

DEMYSTIFYING THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF DESTINY: *ODÙ OGBÈGÚNDÁ* IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*The traditional understanding of destiny in Yoruba philosophy is onerous. It has been a subject of philosophical interrogation right from the emergence of African philosophy. It is one of the controversial issues that has received traditional analysis from different scholars. However, the existing analysis sounds more like a metaphysical explication. This, to some extent, suggests it as a mere belief that is held on to tenaciously without critical explanation, hence its dogmatic acceptance in and among the Yoruba people. Against this understanding, this study sets out to re-examine the Yoruba philosophies and beliefs associated with the traditional understanding of destiny within the content and context of *Odù Ogbègúndá*, one of the *Ifá* Literary corpus. The choice of this corpus is to show the paradoxes that rattle the uncritical acceptance of the essence of destiny as codified in the traditional explanation of *Àkúnlègbà*, *Àkúnlèyàn*, and *Àyànmó* as used in adumbrating the inalterability of destiny with a view to demonstrating their inadequacy in the contemporary period. Using the critical and hermeneutic methods of philosophical investigation, I argued that *Odù Ogbègúndá* negates the interpretation of destiny through *Àkúnlègbà*, *Àkúnlèyàn*, and *Àyànmó*. Hence, the discourse advocates attitudinal change and belief towards what destiny is for the Yoruba to meet up with the challenges of self-actualisation in the contemporary age.*

Keywords: Destiny, *Odù Ogbègúndá*, *Àkúnlègbà*, *Àkúnlèyàn*, *Àyànmó*.

Introduction

The concept of destiny is a metaphysical concept, as its understanding in the Yoruba worldview transcends human comprehension. It is the belief in the supposition that human beings picked their lot in the primordial world before coming to earth for earthly existence. Thus, the Yoruba belief that whatever a man is on earth is a product of the pre-ordained lot picked in the house of *Àjàlá*, the deity saddled with the responsibility of moulding human destiny by *Olódumarè* in the Yoruba mythological account of creation. It is a general consensus among the earlier scholars of Yoruba tradition that *Orí-inú* (destiny) is inalterable.

One of the major paradoxes that rattles the Yoruba understanding of destiny is the idea of the inalterability of human destiny. This is more technical and polemical given the circumstances under which destiny is believed to be allotted in the primordial world before the earthly existence of the being that

bears such destiny in the presence of *Òrúnmìlà* (the *Èlẹ̀rì-Ìpín*). In this essay, I contend that such uncritical belief in the inalterability of destiny, as believed in the Yoruba traditional understanding of destiny, seems to deny the bearer of destiny the possibility of self-actualisation. Thus, this discourse sets to rethink the traditional understanding of Yoruba idea of destiny without necessarily being a denial of a belief system, but an attempt to deconstruct the belief with a logical analysis of the myth of destiny in one of the *Ifá* literary corpus (*Odù - Ogbègúndá*) with a view to make the belief a profound existence that guides human achievement, as documented and articulated by Wande Abimbola.¹

In doing this, the essay comprises the introduction and five segments. The introduction introduces the subject matter and the expectations of the would-be reader. This is followed by a brief analysis of the traditional understanding of destiny through a peep into the meaning and nature of destiny from antiquity, which is followed by an exposition of the ‘Myth of Destiny’ in Yoruba culture with particular reference to the *Ifá* literary corpus (*Odù - Ogbègúndá*). After the exposition, the myth is subjected to critical interrogation using the philosophical tool of analysis, and the next is an existential interpretation of destiny (*Orí-iní*) beyond its traditional interpretation. This is followed by the conclusion.

The Concept of Destiny from Antiquity

The idea of destiny in the Yoruba traditional belief system is seen as that which is pivotal in the understanding of the human person in their mythological account of creation. The Yoruba hold that whatever has happened to an individual, whatever is happening to him now, and whatever will become of him in the future has been designed to happen that way. Hence, to the Yoruba, it is quintessential to suggest that a person’s destiny determines his or her existence, success or failure, luck or ill luck, progress or retrogression, reflective of their belief in the saying *bí a ti wáyé pé a ó rí là á rí* – we are what we have chosen to be on earth.²

This is insightful of their belief that individual actions on earth are a pre-ordained action, which confirms the content of one’s master plan in the primordial world. This is crucial as thought out by Balogun when he states that “destiny is the mysterious power believed to control human events.”³ He states further that destiny is “the belief that whatever happens or that will happen in the future has been pre-ordained and happened according to an earlier plan.”⁴ This conception, however, raises the question of the content of the pre-

¹ Wande Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*. Oxford University Press: Ibadan, 1976.

² Sunday Layi Oladipupo, “The Metaphysics of *Ese* and the Question of Inalterability of Destiny in Yoruba Culture,” *Philosophical Alternatives*, XXXIV(1), 2025:104.

³ Oladele Abiodun Balogun, “The Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(1), 2017:119.

⁴ Balogun, “The Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought,” 119.

ordained destiny. Is it the case that destiny is pre-ordained, or that destiny is predestination? In order to resolve this paradox, it is imperative to peep into the origin of destiny as upheld in the Yoruba mythological account of creation. In understanding the nature of human destiny in Yoruba culture, it is pertinent to attempt a sojourn into their mythological account of creation as articulated by scholars of Yoruba studies. This is crucial as it forms the basis on which the idea of destiny could be understood by readers, especially those who are not of the Yoruba origin or those who share no idea of what destiny is to the Yoruba.

Virtually all the Yoruba scholars who have written and/or researched into the concept of person and destiny within the Yoruba worldview agreed that the creation of man is a stage-by-stage affair with reference to both physical and spiritual elements. In their accounts, it is clear that *Olódùmarè* (Supreme Being) assigned responsibility to some lesser deities, namely *Òrísánlá* and *Ajàlá*, in the process of creating a human person. *Òrísánlá* (the arch-divinity) was given the responsibility of moulding the *ara* (body), which is the physical aspect of a person. After this, *Òrísánlá* quit the stage for *Olódùmarè* (Supreme Being) to breathe the life-force *èmi* (soul) into the lifeless body moulded by *Òrísánlá*. It is after breath of life (*eémi*) that the lifeless body becomes active. The life-full *ara* then proceeds to *Ajàlá*'s store (another primordial divinity who makes *orí*) to make a choice of *orí* that represents human destiny. It is this *orí* (inner-head) that Yoruba scholars believed to be the bearer of human destiny that determines or becomes the essence of its bearer on earth. It is believed by the Yoruba that the individual is unaware of the content or quality of the chosen *orí*, that is, the person making the choice does not know if the destiny embedded in an *orí* is good or bad.⁵

The choice of destiny (*Orí-inú*) in Yoruba narrative, according to scholars, can be made through several means. For instance, Adegboyega Orangun gives some descriptive names to depict the choice of *Orí-inú* and their linguistic interpretation in the Yoruba language. These include:

Àkúnlẹ̀yàn – that which one chooses knelling
Àkúnlẹ̀gbà – that which one receives knelling
Àyànmọ́ – that which is affixed
Ádámọ́ – that which is affixed after creation
Àkọ̀sílẹ̀ – that which is written down at creation.⁶

⁵ The analysis as explained here is adopted from the discussion of various philosophers in their discussion on the African (Yoruba) Conception of Human Person, namely Segun Gbadegesin, M. Akin Makinde, Segun Ogungbemi, Olusegun Oladipo, Adegboyega Orangun, S. Ade Ali, etc., For further reading see Sunday Layi Oladipupo, "Rethinking the Tripartite Conception of Person in the Yoruba Traditional Thought," *Ewanlen: A Journal of Philosophical Inquiry*, 2(1), 2018: 62-78; Sunday Layi Oladipupo, *The Metaphysics of Eṣeṣe*.

⁶ Adegboyega Orangun, *Destiny: The Unmanifested Being (A Critical Exposition)*, African Odyssey Publisher: Ibadan, 1988:46.

After the choice, it is believed that the animated being would pass through the gate (*Ibodè*) for earthly existence and that he will have to discuss the content of the destiny with the *Oníbodè* (Gate-keeper) in the presence of *Òrúnmìlà* (the *Èlérì-Ìpín*). After this encounter, the animated being will be made to swim through the river of forgetfulness (*Odò Igbàgbé*) or clamp a tree of forgetfulness (*Igi Igbàgbé*), consequent upon which the content of such discussion is wiped out of the bearer's memory. This can only be brought back through consultation, that is, by consulting *Òrúnmìlà* - the *Èlérì-Ìpín*. Thus, the inalterability of destiny in Yoruba culture. This understanding raises some philosophical possibilities under which the concept and idea of destiny, as obtained in Yoruba culture, could be examined. These philosophical possibilities include fatalism and determinism. These two possibilities are envisioned in the submissions and explanations of the Yoruba scholars on the nature of destiny.⁷ For a clear understanding of this perspective, it is imperative to explicate on what fatalism and determinism connotes and their relevance to the understanding of destiny in the Yoruba culture.

Derivable from the foregoing is the inescapability of the Yoruba understanding of destiny as that which portends determinism. Despite this fundamental attribute of what destiny could mean within its understanding in Yoruba tradition and worldview, the contention has always been between the two variance of determinism, that is, hard and soft determinism. Determinism is simply the claim that every event, both past, present and future, is a product of cause; that is, to every event there is an attendant cause that is responsible for it. This cause, within the Yoruba understanding of human destiny, is beyond the control of the actor. As such, for the Yoruba, everything that transpires in the universe must be the effect of a cause; to them, nothing could happen in isolation from a cause that percolates its occurrence. By implication, destiny determines the essence of an individual on earth. It is apposite to mention that while hard deterministic interpretation of destiny on the one hand presupposes fatalism, which does not give room for alteration of destiny, soft determinism is that interpretation of destiny that suggests a possibility of alteration, on the other hand.

The hard deterministic (that is, fatalistic) variation of Yoruba understanding of destiny is the form built on the belief that whatever happens could not have been escaped under whatever situation and condition. Put in other words, it is a belief that certain events are such that they cannot but occur no matter the antics put in place to avert their occurrence, hence the popular interpretation of fatalism as 'what will be, will be.' From this perspective, it is believed that destiny in Yoruba culture cannot be subjected to negotiation. It does not allow for self-actualisation, such that adherents of this belief system often console themselves in the face of an unpalatable situation, that no matter what they do to avert the manifestation of the content of their destiny, they cannot in any

⁷ Oladipupo, "The Metaphysics of *Ese*," 105.

way change the status quo.⁸ This is suggestive of the Yoruba belief that any attempt to alter the order of one's experience merely extends the strength of that which had been pre-ordained; there is no point in our trying to do anything about it. This is crisply captured in Wande Abimbola's thought that once a person has chosen his destiny by selection of an *orí*, it becomes almost impossible to alter it on earth. Thus, he posits "indeed, the gods are not in position to alter a man's destiny."⁹

If this thought is taken, then the tenacity of self-discipline, self-actualisation, and even the idea of appeasing one's destiny through sacrifice, characters, and one's double or evil ones, such as witches and wizards, is ruled out. This understanding, however, suffers a contradiction in Wande Abimbola's further submission when he contends that despite the metaphysical nature of the process of chosen *orí* in the primordial world before earthly existence and the belief that such could not be reversed or changed, the probability of the destiny bearer influencing it could not be ruled out. He envisaged such a possibility through *ẹbọ* (sacrifice) and *eṣe* to change the outcomes of an *orí* that contains bad fortunes. Wande Abimbola is unequivocal on the claim that when a man makes a sacrifice to his *orí*, which requires freewill, and complements it with the utilisation of his *eṣe*, which involves decisive struggle and hard work, there is a possibility of change of fortunes.¹⁰ It is evident, therefore, that Wande Abimbola could not be holistically seen as a fatalist. This assumption is centred on the fact that he is of the view that, despite the pre-ordained nature of human destiny as believed in Yoruba culture, it could still be influenced. In this light, it is arguable to suggest, as done by Balogun, that "pre-determinism does not remove freewill because the notion of *ẹbọ* (sacrifice) *eṣe* (strife) and *ìwà* (character) are unconstrained exercise of freewill."¹¹

One of the proponents of the fatalistic nature of human destiny in Yoruba culture is E. O. Odùwole. In her analysis, she contends that the Yoruba in their worldview believe that everybody has chosen their destiny before their earthly existence and that whatever they do is not done out of free will but because it has been pre-ordained.¹² Her interpretation stunts the inalterability of destiny, which shares the attribute of hard determinism in philosophical parlance. In her submission, whatever a person does is not as a matter of chance or luck; it is something that has been pre-ordained. It is something that the bearer has no control over because the choice of *Orí* is forced on man by forces more powerful than himself, and any attempt at changing destiny often tends towards fulfilling it.¹³

⁸ Oladipupo, "The Metaphysics of *Ese*," 106.

⁹ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, 115.

¹⁰ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*.

¹¹ Balogun, "The Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought," 123.

¹² Ebunoluwa O. Oduwole, "The Yoruba Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny: A Fatalistic Interpretation," *Journal of Philosophy and Development*, 2(1&2), 1996:48.

¹³ Oladipupo, "The Metaphysics of *Ese*," 107.

This fatalistic (hard deterministic) of the Yoruba understanding of destiny as pictured by Odùwole is suggestive of the fact that what becomes of an individual is a product of the type of destiny his *orí* had chosen for him at creation. Thus, to the Yoruba, the notion of ‘chance’ or ‘freedom’ is of no importance, because whatever happens to a person is attributed to the choices which his *orí* makes. This is amplified in their belief that once a destiny has been chosen, it becomes doubly sealed as evidence in the mythical encounter with the *Oníbodè* (Gate-keeper) in the primordial world, as enunciated in the mythological account of creation.¹⁴ This makes it impossible for any thought of change. However, the polemics of inalterability of destiny are worrisome as scholars seem to have concluded it is real, despite the claim that sacrifice can be used to change it.

Debunking the perennial consternation of the age-long and widely accepted thesis that destiny cannot be changed, Sophie B. Oluwole argues that:

The *Babálawo* claim that Destiny was determined by *Ajàlá*, like the Greek Demiurge, one of *Olódùmarè*'s agents of creation. When rendered in full, we have: “Destiny cannot be changed by man but by its creator.” What is then logically contradicting or conceptually inconsistent in appealing to the maker to effect a change? What is being defended here is not the scientific sanctity of the myth of destiny. The concentration is on the logical congruence of the two views of the *Babálawo* within the same concept of destiny.¹⁵

Two fundamental propositions are envisioned from the above, though they seem contradictory. This, notwithstanding, does not suggest that the concept is inept. One of such fundamental propositions is the view that destiny is a determined phenomenon, with reference to the belief that it is part of creation processes, and, second, that the age-old proposition that destiny cannot be changed is incomplete. Thus, its complementary aspect, that is, destiny cannot be changed by man, but by its creator. By implication, while it is suggestive to appraise the possibility of inalterability of destiny that enhances the tenacity of hard determinism, the possibility of reducing the deterministic nature of destiny to a soft determinism that gives room for alteration of destiny through some activities such as sacrifice, character, one's enemies, and self-actualisation, among others, cannot be totally invalidated.¹⁶

In what seems as a corroboration of the above disquisition, A. O. Balogun claims that virtually all Yoruba African philosophers (Olubi Sodipo, Segun

¹⁴ Oladipupo, “Rethinking the Tripartite Conception of Person in Yoruba Traditional Thought.”

¹⁵ Sophie Bosede Oluwole, *Katanfuru: Who are (they/we) African? Some Memorable Answers*, Ark Publishers: Ogba, 2015:40.

¹⁶ Oladipupo, “The Metaphysics of *Ese*,” 107.

Gbadegesin, Moses Makinde, Segun Oladipo, Ebun Odùwole, Samuel Ali, and others) who have commented on *orí* vis-à-vis the freewill-determinism problem have overlooked a point that is quite clear in the exposition of the two important religious scholars on this issue (i.e, Bolaji Idowu and Wande Abimbola).¹⁷ He states that, indeed, virtually all these Yoruba African philosophers who have written on *orí*, human personality, vis-à-vis freewill cite these two religious scholars, but these philosophers all overlook one point, which is obvious in the writings of these religious scholars: *orí* is limited to issues of material success (i.e., things like wealth, riches, and success in one's profession). *Orí* has nothing to do with moral character, and as such, it does not affect all of human actions and/or inactions. *Orí* in Yoruba thought is concerned only with issues of material success in life at a general level. Arguably, nowhere in any of the ancient Yoruba scriptures (i.e., the *Ifá* literary corpus, *Ìjálá* and *Ìwí Egúngún*, and *Èsà Egúngún*) is there the claim that moral character can be pre-determined by one's earlier choice of *Orí*.

The idea that *orí* is not about moral character, but about issues of prosperous or impoverished destiny, to a considerable extent, is a boost to establishing the case for soft-determinism as a possibility that is more resonant with the Yoruba cultural belief.¹⁸ By implication, it is arguable to suggest the ambition of the individual bearer of destiny as the motivator and vehicle that projects the individual's destiny. This hinged on the Yoruba saying *owó ẹni n là fí ń tún iwà ẹni se*. This saying is suggestive of the fact that, though the nature of the Yoruba idea of destiny presupposes that the Yoruba are incurably fatalists and hard-determinists, such that in theory, the destiny of a person is said to be unaltered because it became doubly sealed after its choice, nevertheless, it is arguable to state that it is not holistic.

Thus, one is poised to subsume the idea of hard determinism within the prism of the soft deterministic nature of destiny as orchestrated in the Yoruba worldview. Thus, the inevitability and possibility of alteration of destiny. As such, it may be ingenious to suggest what I termed the *desired destiny*.¹⁹ And, if destiny is alterable, it follows, then, that it could not be fatalistic holistically as some scholars have adduced. Hence, it is possible to alter destiny either for good or bad. An individual's destiny may be changed for good or for bad. Instances of this proliferate in the Yoruba cultural milieu. This is avidly established in the Yoruba belief in the consultation of the god of divination (*Òrúnmìlà/Èlérì-Ìpín*) to know the kind of *orí* one had chosen and to do the needful in accomplishing one's fate on earth. And, in the case of unfortunate fate/destiny, one may seek the help of some spiritual forces as well as carry

¹⁷ Balogun, "The Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought," 125.

¹⁸ Balogun, "The Concepts of *Orí* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought."

¹⁹ By *desired destiny*, I meant an interpretation of destiny as that which is the individual choice within one's consciousness and as to what situation and/or circumstance presents in a given situation. As such nothing can be said to be permanent in destiny.

out the necessary sacrifice to appease and/or venerate one's unfortunate destiny with a bid to redeem it.²⁰

Kola Abimbola captured the above when he posits that "sacrifice in Yoruba is a code of communication between the natural and the supernatural realms of the Yoruba cosmos."²¹ He states further that "sacrifice is founded on the principle of exchange, that in order to bring about positive changes in one's life, s/he-the actor - must give up something."²² He, however, concluded that "the basic meaning of sacrifice, therefore, is that of forgoing, relinquishing or doing without something in the expectation of gaining something else."²³ Deducible from Abimbola's conception of sacrifice is the principle of reciprocity. This is amplified by Balogun, who argues that:

Among the Yoruba, it is more of food for the gods; a social act; a means of repentance; and insurance against failure. It is founded on the ideal of mutual exchange or reciprocity between man and the spirits in order to influence or bring about positive changes in man's life. It is for this reason that the Yoruba will say: *Rírú ẹbọ ní gbe ni, àí rú ẹbọ kì gbèniyàn* (making of sacrifice favours one more than its utter refusal).²⁴

Outside sacrifice, another factor that could be used to salvage one's unfortunate destiny, is one's character. Character is an important determinant of meaningful existence in Yoruba society; it is believed that one's character can make or mar one's existence. This is reflected in the Yoruba aphorism *Obinrin sọ iwà nù, ól'òun ò rí ilé ọkọ gbé*. The result of one's character could be positive or negative in the Yoruba worldview. One's attitude of disrespect for others, especially the elders and constituted authorities, can affect one's destiny for the worse. On the other hand, one's inordinate ambition can polarise one's essence in life. Besides, the existence of other agents of possible change in the fulfilment of destiny, such as evil forces (witchcraft and some other demonic forces), could also alter one's destiny.

This unresolved contention between the hard deterministic and soft deterministic interpretations of destiny is onerous and has perpetuated the Yoruba understanding of destiny as a perennial issue in African philosophy. The debate appears to be unending; it is within this perspective that I turn to unveil the *Ifá* literary corpus (*Odù Ogbègúndá*), hoping to introduce a new vista to the discourse on destiny in African philosophy.

²⁰ Oladipupo, "The Metaphysics of *Ese*," 109.

²¹ Kola Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*, Birmingham: Iroko Academic Publisher, 2006:62.

²² Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*.

²³ Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*, 62.

²⁴ Balogun, "The Concepts of *Ori* and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation," 126.

Unveiling the *Odù Ogbègúndá*

In traditional Yoruba society, there is always at least a myth that explains any of their belief system. Thus, most of their concepts are often mythologised.²⁵ The concept of destiny (*Orí-inú*) is not an exception. Several myths abound that explain destiny (*Orí-inú*) in Yoruba society, but this discourse adopts the one provided by Abimbola in the *Ifá* literary corpus known as *Ogbègúndá*.²⁶ The *Odù* explains the choice of destiny (*Orí-inú*) as one of the stages involved in the creation of a human being and their existence in the world. It presents *Ajálá* as a moulder of destiny, his attributes as a corrigible, drunkard, and useless deity.²⁷

Odù Ogbègúndá is characterised by three (3) friends, namely *Ìsánkú* (the son of *Ògún*), *Ìléémèrè* (the son of *Ìjà*), and *Àfūwàpè* (the son of *Òrúnmilà*), who are set for earthly existence. In achieving their desired goal for earthly existence, they embarked on consultation. In the process, they were advised on what to do and not to do. They were instructed that before they could dwell on earth, there was a need for them to visit *Ajálá's* house to pick their destiny, and that on their way, they should not branch nor call at any place. They should go straight to *Ajálá's* house for their destiny that will aid their earthly existence. Not long after their journey to *Ajálá's* house, *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè* attempted to visit their father, but the two were cautioned and reminded of the instruction not to call or branch at any place. The two consented and continued with their journey, not until they got to *Àfūwàpè* father's house. *Àfūwàpè* insisted on seeing his father. His insistence forced *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè* to leave him behind while they continued their journey.

At *Àfūwàpè's* father's house, *Àfūwàpè* met his father (*Òrúnmilà*) consulting the oracle through the priest. During the divination, his father was divined for and was requested to offer plenty of money and sacrifice as sacrifice for his son. Part of the sacrifice money and salt were given to *Àfūwàpè* to carry with him as he continues his journey. *Ogbèyónú* was revealed to *Àfūwàpè* in the process. His father was told to give unto *Àfūwàpè* some cowries and salt to take along as he ventures on his journey. Hence, *Àfūwàpè* from the interpretation of the divination was blessed for favour. While *Àfūwàpè* was left behind, his other two friends, *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*, continue their journey to *Ajálá's* house. On their way, they met an old man, typical of the gate-keeper, an actor in the traditional analysis of the Yoruba idea of destiny. They inquired from him the way to *Ajálá's* house, and the old man directed them. Getting to *Ajálá's* house, *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè* waited for some time expecting *Ajálá*, but he was nowhere to be found. They (*Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*) ran out of patient and they requested from people around *Ajálá's* house where *Ajálá's* storehouse is located. They were shown *Ajálá's* storehouse, and they jumped

²⁵ Sunday Layi Oladipupo, "Yoruba Justice and the Quest for Sustainable Development," *Africa: Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 13(13), 2015:103.

²⁶ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, 1976, 113-132.

²⁷ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, 113-132.

in to pick their inner head representing their destiny. After their choice, they embark on their journey for earthly existence. On their way, there was a heavy downpour, and that washed away the contents of their chosen half-baked inner head. It was after their (*Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*) had left *Ajàlá's* house that *Àfūwàpè* arrived. However, *Àfūwàpè*, on his way to *Ajàlá's* house, met the old man, typical of the gate-keeper as mentioned earlier. The old man was pounding yams with a needle and cooking soup. *Àfūwàpè* assisted the old man in pounding the yams, and while the old man was about adding ash to his soup, *Àfūwàpè* suggested to him to add salt, which he volunteered to give him in place of ash. The old man consented to this. There and then, the old man sees the difference in the sweetness of a soup made of ash and salt. He was excited. He later inquired from *Àfūwàpè* of his search, and *Àfūwàpè* informed the old man of his mission to *Ajàlá's* house. The old man informed *Àfūwàpè* of the corrigible and corruptible characters of *Ajàlá*. In appreciation of all that *Àfūwàpè* did for the old man (gate-keeper), he advised *Àfūwàpè* to be kind to *Ajàlá* and possibly pay off his debt if, by chance, he met *Ajàlá's* creditors in *Ajàlá's* house.

Fortunately, on getting to *Ajàlá's* house, he was nowhere to be found as his creditors were around, and without any hope of paying off his debt, he hid himself on the rooftop. *Àfūwàpè* arrived in the hands of *Ajàlá's* creditors and was able to pay off *Ajàlá's* debt. Upon settling *Ajàlá's* creditors, they all left. Excited with *Àfūwàpè's* gesture of paying his debt, *Ajàlá* jumped down from the rooftop and appreciated *Àfūwàpè's* uncommon gesture by helping and guiding him to make a good choice of his inner head from the store. *Àfūwàpè*, after making his choice, also embarked on a return journey for earthly existence, and while coming there was a heavy downpour, as it was during the return of *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*, but instead of the contents of his own inner head - destiny to be washed away, it kept shining as the inner head was a perfectly backed one.

At last, the three friends *Àfūwàpè*, *Ìsánkú*, and *Ìléémèrè* arrived in the world for their earthly existence, and they were all engaged in meaningful ventures to better the standard of their living. However, while *Àfūwàpè* was prosperous in all he does, *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè* are always losing out. This prompts them (*Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*) to consult a diviner to know why their lives were miserable. It was during the consultation that it was revealed to them that their destiny is a bad one, while *Àfūwàpè's* own is a good one.

Interrogating the Myth of Destiny

Reading through the interpretative analysis of the *Ifá* literary corpus (*Odù Ogbègúndá*) that signposts the quandary of destiny, one is poised to raise the question of the significance of the traditional appellation of *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà*, and *Àyànmọ́* as means by which destiny is explained. The myth, *Odù Ogbègúndá*, pictured a negation of the belief in *Àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, *Àkúnlẹ̀gbà*, and *Àyànmọ́* as obtained in some scholars' analysis of it being inalterable. The following implications are deducible from the myth.

Derivable from the hermeneutics of *Odù Ogbègúndá*, it is evident that disobedience often leads to self-actualisation. However, it could be argued as to how disobedience could enhance self-actualisation in a cultured and moralised world. Disobedience here could be attuned as a cogent factor that needs to be understood within the contents of the activity of *Àfùwàpè*. His choice to disobey the instruction given to them at the beginning of their journey serves as a turning point for his rightful choice of inner head - destiny. Though his friends tried to remind him of the instruction as they were placed on notice in their own attempt to do the same, it seems that they were not courageous enough to damn the consequences which *Àfùwàpè* was ready to do. Hence, disobedience as adduced here could be seen as a positive act insofar as the actor is ready to bear the consequences.

Aside from this, the myth of destiny as outlined in *Odù Ogbègúndá* amplified the inevitability of the doctrinal belief that existence cannot be attained in isolation. It suffices, therefore, that the place of destiny helper(s) cannot be ruled out as seen in *Àfùwàpè*'s encounter with the gate-keeper, his payment of *Ajàlá*'s debt, among others. In addition, the assumptive conundrum of character as an ingredient that could make or mar one's destiny played out in *Odù Ogbègúndá*. This is symbolic in *Àfùwàpè*'s assistance to the man pounding yams with a needle, which is suggestive of the elements of good character, such as respect, humanity, and patience, while *Ìsánkú* and *Ìléémèrè*'s attitudes suggests impatient, anger, anxiety, and arrogant behaviour that eventually marred their choice of destiny.

The myth of destiny as obtained in *Odù Ogbègúndá* emphasised the place of self-determination, discipline, and detaching the self from the multitude as a necessary sauce for self-actualisation. The activities of *Àfùwàpè* of the three characters in the *Odù Ogbègúndá* signal this. He was determined to see his father, which facilitated his detachment from his friends on their journey, and showed a high sense of discipline by assisting the old man in pounding yams. In fact, a verse of the *Odù Ogbègúndá* echoes this:

Eni t'ogbón
Orí ẹ l'óní ó gbón
Eeyàn tí ò gbón
Orí rẹ l'ó ní ó gò j'usu lọ

Meaning

He who is wise
 Is made wise by his *orí*
 He who is not wise
 Is made more foolish than a piece of yam by his *orí*.²⁸

The implication of the above excerpt is sacrosanct as it places the individual destiny bearer as the sole determinant of his/her destiny. Thus, the idea of destiny as that which is inalterable seems to be wrongheaded. In this sense, it

²⁸ Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*.

is arguable to suggest that the acceptance of the traditional interpretation of destiny (*Orí-inú*) as inalterable could enhance the possibility of people becoming liable to society. Wiredu captured this:

.... my life is obviously a gloomy one. However hard I may try, I will never succeed, for no one can change the destiny that was fixed for him by god. After this kind of meditation, we should not be surprised if he tries less till he becomes dependent on his family. Such people ought to reflect that there is at least one bright spot in the dark canvas of their destiny.²⁹

The above could be re-examined within the Yoruba lyric *È wo bi orí gbé mi dé ò eeee, È wo bi orí gbé mi dé ò aaaa, èmi ò ma mọpé n gọ de ilẹyí, È wo bi orí gbé mi dé* and the saying *Èmi ò mọ bi olóri gbé yan orí ẹ n bá lọ yan t'èmi*. The import of these Yoruba lyrics and sayings provides succour to the contents of *Odù Ogbègúndá* as that which negates the traditional understanding of destiny as inalterable or that which is determined beyond individual control, as interpreted by scholars through concepts such as *Akúnlẹgbà*, *Àkúnlẹyàn*, and *Àyànmọ*, among others.

Beyond the Traditional Understanding of Destiny

The perennial status of the Yoruba idea and understanding of destiny will continue to surface and generate controversy unless it is contextualised as an existential part of human existence, as opposed to its metaphysical connotation. Thus, to make meaning out of existence and the belief in destiny, if any, is to conceive destiny as “a transcendent drive that makes one not to accept what he is. That is, the ability to transcend one’s bad position to a good one.”³⁰ This claim is a reflection of *Àfūwàpè*’s self-definition to separate himself from the multitude in attaining his desired goals for “man is nothing else than his plan, he exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life.”³¹

The essence of self-actualisation is paramount in redefining the concept of destiny. The preponderance of this is evident in the need for struggle for success in life. This struggle in the Yoruba worldview is metaphorically represented with one of the Yoruba saying *Ibi orí n gbé ni lọ, k'èsẹ ma sin ni lọ nà* - May one not be misled by his choice. Abimbola refers to *esẹ* as the “symbol of power and activity.”³² This, in a way, is suggestive of the fact that

²⁹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980:16-17.

³⁰ Sunday Layi Oladipupo, “The Phenomenon of Destiny in the Yoruba Worldview: Beyond Literal Interpretation,” *Akungba Journal of Linguistics and Literatures*, 4, 2013:13.

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion*. New York: The Wisdom Library, 1957:32.

³² Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, 148.

the Yoruba concept of destiny is not fatalistic as generally subscribed to by scholars. Danoye Oguntola-Laguda buttresses this fact when he posits that “what will be, will be is not Yoruba in origin and orientation.”³³ This is possible because room is given to rectify or adjust their determined lots through consultation with *Òrúnmìlà* with appropriate sacrifice(s) and offering(s).³⁴ This is fundamental as it is arguable to equate *Àfùwàpè* assistance in offering money to pay off *Ajàlá* debt with earthly investment, as is adduced in *Odu Ògúndá-Méjì*,³⁵ another *Ifá* literary corpus that explains destiny. In contradiction to the uncritical acceptance of the status of destiny as that which is metaphysically affixed to the individual, it is important to bring to bear the Yoruba idea and belief in the concept of *Àfowófà* as a fundamental pole in redefining destiny. *Àfowófà* is a process by which Yoruba people trace the cause(s) of some events to the individual who acts and not any supernatural force outside of the individual.

Conclusion

Within the hermeneutics of the myth of destiny as obtained from *Odu Ogbègúndá*, I have been able, through this essay, to argue beyond a reasonable doubt that the concept of destiny (*Ori-ini*) in the Yoruba worldview is self-made. Hence, the projection of destiny as that which is desired, such that the place of self-actualisation cannot be ruled out in sustaining one's success or failure in life. It is, therefore, suggested that few men make it because of talent, but most men make it through hard work; hence, “man’s destiny lies in his/her hands”, which portends meaningful existence devoid of self-deception and delusion in the name of pre-ordained destiny.

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³³ Danoye Oguntola-Laguda, *Esu: The Individual and the Society*. LASU Inaugural Lecture Series 57th Edition, Ojo: CIPPR-LASU, 2017:51

³⁴ Oguntola-Laguda, *Esu: The Individual and the Society*, 50.

³⁵ *Odu Ogunda-Meji* is an *Ifá* literary corpus that explain destiny. Here two friends were presented to have consulted a diviner to know what future holds for them. The two were divined for and were told the contents of their destiny. But while the one with good destiny choices not to play his part end up living a miserable life, the one who was divined for to live in penury decided to play himself to his destiny and ended up living a wealth and affluence life.

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