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# Translation and Transformation: Travel and Intra-National Encounter in

# the Yoruba Novel[[1]](#footnote-1)[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Abstract:**

This article explores how Yoruba-language novels have used the figure of the traveller to interrogate the idea of the Nigerian nation. My concern is not so much with representations of the nation itself, nor with how Yoruba novels can ‘narrate the nation’, but with the ways Yoruba novels depict intra-national encounter, as characters come face-to-face with difference within the nation.

In Yoruba print culture, travel has often been associated with formation and transformation. The novels of D.O. Fagunwa, for example, established a highly influential quest motif in which travellers gain wisdom and experience from their journey, and this conception of travel as transformative has been shared by non-fiction Yoruba travel writers.

However, this article argues that we can also read Yoruba novels of national travel through the paradigm of translation. I discuss the differing strategies of literal and metaphorical translation employed by two Yoruba novels in their depictions of encounters with non-Yoruba speaking Nigerians: J. Akin Ọmọ́yájowó’s *Adégbẹ̀san* (1961), a thriller centred on the chase after a murderer fleeing to central and northern Nigeria, published just after Nigerian independence, and Débọ̀ Awẹ́’s *Kọ́pà* (1990), a story of youths serving the nation as part of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme.

**Keywords:**

Yoruba; novel; travel; travel writing; nation; Nigeria; NYSC

# Translation and Transformation: Travel and Intra-National Encounter in the Yoruba Novel[[3]](#footnote-3)[[4]](#footnote-4)

Relations between Yoruba towns and sub-groups, as well as with the rest of what would later become the Nigerian nation, changed rapidly across the late 19th and the 20th century, and Yoruba-language writers sought new ways of conceptualising relations and encounters between peoples within those spaces. As Rita Nnodim (2006) has shown, in the 1920s, poets and novelists imagined audiences centred on particular towns or regions; they used sub-group dialects of Yoruba, and made reference to local settings and concerns. From the 1930s onwards, they ‘not only began to reach out to more encompassing audiences, but also to inscribe their texts with imaginings of larger social formations, such as publics, ethnic communities or nations’ (157).

Another way that writers have represented these changing spaces and collectivities, and encounters between them, has been through the figure of the traveller. Travel writing, though not usually recognised as a characteristic Yoruba genre, has played a small but significant role in Yoruba print and literary culture (Jones 2014). As well as international travel writing – such as novelist D.O. Fagunwa’s travelogue *Irinajo* (1949c; 1951) about his journey to the UK, and the letters from abroad which proliferated in the newspapers from the 1940s – Yoruba writers have also produced a significant amount of writing about travel *within* Nigeria. The Lagos newspapers were an important home for travel writing in the 1920s and 30s; they published both Yoruba- and English-language serialised travel narratives written by newspaper editors and other local intellectuals as they travelled throughout the new colonial nation of Nigeria (Jones 2013). Nearly a hundred years later, travel writers such as Pẹlu Awofẹsọ continue to write about their travels across the nation, publishing both in the newspapers and digitally, though there has been a shift towards English rather than Yoruba as the language of expression (see Jones, forthcoming).

This article moves sideways from these non-fiction narratives to explore how Yoruba-language novels have used the figure of the traveller to think about collectivities and encounters within the intensely multilingual nation of Nigeria. However, my concern is not so much with these novels’ representations of the nation itself, nor with how Yoruba novels ‘narrate the nation’ in the ‘national *Bildungsroman*’sense – the formation and maturation of the nation – as has often been the concern of postcolonial criticism. Although the rise of the Yoruba novel could be understood as, in part, an assertion of Yoruba-ness in the midst of a nation which threatens to transform ‘Yoruba’ into ‘Nigeria’, this article does not seek to maintain a dichotomy between the ethnic and the national. Nor am I asking whether Yoruba-language print culture is able to express Nigerian (rather than Yoruba) nationalism, as Senayon Ọlaoluwa (2012), for instance, has explored in his discussion of nationalisms in contemporary Yoruba poetry.

Rather, I am interested in intra-national encounter, as novelists envisage travel as a way in which characters can come face-to-face with difference within the nation. In Yoruba print culture, travel has often been associated with formation and transformation; in the Lagos newspapers of the 1920s and 30s, for instance, domestic travel writers placed emphasis on the ‘benefits of travel’ as transformative for both traveller and reader of travel writing (Jones 2013: 46-49) while influential Yoruba novelist D.O. Fagunwa’s novels, as we will see, revolve around the figure of the travelling hunter transformed by his journeys. The novel itself, particularly in the European context and especially the *Bildungsroman*, is also often understood as a form concerned with formation or transformation (Moretti 2000: 7).

However, this article proposes that in the Yoruba novels I discuss we can also locate an ethic of travel as translation within the nation. Translation, António Ribeiro (2004: 187) suggests, is a ‘central metaphor, one of the keywords of our times’. Indeed, postcolonial criticism has often understood translation, like travel, in its most metaphorical manifestations: as a process of ‘transculturation’ (Pratt 1992), or as a cultural encounter that produces an ‘in-between’ space, hybridity and thereby newness (Bhabha 1994). Translation in this sense implies a negotiation of cultural and social difference across a ‘third space’, a ‘contact zone’ of ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power’ (Pratt 1991: 34; see also Bassnett 2002: 6). While bearing in mind these metaphorical and cultural senses of translation, my interest in this article is also in literal practices of translation during travel within Nigeria. As J. Hillis Miller (1996: 207) reminds us, the etymology of ‘translation’ points to movement, travel: something ‘carried from one place to another’. This article accordingly considers how translation is imagined as immanent to travel and vice versa in encounters with Nigeria’s multilingualism, as a nation home to more than 450 languages (Adegbija 2004).

A number of Yoruba novels feature travelling protagonists, and the diversity and size of the Yoruba novel tradition means it is not possible to attempt a representative sample in this article. Although I begin with a brief discussion of D.O. Fagunwa’s famous quest novels and canonical realist novels featuring travellers, such as J.F. Ọdunjọ’s *Kúyẹ̀* (1964) and Fẹmi Jẹbọda’s *Olówólaiyémọ̀* (1964), my principal focus is on two novels that are more atypical and which I have selected to add diversity to existing critical ideas about the Yoruba novel: Debọ Awẹ’s *Kọ́pà* (2009 [1990])*,* an account of young Nigerians travelling for their National Youth Service year, and J. Akin Ọmọyajowo’s *Adégbẹ̀san* (1979 [1961])*,* which tells the story of Adegbẹsan’s chase across central and northern Nigeria in search of his mother’s murderer.

## Travel in the Yoruba novel: quests, transformation and realism

The novel tradition in Yoruba is extensive and varied, totalling over 200 novels in one recent estimate (Adeyẹmi 2003, cited in Adeyẹmi 2010: 92), accompanied by a growing body of criticism in both Yoruba and English.[[5]](#footnote-5) Yoruba print culture began to develop with both missionary and local elite input in the mid-nineteenth century (Nnodim 2006: 155), and a local tradition of writing in the African-owned newspapers in the early twentieth century in part opened up the creative and discursive space for the Yoruba novel; the first Yoruba novels was serialised in the newspapers in the late 1920s (see Ogunṣina 1992: 11; Barber 2012; Jones 2013).[[6]](#footnote-6) Yoruba print and literary culture has had a considerable interaction with locally and internationally-published Anglophone texts. Writers have experimented with, adapted and re-created both ‘local’ and ‘European’ genres, borrowing, for instance, from American thrillers as well as from Christian literature (Iṣọla 1998: 2-3; Adeyẹmi 2006: 46). However, this has not always been an imitative relationship; local English- and Yoruba-language traditions often grew up dialogically alongside each other, quoting from one another but nonetheless retaining distinctive characteristics, such that, as Karin Barber (1995: 15-16) argues, Yoruba novels display a ‘superabundant confidence in the value of their local subject matter and in the capacities of the Yoruba language and Yoruba verbal art’.

However, it was from the late 1930s onwards, when D.O. Fagunwa published the first of his five great Yoruba novels, that the novel began to flourish in numbers.[[7]](#footnote-7) D.O. Fagunwa’s novels, drawing on Yoruba storytelling and print culture, European literature such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (see Hofmeyr 2004: 194), Christian texts and Fagunwa’s own imagination, established a quest motif that has influenced numerous subsequent Yoruba novels. To summarise very briefly, in each of Fagunwa’s novels – *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ̀* (1938), *Igbó Olódùmarè* (1949a), *Ìrèké-Oníbùdó* (1949b), *Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje* (1954) and *Àdììtú Olódùmarè* (1961) – a hunter and his companions set out from home into the forest. They encounter obstacles, challenges and opportunities in the form of people, creatures and places, and sometimes linger in places on the way for some years. When the hunter eventually returns home, he brings with him his newfound wisdom and experience of the world and uses it for the good of his home community.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The motif of the transformative journey is common in Nigerian fiction, from picaresque adventures in the Anglophone tradition, as represented by Amos Tutuọla and, later, Ben Okri (see Griffiths 2000: 117-8), to the popular figure of the young traveller leaving the small town for the big city: ‘the single most common theme in [English-language] Nigerian novels’ (Griswold 2000: 143). Critics often read these journeys either along structuralist lines – as quests representing rites of passage and the transformation from youth to adulthood or innocence to experience (see Kunene 1991; Mortimer 1990 on journeys in African epics and fiction) – or as representing the contrasts between urban and rural life, or modernity and tradition, and the temptations and dangers of urban (female) sexuality (see Newell 2002: 6-7; Griswold 2000: 166; Nnolim 1992). In either case, the physical journey is often accompanied by an ‘inner journey’ of transformation. Journey narratives of this type are generally conservative – the ideal journey results in return home, whether triumphant or chastised, not a radical break from home – and have a moral or allegorical significance (Mortimer 1990: 6).

In a similar vein, critics have read the journeys in Fagunwa’s novels as allegorical sites of social and character transformation. Bamgboṣe (1974: 91), for instance, understands the journeys as allegories for ‘life’s journey’ and its challenges, while Ọlakunle George (2003: 125) suggests that the novels use ‘the quest motif to allegorize the subject’s potential in modernity’ and Toyin Falọla (1997: 160-161) shows how Fagunwa’s heroes are transformed not only in status, but also into ‘wise, strong, and competent men, able to narrate stories and teach society what they have learned’. Indeed, Fagunwa’s novels share with many forms of travel writing in Yoruba an emphasis on the embodied experience of travelling, as travellers gain wisdom (‘ọgbọ́n’) by physically encountering challenges and strange places away from home. The novels may thus be read as narratives of transformation, and not only for the traveller within the novel but also for the reader, who is often explicitly asked within the text to learn from reading about the journey, even if not to the extent of the traveller him- or herself. This emphasis on *reading* about travel as a transformative exercise has broader resonances in Yoruba print culture; the writers of the intra-Nigerian travel narratives published in the Lagos newspapers in the 1920s, for instance, often stress the benefits of reading their travel narratives as ‘ẹ̀kọ́’ or ‘lessons’ for readers (Jones 2013: 46-49).

Novels written in Yoruba since the 1950s have been increasingly (though by no means exclusively) realist and focused on urban, ‘modern’ life (Ogunṣina 1992: 47-50, 110; Adeyẹmi 2010: 92).[[9]](#footnote-9) However, Fagunwa’s fantastical novels ‘had a profound influence on the development of the novel in Yoruba’, with numerous Yoruba novels adopting the ‘wandering hero’ motif (Bamgboṣe 1974: 5). Two well-known early realist novels[[10]](#footnote-10), Fẹmi Jẹbọda’s *Olówólaiyémọ̀* (1964) and J.F. Ọdunjọ’s *Kúyẹ̀* (1964), for instance, both feature travelling protagonists who are cast out of home by mishap or misfortune and embark on journeys. *Kúyẹ̀* concludes with Kuyẹ’s successful transformation from a young deaf orphan into a mature man of the town via a journey through several towns and into the forest; this transformation is conservative since it concludes with his maturation into an established society, the formative ‘novel of classification’ in Moretti’s (2000) terms. *Olówólaiyémọ̀*, meanwhile, is more unusual in that it ends with Olowolaiyemọ’s transformation into a solo farmer, far away from home, in retreat from the world of family and conventional sociality. *Olówólaiyémọ̀* thus disrupts the possibility of a ‘return to the hearth’ in the postcolonial era, as Mortimer (1990: 5-6) suggests is also common in postcolonial Francophone African novels of travel.

## Travelling in Nigeria: alienation, transformation and translation

However, transformation is not necessarily the only outcome or ethos of travel in Yoruba novels. The possibility of other modes of travel encounter becomes apparent if we examine novels’ representations of the realist space of travel, particularly within the Nigerian nation. While the first Yoruba novels were published in the late 1920s, they began to be published in large numbers from the late 1950s and early 1960s, a period which roughly coincided with Nigeria’s independence in 1960. Since this time, novelists have been thinking through ways of representing the Nigerian nation in Yoruba, to a Yoruba readership.

The Yoruba term for nation, ‘orílẹ̀-èdè’, which refers both to a sense of an ancestral home and place of origin in ‘orílẹ̀’ and to a shared language in ‘èdè’, can in fact be used by Yoruba speakers to refer to both the Yoruba ‘nation’ and the Nigerian nation. The polysemous nature of the term echoes some of the differing strategies Yoruba novelists have used to represent the nation. Karin Barber and Rita Nnodim have shown how Fagunwa’s novels imagine themselves to be convening audiences simultaneously composed of individual Yoruba towns, all black people, even the whole world, and often many different senses of ‘orílẹ̀-èdè wa’, ‘our nation’ (Barber 1997: 123-124; Nnodim 2006: 160-164). The novels operate a series of synecdoche or ‘nested’ references, thus, ‘the Yoruba are the Egba writ large, Nigeria is Yorubaland writ large, and Africa, perhaps, is Yorubaland writ even larger, [which] means that no new resources are deployed for imagining a composite, multi-ethnic, multilingual nation state such as Nigeria’ (Barber 1997: 124).

This use of nested synecdoche echoes Kole Ọmọtọṣọ’s (1991) argument that Nigerian novels have represented the nation in two ways. Especially before the Civil War, Ọmọtọṣọ argues, national consciousness was (paradoxically) usually represented through ‘a single ethnic national framework’ (146). This was the case not only in novels written in Yoruba or other Nigerian languages, which Ọmọtọṣọ argues perhaps ‘had no choice’ but to represent the nation through their own language setting (147), but also in novels written in English. However, later, the multi-ethnic nation in its entirety began to be addressed. Ọmọtọṣọ makes a distinction between ‘geographic’ representations of the nation, which depict the mobility of people of different ethnicities across national space without explicitly invoking the nation state (as in Cyprian Ekwensi’s novels), and political representations of the nation, which focus on the nation state itself as a ‘federal community of sensibilities’ (Ọmọtọṣọ 1991: 146-148). Ọmọtọṣọ’s attempt to construct the Civil War as a ‘watershed’ (149) when novelists shifted from ‘ethnocentricity’ (146) and ‘geographic’ representations of the nation to representation of the political nation is not entirely convincing; he cites novels from both periods for both types of representation. But his analysis of dichotomies of representation of the nation – metonymic vs. entire, geographical vs. political – is a useful tool to think with, even *within* the Yoruba-language novel tradition.

J. Akin Ọmọyajowo’s novel *Adégbẹ̀san* (1979 [1961]) emerged out of the first wave of realist novels. *Adégbẹ̀san* is an early Yoruba thriller and the tale of Adegbẹsan’schase for his mother’s murderer from his home town of Ayetoro, near Abẹokuta, across central and northern Nigeria, all the way to Sokoto. *Adégbẹ̀san*, set in the 1950s and published shortly after Nigerian independence,lingers over representations of central and northern Nigeria, describing its towns and people through the eyes of a Yoruba stranger. It is, as Ogunṣina (1992: 149) writes, ‘technically amateurish’ if we read it in the realist and detective traditions. But the novel is nonetheless an original engagement with not only the detective or thriller genre, but also with the independent Nigerian nation. Rather than imagining Yorubaland standing for the nation, or creating microcosms of the nation, the novel represents the encounter between just particular parts of the nation: Yorubaland and the north and central regions.

The second novel this article focuses on, Debọ Awẹ’s *Kọ́pà* (2009 [1990]), also uses a realist chronotope and is set (at least ostensibly) in the space of the nation. The Civil War of 1967-1970 had made the fractures within the Nigerian nation very apparent, and the National Youth Service Corps scheme (NYSC) was established in 1973 to attempt to overcome these. Since then, Nigerian university and polytechnic graduates under the age of thirty have been compelled to spend a year as members of NYSC, a nationwide scheme involving work and community activities. Corpers are required to serve in a state other than their home state, resulting in many Yoruba-speakers experiencing life in northern and south-eastern Nigeria, and vice versa.[[11]](#footnote-11)

With Corpers being literate university graduates, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a growing literature concerned with NYSC in the form of advice guides, pamphlets, short stories, poetry and novellas, often aimed at schoolchildren who may one day become Corpers themselves (see Jones 2014: 186-189). But another strand of NYSC-related texts, fictional texts in particular, is interested not just in personal experiences of being away from home, but also in inter-linguistic, inter-ethnic interaction during the course of NYSC service. *Kọ́pà*[[12]](#footnote-12), first published in 1990 when NYSC had been established for nearly twenty years, tells the story of a group of young Nigerians serving as members of NYSC in Ilọrin, in northern Yorubaland. *Kọ́pà* is a portrayal of both the potential for national unity, and the despair and anger of youth who serve their nation but who feel they receive little from it in return. But it is also an energetic depiction of what it is like to be a young person who has travelled away from home; it dwells on the comings and goings of the Corpers’ lives, the way they talk and relate to one another and their aspirations for the future, as well as sexual politics among youth. The novel focuses in particular on Bọla, another Yoruba-speaking Corper, who, as Awẹ tells it, on leaving home for the city loses sight of the values instilled in her by her family and accidentally falls pregnant by Maiki, resulting in Maiki abandoning her.

The shift towards realism in the novel has included an increasing use of real rather than fictional and fantastical locations (Iṣọla 1998: 151-152), and both *Kọ́pà* and *Adegbẹsan* make full use of Nigerian locations: *Kọ́pà* is set in Ilọrin with Corpers arriving there from all over the nation, while Adegbẹsan travels through Ile-Ifẹ, Ibadan, Ilọrin, Lafiaji, Baro, Bida, Jega and Sokoto. The novels describe realistic, everyday places, such as markets and lorry parks, and the places characters travel to are named and described, even down to street and house level; we learn, for instance, that ‘Adegbẹsan ń lọ jà ni ile àfáà Músá ni adugbo Tápà ni ilẹ̀ yìí’ (‘Adegbẹsan went to fight at the house of Alfa Musa, in the Nupe neighbourhood of this land’) (*Adegbẹsan*, 17). Both novels make use of a striking and precise mapping of the space and time of travel, often recording journeys in minutes and miles. As *Adegbẹsan* opens, for instance, Adegbẹsan tells the reader ‘Agogo meje ku iṣẹju mẹ́ẹdógún gééré ni mo dide kuro ni ile, o si tó déedée agogo meje-àbọ ki ng tó pade baba mi ní ọna ilu Ọbádárà ti i ṣe ibùsọ̀ mẹrin si ilu wa Ayetoro’ (‘At exactly quarter to seven I left home, and it was almost half past seven before I met my father on the road to Ọbadara, which was four miles from our town Ayetoro’) (1).

This detailed recording of time and space is reminiscent both of the 1920s newspaper travel writers’ repeated references to the length, distance and cost of their journeys, designed to stress their embodied experience of travel (Jones 2014: 82), and of the imposition of hours and minutes onto the otherwise dreamlike space that Barber (1997) identifies in Fagunwa’s work. Barber suggests that these times and distances are markers of colonial modernity, flimsily superimposed on the ‘unstable world of the forest’ (121). *Adégbẹ̀san* and *Kọ́pà* similarly deploy objects and mundane details of time and place as a marker of the real, but here as a marker not of concreteness against the slipperiness of language, but of narrative realism. In Kọla Akinlade’s Yoruba thriller *Owó Ẹ̀jẹ̀* (1986), Akinlade’s publisher elaborates on the importance of such signifiers of ‘civilisation’ in the notes at the end of the novel:

Ìtàn báyému ni ìtàn náà, kò sí iwin tàbí ànjọ̀núníbẹ̀, àwọn ènìyàn gidi gẹ́gẹ́ bí èmi àti iwọ ni wọ́n wà níbẹ̀. Àwọn ohun ọ̀làjú òde-òní bíi kẹ̀kẹ́, mọ́tò, wáyà, tẹlifóònù, ọti bià àti sitáòtù, súyọ nínú ìtàn náà (Akinlade 2004 [1986]: 119).

This is a contemporary story, there are no fairies or spirits, it’s real people like me and you. The story contains modern things, like bicycles, cars, telegraphs, telephones, beer and stout.[[13]](#footnote-13)

It is no coincidence that transport and means of communication over long distances are some of the physical objects through which Akinlade marks out the difference between the realist and the metaphysical; these ‘modern’ forms of travel are symbols of the ‘modern’ narrative grounded in realist space and time.

But despite their naming, the towns described in these novels have a surprising vagueness. Although Awẹ weaves details about Ilọrin’s heat and harmattan into his novel to add local colour, there is little sense that this could *only* be an Ilọrin novel: it could have happened in any Yoruba city. The city serves as a focal point for a community of youth who have travelled away from home, rather than being the centre of the novel itself. Moreover, travel continues to hold metaphorical meanings. In Fagunwa’s novel *Ìrìnkèrindò*, the road is frequently used as a metaphor for life, its challenges and opportunities. Similarly, chance encounters and metaphors of choice and transformation still abound in *Adégbẹ̀san*, as Adegbẹsan is faced with crossroads at which he must make important decisions, or as he comes across other characters who help him on his way. The road is thus both a physical road whose concrete nature causes particular events, and the metaphorical ‘path of life’ and site of transformative chance meetings that Bakhtin (1981: 120) suggests is characteristic of the folkloric chronotope of the road.

### *Adégbẹ̀san* – travel as encounter and translation

Nonetheless, realist travel does also enable an encounter with *Nigerian* space. As Adegbẹsan travels into northern and central Nigeria, Ọmọyajowo emphasises his otherness; the text is suffused with descriptions of how central and northern Nigerian society and people are different from home: ‘ètò ijọba ati ìṣelú ti ilu Láfíàjí yàtọ̀ si tiwa...Ofin ti o de ẹlẹ́ṣẹ̀ ni ilu temi lè ṣai de ẹlẹ́ṣẹ̀ ni ti wọn’ (‘the government and politics of Lafiagi are different from ours...The law that applied in my own town might not apply in theirs’) (7). Here, when Adegbẹsan refers directly to his home town, he uses the pronouns ‘mi’ or ‘tèmi’ – meaning ‘my’. But he also uses the emphatic pronoun ‘tiwa’ – ‘ours’ – to argue that the ways of the people of the primarily Nupe town of Lafiagi are different from ‘ours’. Though ‘tiwa’ in part refers to the people of Adegbẹsan’s home town, its inclusivity is also indicative of Ọmọyajowo’s implicit audience of Yoruba readers who inhabit a different geography from that of Lafiagi. These readers are distinct from Adegbẹsan’s home town, hence the exclusivity of ‘tèmi’, but they are included in a broader category of Yoruba readers unified as ‘home’. Ọmọyajowo moreover emphasises the solidarity between Yoruba-speakers in non-Yoruba space: when Adegbẹsan meets a Yoruba woman, Adukẹ, in Baro (in central Nigeria), Adukẹ introduces herself as being from Ifẹ, as having read of the murder of Adegbẹsan’s mother in the Yoruba newspaper *Irohin-Yoruba* and wanting to meet him because ‘ọmọ Yoruba ni oun, oun si ń fẹ́ sọ eleyi fun mi ki ng bá maa de ile oun nigbakuugba tí mo bá ń fẹ́ ìrànlọ́wọ́’ (‘she was Yoruba, and she wanted to tell me this so that I could come to her house any time I wanted help’) (20).

*Adégbẹ̀san* thus admits few distinctions within the Yoruba-speaking region; rather, divisions of otherness lie between the exoticism of northern Nigeria and the familiarity of Yorubaland, as well as between ‘civilisation’ and wandering in the bush. The novel is a kind of joyful, exuberant travel writing which glories in being away from home, in representing northern Nigeria to a Yoruba readership. Ọmọyajowo displays the exotic distinctiveness of northern Nigeria in the clothes people wear, Adegbẹsan’s reactions to Hausa and Fulani people, the lavish court of the Sultan of Sokoto – with the Sultan wearing ‘agbádá rẹpẹtẹ kan ti a fi òwú sílíkí ṣiṣẹ aràmọdà si lara. O wé láwaǹí rururu, o si wọ bàtà sálúbàtà’ (‘a huge agbada[[14]](#footnote-14), which was embroidered in silk in fabulous patterns. He wore a high-wound turban, and sandals’) (59). This place, Adegbẹsan tells us on the road to Sokoto, is not like home:

Pàápàá jùlọ, ṣé ọ̀nà wọn lọ́hùún kì í ṣe ẹgbẹ́ ọ̀nà tiwa níhìín. Lọ́nà kínní kò fagbára sí òkè. Lọ́nà kejì kò si igbó ńláńlá tí ó ń mú kí ọ̀nà ṣe wọ́kuwọ̀ku. Gbogbo rẹ̀ ni ó fẹ̀ tí ó tẹ́jú tí ó sì gún tínríntín (51).

Above all, their roads were superior to ours. Firstly, there were hardly any hills. Secondly, there was no thick forest which could make the road rough. All of it was wide and flat and stretched straight out ahead.

Here, again, is the assumption of a home recognised by his audience – ‘ọna tiwa’ or ‘our roads’ (a phrase which could also, significantly, be read as ‘our ways’) – juxtaposed against the exoticism of the north.

In its dwelling on the foreign and the strange, its familiar addresses to its readers and its pauses to describe new places, Ọmọyajowo’s narrative is reminiscent of the 1920s and ‘30s Lagos newspaper travelogues, which similarly give informative, panoramic views of exotic towns (Jones 2014: 67-68) – although also of Fagunwa’s lavish descriptions of the fantastical towns his heroes travel through. Thus Ọmọyajowo describes the central Nigerian town of Bida:

Nitori náà, a pinnu lati rin ilu naa yíká lati lè ri ìlàjú wọn. Ilu Bida tobi púpọ̀. Ile wọn yàtọ̀ si ti ilẹ wa. Erùpẹ̀ tabi bíríkì ni wọn lò fun ile wọn. Ọ̀pọ̀ ninu awọn ile naa ni kọ̀ ní igun bi tiwa: gbogbo wọn ri kìrìbìtì- kìrìbìtì yika ni. Ọpọlọpọ ni ki i ṣe paanu ni a fi bò wọn, ti o si jẹ wi pe koríko tabi erùpẹ̀ ni, sibẹsibẹ ilu wọn mọ́ tónítóní, o si lẹ́wà. Ile ọjà wọn pọ̀, ọ̀pọ̀lọ́pọ́ ati oriṣiríṣi ohun ọ̀ṣọ́ ni a si ń tà nibẹ, Oríṣiríṣi iṣẹ́ ọnà, awọ, bàtà, ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ ati awọn nkan bẹ́ẹ̀-bẹ́ẹ̀ gbogbo ni ó kún inu ọja naa. Aṣọ awọn ọkunrin wọn funfun o si tobi gbẹ̀rẹ̀gẹ̀dẹ̀-gbẹrẹgẹdẹ, ọpọlọpọ wọn ni o wé láwàní. Awọn gbajúmọ̀ ati awọn olówó wọn gun ẹṣin, awọn obinrin wọn fi ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ ṣe ọ̀ṣọ́ si ara wọn. Ẹ̀gàn ni hẹ̀ẹ̀: ìlẹ̀kẹ̀ wà ni ihò imú, o wà ni etí, o wà ni ọrùn, o wa ni irun orí, bẹẹni idẹ nì yìí ni ọrùn ọwọ́ ati tẹsẹ̀ gbogbo yii. Ilu wọn fa ni mọra. Ẹran pọ̀ ni ibẹ ju ti apa ọ̀dọ̀ wa lọ (22-23).

Therefore, we decided to walk around the town to see its level of civilisation. Bida was very big. Their houses were different from those in our land. They used mud or bricks for their houses. Many of these houses were not angular like ours; all of them were curved all the way round. Many of them were not roofed with galvanised iron sheets, but with grass or mud, nonetheless their town was spotless and beautiful. Their market stalls were many and they sold various adornments there. All kinds of craftsmanship, leather, shoes, beads and other such things filled that market. The men’s clothes were white, and they were big and broad, many of them wore turbans. The prominent and wealthy men rode horses, and the women wore beads to ornament themselves. Let detractors eat their hearts out: they had beads on their noses, ears, on their necks, on their hair, they also had brass jewellery on all their wrists and ankles. Their town was attractive. There were many domestic animals here, more than in our place.

For Ọmọyajowo, the value of the text lies in this intra-Nigerian exotic, in being somewhere his readers may not have been. His text depends on an assumed a Yoruba-speaking readership – as suggested by the reference to ‘ilẹ wa’ (‘our country’ or ‘our land’) against which Bida is compared – to deliver the exoticism it revels in. However, the novel is more translocal than national; it is more interested in the encounter between Hausa or Nupe and Yoruba, southwestern and northern, than in the nation as a whole. We see the emergence of local centres and peripheries, axes of encounter with Nigeria, a heterogeneous nation imagined through translocal encounters. The novel depends, nonetheless, on the possibility of intra-national co-operation; Adegbẹsan can be, without question, in this strange place because it is something to do with him, not entirely separate from his homeland.

Transformation is of minor importance to the novel’s agenda. Adegbẹsan returns home apparently unchanged in character despite having been seriously injured and incarcerated, found a wife, apprehended Ogidan and undergone several misadventures. Ọmọyajowo points out moments when Adegbẹsan acts reprehensibly, but while Adegbẹsan becomes a husband, moving up on the scale from youth to maturity, there is little suggestion he has learnt anything from the journey itself. Instead, *Adégbẹ̀san* is interested in an alternative outcome of travel: encounters with difference that engender translation. Ọmọyajowo’s representation of Nigeria is of separate and distinct people and places, a polyglot nation in which Yoruba-speakers and Hausa-speakers co-exist but are unable to understand one another straight away. On first meeting a Hausa man after running away into the bush, Adegbẹsan is frightened, unable to understand him, and struck by his difference from him:

O pe mi ni ede Gambari ṣugbọn ọrọ ti o sọ kò ye mi…Ọkunrin náà gùn, o síngbọnlẹ̀, o bu ila sójú rẹ̀, wọ̀nàwọ̀nà awọ ni o fi ṣe ìbàntẹ́ ti o wa ni idi rẹ…ọkunrin naa soríkọ́, o ronu fun iwọn iṣẹju kan, o mi ori, o fa oju ro, ẹru ba mi, mo si wòye pé ko fẹ ṣe iranlọwọ fun mi (26).

He called to me in Hausa, but I didn’t understand what he said…The man was tall, he was well-built and agile, he had facial markings, his shorts were made of leather… the man paused and thought for a minute, he shook his head, he looked unhappy, I was scared, and I assumed that he didn’t want to help me.

But despite this initial incomprehension, the novel in fact goes on to insist on the translatability of Nigeria; characters who do not share a language eventually find ways to communicate through sign language, while many minor characters are bilingual. English is used only occasionally*,* principally by representatives of the state; instead of using a ‘national’ language, the characters translate between Yoruba and Hausa. *Adégbẹ̀san* also insists on the possibility of co-operation and mutual comprehension across the national space; police from Ayetoro and Baro come to Sokoto where they work with the local police, and the Sultan of Sokoto sends the case back to Yorubaland.

 ‘Translational reason,’ Ribeiro (2004: 192) argues, is ‘a cosmopolitan reason’ – not only in the sense of one place knowing about the other, but in ‘its ability to situate itself *on* the border, to occupy the spaces of articulation and to permanently negotiate the conditions of that articulation,’ to be a ‘get-between’ as well as a ‘go-between’. Thus, Ribeiro envisages cosmopolitan translation configured ‘in such a way as to provide for mutual intelligibility, without having to sacrifice difference in the interest of blind assimilation’ (187). Similarly, Wolfgang Iser (1994) distinguishes between a superficial understanding of translation as an equivalence of vocabulary imposed on a central ‘meaning’ imagined to be identical to both sides, resulting in appropriation and assimilation; and an iterative production of comprehension but also difference, in which ‘the very frame [of reference of one’s own culture] is subjected to alterations in order to accommodate what does not fit’. ‘Translatability’, in Iser’s framework, can therefore be understood as a (utopian) ‘counter-concept to a mutual super-imposing of cultures’, a transformative rather than conservative form of encounter.

At first glance *Adégbẹ̀san’*s ethic of translation may not seem cosmopolitan in this sense, since it does not envisage the border between Yoruba and Hausa as a ‘space of articulation’, but simply as a place to be crossed back and forth, without resting in between. Thus despite its celebration of the potential of translation and of interlingual dialogue, *Adegbẹsan* does not conform to Iser’s sense of ‘translatability’ in that it insists on its ability to translate English and Hausa, make sense of the encounter, but without transforming Yoruba, Adegbẹsan or the text itself. However, we can also read *Adégbẹ̀san* in the light of a literature that considers these intra-national borders. Though it is set in the 1950s, *Adégbẹ̀san* was published in 1961, shortly after independence and at a time of public debate about what the newly independent nation would mean for relations between northern and southern Nigeria. On the other side of the Yoruba-Hausa encounter, Mervyn Hiskett (1975: 105-107) has shown that some Hausa poetry, especially that adopted by political parties and activists, displays a marked reluctance about independence and north-south union, figured especially in the threat of southern-dominated political parties but also expressed as antipathy towards southern migrants in the north.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is unlikely that *Adégbẹ̀san* is in direct dialogue with this literature, but the novel is nonetheless a contribution to this discussion about modes of encounter in a newly independent nation. Translation allows *Adégbẹ̀san* to encounter the north without being changed by it, in contrast to some Hausa poetry’s fierce refutations of the transformation that the nation might bring to Hausaland. *Adégbẹ̀san* makes tentative steps towards imagining a nation that allows room for co-operation and translation through translocal encounter, even if it falls short of the ‘get-between’ nature of the translator in Ribeiro’s sense.

### *Kọ́pà* and the failure of national translation

By contrast, Debọ Awẹ’s *Kọ́pà* envisages relatively little literal or metaphorical translation or encounter between Yoruba-speakers and other Nigerians, especially considering that the novel is explicitly set within the intra-national framework of the National Youth Service Corps. Instead, the novel retreats into the representation of pan-Yoruba sociality instead of the national unity of youth it initially claims for itself, echoing Awẹ’s depiction of the failure of the nation to repay the youth who serve it.

*Kọ́pà* plays with multiple levels of national synecdoche and microcosm. Though the novel begins with a dedication to Nigerian university students (iv), and the cover illustration depicts a Corper in front of an outline of Nigeria with the Nigerian flag superimposed on it, this national context fades in and out of the novel. The protagonist Bọla has not travelled much before beginning her service year: ‘Ohun tó jẹ́ ìyàlẹ́nu fún Màíkì nípa Bọ́lá ni pé kò fi ìgbà kankan kúrò ní agbègbè Iléṣà rárá’ (‘what surprised Maiki about Bọla was that she had never left Ileṣa region at all’) (60). The novel travels both imaginatively and literally beyond home, just as Bọla does as she moves to Ilọrin to carry out her youth service. There is little intrusion of the nation into the domestic space; characters must leave home to encounter the nation.

Bọla relates to her mother Dekẹmi how the three people with whom she shared a room in the NYSC camp were from the north and the south-east of Nigeria:

Ó sọ bí ó ti ṣe jẹ́ pé ní ilé-ìwé tí òún lọ gan-an, òun ò ní ànfààní àtiwá láàrin àwọn ọ̀pọ̀ èrò bẹ́ẹ̀, pàápàá tí kì í ṣe ọmọ Yorùbá. [...]“Ṣùgbọ́n, ṣẹ́ ẹ rí ti ibi iṣẹ́ ìsìnrú ìlú yìí, kò rí bẹ́ẹ̀ rárá. Bá a bá ka àwọn ọmọ Yorùbá tó wà níbẹ̀, bóyá ni wọ́n fi pé igba nínú bi ẹgbẹ̀rùn mẹ́ta àwa tá a wà níbi ìpàgọ́. Yàrá ti wọ́n fi mí sí, àwa mẹ́rin la wà níbẹ̀. Ẹnìkán ti ìpínlẹ̀ Ṣókótó wá, ẹnìkan wá láti ìpínlẹ̀ Bọ̀rọ̀nú, ẹnikán tún wá láti Ẹnúgù, ìyẹn ìpínlẹ̀ Anámbra...” Ìròyìn yìí jẹ́ ohun ìyàlẹ́nu fún Dékẹ́mi pé àwọn ‘kò-gbédè’ mẹ́rin ni wọ́n kó sínú yàrá kan (11).

She explained how it was the case in the school that she attended that she didn’t have the opportunity to be among such multitudes, especially those who were not Yoruba [...] “But, you see, this venue of [NYSC] service is not like that at all. If we count the number of Yorubas there, they are hardly up to two hundred out of the three thousand of us who are there in the camp. In the room they put me in, we were four there. There was one person from Sokoto state, one came from Borno state, another came from Enugu, in Anambra state[[16]](#footnote-16)…” This news was surprising for Dekẹmi, that four people with different languages were gathered together in one room.

These ‘four people’ from across the nation are invoked as synecdoche for the nation throughout the novel. Igbo and, to a lesser extent, Hausa Corpers are often present in the backdrop of the novel, contributing to a vision of a nation potentially encountered through translation. When the Corpers are sent to work on a farm, Awẹ pointedly records equivalent national voices exclaiming in the three main Nigerian languages about the exertion of the work: ‘‘Bó o ti ń gbọ́ “*Chei, Chínéke Gọọ̀d!*” níhìn-ín, lo ó máa gbọ́ “*Hábà Hallah*” lọ́hùn-ún. Òmíràn a fi igbe “orí ìyá mi ò!” bọ ẹnu.’ (‘As you hear *“Chei, Chineke Good!*” in one place, you will also hear “*Haba Hallah*” in another. Others would shout out *“ori iya mi o!*”’[[17]](#footnote-17)) (83). This linguistic synecdoche echoes Ọmọtọṣọ’s (1991) schema of geographical representations of the nation, focusing on linguistic rather than political differences. English and Pidgin are also represented as a national lingua franca. Awẹ domesticates these languages into Yoruba, transliterating, for example, ‘finish’ as ‘finiṣ’ and ‘rest’ as ‘rẹ́ẹ̀st’ (82), as if English, Pidgin and the other Nigerian languages represented in the novel are foreign to Yoruba but translatable, part of the idealised process of national mingling. The novel thus grasps towards ‘translatability’ in Iser’s (1994) sense, imagining English transforming Yoruba and vice versa, rather than allowing English to become an assimilative national or globalising language.

However, the novel is torn between hope for the nation and its youth, and cynicism about the possibility of a national ‘imagined community’ in the years of ‘ọsitẹ́rítì’ (‘austerity’ (33)) and following the betrayal of youth by elder politicians. The characters engaged in farm work described above are not delighting in their work and their utopian national mingling, but exclaiming about its difficulty, as if in recognition of an ambivalence about the desirability of national co-operation. The Corpers are not well looked after by the state: they have poor accommodation, little money (53) and unreliable transport (27). Moreover, the novel’s ideals of mutual understanding through intra-national encounter have dystopian echoes as, for instance, Bọla and Maiki listen to a cassette of *ewì* (spoken word poetry) which deplores the murder of three students at the hands of the police: [[18]](#footnote-18)

Yorùbá ń sunkún

Wọ́n ń pe Ọbalúwayé;

Ìgbò ń ké,

Wọ́n ń pe *Chukwu*;

Bí Haúsá ṣe ń ṣe lááìláàà!

Ni wọ́n ń pe *Aálàh*

Ni wọ́n ń pe *Aálàh* lókè.

Gbogbo wa là ń dáró…(65).

Yorubas are crying

They call on Ọbaluwaye;[[19]](#footnote-19)

Igbos are lamenting,

They call on Chukwu;[[20]](#footnote-20)

As the Hausas cry ‘laaailaa’![[21]](#footnote-21)

They call on Allah

They call on Allah on high.

All of us are grieving…

Again, Awẹ uses translation to establish a student community united across national difference; the students all call on a god in their own languages. But here the novel reimagines the national unity of youth not as a utopia of equivalence, but as a reaction to the horror of state violence.

This rendering of the underside of national unity is echoed by the novel’s own retreat from the possibilities of intra-national encounter and translation through travel. Despite its idealisation of national translation, there are in fact only a few instances in which non-Yoruba characters speak or act in depth. In Bọla and Maiki’s initial meeting, Awẹ points to the potential for differences of language or culture within NYSC:

Ìṣòro tó kọ́kọ́ kojú Màíkì ni pé kò mọ ibi tí Bọ́lá ti wá àti irú ẹni tí í ṣe. Bóyá Òkóró ni, bóyá Hausa, bóyá Yorùbá ni. (25).

The major concern for Maiki was that he didn’t know where Bọla came from and what kind of person she was. Perhaps she was Igbo,[[22]](#footnote-22) perhaps Hausa, perhaps Yoruba.

But though Maiki initially speaks to Bọla in English – again symbolising potential for national translation – ‘Ìṣọ̀rọ̀sí Bọ́lá’ (‘Bọla’s way of speaking’) (26) confirms that she is Yoruba, and from then the two converse in Yoruba.

Maiki’s housemate from faraway Borno state, meanwhile, is a shadowy presence who never arrives, held up on his journey there. Amina, another of Maiki’s girlfriends, who is Ebira and has some agency in the novel, is an exception to this non-Yoruba voicelessness. But even her difference is subsumed by her ability to speak Yoruba: ‘Ìgbìrà ni, ṣùgbọ́n ó gbọ́ èdè Yorùbá ju “kí-rèé” lọ’ (‘She was Ebira, but her understanding of Yoruba extended beyond the basics’) (92). Differences of culture between Corpers are rarely represented, unlike in the newspaper travelogues of the 1920s and 30s which highlight differences of food, clothing and language in the other Nigerians they encounter on their travels (Jones 2014: 75-78). The broadening geographic and social scope of the novel as the characters travel is thus pan-Yoruba, with the nation lurking only hazily beyond this.

*Kọ́pà* alsodoes not use travel to establish differing social formations *within* the Yoruba-speaking region, as Barber (1997) and Nnodim (2006) identify in I.B. Thomas’s and D.O. Fagunwa’s earlier Yoruba novels. Though Bọla and Maiki come from different regions of Yorubaland, the most important regional difference between Bọla and Maiki is shown to be the affiliative difference of university, rather than essentialised differences of origin. Similarly, though Maiki and his friend Kọla discuss how the northern Yoruba town of Ilọrin is very much like a Hausa town, there is otherwise little discussion or description of the town’s ‘Hausa’ nature, in contrast to *Adégbẹ̀san* which revels in the exotic strangeness of Hausaland. Michel Doortmont (1994: 63) suggests that since the 1950s, there has been an increasing denial of intra-Yoruba differences in Yoruba historical writing, since ‘the political constellation of Nigeria as it developed since then did and does not permit this’. We see a similar promotion of pan-Yoruba unity in Awẹ’s depictions of Yoruba encounters.

The novel is, relatedly, ambivalent about travel itself. ‘Ó mà yẹ kééyàn máa lọ ìrìn-àjò’ (‘It’s certainly good for people to travel’ (11)) explains Bọla to her mother at the beginning of the novel, fresh from encounters with non-Yoruba Nigerians for the first time. Bọla’s travels represent a newness arriving in her parents’ world, embodied in the figure of travelling youth. But simultaneously, the novel reminds us that travel can also be a source of vulnerability. As Bọla arrives in Ilọrin she is tricked into paying too much for a taxi (10). On hearing her stories of life as a Corper, Bọla’s parents remark that ‘Ìròyìn òkèèrè ni, ó lè ni irọ́ pẹ́ẹ́pẹ̀ẹ̀pẹ́ẹ́ nínú’ (‘It was news from far away[[23]](#footnote-23), it could have little lies in it’ (9)). This suspicion of travelling news infects *Adégbẹ̀san* too, as a deceptive letter from another town lures Adegbẹsan’s father away from home while Adegbẹsan’s mother is murdered (1). It is as if the novels are reminding us that their own narratives could be ‘irọ́’ (‘lies’), that stories from both literal and narrative travel outside our own experience should not necessarily be trusted.

There is thus a tugging both outward and inward that Awẹ plays against one another in *Kọ́pà*. The Corpers’ world expands through travel to an ostensibly national scope but is simultaneously layered with a distinctly Yoruba sociality. Although *Kọ́pà*’s characters speak proudly of their service to ‘this our fatherland’ and ‘the nation of Nigeria’, they also end up metaphorically ‘ń sun ẹkún fún orílẹ̀-èdè Nàìjíríà tí í ṣe ilẹ̀ baba wọn’ (‘crying for the nation of Nigeria, their fatherland’) in despair at the failures of the state (36). *Kọ́pà*’s characters simultaneously aspire to the nation but expose it as not yet realised. As such, the novel embodies the duality Bhabha (1990: 2) recognises in the nation – with both home and Other, belonging and exclusionary classification immanent in the idea of the nation. But it is also a failure the novel sees as specific to Nigeria, written about and during the 1980s, a time of high youth unemployment, with state institutions and infrastructure scarcely functioning, and few opportunities for the ‘lost generation’ of youth (Cruise O’Brien 1996). The novel tugs back and forth between the desirability of travelling, encountering other Nigerians, serving the nation and hoping for better, and retreating from the nation in recognition of its failure – with its own partial depiction of the nation echoing this expanding and contracting scope.

## Conclusion

Our reading of the space of travel in these Yoruba novels has demonstrated the importance of the national traveller in the era after Nigerian independence, but also some novels’ scepticism about the nation. *Adégbẹ̀san*’s optimistic approach to the Nigerian nation is founded in not only the hopeful years of the newly independent nation, but also in what Ọmọtọṣọ (1991) might schematise as a geographic depiction of the nation. By contrast, a more political representation of the nation, as in Awẹ’s *Kọ́pà*, written after the bitterness of the civil war and in the midst of military rule, is figured through its characters’ desire for something better than the nation they see before them.

The figure of the traveller who leaves home to encounter the national other helps the novelist imagine a nation that Yoruba-speakers are both part of and representative of. Karin Barber (1997: 124) argues that in Fagunwa’s novels, the idea of the nation is not quite fleshed out: ‘while Nigeria is alluded to, as one level in the range of collectivities, the Hausa, Igbo, and other Nigerian peoples are not’. The use of synecdoche – using Yoruba experience to represent national experience – in *Kọ́pà* is surely a pragmatic strategy for representing an abstract concept such as ‘the nation’. But it is also indicative of an absence figured in the nation, similar to that which Barber identifies in Fagunwa’s novels, in that *Kọ́pà* envisages emptiness or even violence behind the idea of the nation, even as it also desires national unity, a nation that is a ‘border zone’ or ‘between space’ for translation.

The understanding of travel as transformation in previous work on Yoruba print culture (and African fiction more broadly) places the emphasis on character and, to a lesser extent, form as the means through which travel engenders change. But this article has shown that translation can also be immanent to travel, and thus stresses the role of *language* in travel. However, this is not to say that these novels always represent encounters with other languages as opportunities for translation. As we have seen, *Kọ́pà* envisages the importance of travel to lie not only in its possibility to represent the nation, but in its ability to dramatise the alienation and yet simultaneous solidarity of youth away from home.

Exotic central and northern Nigeria in *Adégbẹ̀san* is not so much an expression of the strange and uncivilised, but a way to think about people who are not like us but ultimately translatable, as if through travel and encounter the nation can eventually be comprehended. Translation in *Adegbẹsan* creates a border space or contact zone between two different places and peoples. However, it imagines both sides of the encounter co-operating before retreating home to carry on as before. In this it betrays Iser’s (1994) notion of ‘translatability’ as a transformative encounter – but the novel seems to *celebrate* this potential for translation to keep the nation comprehensible but at arm’s length. The novels of travel in the national context discussed in this article do not seem to see themselves *creating* (or ‘imagining’, in Anderson’s (2006) sense) the nation through writing and reading. As such, they can be read not so much, or not only, as novels of formation or transformation (Moretti 2000), but as novels of encounter.

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1. Note on orthography: Standard Yoruba uses diacritical marks: tone marks above vowels and sub-dots beneath certain letters. I have used full diacritics for all the Yoruba words that I myself have used (i.e. not quotations). The exception to this is for personal names and places, for which, in the interests of legibility, I have used only sub-dots, as is becoming common practice. However, many Yoruba texts themselves use diacritics inconsistently. For quotations from Yoruba texts, I have preserved their original diacritics. I have also faithfully reproduced any spelling and orthographical mistakes in the original Yoruba texts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note on translation: All translations from the Yoruba are my own; however, I gratefully acknowledge the advice of Professor Karin Barber, Dr George Oluṣọla Ajibade and Olufẹmi Ogundayọ with regard to my translation queries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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5. There is unfortunately not space here to give a fuller account of the emergence of the Yoruba novel or of Yoruba print culture in general; however, for further details please consult Ogunṣina (1992); Nnodim (2006); Barber (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The text now regarded as the first Yoruba novel, *Ìtàn Ìgbésí Ayé Èmi Sẹ̀gilọlá Ẹlẹ́yinjú Ẹgẹ́ Ẹlẹ́gbẹ̀rùn Ọkọ L’áiyé* by newspaper editor and proprietor I.B. Thomas, was first published in serialised form in the 1920s in Thomas’s newspaper *Akede Eko*; see Karin Barber (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. There is not space here to detail the history of Fagunwa’s writing or his influences in earlier Yoruba print culture, but for more on Fagunwa see Bamgboṣe (1974) and George (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The exception to this format is *Àdììtú Olódùmarè*, which diverges from the quest plot, although it does still involve periods of wandering. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Though fantastical novels continue to be published, the shift to realism and to popular novels (often with echoes of the video film industry) has resulted in increasing numbers of novels focused on everyday urban life, both in Yorubaland and farther afield, as well as thrillers, detective novels and historical novels. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Both novels feature a realist setting, but also the use of magical charms, so might be considered semi-realist; however, the use of charms could in fact be considered well within the bounds of realism for some Yoruba readers. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. However, since 2011 there has been considerable public debate about lifting the requirement to serve outside one’s home state. This followed the increase in violence in several parts of Nigeria, some of which was directed towards Corpers serving as election officials in the 2011 elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Kọ́pà’* is a transliterated borrowing from the English word ‘corper’, referring to members of the National Youth Service Corps. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. As Iṣọla (1998: 148) notes, notices advertising the writer’s realism were ‘fashionable’ from the 1960s onwards. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A long, flowing gown for men – ‘agbádá’ is the Yoruba word, rather than the Hausa equivalent. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Many thanks for William Burgess (personal communication, 27 June 2013) for drawing my attention to contemporaneous Hausa literature about intra-national encounters. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In 1991, just after *Kọ́pà* was published, Anambra State was sub-divided into Anambra State and Enugu State, meaning that Enugu is no longer in Anambra State. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Chei, Chínéke Gọọ̀d!*:Igbo, meaning ‘Hey, Chineke God!’. *Hábà Hallah:* Hausa; ‘haba’ is an exclamatory word (meaning roughly ‘come on!’). The whole phrase approximates to ‘my God!’. *Ori iya mi o!*:Yoruba, meaning literally ‘Oh, my mother’s head’ but referring to the metaphysical concept of ‘head’ as destiny.  [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This part of the novel draws on the real-life murder of three student protestors at the hands of the police in Ile-Ifẹ in 1981. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The Yoruba deity also known as Ṣopona or Babalu Aye, the god who has dominion over the earth and who is associated with disease, especially smallpox, but also with healing. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Igbo supreme deity. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Presumably a reference to the Arabic *lā ʾilāha ʾillā-llāh* (‘there is no god but Allah’), from the beginning of the Islamic *Shahada,* the testimony of faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Òkóró is a Yoruba nickname for Igbo-speakers. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ‘Ìròyìn òkèèrè’ can also mean ‘rumours’, although here it also seems to refer literally to news from a distant place, with the same undertone of unreliability. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)