE* 71-72)

Again, the disappearance of women and, in turn, the appearance of white antelopes are suggestively linked. Once, for instance, Azaro observes that on a "day of half-miracles ... [w]omen in white filed silently down our street and disappeared into the forest" (*SE* 244). Gradually, the (white) antelopes acquire quasi-sacred status. This is underscored by their colour, which, in Yorùbá culture, signifies ritual purity and indicates their symbolic revitalising transformative powers with regard to society. Initially people try to capture them in order to gain control over the situation but fail. According to rumours, a hunter who succeeds in killing one of the white antelopes is "run over by one of the trucks of politics" (*SE* 71), "sacrificed to the road" (*SE* 72). According to other rumours, the Party of the Poor eventually forbids killing them (*SE* 79), while a prophet, who emerges from the forest one day, speaks of "the dreadful consequences that would be visited on those who had been killing the white antelopes" (*SE*

¹⁸⁰ The way in which their haunting voices capture people's attention, thus assuming a prophetic dimension, recalls Azaro's plan to "cry at night" so "people will remember the forest" (*FR* 219).

210). In the same vein Azaro's recurrent references to the cooking or consumption of (white) antelope meat, especially in Madame Koto's bar seem to suggest that an important taboo is being broken, and reverberate with the possibility of ritual murder.

Perhaps most importantly, the (antelope) women who have disappeared into the forest are associated with forgotten powers, which are neither revered nor practised any longer:

People in our area claimed that the women of the forest were seers, that they had powers of transformation, and that they turned into white antelopes. It was also claimed that the women had discovered the secrets of herbs and bark, of the earth and the night. They understood the language of trees and butterflies. It was said that an old woman was their leader ... The men of our area began to suspect their wives of belonging to a new, secret sect. More women disappeared from their homes. It was whispered that the women of the forest could see into the future. ... And mum surprised me one night by telling me that the women were singing of the forgotten ways of our ancestors. They were warning us not to change too much, not to disregard the earth. (*SE* 79)

Once, when Azaro has secretly followed Mum into the forest at night, he witnesses one of the women's nightly gatherings, which has the character of a secret ritual performance:

Then everything went silent. And in the silence I beheld a gathering of white antelopes with jewels around their necks. They were in a white circle. In the centre of the circle was a tree that resembled a rhinoceros. The antelopes didn't move. Their stillness was uncanny. Their heads were craned forward as if they were listening to an oral rendering of wise old legends. The jewels and precious stones glittered round their slender necks with many beautiful colours which the wind kept changing. The moon reappeared and the sky withdrew from over my head. The antelopes stood white and wondrous in the clearing with the rhinoceros tree in their middle, and with the bells gently tinkling in the wind. The voices had stopped singing. Incense wafted from the open spaces. Something felt hot on the nape of my neck. I turned, and saw the glassy green eyes of an owl. I drew a breath. The wind circled my head. The owl gave a piercing hoot and then flew up into the sky with a flurry of beating wings. The antelopes all looked up, and froze. The owl circled the air above me, hooting its alarmed cry. Suddenly, there were many eyes on me in the forest. It seemed that the trees and leaves had eyes, that insects were watching me, that the darkness was intensely populated with eyes, all concentrated on me. I couldn't hide. Crouching on the earth, I felt water flowing

beneath my feet. I looked down, and saw nothing. I could have been standing over an abyss. The wind rose and I looked up and saw a blue mist obscuring the antelopes. And then I saw women in the mist, with jewels and precious stones twinkling round their necks. The women wore white. They moved towards me. ... Lost among the trees, I heard the beating of wings and the whisperings of the wind and hooves and footsteps everywhere. (*SE* 85-86)

The women's mystical empowerment seems to represent a new way of life rather than the boon the monomythic hero brings the community at the end of a linear, monomythic quest; and it is related to their suffering. The assumption of secret antelope identities is associated with the notion of reconnecting with the past, which will restore (forgotten) powers of positive transformation. Cooper (1998: 112) has criticised Okri's characterisation of the women in the forest in terms of their "familiar, stereotypical female function" as "priestesses, as the custodians of traditional values and knowledge", which, in her view, is symptomatic of a tendency in West African literary discourses to idealise and "take recourse to the myths of old in the service of the familiar nationalist project of cultural healing" (*ibid.* 110) while, at the same time, warning against change and progress. However, while Cooper has a valid point regarding the stereotypical – or, perhaps, rather archetypal – function of the women in the forest, it is significant that Okri chooses to draw upon the topos of the antelope woman in this regard. While the (antelope) women warn the people "not to change too much" (*SE* 79) indeed, they themselves embody the – ambivalent – principle of change, which relativises their message and puts it into perspective. Their priestly roles and the significance they take on are based on their own ability to change: they command much needed "powers of transformation" (*SE* 79). Moreover, while they listen to "wise old legends" (*SE* 86), they also "see into the future" (*SE* 79).

Furthermore, Dad's version of the antelope woman's tale, transcending its own fictional boundaries, interferes with the plot of Azaro's narrative in a way that suggests the transference of heroic energy onto the antelope woman herself. Before the hunter sees the flashing light heralding the antelope woman for the third time, Dad's narrative is interrupted as a strong

wind blows into the room, "in the emerald form of a majestic and mighty leopard" who is "growling" deeply and surrounded by "a powerful light" which parallels that of the antelope woman's flash (*SE* 267). The appearance of this "great invisible beast" represents the fulfilment of what the old woman in the forest has told Mum: "One day a great animal will visit him. Tell him to take care of it. The animal will show him some of the wonders of the earth" (*SE* 241). This is significant as the old woman – who is, moreover, referred to as a "benign witch" (*IR* 90) – is herself associated not only with Okri's antelope women more generally, but also with the antelope-woman-turned-leopard of Dad's narrative. While her marginalisation and suffering link her to the women in the ghetto (even though her suffering clearly exceeds theirs), the fact that she has been able to transform her suffering into spiritual powers¹⁸¹ – to the extent that she envisions the future by literally weaving the tapestry of people's lives – renders her a model for them. Like Okri's antelopes, she has "jewelled eyes" (*IR* 140). Once, Azaro sees "a bird with a hooked, aged beak" (*IR* 97) which, when it hits the ground, turns first into an antelope and then into the old woman. Once, she is referred to as the "leader" (*SE* 79) of the women whose mysterious disappearance into the forest is associated with the sign of white antelopes; another time, she threatens Azaro and Dad with the words, "Run before I turn into a leopard and eat you up!" before continuing to say: "Hunters are trying to kill me. ... They thought I was an antelope" (*IR* 159).

After a moment of silence, Dad lets "the sign of the leopard" which has entered the room while he is rendering his version of the antelope woman's tale "enter the spell of his narration" (*SE* 268). As the antelope woman in Dad's tale-within-a-tale turns into a leopard to devour the hunter, she becomes metaphorically connected with the invisible leopard staring at Dad. When the latter has finished his story and, significantly, is just about to relate it to the present ("And till this day...", *SE* 270) he interrupts himself again because the invisible leopard, who appears to have been listening to his tale attentively, suddenly leaves the room. Dad, who appears to

¹⁸¹ Her powers encompass female mythic powers from different mythologies.

have "finally understood the meaning of the sign" (*SE* 270), follows "the sign of the emerald leopard" (*SE* 271). It thus seems to be a manifestation of the antelope-woman-turned-leopard who initiates Dad into the mystery of how the world can be redeemed (and transformed) by being redreamed. Immediately before beginning his story, Dad has, moreover, been wondering whether – if, as some people say, he is indeed an animal – what kind of an animal he would be, an "antelope, or a leopard" (*SE* 265). Crying "out for justice and more vision and transformation," he eventually breaks "the seven chains" that, in Azaro's words "tied our dreams down, that kept our vision of more light disconnected from reality" (*SE* 276). This, however, is not to say that the suffering and searching has come to an end: throughout the final pages of *Songs of Enchantment* as well as its sequel *Infinite Riches*, Dad keeps "following the sign of the leopard" (*SE* 275; compare *IR* 8, 15, 25, 37, 77, 143, 149, 153), sometimes temporarily losing sight of it (*SE* 277; compare *IR* 153), which symbolises the ongoing nature of his quest.

While Okri's deployment of the motif of antelope women as a metaphor in relation to transformative vision and agency represents a symbolically significant shift of heroic energy to the seemingly powerless, suffering and oppressed margins of society, it does not imply that the assumption of transformative vision and agency is limited to women. It is important to keep in mind that while Okri associates major male characters with the figure of the hunter in order to examine ways of challenging and counteracting the negative agents of change symbolised by variants of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn*, these characters, in their own condition of suffering, resemble the figure of the antelope woman in Dad's version of the antelope tale. Yet, Okri's symbolic transference of the potential for positive transformative agency onto the (antelope) women represents a significant challenge to popular notions of power. Associating the power of transformation with the figure of the antelope woman and, thereby, choosing a female metaphor to mediate his notion of transformative vision and agency, Okri feminises his theme without turning it into an exclusively female affair: everybody who is suffering and may

therefore seem powerless and disprivileged becomes a potential agent of positive transformation. As Azaro suggests in *Songs of Enchantment*, "some men, unable to bear the sublime voices of the women, had run off to join them in the forest" (SE 79). Similarly, in *Infinite Riches*, he links the appearance of white antelopes to the disappearance of people in general rather than just women: "Many people have disappeared into the forest. I saw white antelopes with jewels round their necks" (IR 77).

5.3.4. "We are part human part stories": (re-)negotiating the power of transformation

In an interview, Okri (Wilkinson 1992: 85) said that for him, suffering was "one of the central themes" in *The Famished Road*: "suffering on the one hand and joy on the other, but especially suffering. Suffering is one of the great characters of the book, the different ways people suffer". As I have shown, Okri links the rediscovery of mythic powers of transformation to women like Mum, thereby associating the potential to assume transformative agency – which is necessary in order to change the world for the better – to those who are suffering the most, thus emphasising that the key to unlocking the destructive cycles of change in which Nigeria has been trapped for so long is to be found in the margins of society.¹⁸² Okri (Wilkinson 1992: 86), highlighting the same point with regard to our understanding of history, said he preferred to "say suffering rather than history" because while there is "a great celebration of history, the great accomplishments of various kinds", the many "invisible histories" are often ignored, and "we have to change our perception of how we speak of people's accomplishments". Quayson (1997: 143) has suggested that, in contrast to characters like Dad or Madame Koto, Mum does not qualify as a potentially heroic character because "[h]ers is a harried and difficult existence". Similarly Cooper (1998: 92), acknowledging the relative powerlessness of both Azaro's parents,

¹⁸² In terms of how Okri (re-)conceptualises power, this is precisely what makes Madame Koto so problematic as a character. In a way, she has too much conventional power to truly be an agent of positive transformative agency. For Okri, conventional power is always ambivalent. The more conventional power any of Okri's characters has, the more ambivalent s/he becomes, in a tendentially negative sense.

has argued that the "virtuous Mum or the demented, raving Dad, will not bring forth much of a transformation". But as I would emphasise Okri suggests that they might, and this possibility is important. In Okri's view, they qualify as potentially heroic characters precisely *because* they are powerless and suffering. As he suggests in one of his essays, when "victims stop seeing themselves as victims and discover the power of transformation, forces are born on this planet. The possibilities of a new history depend on it" (Okri 1997: 86). In another essay, he expresses a similar idea:

They tell me that nature is a survival of the fittest. And yet look at how many wondrous gold and yellow fishes prosper amongst the silent stones of the ocean beds, while sharks eternally prowl the waters in their impossible dreams of oceanic domination and while whales become extinct; look how many does and antelopes, ants and fleas, birds of aquamarine plumage ... how many butterflies and iguanas thrive, while elephants turn into endangered species, and while even lions growl in their dwindling solitude. There is no such thing as a powerless people. There are only those who have not seen and have not used their power and will. ... New vision should come from those who suffer most and who love life the most. The marvellous responsibility of the unheard and the unseen resides in this paradox. (Okri 1997: 103)

In the *àbíkú* narratives, there is some tension between the notion of change as a (super)natural force of quasi-mythic proportions that is ultimately beyond human control – a (super)natural disaster – on the one hand and the notion of change as the result of transformative agency, which can be determined by the people themselves, on the other. The former is how a majority of the people conceives of change. Whether this is a legacy of the colonial period or, more recently, of the years of military rule, there seems to be an overwhelming sense that there is nothing people can do about the situation but try to carve out a little niche for themselves in the hope to survive. It is this lethargy or apathy that Okri writes against, assuming the voice of a prophet who aims to awaken the consciousness of his people. As so often, it is Dad who articulates this idea, shouting: "We can change the world! ... That is why our road is hungry ... We have no desire to change things!" (FR 451). Cooper (1998: 93) has suggested that in the *àbíkú* narratives, the poor are "depicted ... as misguided or downtrodden. Their passivity,

amnesia, naïveté and delusion ensure that they are victims, victims moreover who conspire in their own oppression". Similarly, Okri (1997: 133) argues that the "real quarrel of the oppressed is not with the oppressors. It is with themselves. The real truth they have to face is the truth about themselves". As he expresses it in his millenium poem, *Mental Fight* (MF 26):

"...when you can no longer dream / No longer see possibilities / No longer see alternatives; / When you can see only limitation / Only despair, and negation, / Then you are in the way. / You are also the problem. / The exhausted obstruct / The creation of a greater future".

Both Okri's emphasis on suffering and the crucial importance he ascribes to visionary agency are vital to his reconceptualisation of power and, more specifically, the power of transformation. However, while he makes a very important point in this regard one is occasionally left wondering if Okri is not too fascinated with and preoccupied by what he paradoxically conceives of as the beauty of suffering to want to effect real change. At times, the condition of suffering seems to be idealised to such a degree that, in a way, it becomes its own end. Azaro once notes, in a regretful voice, that there "were no dreams in the air, there was no tension, no yearnings, no hunger", which implies that the potential for positive transformation is nil (SE 115). Especially Mum's condition appears idealised in this regard, despite the harshness of her situation. As Azaro recalls, Mum tells him stories full of "hard images of joy" (FR 183). In his own narratives, in turn, Mum herself would at times seem frozen into a kind of hard image of joy. This is especially problematic as Azaro's *àbíkú* vision is supernaturally sanctioned, so that everything he perceives appears more 'real' and more 'true' than what ordinary people perceive. Furthermore, there arises considerable tension between Azaro's hard but beautiful image of Mum with its latent potential of change and the latter's actual assumption of positive transformative agency on an impressively public scale as she and other women from the ghetto get organised, initially to get Dad out of prison but eventually to effect concrete political changes that will directly affect people's lives. The beauty of Okri's

hard image of Mum seems to depend on her suffering, which subverts the desirability of real change.

A similar problem arises with regard to the power of vision. Dad once asks: "When will our suffering bear fruit? One great thought can alter the future of the world. One revelation. One dream. But who will dream that dream? And who will make it real?" (IR 5). In Okri's view, the power of vision is the necessary prerequisite for the assumption of positive transformative agency. However, one gets the impression that the potential which the sign of the white antelopes with their forgotten powers of transformation as well as that of the antelope-(woman)-turned-leopard seem to hold are always already deferred, perpetually located in some other realm, accessible only through yet another change or modification of vision or through some further metamorphosis. According to the three-headed spirit, a state of incompleteness is desirable because otherwise people will "cease of boredom because there are no more dreams" (FR 329), which suggests that vision, like suffering, becomes its own end. In this regard, Wright (1997a: 157) criticises the cyclicity and apparent futility of visionary and transformative agency in the *abiku* narratives when arguing that

The nature and function of the *abiku*, as we have seen, is to register the recurrence of things, the essential conditions of being that are not subject to history, and Azaro himself proves powerless to change anything in the order of things. The result is that the unceasing transformations, no matter how sensational, are cyclical in character, emphasizing the ultimate futility of the *abiku*'s progress, and in effect are not transformations at all since, after all the changes, things remain much the same. Meanwhile, in the form of the book, this unavailing change is itself unchanging and is responsible for the note of weary sameness that the novel exudes.

It would seem, however, that Okri's point is to encourage visionary resilience despite little immediately visible positive transformation. In his view, one either succumbs to the destructive power of the agents of negative change or one becomes one of "the great good dreamers and the slow secret realisers of great dreams" who need to be "stronger, to hold fast to the difficult

light and to transcend themselves and become the legendary hidden heroes who transform the destiny of peoples and nations for the better" (SE 113). The struggle may well continue infinitely and effect very little positive transformation very slowly, but that is the condition of human life and, as such, no reason or justification to give up hope. Azaro once has an insight into the implications of his decision to stay alive:

I wept for my terrible fate. I saw at once that if I lived I would have to struggle for ever and without much hope against the insidious permeating extensions of the Masquerade's kingdom, I would have to fight against it, never certain of succeeding, never sure of companionship, possibly always betrayed by love ... without rest, and without the certainty of transformation. I saw how my mother and father were doomed in the struggle. ... it seemed better to return to the spirit world and play by the fountains with the beautiful fauns than to struggle against the empire of the Masquerade's dominion... (SE 15-16)

Dad, as a human being, is similarly overwhelmed by the prospect of perpetual struggle. As Azaro puts it:

I knew that he was seeing the true wretchedness of our condition with new eyes. He made us see it more poignantly. ... I could almost feel him thinking that to see anew is not enough. We must also create our lives, everyday, with will and light and love. The endlessness of effort unto death frightened him because he was probably a man who would like a single great act, a heroic act, to be sufficient – for ever and ever. (SE 291)

Beyond its relevance to the immediate and implied historical context of the *àbíkéú* narratives, the notion of transformative power which is based on the power of vision is thus crucial to Okri's philosophy of life more generally as well as to his self-understanding as an artist and poet. In one of his essays on storytelling, Okri (1997: 69-70) describes the present as "an age of discovery and exploration", which brings with it the exploration "of new frontiers ... in art":

In literature, this pushing back of the frontiers lies in the marvel of planting beautiful epiphanic dynamites within innocent-seeming texts or in obscure-seeming books. This feeling that books, that words can once again trouble the sleep of ancient powers; this joyful challenge to the centrality of realism; this eternal questioning of what reality really is; this healing assault on homogeneity; this quest for magical new realms; this

playful ambush on the ivory tower and its guardsmen who police the accepted frontiers of what is considered valid in narrative terms; this unsung age of happy and tragic literary warriors and enchanters and healers; this creation of texts which are dreams that keep changing, fluid texts which rewrite themselves when the reader isn't looking, texts which are dreams that change you as you read them, dreams which are texts which you write in the duration of contact between the eye and the page...

In his literary work, he aims to open up new perspectives on the world as well as the human condition. For Okri, artists and/or poets are people characterised by extraordinary powers of perception. The literary genealogy within which he places himself to construct and legitimise his own identity as a poet-prophet goes back to the "earliest storytellers", who were "magi, seers, bards, griots, shamans":

They wrestled with the mysteries and transformed them into myths which coded the world and helped the community to live through one more darkness, with eyes wide open, and with hearts set alight. They had to have the ability to become lightning, to become a future homeland, to be the dreaded guide to the fabled land where the community will settle and fructify. (1997: 35-36)

But if the artist's or poet's potential and responsibility for visionary and transformative agency are exceptional in many ways, Okri also emphasises that in important ways, every human being partakes of them. In this regard, it is the stories of ordinary people's lives where the potential and responsibility for re-envisioning and thereby transforming the world for the better begins:

Stories can change lives ... We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. ... we are writing the novels of our lives as we live, and in the living ... And sometimes we manage the even greater feat of transforming the unhappy novel of our lives into a happier one – by understanding the bizarre fact that to some extent we are the novelists and composers of our lives. (1997: 42-47)

As he puts it in another essay, we "are part human, part stories" (Okri 1997: 114). The motif of *àgbònín* thus becomes an all-encompassing metaphor for the creative, transformative potential within ourselves as human beings, which is at the heart of Okri's philosophy.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored four contemporary literary transformations of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) in Yorùbá culture. While D.O. Fágúnwà, Amos Tutùplá, Mobólájí Adénúbi and Ben Okri all draw on the same topos, the various ways in which they deploy and transform it are, as I hope I have demonstrated, highly original and imaginative. The resonance which the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) finds in the literary imagination of these writers with their various personal, socio-cultural and historical contexts attests to its symbolic and metaphoric potential. By way of conclusion, I would like to return to some of the suggestions made at the end of Chapter 1 (1.2.3). While each writer's deployment and transformation of the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) is unique, common themes and subthemes do emerge. Specifically, there seems to be a connection between the overall atmosphere of heightened anxiety that characterises the antelope/buffalo woman's tale in general and the ways in which the individual authors deploy and transform the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* to deal with or express anxieties or challenges arising in relation to the colonial or post-colonial contexts in which they find themselves.

Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Qdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* (1938) and *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1949) are hunters' narratives with an allegorical or even metaphysical dimension. The hunter-protagonist's journey to Mount Láńgbòdó and similar locations during which he has to overcome many extraordinary obstacles is an image for the journey of life, and the different kinds of spirit beings and other supernatural powers he encounters on the way represent the challenges human beings are faced with during their lifetime. As I have argued, one of Fágúnwà's most important themes in the two narratives is the importance of finding a good spouse and, more specifically, a good wife. To some extent, his deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* reflects traditional, socio-

culturally determined anxieties regarding women more generally. But it also responds especially to uncertainties and difficulties with respect to the formation of marriage relationships that had arisen in the course of modernisation and westernisation. The role of Christianity in this regard is highly ambivalent: on the one hand it has promoted and enhanced the very processes of modernisation and westernisation that are often seen as the cause of moral corruption; yet on the other hand, certain Yorùbá traditional values can readily be identified with conservative Christian ones, and Fágúnwà's didactic agenda is clearly inspired by both. Fágúnwà's polarisation of the notions of *àgbònrín* '(the) harnessed antelope (woman)' and *ìwà* '(good) character' as metaphors for negative and positive female agency respectively – with special reference to the domestic realm – is central to his moral vision, which, in turn, discerns clearly defined values and models of undesirable and desirable behaviour. Beyond its immediate relevance to the specific (and rather sensitive) issue of choosing a spouse/wife, Fágúnwà's discourse on marital experience more generally expresses and counteracts an increasing sense of socio-cultural instability experienced by many people at the time he was writing *Ògbójú Qdè Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ* and *Igbó Olódūmarè*.

Tutùplá's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) is set in the immediate context of nineteenth-century slave-raiding and general political turmoil in Yorùbáland but, as I have argued, the quest of its hero-narrator for a way out of his essentially nervous condition in the Bush of Ghosts is symbolic both of power relations in general and of the colonial experience in particular. In a fictional environment where power predominantly manifests itself as the power of transformation, Tutùplá deploys the motif of *àgbònrín* as a figure or metaphor for power. The fact that it is essentially through emulating the condition of *àgbònrín* that the hero-narrator himself gradually becomes more powerful and eventually succeeds in finding a way out of the Bush of Ghosts suggests, problematically, that in order to survive and prosper, one has to assimilate into and thus perpetuate existing structures of power and oppression. On the one hand, Tutùplá's comic variations on the motif of *àgbònrín*, which culminate in the symbolically

inverted encounter between Super Lady and the hero-narrator, serve to make the latter's quest heroic as he – like his brother in the human world – has to undergo suffering and humiliation before overcoming his powerlessness and being reunited with his family. On the other hand, Tutùplá's employment of comic irony is highly subversive as, beyond the quasi-ritual humiliation of the hero-narrator, the heroic quest itself is ridiculed and its ultimate absurdity disclosed. Tutùplá's playful variations on the motif of *àgbònrin* in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* symbolically reflect, but also question, ambitions and anxieties characteristic of the colonial and, to some extent, the neo- or post-colonial eras.

Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent" (1996) is part of her project to popularise tales from Ifá divination literature, and her transformation of the motif of *esón* plays a significant role in this regard. In contrast to the traditional tale – which focalises the figure of the hunter rather than that of the buffalo woman – one of Adénúbi's strategies of popularisation is to give the latter a first-person narrative voice at two critical moments in the plot, when the buffalo woman relates the story of her life from her own, female perspective. The buffalo woman's first-person narrative discourse has a subversive effect on Adénúbi's narrative as a whole, resulting in interesting ambiguities and incongruities. Though the narrative is set in mythic time, the buffalo woman is turned into a strong identification figure for contemporary women. Her words not only render her psychologically interesting and understandable but also reflect on the self-perception of many women in 20th-century Nigeria. A heroine in a predetermined plot which does not leave her too many options, caught up in society's notion of gender roles as well as her own internalisation of certain stereotypes about women, Adénúbi's buffalo woman raises the question of whether and to what degree women in contemporary Nigerian society more generally would be able to break out of the all-too-familiar plots of their lives. Like Fágúnwà's narratives, Adénúbi's "The Importance of Being Prudent" draws on the antelope/buffalo woman's tale to comment on contemporary marital relationships but it does so from a completely different angle: breaking the buffalo woman's silence, it points to the

necessity for women to tell their own stories and to redefine their identities and roles in the twentieth century.

Okri's *àbíkéú* narratives – *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998) – are set in Nigeria in the years preceding Independence, a period characterised by political unrest and instability which entailed great hope and economic development on the one hand and suffering and growing oppression on the other. They are permeated by an overwhelming sense of anxiety in relation to the forces of change and the continuous reorientation this necessitates, which extends to the post-colonial period with its quest for modern cultural and national identities. As I have argued, the fact that the forest itself is undergoing change is a powerful image for the magnitude and fundamental nature of the changes confronting society. It also represents the backdrop to Okri's assertion that change is effected and determined by human agents and their hidden agendas and can, therefore, be challenged and transformed by the people themselves. In this regard, Okri draws upon the motif of *àgbònrín* and *efòn* and other images of transformation as metaphors both in order to disclose oppressive, exploitative agents of change and to explore society's potential and responsibility for re-envisioning the world and transforming it for the better. In contrast to Tutùplá, who ultimately seems to accept the inevitability of the assimilation into and, thereby, the perpetuation of oppressive power structures – even though his use of comic irony has a subversive effect – Okri suggests that the potential for the power of positive transformation resides in the margins of society and begins with the rediscovery and re-evaluation of the cultural and personal resources of those who are oppressed and suffering.

The emphasis of this thesis has been on the close literary analysis and interpretation of contemporary literary transformations of one particular topos in Yorùbá culture. I have examined the various meanings or layers of meaning the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) takes on in the individual texts studied, meanings which may sometimes be

hidden or contradictory; and by doing so I hope to have communicated some of its versatility as well as its fascination. As I emphasised in Chapter 1, the recognition of a topos represents the starting point for in-depth analysis and interpretation, not its end. By putting each writer's deployment of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* in a biographical, historical and socio-cultural perspective, I have explored how he or she – more or less consciously – invests it with new meanings and, in the process, transforms it, and how the topos of antelope (woman) and buffalo (woman) thus comes to serve manifold symbolic or metaphoric purposes, reflecting on and expressing a whole range of issues. Not only is the topos as such continuous beyond the precolonial period but it has also assumed a new relevance with respect to the socio-cultural and political anxieties generated in the colonial and post-colonial climates. The contemporary literary transformations explored in this thesis all mediate and negotiate personal, socio-cultural and political anxieties in the wake of sustained contact with the West, especially through Christian missionary activity and colonialism. The thematisation of gender relations plays an important symbolic, metaphoric and even metonymic role in this respect, since the way in which each writer's literary transformation of the motif of *àgbònrín* and *ẹfòn* relates to the issue of women and female agency in Yorùbá culture, or, more generally, in Nigerian culture, is an important means of communicating and conceptualising change.

Works cited

While I have rendered the names of Yorùbá authors with tonemarks throughout the text of this thesis, all names are represented without the tonemarks in this bibliography to facilitate identification. I have, however, added subdots to all Yorùbá names. Yorùbá titles are tone-marked and subdotted. Since this thesis is written in English, I follow the English alphabet, which means that names beginning with 'Gb' are to be found under 'G', and names beginning with 'E', 'O' or 'S' under 'E', 'O' or 'S' respectively.

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