

# **The Zoologist in D. O. Fagunwa**

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*at the*

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## The Zoologist in D.O. Fagunwa

On December 7, 2010, at the 4<sup>th</sup> D.O. Fagunwa Memorial Lecture, I delivered a Goodwill message after listening to Dr. Dúró Adéléké's lecture titled "*Léyìn Itàn Àròso D.O. Fagunwa Máraàrún, Ewo ló kù?*" I was carried away not only by Dr. Adeleke's Lecture, but also by nostalgic feelings about the five well known works of D.O. Fagunwa, all of which I read as set books in the primary and secondary schools. I pledged to write a piece that would show that D.O. Fagunwa was indeed a Zoologist who did not have formal training in the subject. After the event, I picked up two copies each of all the five books written by this author: *Ògbójú Ọḁ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlè (Ògbójú)*, *Igbó Olodumarè (Igbó)*, *Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje (Ìrìnkèrindò)*, *Ìrèké Oníbùdó (Ìrèké)* and *Àdìití Olodumarè (Àdìití)*. I bought two copies each as I always do in such circumstances, one is a working paper while the other becomes a permanent member of my private library.

For almost two years I stared and made cursory looks at these books. Due to exigencies of my work, I couldn't do more than this. There were times I blamed myself for making such a lousy promise that was getting difficult to fulfil. Around June this year, I prayed that my good friend *Diípo Fágúnwà* gets my pledge erased from his memory but alas, my prayers were not answered. Two months ago, he came to Ondo and dropped the bombshell. "Tito. You are delivering this year's D.O. Fagunwa Memorial Lecture". As soon as I heard, I became jittery. If D.O. Fagunwa were alive and saw me, he would have created another character in his next novel and would have described my situation as: *Jinìjini bá òdómọkùnrin náà léhìn tí ó fi ẹnù rẹ sọ wí pé oun yio ẹ nńkan tí oun kò lẹ r'áye ẹ.* i.e. The young man felt jittery when he realized that he could not fulfil his promise.

D.O. Fagunwa captures the mind of the reader of his works in such a way that every imagined event becomes real. The thought of having this said about me by Fagunwa a year less than 50 years that he had passed on made me shake off the fear of not being able to fulfil my promise. Immediately, I got the books off my shelf, cleaned them and started marking the names of animals referred to in the book with my highlighter. I marked 57 in *Ògbójú*; 45 in *Igbó*; 51 in *Ìrìnkèrindò*; 61 in *Ìrèké*; 73 in *Àdiitú*.

Ayo Bamgbose's commentary on the novels of D.O. Fagunwa, published in 2007 is purely an exercise in Yoruba Literature. The most detailed references made to animals in Fagunwa's books were on pages 61 and 83 in the 144-page book. On page 61, Bamgbose ran a commentary on "Man and other Creatures" as follows: "The relationship between man and other creatures is another constant theme in Fagunwa's novels. In several incidents, man is shown as an enemy to other creatures. Mammal, birds, snakes, fishes and even spirits and trees all hate men. The reason for this hostility is the way men treat other creatures. Men kill all snakes both poisonous and non-poisonous (*Igbó*, p. 145); they make fishes suffer before they kill and eat them (*Ìrèké*, p. 65); they torture birds and imprison them in cages (*Ìrìnkèrindò*, p. 110); and they kick other animals, beat them, and give them poor food (*Ògbójú*, p. 24). Like an apologist for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Fagunwa in a devastating way confronts representatives of man with those of other creatures and makes the latter pass judgment on men's cruelty to animals. In one case, he contrives a reversal of roles in order to drive the point home forcefully. Which man would like to be ridden like a horse or fed with raw yam? This is precisely how men treat animals".

Dealing with how Fagunwa captured the "Nature of the Weird Element" in his novels, Bamgbose delved extensively on the weirdness of Fagunwa's presentation of characters in the world of spirits, witches, and various *iwin* and *ẹbọra* such as *ewèlè*, *òrò*, *eseku*, *egbére*, *Aládé Igbó*, *Aroni*, *Ìjàmbá*, etc. all of which Wole Soyinka collectively referred to as

ghommids and trolls. Bamgbose merely mentioned in passing weird creatures which shared both human and animal features. These include: *Ògòngò*, the ostrich with a human head; *Àrògìdìgbà*, the mermaid; *Ìtánforítì*, a centaur; *Àkùko Orun*, a cock with human head; *Kùmódìran*, a half man, half gorilla.

The few other references to animals by Bamgbose were done to expose the didactic element in Fagunwa's stories and not to demonstrate Fagunwa's in-depth knowledge of the habits and peculiar characteristics of the animals some of which demonstrated stupidity while some demonstrated astute cleverness.

I am assuring you all that this piece is not about the moral messages in Fagunwa's works. It is not about his dexterous description of weird elements neither is it about vague and real characters. It is not about warriors missing in action. It is not about the impressions animals have about man. It is certainly not about expositions of and reward for human behaviour such as perseverance, treachery, retribution, etc. It is not about symbolism of characters, places and objects and plots. It is not about appropriateness of the use of proverbs, neither is it the perfectness of expressive imagery. It is neither about Fagunwa's expertise in the use of similes and metaphors, nor the perfect expression of humour through parody and witty expressions as in "*Ìgbàgbó Ohje*" (The Meal Creed) in *Ìrìnkèrindò*. It is not about love, expression of it and its deadly serious nature, all of which were sufficiently demonstrated in the courtship between *Ìrèké Onibùdó* and *Ìfèpàdè* in *Ìrèké*, *Àdìitú* and *Iyùnadé* in *Àdìitú*, *Ìrìnkèrindò* and *Ìfèpàtàkì* in *Ìrìnkèrindò*, *Olówó-aiyé* and *Àjédìran* in *Igbó*. It is also not about Fagunwa's portrayal of women as creatures with a wide array of character traits ranging from rivalry in polygamous homes through betrayal demonstrated by the wife of the king of a small town during *Àkàrà Ogùn's* second sojourn in the forest of a thousand demons, to rescue missions as *Ìrànlówó* and various other strange women did to *Àkàrà Ogùn* in times of

extreme stress and difficulty. Ladies and gentlemen, it is about the Zoologist in D.O. Fagunwa.

### **Who is a Zoologist?**

A Zoologist is one who studies animals in their habitats or a confinement or in the laboratory either in the living form or when they are dead and preserved. No version of Fagunwa's *Resumé* has revealed that he enrolled formally as a Zoologist in any school. He attended the famous St. Andrew's Teacher Training College in Oyo where he trained as a teacher. I learnt from Ayo Bamgbose's biographical account of Fagunwa that he studied further in Britain on a British Council Scholarship between 1946 and 1948. He went back to Britain again in 1950 before coming back to Nigeria in 1955 not as a secondary school teacher that he was, but as an Education Officer with the Ministry of Education in Western Nigeria. None of these accounts referred to him as a student of Zoology. However, being born in 1903 at a time when Christianity was just 61 years old in Nigeria, to parents who were originally traditional worshipers of Yoruba religion before they converted to Christianity, one would expect that his knowledge of traditional Yoruba belief will be vast and undoubtedly not second-hand. His original name, *Òròwolé* (*Òrò* enters the house) which he changed later to Olorunfemi (God loves me) reveals the deep traditional element in his pedigree. That he was born in Òkè-Igbó Igbo, a town in the heart of Yorubaland which up till today is surrounded by thick forests and mountains of great heights suggests that as a kid, he must have grown up in the midst of hunters. Bamgbose (2007) had this to say about him on his cultural background: "Fagunwa is obviously influenced by his experience of rural life in his own town of Òkè-Igbó which is surrounded by dense forests, and where the main occupations are farming and hunting. It is therefore not surprising that almost all the heroes in his novels are hunters". Ladies and gentlemen, the task before me today is not only to prove to you all that hunters are Zoologists but that Fagunwa's books made the tremendous impact they made because of the instinctive

Zoologist inside him. I will also prove to you today that this is a case of *abínibí* (innate talent) that took advantage of the situation around him to achieve a great ability in the subject Zoology.

### **The animal as a tool in Fagunwa's novels**

In all of Fagunwa's stories, the animal is either used in a descriptive way to express the author's views or used in proverbs to serve the same purpose. On the other hand, stories are told of animals to illustrate the association and genial relationships between them or the association between them and human beings. In both cases, animals are used as tools to communicate effectively with the reader.

### ***Yànmùuyánmù* (Mosquito)**

In the very first page of *Ògbójú*, Fagunwa wrote:

*“... Nkò fẹ́ kí ẹ́ jó ilù mi bí ìgbà tí yànmùuyánmù bá njó ìbénbè, tí ó nta ẹ̀sè wáíwáí tí ẹ̀sè rẹ̀ kò sì bá ilù dógba, sùgbón kàkà béé kí ẹ́ jó ilù náà dáadáa, kí ẹ́ jóo tayòtayò, kí ẹ́ jóo tẹ̀rintẹ̀rín, tó béé tí àwon enia yio máa fi owó lè yín lóri, tí won o máa ju aso sí yin lójú ijó, tí awon okùnrin yio máa dòbálè, tí awon obìrin yio si máa kúnlè níwájú yín, nígbàtí ijó yín bá dùn mó won...”*

Now please listen to Wole Soyinka's interpretation of this phrase:

“Now I don't want you to dance to my drumming as a mosquito to the deep *bèmbè* drums, its legs twitching haphazardly, at loggerheads with the drums. Dance my friends in harmony with joy and laughter that your audience will ring your brows with coins and pave your path with clothing; that men may prostrate before you and women curtsy in sheer pleasure at your dancing”.

As a Zoologist, I have had the opportunity of seeing the video clip of the tiny mosquito displaying stridulating and near acrobatic flights with its fragile membranous wings and slender legs. Nobody can see this with the ordinary eye. I know for sure that video clips were not common in 1936 when Fagunwa wrote *Ogboju*. How then did he know the “dancing steps” of the mosquito? It must have been a figment of his imagination. An imagination that can only come from the mind of a Zoologist. As a Zoologist, I know that a mosquito in flight, dancing to *ibèmbè* is like someone displaying the Rock ‘n’ Roll dancing steps in response to the smooth renditions of Jim Reeves’ country music.

### ***Agílítí* (Monitor Lizard)**

In that great encounter between *Àkàrà Ogùn* and the sixteen-eyed dewild (*ewèlè olójúmérindinlélógún*) called *Agbako* in *Ògbójú*. The fight which was witnessed by various creatures in the wild just like people watching a friendly football match in a world class stadium, was a combination of physical assault and display of supernatural application of rarifying acts (use of *egbé*) of appearance and disappearance as well as back-to-sender spells which affected both the target and the source. Midway into the ferocious encounter, *Àkàrà Ogùn* was so exhausted that he expressed regretfully that: “*Ó ti wá rẹ̀ mí náà wàyí se ni mò nmí hòò bí agílítí ...*” Wole Soyinka’s (1982) translation of this is: “*And now I was truly exhausted; my breath came and went in rapid bloats like the hawing of a toad*”.

*Agílítí* is a reptile that belongs to the group collectively called **Monitor lizards**. Monitor lizards are generally larger than the well known common lizards although small ones that may not be longer than 20 centimetres in length also exist. They have long necks, powerful tails and claws, and well-developed limbs. Most species are terrestrial and arboreal. A few are semiaquatic. They are largely carnivorous, although a few species eat fruit. They are oviparous, laying not less than seven but sometimes up to 37 eggs which they often cover

with soil like common lizards and crocodiles. The arboreal forms protect their eggs inside hollows tree stumps.

Monitor Lizards belong to the genus *Varanus* which is widely distributed in Africa, Asia and Australia. The largest concentration of monitor lizards in the world is in Tioman Island in the Malaysian state of Pahang. Monitor lizards differ greatly from other lizards in several ways. Being predators that hunt their prey live, they have a relatively high metabolic rate when compared with other reptiles. It is not unusual to see monitor lizards stand on their two hind legs and appear to "monitor" their surroundings as they look for (or warn) their prey. This posture must have led to their common name: "Monitor Lizard" which was derived from the Latin word *monere* meaning "to warn" Even the Latinized generic name *Varanus* has something to do with monitoring and warning.

There is no doubt that Fagunwa must have seen and probably hunted *agiliti* in the forests around Òkè-Igbó when he was young. The last time I saw *agiliti* was about a decade ago when I took Zoology students in Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife to Omo Forest Reserve in the boundary between Ogun and Ondo states on field trip. We did not see it in the wild, we saw it in a roadside restaurant, freshly killed by a hunter, waiting to be skinned, carved and cut into pieces in readiness for smoking and roasting as *Àkàrà Ogùn* did to the *Ìjímèrè* (Grass monkey) and *Akátá* (Jackal; not Civet) he killed in Igbó Irúnmòlè; (Ògbójú, p. 11).

It is quite certain that the hawling of a toad may seemingly resemble the posture of a monitor lizard in frantic search for its prey but I am sure that Fagunwa did not have the toad in mind. This is an indication of a fundamental difference between Zoology and Literature. Fagunwa demonstrated his in-depth knowledge of the habits of *agiliti* further in Ògbójú when in one of the stories of "Íràgbèje in the house with seven wings" the Lion (*Kinìún*) gathered all animals and said among many other things:



“... *Olúkúlùkù ni Èléda fún ní onje tirè lati máa je, gbogbo wa si mọ pe ebi kii wọ inú kí òrò miran tún wọ ibè; ẹ̀lòmíràn ninu yin a máa jẹ ewéko a si máa ni itélórùn, ẹ̀lòmíràn kẹ , èso igi ni ije, bakanna ni a kò ẹ̀sà rí ògbéni agílítí ti nwon máa nje ẹran”.*

Wole Soyinka’s (1982) translation of this is:

“... Everyone of you has been allotted his diet by the Creator, and all of us are aware that when hunger enters the stomach, no other matter has place within it; some of you eat leaves and this satisfies you, others treasure fruits for food, nor do we fail to see how the worthy wall gecko loves his meat”.

The wall gecko is closer in morphology to the monitor lizard than the toad, being a reptile, so it is a more acceptable substitute to the toad in describing *agílítí*. However, the wall gecko hardly lives in the wild. It does not stand on its two hind legs “monitoring” surroundings. It has no venom which recent research has discovered in monitor lizards. This has led to the Toxicofera hypothesis: that all venomous lizards and snakes share a common venomous ancestor. Furthermore, not all species of animals fight themselves. I have never heard of toads and wall geckos fighting. So therefore the *agílítí* that Fagunwa referred to in *Ògbójú* is the monitor lizard. A perfect translation of Fagunwa’s books will therefore require the input of a Zoologist to be able to satisfy the Zoologist in D.O. Fagunwa.

Wole Soyinka (2010) admitted in the “Translator’s Note” of the latest edition of “*The Forest of a thousand Daemons*” that: “Indeed *agílítí* is far from being a toad”. This is in response to what he described as a “protest from a critic”. In his defence, he opined that a translator must select equivalents for mere auxiliaries where these serve the essential purpose better than the precise original. This is true when such translations convey the meaning more properly and preserves the fusion of sound and action which I agree is the essence of Fagunwa’s writings. Thus, *Irúnmọ̀lẹ̀* (Four Hundred Daemons) could be translated to “A Thousand Daemons”

because in the current way of reasoning, four hundred may not appear as many as they were in 1936 when Fagunwa first published *Ògbójú*. If this is seen as a rule, then translation of names of animals in Fagunwa’s books is an exception to this rule.



*V. timorensis* (Small) [Bengal monitor](#) (Big)

Predatory Monitor



The Ornate Monitor (spotted in Omo Forest Reserve?) (Perentie Monitor (*Varanus giganteus*) “Monitoring”

Asian Water Monitor Fighting (just like *Akàrà Ogùn* and (*Varanus salvator salvator*) Àgbàkò on p. 26 of *Ògbójú*) “Monitoring”

### The many faces of *agiliti*.

Thus, calling a toad, frog (p. 15 of *The Forest*) and calling it toad on the next page deserves to be reviewed in the next edition of *The Forest*. Toads hop while frogs leap into the air with their limbs fully stretched. All I am saying is that “*òmíràn ntọ bí òpòlò*” (*Ògbójú* p. 7) is not frogwise. It is about hopping like a toad.

I know that using different translations for the same animal by literary translators is deliberate. It may be acceptable in Literature but it is not acceptable in Zoology. One of such is in *Igbó* where the translator translated “*àwọn ẹiyẹ kékeré gbogbo*” as “the minnows of the air”. Minnows are tiny fishes used as baits in fishing. To a Zoologist, this poetic translation is not acceptable.

The unfortunate news about *agiliti* as I speak today is that all the known species are threatened with extinction due to hunting pressure and loss of habitat. Five of them in particular *V. bengalensis*, *V. flavescens*, *V. griseus*, *V. komodoensis* and *V. nebulosus* are on the brink of extinction.

### ***Eiyẹ* (Birds)**

In *Ògbójú*, Fagunwa described the habits of birds in a way that will make the modern day ornithologist envious. The crowd that gathered to listen to *Àkàrà Ogùn* in the author's house on the second day was described as:

“...òpòlópò ni ó gun orí igi, òpòlópò ni ó wà ní orí òrùlé: nwọn dàbí òké àìmoye eiyẹ ega tí nwon nje aiyé orí wọn lóri igi òpe”.

”Some climbed trees, many sat on the roof top – they were as a flock of weaver birds frolicking on the crown of a palm”. (Forest p.68).

Perfect translation! Weaver birds are a common site on palm trees in the rainforest zone of Southern Nigeria. Frolicking is indeed the best way to describe their state as they destroy the palm while going about their normal nest-building and food foraging activities.

*Èlulu* {Black-throated Coucal (*Centropus leucogaster*)} was referred to twice on pages 11 and 59 in *Ògbójú* and on page 11 in *Igbó*, while *Agbe* {Ground Hornbill (*Bucorvus abyssinicus*)} was referred to on page 60 of *Ògbójú*, both in relation to their characteristic and peculiar calls. *Èlulu* calls at dawn while *Agbe* calls at dusk. Traditionally, these birds serve as indicators of time. In *Ògbójú* Fagunwa said: “*Nkò tún ẹ ọdẹ lálẹ ọjó náà mó, nigbati mo ti ẹ itójú akátá náà tán ni mo ti fi èhìn lé ilè tí mo sùnlo, igbe Èlulu l'owuro ọjó keji ló sì jí mi*”. My translation goes thus: “I did not hunt anymore that night. After smoking and roasting the Jackal, I slept deeply only to be woken up at dawn by the calls of the black-throated Coucal”.

On page 59 of *Ògbójú*, Fagunwa said: “*A kò rìn jìná jubéè lẹ lehin eyi tíí ilè fì sù ti a sùn, Èlulu ké àì ké ni owurọ ojó keji ni a ti fì esè si ona ti a nlo ...*”. Again my translation of this is: “It became dark soon after this rescue, so we did not advance much before we slept. Hardly had the Coucal called the following day that we continued on our journey ...”. I prefer to use my own translations here because of the animals involved. As far as the Zoologist is concerned, birds don’t cry, they call. It will interest you all to learn that the black-throated Coucal’s call is a succession of about twenty “hoos” which is loudest at first and decreases gradually until it dies away at the end. This call is usually at dawn. *Agbe* (the Ground Hornbill), on the other hand makes a prolonged deep booming call usually at dusk. Who says Fagunwa was not a Zoologist?

*Ògòngò* (Ostrich)

Perhaps the most prominent bird celebrated in Fagunwa’s books is *Ògòngò* (Ostrich) the Father of Birds through whose territory the brave hunters had to cross on their way to *Òkè Lángbòdò* in *Ògbójú*. The notice at the entrance to this territory of birds is quite suggestive of Fagunwa’s views on animal conservation.

*“Ògòngò baba ẹiyẹ, olóri ẹiyẹ ma re o  
Èlẹda kò kò ki ẹnikéni pa ẹiyẹ jẹ;  
Èlẹda kò kò ki ẹnikéni fì ẹiyẹ ẹe ohun rere  
Şugbón ẹnikéni ti o ba ti pa ẹiyẹ lainidi ri,  
Ko gbòdò wọ inu ilu wa”.*

Wole Soyinka’s translation in *The Forest* goes thus:

“Father of birds the Ostrich,  
this is indeed the King of birds.

The creator does not object  
that anyone should kill a bird for food

The Creator does not mind  
that birds be killed for a good purpose

But whosoever has at any time

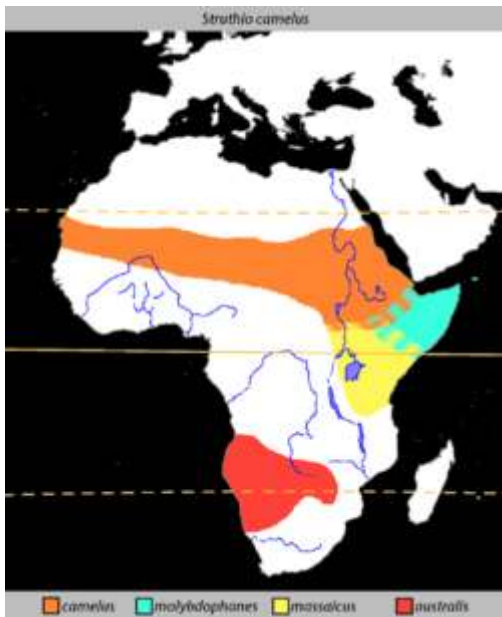
wantonly killed a bird.

To him this town is forbidden”.

This is one of the numerous perfect translations in “Forest” that preserved Fagunwa’s message without any ambiguity. Fagunwa’s description of *Ògòngò* as a bird with human head notwithstanding, he had a good grasp of how an ostrich looks like. Giving it a human head is a matter I will leave for literary *gurus* to explain. As a Zoologist, I am not bothered by this. Afterall, all the animals in *Ògbójú* talked as if they were human beings. Fagunwa’s choice of style of communication with his audience is his exclusive reserve and he has done this effectively well in all his books.

The Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), is a large flightless birds native to Africa but not Nigeria. It is the largest living species of bird and lays the largest egg of any living bird. The Ostrich is distinctive in its appearance, with long neck and legs and the ability to run at maximum speeds of about 70 km/h (43 mph), the fastest land speed of any bird. This speed surpasses that of the horse but unfortunately, being exotic, these birds exist in captivity usually in confined enclosures in Nigeria. Where then did Fagunwa see an Ostrich in 1936? It is definitely not in Oke-Igbo. The long neck and legs of the Ostrich keep its relatively small head up to about 2.8 m (9 ft) above the ground, and its eyes are said to be the largest of any land vertebrate being about 50 mm (2.0 in) in diameter. With their acute eyesight and hearing, Ostriches can perceive predators such as lions from a great distance. Ascribing to the Ostrich the title of “Father of birds” is therefore not a misnomer. When lying down and hiding from predators, the ostrich lays its head and neck flat on the ground, making them appear as a mound of earth from a distance. When threatened, Ostriches run away, but they can cause serious injury and death with kicks from their powerful legs. Contrary to popular belief, Ostriches do not bury their heads in the sand when hiding from predators. This myth began with a novel written by Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), who wrote that Ostriches

"imagine, when they have thrust their head and neck into a bush, that the whole of their body is concealed."



Ostrich Distribution in Africa



An Ostrich pair. Male (left); Female (right)



Ostrich Head



Ostrich Egg

It is on record that in the medieval time, Ostriches were hunted and farmed for their feathers, which at various times have been popular for ornamentation in fashionable clothing such as hats. Their skins were valued for their leather. In the 18th century, they were almost hunted to extinction. Farming for feathers began in the 19th century. At the start of the 20th century there were over 700,000 birds in captivity. The market for feathers collapsed after World War I, but commercial farming for feathers and later for skins became widespread up till the 1970s. The Arabian Ostriches in the Near and Middle East were hunted to extinction by the

middle of the 20th century, not long after Fagunwa wrote *Ògbójú*. I suspect strongly that Fagunwa had access to all these information through books on conservation and saw this extinction coming hence the notice, declaring its territory out of bounds to those who kill birds indiscriminately. Who says Fagunwa was not a Zoologist?

*Òkin* (Peacock)

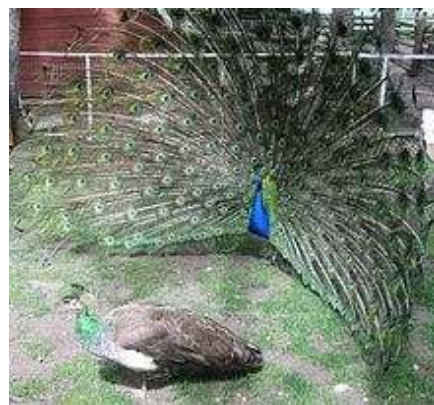
There is no doubt that Love is a major theme in the plot of Fagunwa's novels. In every one of them, there is a love story involving the hero (Bamgbose, 2007). Fagunwa's preference for a monogamous marital affair must have informed his choice of the Peacock in a letter *Adiitu* wrote to *Iyùnádé* during courtship:

*“Eiye bí òkín sòwón nínú gbogbo eiye, òkín léwà ju gbogbo won lo, òkín ní dúdú lára bí agbe, ó ní pupa lára bí álùkò, ó tún ní funfun lára bí ológosé. Àdàbà kò lè dúrú nibítí òkín wà, oriri kò lè sòrò nibítí òkín dúrò sí. Alápándèdè ati Odíderé, ibáákà àti ègà, Lekeleke ati Àparò, Odèrè kókò ati Asere, gbogbo wonyi a pa lóló nibítí òkín bá gbé dúrò. On ju won lo. Ó ní olá jù wón lo odo olólá ati ile olólà ni a si iti iri i. Iyùnádé, iwo ni òkín mi. Ko si irú re nínú àwon obìrin, o ju gbogbo won lo”.*

Obafemi's translation of this goes thus:

“A bird like *okin* is rare among birds. The *okin* is more beautiful than them all. The egret has a flourish of black like the sparrow, it had red spots like woodcock, and it has white quills like *ologose*. The dove cannot perch where *okin* perches and the *oriri* dare not chirrup in the presence of *okin*. *Alapandede* and parrot, *Ibaaka* and *Ega*, the cattle egret and the partridge, *odere koko* and *Asere* – all these birds will hurtle together wherever *okin* perches. It is greater than them all. It is more prosperous than them and it is found with prosperous persons in prosperous homes. *Iyunade*, you are my *okin*. There is none to compare you with among women. You surpass them all”.

Fagunwa compared the Peacock with thirteen other birds in respect of shared traits and supremacy of the Peacock. The Peacock is one of the most ostentatiously adorned creatures on earth. The Peacock spreads its iridescent blue-green or green coloured plumage to entice females during courtship. The female has a mixture of dull green, brown, and grey in her plumage which it displays to ward off female competition or signal danger to her young. It is indeed true that this bird is more colourful than most other birds. Was bird-watching Fagunwa's hobby? His display of adequate knowledge of the special features of birds would make an amateur ornithologist turn green with envy.



A peacock displaying its brilliant plumage to entice females. Courtship between a Peacock and Peahen

### **Other animals**

Fagunwa's in-depth knowledge of the world of vertebrates is not limited to birds alone. Three stories confirm this in *Ògbójú*. First is the story of *Àjàntálá*, a story that Fagunwa rendered through *Ìràgbèje*, the sage on their first day in *Ile Olójúléméje* (the house with seven wings). The theme of the story was home-training for the child. It was inconceivable to me at the beginning of this story that it would end with global distribution of animals the way it did. After *Àjàntálá* had been abandoned in the forest by his parents, he was accepted by a group of five animals living in "perfect amity" (Forest p. 111) as their servant. These animals (Goat, Hyena, Leopard, Lion and Elephant) displayed many bad human traits such as greed,



covetousness, lying etc. but *Àjàntálá* outwitted all of them. The Zoologist in Fagunwa was exposed at the tail end of this story when *Àjàntálá* scattered all of them and:

*“Lati ojo náà ni ewúré ti sá wá ilé, erin si sá wá si ilè enia dúdú ati si ilè India, ẹkùn ati ikókò sálọ si aginjù, şùgbón kìnùún ni òdàn ni ti òn”.*

“And from that day, it came about that Goat fled to human habitation, Elephant to the home of the black race and to India, Leopard and Hyena into the depths of the jungle, but Lion chose to live in the plains” (Forest p.115).

Fagunwa knew not only the habits of these animals, but also their global distribution. How did he know in 1936 that Elephants were also endemic to India? Before this dispersal as a result of beatings they received from *Àjàntálá*:

“...each of them gave voice to different cries, Goat cried Mme-e-e, Hyena wailed, the voice of Leopard shook the ground, Lion rumbled like a rainstorm and Elephant trumpeted” (Forest p. 114).

This is Wole Soyinka’s translation of:

*“Olúkúlùkù bèrè mú igbe – ewúré nke ‘Mee’! ikókò nbu, ohun ẹkùn nrin ilè dòdò, kìnùún nkù bi òjò, erin si nfon”!* (Ògbójú, p. 80).

Ladies and gentlemen, there was indeed undoubtedly a large chunk of Zoology in Fagunwa. He knew in 1936 that all domesticated animals once lived in the wild.

Please permit me to delve a little bit into the realm of Zoology in respect of wild cats.

***Panthera*** is a genus of the family Felidae which contains four well-known living species: the tiger, the lion, the jaguar, and the leopard. Only these four cat species have the anatomical structure that enables them to roar due to the morphology of their larynx.

The **tiger** (*Panthera tigris*) is the largest cat species, reaching a total body length of up to 3.3 metres and weighing up to 306 kg. It is the third largest land carnivore coming after the Polar

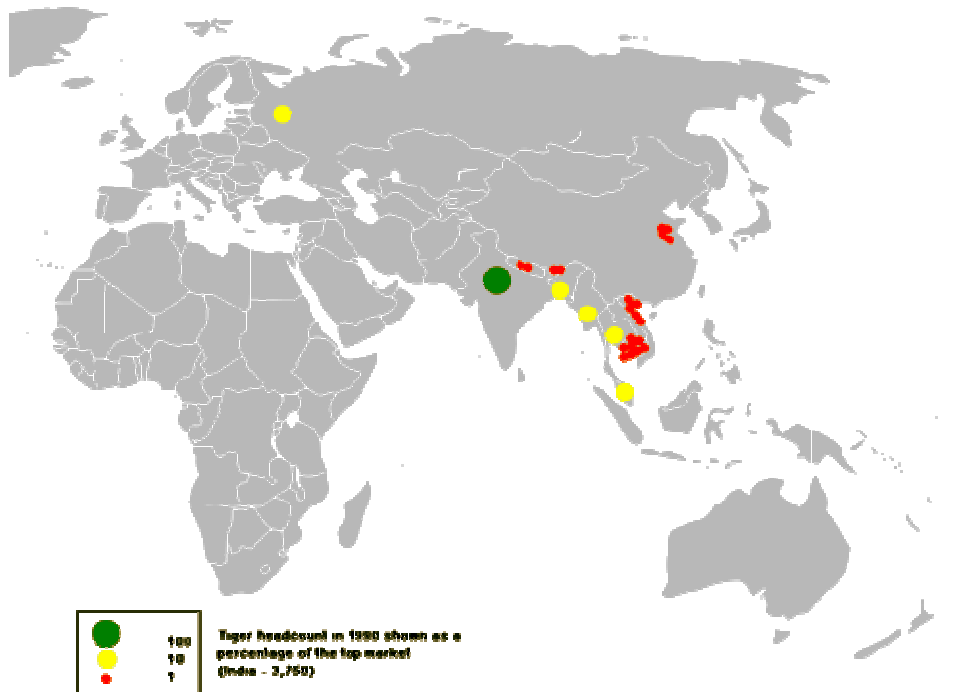
bear and the Brown Bear. Tigers once ranged widely across Asia, from Turkey in the west to the eastern coast of Russia. In the past 100 years, they have lost 93% of their historic range. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there were about 100,000 tigers in the wild. The global population in the wild as at 1990 when the last head count was made is 3,948. The major reasons for population decline include habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation and poaching. Tigers have been classified as endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



Top to bottom: Tiger, Lion, Jaguar, Leopard  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panthera>

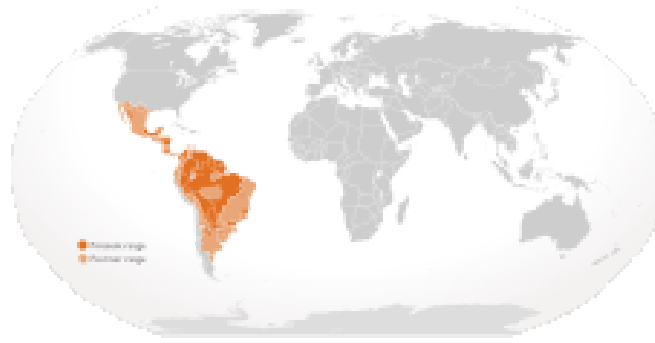
The tiger had never existed in Africa. It is not surprising therefore that there is no Yoruba translation of the tiger. The *ẹkùn* that Fagunwa referred to in his book is certainly the leopard. I am emphasizing this because many literary works have referred to *ẹkùn* as tiger.

The Leopard *Panthera pardus* has a wide range of habitats ranging from rainforest to desert in some parts of Africa and tropical Asia. In Africa, they are most successful in woodland, grassland savanna and forest but also occur widely in mountain habitats, coastal scrub, swampy areas, shrubland, semi-desert and desert. It is not out of place therefore for Fagunwa to say that: “*ẹkùn ... sálo si aginjù*” because there are forest dwelling leopards in Africa, Like the tiger, the leopard is also a threatened species.



Tiger headcount in 1990  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger>

The Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) is the only *Panthera* species found in the Americas. It is the third-largest feline after the tiger and the lion and the largest in the Western Hemisphere. This spotted cat most closely resembles the leopard physically, although it is usually larger and of sturdier build and its behavioural and habitat characteristics are closer to those of the Asian tiger. It is a forest species although it is also found in open terrains. The jaguar is not as threatened as the tiger but it is a near threatened species because its numbers are also declining.



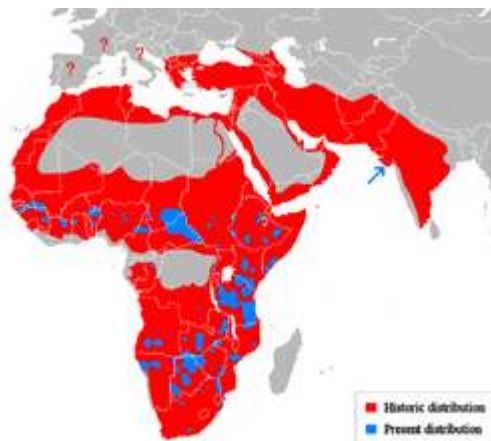
Jaguar range

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaguar>

The fourth species of *Panthera* is the Lion – “*kìnìún olólá ijù, akọ ọmọ láì lábẹ ...*”. It is the second-largest living cat after the Asian tiger. Wild lions currently exist in sub-Saharan on record that the lion has disappeared from North Africa and Southwest Asia. The lion is a generally vulnerable (i.e. next to being threatened) and within Africa, the West African lion population is particularly endangered. In Africa, lions are found in savanna grasslands with scattered *Acacia* trees which serve as shade. So you can see that Fagunwa’s claim that: “...*şùgbón kìnìún ni òdàn ni ti òn*” is suggestive of in-depth knowledge of the habitat preference of the lion.



The Lioness in the Savanna



Historic and present distribution of Lions

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion>

The fox, another carnivore was portrayed as a very wise animal in two other stories the hunters listened to from the mouth of *Ìrágbèje* the sage. The crafty way the fox outwitted the Lion who wanted animals to come to him daily to be devoured following a roster the fox was

asked to draft is unimaginable. The Lion was not only outwitted, it perished in a deep well along with other animals such as the Hyena, Leopard and Elephant who supported it foolishly out of selfishness. This story was rendered on the second day in the House of seven wings.

The focus was the negative consequences of being immoderate. *Ìrágbèje* said:

*“Lana mo sòrò nipa ọmọdẹ, ẹ̀gbón loni ngo sòrò nipa awọn ti wọn dàgbà ti nwọn sị jé alaşejù ...” Mo fé fi itan kekere yi kín ara mi lehin nisisiyi ki ẹ ba le ri ìgbèhìn alaşejù kedere”.* (Ògbójú, pp 82 and 83).

“Yesterday I spoke to you about children, but today I will talk about grown-ups who are the immoderate type ... I want to tell you a little anecdote to give weight to my words that you may see the end of the excessive man in the clearest manner” (Forest, pp 116 and 117).

Like the *Àjàntálá* story, the Zoologist in Fagunwa was subsumed in a theme that was not in any way suggestive of animal habits or behaviour.

*Ìrágbèje* rounded that day up with another story on the sharp and witty fox. As usual, the theme was not about animals. It was about human behaviour. It was a twin issue of “had-I-but-known (*àbámò*) and performing of good deeds (*oore şíşe*). “These two traits which to me occupy opposite ends of the continuum of human behaviour were perfectly combined in this story dexterously by Fagunwa, speaking through *Ìrágbèje*, the sage. In this story, the fox tricked the lion into re-entering an iron cage from where a man had rescued him earlier is another fascinating demonstration of the tricky and shrewd nature of the fox.

Fox is a common name for many species of largely carnivorous but also omnivorous mammals of the Family Canidae. Foxes are small to medium-sized canids that are slightly smaller than a medium-sized domestic dog. They are characterized by possessing a long narrow snout and a bushy brush-like tail. 37 species of fox have been identified worldwide.

They are found in almost every continent and their reputation for cunning and trickery is widespread. In many cultures in the world they appear in folklore and popular culture.



A Fox

The hearing of Foxes is so sharp and they are opportunistic feeders that hunt live prey which are usually rodents and hens in poultry. They are therefore readily found in farmlands and areas with human presence. They are known for a peculiar pouncing technique practiced from an early age that enables them to kill their prey quickly. This trait is one that could have earned them their reputation of being crafty. The average life span of foxes in the wild is about 10 years, but they hardly live up to 3 years due to hunting, road accidents and diseases. Fagunwa must have had a direct experience with foxes in his childhood days.

### **Animal behaviour and adaptation to the environment**

There are two broad types of Zoologists. One type studies animals either in their natural environment (*in situ*) or in confinement elsewhere (*ex-situ*). The other types study them in the laboratory in their lifeless form. Fagunwa belongs to the former group who are also known as animal ecologists. Ecology is a sub-discipline of Biology which has been described by Odum (1970) to be a horizontal layer in the biological cake such that when a vertical size is cut, some ecology is cut with it. Fagunwa's knowledge of how animals behave in the environment where they live was clearly demonstrated in the very opening paragraph of Igbó Olodùmarè

where the author himself described the environment behind his house where he sat in seclusion, on a bright sunny afternoon, ruminating about his father's demise.

*"... ogunlógò awon èdá aláàyè ni nwon mò pe oòrùn naa mú, awon alángbá nsáré, ara won ndún hánránhánrán lóri ewé gbígbe, awon eiyẹ nla kò sì ké mó, nitori mo ti gbó igbe ẹlulu, mo ti gbọ ti àdàbà, eiyẹ agbe ti ké, àlùkò ti sòrò, olúkùlùku won si dáké minimini si ibiti Olodumarè so won lójò si, àfi eiyẹ kékeré gbogbo, ti nwon ko tobi ju alápandèdè, ni nwon nfo sihin fò sọhun ti ara won kò balè bi ewé ojú omi, nwon nti orí igi dé orí igi bi nwon ti nké bi ọmọ adìe". (Igbó, p. 1).*

Please permit me to modify Wole Soyinka's translation of this description based on my perception, as a Zoologist, of the most suitable translations of the names of the birds.

*"... Countless were the ones who knew the malice of the sun. Lizards were restless, their skin crinkling stridently over dry leaves. Birds were silent. The Black-throated Coucal has already called and the hooing had died away, the dove has equally called, so also are the Ground Hornbill and the blue Woodcock . Each of them fell impenetrably silent wherever their maker had assigned them. Only the pint-sized birds that are not bigger than the swallow bird flew ceaselessly hither and thither, restless as floating leaves on water surface, hopping from tree to tree and chirping like chickens".*

In literary circles, Fagunwa's prowess in using appropriate descriptive words to express himself will be the focus here. I am afraid, I am not bothered by this. What I am concerned with is his in-depth knowledge of the habits of the lizard and birds he used as his descriptive tools. Only a Zoologist can describe the habits of animals the way Fagunwa did and only a Zoologist can translate them appropriately.

The opening paragraph of *Àdìtù Olodùmarè* was a description of a heavy downpour, in sharp contrast to the sunny day in *Igbó Olodùmarè*.

“... *A! Òjò na pò gidigidi. ... Omi odò gbogbo tí o ti tòrò kinkin ti di pupa, ewéko alára mímó ti di eléerí, awọn eja mokun nwọn ba isale inu ibú lẹ, ẹranko nka síósíó kiri ninu igbó, awọn ẹiyẹ joko gúlútú gúlútú kaakiri ninu itẹ wọn, àgbàrà le òpò ejò jade lati inu ihò, ejò ere nse làgbà loju omi, ohun aláàyè kan ko le wipe on gbadun rara, afi ekòlò ti o nẹ aiye ori rè kiri”.*

Obafemi (2012) in a fair attempt in translation wrote:

“Ah! The rain was heavy. ... Clean and pure streams had become red like troubled mud. Green allure leaves had turned to dirtiest sight. Fishes had dived into the bottom of the rivers. Animals cringed in the forest, weather-bitten. Birds sat in hushed forms in their nests. Floods chased snakes out of their warm holes. Pythons wandered on the surface of the river. Every living thing was in a state of discomfort. Only the earthworm sauntered in great pleasure, unruffled”. (Mysteries, p. 2)

So you see, Ladies and gentlemen, Fagunwa knew that the earthworm is an invertebrate that thrives well under waterlogged conditions. One has to be a Zoologist to know this.

### **Fishes and other aquatic creatures**

I will round this piece off with *Ìrèké Oníbùdó's* boat mishap that led him into a strange land underwater where he saw hell in the hands of *Àrògìdìgbà* the leader of fishes i.e. *Àrògìdìgbà ti iṣe Olórí eja inu omi*. Eja Àrò is the generic Yoruba name for Catfish of the Genus *Clarias*. Catfishes are very rugged bottom feeders that can survive out of water for a longer time than many other species of fish. But as described by Fagunwa, *Àrògìdìgbà* is not really a fish. It is a ghommid, half human, half fish. It is indeed a mermaid. To be consistent, the physical



features of *Àrògìdìgbà* are not of interest to me rather, other aquatic animals she claims to rule over as well as her utterances are.

“...èmi ni iṣe alakoso awọn nkan ti o ngbé inu omi, erinmi, awọn ejo pataki, ati awọn eranko nla inu omi, Olókun nikanṣoṣo ni o jé aṣaju mi ninu awọn ebọra”.

I am yet to lay my hands on Femi Osofisan’s translation of *Ìrèké Onibùdó*, so the following translation is mine.

“I am the High Chief of all aquatic creatures, the hippopotamus, prominent snakes and very big semi-aquatic animals. I am next in command to only the *Olókun* in the world of ghommids”.

Very many facts of Zoology emerge from these claims of *Àrògìdìgbà*, though cryptic. First is the fact that there are semi aquatic snakes and mammals. The hippopotamus is a semiaquatic mammal that inhabits rivers, lakes and mangrove swamps. Its ecological equivalent in the oceans is the whale. Both whales and hippos have a common ancestor which is the even-toed ungulates from which they evolved around 60 million years ago. How many people know that the Whale is not a fish? How many people know that because the whale is not endemic to our oceanic waters, the *Erinmi* that Fagunwa referred to in 1949 must have been the hippopotamus and not the whale? Even in the translation of the King James Version of the Bible to Yoruba, the Whale was referred to in a few verses as a fish. For example Matthew 12<sup>40</sup> says:

“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”.

The Yoruba version says:

*“Nitori bi Jona ti gbé òsán męta ati òru męta ninu ęja; bęli ọmọ enia yio gbé òsán męta ati òru męta ninu ilẹ”.*



Geographical distribution of Whales.  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whale>



Range map of Hippopotamus. Historic range is in red while current range is in green  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippo>

Next is *Àrògìdìgbà*'s deference to *Olókun* which lives in the ocean which is a more turbulent, harsh and larger aquatic environment than the river where *Ìrẹkẹ Onibùdó*'s boat capsized. Students of Fisheries, Limnology and Oceanography will agree that the knowledge of the

aquatic habitats and the creatures that live inside them were not alien to Fagunwa. Who says Fagunwas was not a Zoologist?

*Àrògìdìgbà's* utterances on the wicked and painful killing of fish by humans go thus:

*“... Tani tọ yin, eyin enia? Ki si ni ilò yin si awọn eja? Eja kékeré, òta ènia: titobi, òta ènia; bi enia bá tilè npa eja ti nwọn nje eja a ko ba ti binu ju bée lọ, nitori ọla ti Eḷeda fun wọn ni, sugbón iya ti ogunlógò wọn fì nje eja kí nwọn tó pa eja lòdì si ilànà ti Eḷeda se fun wọn”.*

I translate this as follows:

“ ... Which creature is above you, you humans? Of what use are fishes to you? You hate small fish, you hate big fish. If humans kill fish for food without making the fish suffer, we would have tolerated that because God gave you that advantage over us. But we suffer a great deal in your hands before you kill us in gross abuse of the advantage God gave you over us”.

Again, Fagunwa sounded here as an apologist for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as claimed by Bamgbose (2007). To think that a Nigerian who did not have formal training in Zoology could understand how nature should be exploited without the element of cruelty in 1949, very many years before the average citizen became aware of environmental protection during exploitation of nature, is commendable.

## **Conclusion**

If I go on citing instances in these five weird imaginations of Fagunwa written between 1936 (*Ògbójú*) and 1961 (*Àdìtú*), we will not leave here today. Or rather, I will bore you and by the time I finish, I will be left with only the janitor waiting to lock the door. I have quoted extensively from *Ògbójú* which is the only one I read fully several times over while preparing

this piece. According to Bamgbose (2007), Olubumo (1963) opined emphatically that: “If Fagunwa had not written a single line after *Ògbójú Ode* ... he would still have been regarded as an important Yoruba writer”. This, coupled with Bamgbose’s (2007) opinion that there are obvious similarities in cultural setting, theme, style and narrative technique, ... plot, characterisations and actual passages used in the text of different novels and Wole Soyinka’s (2010) assertion that *Ògbójú* is the truest expression of Fagunwa’s creative originality and inspiration, provide the justification for quoting more extensively from *Ògbójú* than any of the other four novels in doing justice to this mission of revealing the Zoologist in D.O. Fagunwa. I know of a certainty that there are also similarities in the animals that featured in the different novels (see Appendix I) to the extent that if only one of them is used for the purpose of this piece, the objective would still have been met. So please permit me to fizzle out at this juncture, not the way *Àkàrà Ogùn* did after narrating his ordeal in *Igbó Irúnmolè* to the fictional author that we are celebrating today, but the way the fictional author ended his story. *Gbogbo yín ẹ dá Músò. Músò! Músò! Músò!*

Thank you for your attention.

### **Acknowledgement**

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