

## **PATRIARCHY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SELECTED YORUBA FOLKTALES**

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### **Introduction**

Folktales are of great importance to the Yoruba people. These tales serve as a social codification of a sort in the community. It is therefore not surprising that gender, which is pertinent to the social system, forms one of the issues in Yoruba folktales. Gender in this paper is not sexist; but refers to imbalance in social relations in a patriarchal setting. In some societies and cultures, the male is regarded as the norm, as the central and neutral position, from which the female is a departure. The female is seen as inferior to the male gender, thereby causing the devaluation of the female in the society. Over a period of time patriarchy became a phenomenon that rendered the female folk vulnerable even among the Yoruba. Some critics have stated that the area of patriarchy which is influenced by religion, tradition, customs, norms and beliefs is a no go area, since tradition, or culture cannot die and the ' woman's umbilical cord is still tied to tradition' (Emelia, 1996). This oppressive phenomenon (patriarchy) has influenced greatly the representation of the female folks in Yoruba folktales, and the unfair treatment meted out to them in the folktales. The tales therefore depict the male and female sexes to reflect the gradual changes in gender relationships in Yoruba communities. Ecology which serves as the template for the emergence of beliefs, and people's folktales revolve around the challenges posed by the ecology. The belief system emanating therefore, serves as a guide to the society. The Yoruba people of the south west, Nigeria, perceive the terrestrial as transpositional from the celestial in the saying, "bi won ti se laye, ni won se lorun" (As it is done on earth, so is it done in heaven).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts eco-feminism which was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne (Diamond & Orenstein, 1990). Eco-feminism is a philosophy and movement coined from the union of feminism and ecological thinking, and the belief that the social mentality which leads to the domination and oppression of women, is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. A central tenet in eco-feminism states that the male ownership of land has led to a dominator culture (patriarchy), manifesting itself in food export, over-grazing, exploitation of the people, and abusive land ethic by which animals and land and by extension the woman, are valued only as economic resources. (Plant Judith, 1990: 155).

Women's spirituality such as goddess spirituality has likewise left a distinct impact on eco-feminism. Alienated by male centered hierarchical religions, women are increasingly turning back to spiritualities which validate female divineness and equality. This vision is enshrined in a sacred experience of the earth as eco-feminists share and celebrates a glorious matriarchal past, where women are valued equally with men. In the past, before civilization, the connectedness of the woman to the earth

was acknowledged and valued through female goddesses like Oya, Aje, Yemoja, Osun in the Yoruba community, who were highly worshipped and revered alongside male deities, without any form of disparity. During this period, the earth was not seen as "an object of exploitation and domination" (Eisler, 23). Based on this belief, this study will explore the Yoruba pantheistic tradition to show the opposing attributes accorded to the male and female deities against human portrayal.

### **Yoruba Cosmogony and Gender**

In relation to the spirituality features of eco-feminism, the Yoruba cosmogony believes that there is a strong link between the celestial and the terrestrial. The people are conscious that there is a transcendent order, and this awareness of the ultra-human is responsible in part for their belief in the supernatural. The Yoruba pantheon consists of hundreds of deities which are worshipped for an immense variety of purposes. These deities symbolically represent the male and female terrestrial manifestations. Some of the deities are known for their dual attributes but are specifically prone to some traits than the others. Female deities are "construed as possessing the ability to soften, cool and enliven any situation that is harsh or aggressive"; (i.e., they are well known for their nurturing attributes). Male gods are perceived as representing toughness, aggressiveness and hotness (Olademo, 2009:40) and thus are known for their rigidity and the ruling of their domain with a "strong hand".

From the above, it is evident that some male gods are known for their destructive, greedy and ferocious traits while the females are characterized as loving, calm and sustaining. However, with the introduction of patriarchy through wars of political domination, social rupturing and shift in values, the destructive attributes of the male deities predominated and became the yard-stick for value judgement. Men's view of society was engendered while the female were at the receiving end.

In folktales, which are the focus of this study, it is often seen that females are labeled with attributes of jealousy, greed, murder etc., (attributes known with the male deities) while the males are depicted as strong, and knowledgeable. The new classification negates the ethos of the Yoruba pantheistic worldview. Thus, the folktales reflect the patriarchal ethos which eroded the initial value system.

### **Erosion of Eco-Maternal Traits in the Yoruba Cosmogony**

The Yoruba believe that women have the peculiar task of making and keeping the entire family happy. This complements the Yoruba saying: 'Obirin lo ni ile' (The home belongs to the woman). Being a mother, her impact in all domain of the family life and in the community becomes noticeable at once. This is evident in all activities traditionally associated with women and these include: childbirth, nurturing and taking care of the domestic arena. Throughout history, nature has been portrayed as feminine, hence the name 'mother earth' or 'mother nature' to depict the closeness between nature and the woman.

In the Yoruba cosmogony, maternal traits of care, love, sympathy and non-violence are evident and this is exemplified in one of the folktales studied in this work. In the tale '*One man and his precious cow*', it is obvious that a maternal figure is absent in the home; the presence of a woman would not allow the child to be sent out by the father because he sees the child as a hindrance to his source of wealth; rather she would pacify or cajole him to reconsider his actions. Maternal care and love are also shown in the tale '*How Olumuroro Made Children Thin*', where the mother attends specially to the needs of her

child; and when she notices discrepancies in the growth of the child, she goes all the way to seek for solution. The protagonist in the tale can be likened to the Yoruba goddess, Osun, who is widely known for her love for children, and fondly called 'Iya ewe' (Mother of little children) due to her fertility and nurturing powers.

### **Gradual transformation of Yoruba culture to a patriarchy system**

In pre-industrial Africa communal living was the vogue. It was where everybody lived and worked together, and the ownership of land and its possession were judicious. Land was believed to be for all and not for certain people. Land was meant to be shared so that everyone had enough farmland whether he was an indigene or a stranger since agriculture was the main- stay of the economy and a mark of man's closeness and friendliness with nature.

Gradually, the monarchical system of government crept in where the community was headed by a king, who reigned for life and supported by councils of chiefs, who were usually clan heads in the community (Olademo, 2009). In the Yoruba culture, the king was regarded as an absolute monarch having the powers of life and death over his subjects. It was therefore mandatory to accept what the king shared as one's worth. The door for dictatorship and oppression was opened. This absolute authority was caused primarily by migration from one place to the other, and the need to have a ruler over the migrated clan. These movements caused displacement and inter-mingling of peoples. Majority of these migrations were caused by one group's superiority over the other in terms of weapons and wealth, thereby the strong exerted powers over the weak. According to Akinjogbin and Ayodele, 1980, the cause of migration of Yoruba descendants from Ile-ife was obscure, but one plausible reason was that ambitious people, who found no place for themselves in the government of Ile-ife, decided to move out to establish their own kingdoms. Finally, people accumulated wealth in a number of ways, particularly through the proceeds from sales of farm produce, crafts, hunting etc. and these local economic developments and contacts were reinforced by the introduction of European external trade from the Atlantic coast of Nigeria, thereby paving the way for a new civilization or modern development. It is therefore obvious that before the advent of the Europeans, there was a tilting towards patriarchy and oppression.

### **Nurturing patriarchy in the selected Yoruba tales**

The shift in authority from the collective and dynamic approach to the individual and rigid style marked the end of justice and tranquility in Africa in general and among the Yoruba in particular. This political shift no doubt destabilized the socio-economic and ecological relationships. A new course was channeled and nurtured in redefining relationships among people and between them and the ecology. The absence of freedom, equality and justice which characterized the pre-industrial Yoruba society gave way to exploitation, favoritism and injustice at all spheres/levels of the society.

In '*The Farmer's Son Became a Hunter*', there is complete erosion of value as Ajadi disobeys his parents and insists on hunting instead of farming which is the family occupation; and worst still Ajadi's decision to perpetually imprison the singing bird (ecological disruption) is encouraged as the decision later fetches the family a fortune from the king. The offer of half of the kingdom as a price to make the king happy is individualistic while the family of three that gets the offer can definitely not farm the massive land therein. Hence the land would either lie fallow while hundreds of families go farmless or forced/ cheap labor would be employed to till it for Ajadi's family to reap. This monopoly no doubt

deprives people of the best from ecology through farming while the sudden change of fortune of the family encourages ecological destruction through unethical exploration and exploitation of the forest. The patriarchal stance of man in this tale is evident in the king's use of the land belonging to all citizens of the kingdom to make him happy. Also, Ajadi's movement of the bird from its ecologically convenient environment to a hunting bag for his amusement and that of others is gross individualism. He ceases to explore the ecology for survival only as a hunter; he now exploits it for self aggrandizement and wealth with the full support of the parents.

The twin qualities of Ogun deity as a hunter (destroyer of men and animals) and a farmer (commune with the soil for sustenance) are juxtaposed in 'The Farmer's Son Became a Hunter' tale to foreground the nurturing of patriarchy therein. The fact that hunting gains ground over farming is regrettable and it depicts the societal patriarchal disposition against nature. While hunting deflates nature, farming nurtures it; but the emphasis on the negative attribute of Ogun is a clear indication that the society has redefined its relationship of mutual co-existence with nature into a fierce and desperate exploitation. As this human attitude escalates so does nature becomes gradually unfriendly in its reaction. Patriarchy as used in this paper is attitudinal in nature and not sexist; and this can be exhibited by either of the sexes. In '*The Hunter and His Wives*' one of the folktales studied for this work, it is obvious that patriarchy can be exhibited in two ways and these are: inter oppression and intra oppression. Gender inter oppression is shown in the hunter's forceful manipulation of the animal-turned-beautiful woman into marrying him. The marriage would not have been possible if he has not stolen and hidden the woman's animal skin, thereby causing her to enter into a forced marriage. He also dominates his other wives by treating them as beings with lower intellectual capacity. First, he refuses to tell them the truth about how he came about a third wife thinking they are gullible enough to believe his cooked up story. Gullibility is ascribed to the woman because family system now operates under the draconian law of a slave-master relationship. The wives have to resort into using trick on him to divulge the truth, which he was commanded not to. The disclosure later causes the termination of his new marriage.

Gender intra oppression is also obvious in the tale being discussed. The other women maltreat the younger wife because, her presence in the house makes them lose the favor of the husband; the younger wife assumedly becomes their husband's favorite. In '*The Ugly Queen and The Stone Baby*', intra gender oppression is also visible. The first queen (the head of the wives), makes life difficult for the last queen because of a prophecy that the latter will mother the only male child in the palace. Similarly, greed which characterized Ajadi's 'caging' of the bird in '*The Farmer's Son Became a Hunter*' is noticeable in '*The Hunter and His Wives*'. Not satisfied with the two wives and disrespectful of marriage conventions, the hunter forces the antelope-turned-woman into marriage. He is controlled by his lust and passion and cares less about the implications of the new conjugal relationship on other stakeholders. The notion of cordiality among the inhabitants of the eco-system is established in '*The Hunter's and His Wives*', via the magical transformation of the antelope into a woman. Her interaction with people in the town, which presumably is constant, shows the inter-dependence between the inhabitants of the forest and township for survival. However, the hunter's individualism, no doubt, has dented this relationship. Just like the bird, the removal of the antelope/woman from the forest is ecological disruptive because possibly she has been forced to severe relationship with her original husband or parents and other family members. This is pure individualism, which is the main thrust of patriarchy. In a similar vein, the co-wives prioritize their personal interest of having monopoly over the husband to compound a fellow

woman's woes. In spite of her unhappy marriage with the hunter, she remains subservient to the co-wives. But true to any patriarchal relationship, the co-wives exploit and continually frustrate their 'victim'. The husband is considered invincible and all they do is vent their own anger and frustration on the innocent girl.

### **Attributes of Patriarchy in the Selected Tales**

Some of the attendant effects of the shift from collectivism to individualism (characteristic of patriarchy) are greed, oppression, cunning and violence. These patriarchal traits bring about inhumanity. These negative effects characterized all facets of societal life including the family unit which ought to have modeled the society.

#### Greed and Oppression

These attributes are like Siamese twins. Greed leads to oppression while the latter aids the former. In *'How Olomuroro Made Children Thin'* the extent of greed and monomaniac which permeate the patriarchal society are made obvious. These endangering traits rob the monster, and even the boy's parents, the sympathetic feeling towards care and security for the boy; the parents just provide food for the boy and leave him to cater for himself because the occupational engagements of both are more important to them. This no doubt creates a psychological defect of lack of love and security in the boy. To worsen the situation, the monster terrifies the boy to surrender his only means of sustenance. The psychological trauma experienced by the child would possibly harden him to a level of insensitivity to others as the environment is that of hostility. The rescue mission by the father might be late considering the time lag. If the monster represents the greed of the people in authority, the parents portray a society deprived of humanity where it should be readily available (the immediate family). This trend is replicated in many parents/children relationships where the greedy older generation treats the young like lifeless items which require only monetary care. Thus the twin monsters of society and the family unit combine to model the child with a wild and tameless animal due to lack of care, love and protection. On and on, the society engenders patriarchy and at times, in a worst perspective, as greed is nurtured in the new generations.

The monster has a male personality, so does the father who rescues the child. The father's gesture must not be construed as humane; rather it is selfish. He sees in the boy, the prosperity of a bigger farm and wealth therefore, which the monster plans to deny him. Ordinarily, if an interaction is constant between the boy and the father, the secret would have been revealed since. But it almost cost the boy his life (through sickness) before it is discovered that something is amiss. The mother too is engrossed in trade to have lost all clues to the boy's worries. This presupposes that patriarchy could be gender blind. It is an attitude delineated menace rather than being sexist.

A similar reading is applicable to the protagonist of *'One man and his precious cow'*. The preference of the cow to his children boils down to greed. His mental calculation of a calf yearly deprives him of any human thought for the children. Put side by side, the cow weighs on his mind than the children who he perceives as mere burdens. The myopic thought of the man is characteristic of the capitalist orientation of profiteering at the expense of humanism. This is compounded by impatience, as he fails to investigate and have balanced information before passing judgment. The authoritarian posture of the man is capitalized upon by the cow to do away with hitherto rivals of it before the man. This is true of the materialist monopoly of resource. It does not believe in complementarity and sharing as these give room for healthy competition. The cow takes the whole of the man's attention and love at the detriment

of the children. The regret he shows towards the end could be attributed to his foolishness which turns him a loser at the end, and not the effects of his actions on the children who take up the challenge of prospering in life without a father. They diversify to explore the numerous ecological advantages at their disposal to stem unhealthy competition. This diversification inheres cooperation as the knowledgeable, the farmer and the blacksmith play complimentary roles rather than contradictory ones. This, hopefully, would 'de-patriarchalize' the society to resume interdependency and create a friendly and productive society.

The same greed and oppression inform the hunter's action of blackmailing the antelope into marrying him in '*The Hunter and his wives*'. With two wives already, the hunter's action goes beyond canal desire but it also portrays the patriarchal pride of accumulation. His decision to hide the antelope's skin is an oppressive strategy of keeping the woman/antelope in perpetual subservience. This oppressive tendency is not limited to the hunter; the elder wives suddenly became friendly to manhandle the junior wife. This artificial cooperation is symbolic of the patriarchal society's antic of collaborating to deal with the 'enemy' (the less privileged) in order to protect their immediate common interest. While the hunter lords it over the women, the elder wives form another bloc of authority over the junior wife. The hierarchy in the oppression shows the menace as a permeating one in the setting of the story.

#### Cunning and violence

Cunning and violence constitute the veritable weapons employed by the patriarchal society on its victims. In the four folktales selected for this study, two each exhibit these crude methods of patriarchy. '*How Olomuroro made children thin*' and '*The farmer's son becomes a hunter*' are replete with the use of trick and cunning to subdue or deal with the victims of their inhumanity. Olomuroro cajoles Tojo with a sweet voice and rhythmic song to monopolize his only means of sustenance. The innocence of the boy provides a lee way and easy access for the monster such that the second weapon of violence is not necessary. Yet one cannot rule out the fear of the monster in the heart of the boy because, he refuses to divulge the secret visit of Olomuroro; not even the sweet song experience is related to his parents. But the sustenance of Olomuroro's greed is achieved through cunning. Being part of the same patriarchal system, Tojo's father also assails the monster, Olomuroro, equally employing a cunning way. A face to face attack on the monster might have spelt doom; but a sudden leap on the enemy does the trick and this saves Tojo only from the oppression of the monster but not that of the parents who neglect him for the jingling coins. Both find his company at their place of work as a distraction or even a burden, a thought pattern that is the prototype of modern professional couples.

Also '*The Hunter and his wives*' story exhibits this trait as the hunter's seizure of the antelope-turned-woman's skin is a cunning means of making her his wife. Though not comparable to the sweetness of the voice which makes Tojo surrender his meal willingly, yet it has the magic of sustaining the marriage relationship without a choice from the victim. Equally, the innocence which characterizes Tojo's action is absent in the antelope's submission, all the same, the oppressor has his way. The elder wives use similar tricks to obtain information about the antelope's secrets from their husband through the use of intoxicants. This establishes cunning as an effective weapon in patriarchy. With the information fully obtained, the elder wives launch a final attack on their victim, the antelope-turned-woman rival of theirs. The excuse of fighting is because the woman is not married via a proper cultural process is just an excuse, the greed of not wanting to share their husband's kill with yet another woman is obvious. And to succeed in this materialistic pursuit, cunning is the method.

Violence is another instrument of patriarchy in the tales. '*One man and his precious cow*' shows the desperation of a man to maximize profit by bullying his children. He adopts violence as an instrument of eliciting the best from the children; and notably patriarchal, he is dissatisfied and sends the children away. This crude method becomes counter productive as he is left to graze the cow alone. It suffices to note that his love for the cow is due to the commercial value he places on it. As it becomes increasingly unreliable, the same violent reaction is extended to it. Hence a patriarchal influenced adage of the Yoruba says: 'cruelty is the key to wealth and kindness leads to indebtedness.' The system believes that to be rich requires high handedness in your exploitation of others, which explains the violent disposition of the man in '*one man and his precious cow*'.

Moreover, in '*The Farmer's son became a Hunter*', similar desperations is noted in Ajadi's choice of career as a hunter. Hunting involves violence against the victim. Ajadi jettisons farming in spite of its predictability for hunting which is a chance driven career. The cat and rat game between the hunter and the hunted animal creates tension in the do or die battle for survival unlike the solemnity which pervades farming experience. However, the get rich quick syndrome of the patriarchal system accommodates the tensed, the violent and the deadly as the veritable means of attaining one's goal. From Ajadi's undiplomatic manner of addressing the parents, to his unfeeling towards the hunted games, and his hard heartedness to the caged bird, the violent drive for selfishness at the detriment of others is revealed. Not even Ajadi's welfare matters to him because all the warnings of uncertainty and danger sounded by the parents did not move him. To sow the trend and its infectious nature, Ajadi's parents instantly tow his line of thought as hunting begins to yield fortune for their son. While they dread losing Ajadi to the danger ridden forest, they feel not the same for the caged bird, which life is endangered by changing its ecological environment, thereby depriving it of access to others of its kind and the natural means of sustenance.

### **Retributive Justice and Patriarchy in the Selected Tales**

The motif of retributive justice is based on acknowledging the truth of a matter. It is famous in Nigerian folktales, most especially in the lack-and-the-norm narratives, which evince the triumph and transfiguration of one character, and the punishment of other characters (Kehinde, 2010:7). Retributive justice is a phenomenon which encourages truth and punishes offenders rightly or fairly. This phenomenon reveals that the African culture supports and agrees with the values of truthfulness and goodness, while rejecting opposing values. In '*Exploring the utilitarian values of Nigerian folktales*', Ayo Kehinde supports Anny Wynchank's view that a society expresses itself through oral tales. This in turn reflects that the society and its beliefs are brought to focus; that folktales are antidote to social vices in the country, and they are used to encourage the citizenry to become better citizens. Also eco-feminism as a theory supports justice in all relationships.

In the folktales studied, retributive justice is an essential ingredient which allows for offenders to be punished accurately. The Yoruba society encourages balance in meting out punishment without tilting towards a particular gender. However, the meting out of justice in the tales is affected by patriarchy because it is not in total proportion to the offence. It is noticed that the females are heavily punished while the males would either go scot free or are slightly punished.

The erroneous depiction of women in folktales is the first injustice done to the female folks. Women are portrayed as greedy, hot tempered, and aggressive, and these are contrary to the Yoruba cosmogony. It is therefore surprising to find such display of attributes by women in the folktales. In the

Yoruba worldview, women have been known to ease a tense atmosphere, and help to pacify the angry, hot tempered male. This is why the goddess Oya, is a pacifier of her husband, the great aggressive god, Shango. In virtually all the tales studied, the attributes associated with women are degrading and oppressive. It is obvious that there is no balance in human relations with existing community rules and regulations. This is because man, who makes the law, is also shown to be breaking the law. In *'The Hunter and his wives'*, the women are depicted to be jealous and rude because they inquire about the presence of a new wife in the house. This inquiry is allowed since in the Yoruba community, both parents must be aware before the union. It is therefore not out of order that the co-wives questioned the mystery surrounding the appearance of a third wife, whose lineage no one can account for. This attitude by the other wives is termed jealousy and rudeness in a patriarchal society. Also women are portrayed as impatient and unkind towards their co-wives, but the question of why that is so has never come up. Ironically, the women are adhering to laid down ethos of the same community that the husband has flouted. This shows that there is disparity of gender in adherence to community rules and that the society is not balanced in the actualization of the norms. Also, the atonement for the secret of the third wife which is revealed by the husband is not carried out in the tale. This negates the Yoruba belief and saying that *'Eni ti o ba da ile, a ba ile lo'* (he who breaks a covenant will be punished for it).

Also, in *'one man and his precious cow'*, the man in question sends his sons out of the house because he feels they are impeding his source of wealth. Consequently, he is alone in his old age, tired and poor. At the end of the tale, he is reconciled with his sons through fate. The man would probably not have felt the absence of his sons if he has not lost his source of wealth, or if he is not too old to run around. This punishment is therefore minimal compared to the offence he commits. In modern times, retributive justice is no more visible because of the introduction of foreign religions. People now run to God who shows mercy to every act of wickedness on others. The consciousness of people about nemesis is no longer encouraged because modern civilization has caused men to lose faith in the concept of retributive justice and instead it preaches leniency or forgiveness.

The Yoruba ethos of justice is in contrast with the tales which evolved from the patriarchally transformed Yoruba society. In the tales, the ills in the society are hung on the weak, while the same offences by the strong are considered manly attributes, thereby resulting in severe punishment of the weak and leniency or outright freedom for the strong.

## Conclusion

Patriarchy in Yoruba folktales in pre-industrial period is examined using selected tales. It is established that based on the Yoruba concept of justice, punishment should be meted out to any offender fairly. In this study, we have shown that upholding justice is partial in folktales, and this is due to the patriarchal attitude of the new society where the tales evolved; since the tales have been re-told and re-adjusted to suit the intention of the community or narrator, this might have been the result of the narrator's influence over the years, to suit the community's transformation to patriarchy. This study also establishes that the Yoruba cosmogony and philosophy encourage balance in all spheres of life. However, the hallmark of oppression and victimization of the weak, which are signs of a patriarchal society, are encouraged by folktales. The folktales are therefore not a perfect means of accessing pre-industrial Yoruba beliefs and philosophies. This is because regeneration of tales by the narrator has brought about contradictions visible in folktales when compared with the Yoruba cosmogony



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## APPENDICES

### How Olomuroro made children thin (Tale 1)

Olómúroro was a greedy monster who preyed on little children. He was not a good looking creature but children did not seem scared of him because he sang so sweetly. He would approach the children with song and then take their food away.

Tojo was one of the little children that Olómúroro preyed upon. Tojo's father was a farmer and his mother was a trader. Every morning as soon as the first cock crowed, Tojo's father would leave for the farm. Tojo's mother would make him some akara for breakfast and some fufu and egusi soup for lunch before leaving for the market where she sold produce from their farm.

Every morning, as Tojo got ready to eat his breakfast, Olómúroro would appear singing and Tojo would respond:

*Olómúroro má a wolè* (Olómúroro, welcome [watch your step])

*Téré nò nò jantakò*

Olómúroro would ask:

*Ìyá re nkó?* (Where is your mother?)

*Téré nò nò jantakò*

Tojo would answer:

*Iyá mi òràjà lo sójà* (My mother the trader has gone to the market)

*Téré nò nò jantakò*

Olómúroro would ask:

*Bàbá re nkó?* (Where is your father?)

*Téré nò nò jantakò*

The boy, Tojo would answer:

*Bàbá mi òlókò lo sókò* (My father the farmer has gone to the farm)

*Téré nò nò jantakò*

The song would continue with Olómúroro asking the boy where his food was and Tojo would show the creature where his mother kept his breakfast and lunch.

Olómúroro would then gobble up all of Tojo's food leaving not even a tiny bit for Tojo to eat.

The days went by and Tojo got thinner and thinner. His parents noticed and they were worried. Tojo looked like he needed some more food so his mother increased the number of akara she made him for breakfast. She also gave him a bigger bowl of fufu and egusi for lunch, but still Tojo got thinner. The parents were baffled because everyday, they found Tojo's breakfast and lunch bowls licked clean and yet Tojo was getting thinner. If Tojo got any thinner, he would become very sick.

By now, the parents suspected something else was eating Tojo's food and they needed to put a stop to it. The following morning, Tojo's mother put his food at the top of a high shelf where Tojo could not reach it and she went to the market as usual. Tojo's father too picked his cutlass and hoe and set out for the farm. But this time, he turned back home to hide in a place where he could watch Tojo and the bowls at the top of the shelf.

Olómúroro arrived as usual and Tojo's father watched the exchange between Olómúroro and Tojo.

This time when Olómúroro asked Tojo where his food was, he pointed to the top of the shelf. Olómúroro asked Tojo to step on a stool to get the bowls of food. But Tojo still could not reach the bowls.

Olómúroro asked him to use a long stick to get the bowls so Tojo got a long stick and poked at the bowls. The bowls came clattering down and shattered on the floor.

As Olómúroro bent his head down to lick the food off the floor, Tojo's father leapt out with his cutlass and killed Olómúroro. That was how hundreds of children who had been getting thin mysteriously started to grow and get chubby again.

### **One man and his precious cow (Tale 2)**

There was a man with three sons and a precious cow. The man was very proud of his cow because she gave birth to a healthy calf every year. One day, the man asked his eldest son to take the cow grazing. The son took the cow to the fields where green grass grew and then to the water-hole for a nice long drink.

Later, the man asked his cow, "Cow, did you have enough to eat?"

"Hmm", the cow replied. "Your wicked son took me to the wilderness where no grass grows. Then he tied me up and went to sleep."

The man was angry with his eldest son and sent him away from home.

The eldest son wandered through green meadows, parched lands and waded across little ponds until he arrived at a farmhouse. There he met a kind farmer who taught him how to farm in both dry and wet seasons.

The farmer told the boy, "One day I will have to send you back to your father, so you can teach him how to farm. Then he can depend less on that wicked cow."

Meanwhile, the boy's father had called his second son. "Go and graze the cow. She must be well fed and washed." The second son took the cow to the green fields where she grazed. Then he gave her a bath and tied her to a tree to dry. As he waited for the cow to dry, he dozed off.

The father came by to see how his cow was doing. "Have you eaten?", the man asked the cow.

"Hmm", the cow replied. "Your wicked son took me to the wilderness where no grass grows. Then he tied me up and went to sleep."

The man was again very angry. He grabbed a big stick and woke his son up. Then he chased him away.

The second son wandered for days until he came upon the house of a blacksmith. The blacksmith taught him how to make hoes and matchets for farming as well as bows and arrows for hunting. The blacksmith told the boy, "One day, I will have to send you back to your father so you can teach him how to make these tools. Then he can depend less on that wicked cow."

The father had now called his third and favorite son. "Go and graze the cow. Be sure to take good care of her for it will break my heart to send you away like your brothers" he warned his son.

The son took the cow to the green fields where she grazed and bathed. Then he tied her to a tree to dry. Just then the father arrived.

"Cow", he asked. "Did you have enough to eat?"

"Hmm", the cow replied. "Your favorite son is just as wicked as his brothers. He took to the wilderness where no grass grows. Then he tied me up here to die."

The man was very sad to hear this but he wouldn't listen to his son's pleas. He sent him away just like his brothers before him.

The third son wandered for many days until he reached the house of a great scholar. There he learned to read and write.

The father who was now alone took the cow grazing. He took the cow to a pasture where she ate plenty of lush grass and drank plenty of water while the man dozed under a tree. When the man woke up, he asked the cow, "Are you full?"

The cow laughed. "You're a hypocrite like your sons. You took me into the wilderness. You gave me no food and no water. Then you ask me if I'm full?!"

The man couldn't believe what he heard. "Ahh, you've been lying to me all along", he wailed. "I sent my sons away because of your lies." He beat the cow with a stick then he tied her up to a tree and left her to die.

The man wandered from village to village looking for his sons but with no luck. After many years, he returned home a sad and tired old man.

One market day, he decided to go to the market to buy himself some food. When he got to the edge of the market, he was tired that he slumped and fainted. People ran to help him. The noise attracted everyone. Everyone, including the eldest son who had come to sell some of his farm produce, the second son who had come to sell the tools he made and the third son who had accompanied his teacher to the market to buy some food. The boys noticed that that was their father who had fainted and at the same time, they found one another. They were overjoyed.

When the old man was revived, he wept with joy at seeing his sons once again. He asked for their forgiveness and pleaded with them to come back home. "My eyes were opened long ago. You are more precious to me than a cow."

### **The farmer's son becomes a hunter (Tale 3)**

A farmer and his wife had one son named Ajadi. They were not rich but they never lacked for food for no matter how bad times got, they always managed to grow enough food to feed their small family with a little left over to trade.

Ajadi's parents looked forward to the day he would join them in their farming profession. With more hands on the farm, they could increase the output from their land. And more importantly, Ajadi could learn how to fend for himself in the way his parents had before him. But alas, to the parents dismay, Ajadi announced that he wished to become a hunter. "A hunter?" his father exclaimed. "A hunter's life is unpredictable, one day you find food and for many more, you may find nothing" he added. Ajadi's mother added, "It's risky, you never know what dangerous animals you may run into". But Ajadi's heart was set on being a hunter and he told his parents how he felt. He thought he would be happier as a hunter than as a farmer. Even though his parents were unhappy about his decision, they decided to support him however they could and even helped him purchase his new hunting gear.

So Ajadi became a hunter and a skillful and successful hunter he was. No day passed that he did not bring back some game which his mother could add into their soup pot for the evening. But one day came when his luck seemed to have deserted him. His hunting skills and prowess seemed to be of no use to him as there was just no game to be found in the forest. He roamed the forest for days, going ever deeper into the thick, dark forest but still, he found no animal to kill. Then he spotted a bird, a tiny bird perched on a low branch. Normally, he would have ignored an animal so small as there was too little meat to be found in it, but this day was different. Ajadi was desperate and he was determined to make his first kill in days. He took aim at the bird, getting ready to fell it from the branch when the bird began to sing.

*Tín tín to jantó*

*Mo gbé ye kékeré tó l'óun ó pa mí*  
*Tín tín to jantó*

(I hear a bird saying he would kill me)

The bird sang so beautifully. Ajadi had never heard such beautiful music in his entire life and he was almost certain that his parents hadn't either. He had to get that bird home to his parents. Being the skillful hunter that he was, he caught the bird without hurting it and put it in his sack which he slung over his shoulders and headed home.

When Ajadi got home, he removed the bird from his sack and the bird immediately began to sing.

*Tín tín to jantó*  
*Mo gbé ye kékeré tó l'óun ó pa mí*  
*Tín tín to jantó*

Ajadi's father and mother had indeed never heard such beautiful music and they broke out into a dance. They danced and danced and then danced some more until Ajadi put the bird back into his sack. When Ajadi's father got his breath back, he had an idea. The king of their village had been in a depressed state for several years. The best poets, musicians, dancers and jesters had come from far away villages to cheer him up but to no avail. Maybe this tiny bird would do the trick and make their king smile.

So off to the palace, Ajadi and his father set off. When they got to the palace, the guards stopped them at the gate. "What is your business here", they asked. "We would like to see the king" the farmer replied. "Is the king expecting you?" the guards asked. The farmer answered, "No, but...". "Then you cannot see him" the guards interrupted. The farmer pleaded but one of the guards told him, "If I were you, I would go away for the king is in a foul mood and you do not want to risk his anger". The farmer started to turn back but Ajadi brought the bird out of his sack and the guards began to dance.

Ajadi and his father went into the palace where they found the king scowling on his throne. "Who let you in here?" the king bellowed. Ajadi brought out the bird and it began to sing.

*Tín tín to jantó*  
*Mo gbé ye kékeré tó l'óun ó pa mí*  
*Tín tín to jantó*

The king got up and began to dance. All those in attendance began to dance. The king's wives came out of their rooms to find out what was happening...and they all began to dance. All the princes and princesses began to dance. The mood in the palace which had been somber for years was miraculously transformed. Everyone danced until they were weary and could dance no more.

The sun would soon set and Ajadi and his father wanted to go back home. But the king did not want them to take the bird away. He was so happy that he offered the farmer half of his kingdom in exchange for the bird. And that was how the farmer and his wife, through their son Ajadi the hunter, became rich.

#### **The hunter and his wives (Tale 4)**

There was a hunter who was very brave and he used to go into the thick forest to hunt for game. One day, he went on a hunting expedition as he used to do. He was in the forest for three whole days but he was unable to get any game, he did not kill even an ordinary cricket! The hunter was very tired, so he sat in the branch of a big tree; he wanted to see if a game would come his way. No sooner had he sat in the branch of the big tree, than he saw an antelope coming. He quickly took his gun, and aimed it at the animal, as he was about to shoot, the animal ran into a cave. The hunter thereafter laid ambush for it in

order to fire at it immediately it appeared. Instead of the antelope to come out, it was a beautiful woman that came out of the cave. She balanced a basket on her head and took the road to the town.

The hunter was very surprised but because he was a very powerful man, he came down and entered the cave. As he entered, he saw the antelope's skin and he took the animal's skin and put it in his hunting bag, and went back to the branch of the tree where he was before. Not long after this, the beautiful woman returned and went into the cave. Not too long, she ran out quickly, and raised an alarm, and thereafter started shouting at the top of her voice, "who stole my skin?" she combed the foliage right and left, looking for her skin. Later, she started singing;

*Ye! Ye! Ye!*

*Is it a thief that has robbed me?*

*Who stole my skin?*

*The shaking leaves of the tree*

*The shaking leaves of the forest*

*Animals in the forest help to search for my skin*

*The shaking leaves of the forest*

After sometime, the hunter called the woman and discussed with her, he told her he loved her and wanted to take her as a wife. After a long discussion, the woman agreed to be the hunter's wife. She gave the hunter a serious warning that he must not reveal her secret to anybody, and that the day he revealed the secret would be the day she would return to the forest as an animal. The hunter agreed. The animal-turned-woman followed him to his house. The animal with the two previous wives of the hunter began to live together with their husband. But the two senior wives hated the new wife. They could not understand how a woman could become the wife of a man without knowing his relatives or how a woman could just pack her belongings and follow a man. They were hostile to her and they used to send her on irritating errands.

As she fetched water, simultaneously they instructed her to grind the pepper. They did not allow her to rest at all. What annoyed them most was that they did not know anything about the new wife. They asked their husband several times about where he found the wife who had no relations, but their husband lied that the father was a king of a far village, and that she was given as a symbol of friendship in appreciation of what he did for the king a long time ago.

These senior wives did not believe their husband; they decided to find out the details of the matter. They determined to explore all avenues to know the secret about the family of the wife of their husband. One day, the senior wives gave undiluted palm wine to their husband to drink, when they discovered he was dead drunk, they started to converse with him. They asked for the name of the town of the youngest wife. The hunter was no longer himself, he started to talk, and he spoke on how he had found the youngest wife in the bush when he went to hunt in the forest. He told them that the youngest wife was an ordinary antelope.

These women were very happy. They prepared to let the youngest wife know that they know her secret. The eldest wife called the youngest wife, and told her to go and fetch water for her from the stream. There was no well or tap water in those days' people fetched water from nearby streams. The youngest wife observed the weather and saw that it was already getting dark outside. She took the water calabash and she came out of the house, but when she saw that there was no ray of light at all, she went back into

the house and begged the eldest wife not to be annoyed with her, she promised to fetch the water very early the following day.

The eldest wife was annoyed and she said, "Why can't you go and fetch the water quickly". The wife answered her respectfully that she was afraid because it was dark. The senior wife laughed and laughed until she somersaulted. She laughed so much that tears ran down her cheeks. She said she could not get people to laugh with her. "How could an antelope be afraid of other animals?" the eldest wife asked. "do animals kill animals?" They started laughing again. She called the second wife and told her that their husband's antelope was afraid to go to the stream. The second wife laughed and laughed. They made jest of the youngest wife until they were tired.

The youngest wife was surprised to hear what the eldest wife said. She burst into tears; she knew her secret had been revealed to the elder wives. She was upset; she shouted with the voice of a big animal and ran quickly to the room. She went straight into the room where the hunter kept her skin. She put it on quickly and ran with all her strength out of town into the forest. As she was going, she met their husband; the hunter took his gun and wanted to kill the animal. The animal started a song thus;

*Hunter, do not kill me,  
Ijaye, I'm going home, Ijaye,  
My rivals used my skin to insult me, Ijaye,  
I'm going home, Ijaye,  
My rival called me an antelope, Ijaye,  
I'm going home, Ijaye.*

The hunter was very surprised; he dropped his gun, and watched his wife as she ran into the forest. He did not know what to do, he watched as the antelope ran into the forest.