



## Portrayal of Destiny in Contemporary African Drama: Otun's *The Gods are Still not to Blame* and Emoruwa's *Rebirth* in Perspective.

FELIX DAMILOLA EMORUWA, AYODELE MUYIWA TAIWO  
University of Lagos, Nigeria

**Abstract.** This paper “Portrayal of Destiny in Contemporary African Drama: Otun's *The Gods are Still not to Blame* and Emoruwa's *Rebirth* in Perspective” critically examines the concept of destiny through the lenses of tradition (Greek and Yoruba) and religion (Traditional religion, Islam and Christianity) to study the theme of destiny. The work traces how different dramatists have been able to examine this concept and how it applies to human society. Several scholarly materials are utilized in conducting this study aside from the primary texts predominantly used. Using the aforementioned as the bedrock for the research, some answers are sought to this question by engaging several sources of human endeavours. The work looks at the existence and expression of destiny in human lives through a metaphysical perspective and seeks to unravel the authenticity of the claim that the supernatural controls the lives and other things pertaining to the earthly existence of mortals. It studies the consequences of a ‘choiced-destiny’ versus ‘forced-destiny’. This work, therefore, seeks to make scholarly input on literary works such as adaptations, religious and cultural debates on the influence of supernatural forces on human existence, and the failure/success regarding the quest to overturn negative trails of destiny. In addition, it provides a useful contribution to how different worldview unites and differs in the human search to unravel ‘truth’.

**Keywords:** Destiny, adaptation, rebirth, Yoruba culture.

### 1. Introduction

The quest to understand and possibly gain control over the mystery called destiny and its influence on both mortals and immortals alike has been an immemorial search spanning different civilizations, periods, cultures, and races. This is why many religions, societies, and philosophical views have tried to seek answer(s) to this critical question without any measure of absoluteness thus far, making the subject open-ended. For a start, there is a dire need to acknowledge

the standpoints upon which the concept of destiny has been captured in several ways across many worldviews and philosophical underpinnings. Within the Yoruba worldview for instance, in a bid to unravel the concept of destiny, a popular Yoruba adage affirms; ‘*akunleyan oun l’adayeba, a d’aye tan l’ oju n kan gbogbo wa*. Loosely translated, this sentence means ‘all of us (without an exception) have chosen our destiny prior to birth, we only engage in a fruitless search to upturn the tide after birth’.

This accounts for their robust interest in engaging the fundamental questions therein:

- At what point does destiny comes into being in the life of man?
- Who determines one’s destiny?
- How can a mortal know what he or she has chosen before birth?
- How can humans augment or upturn and re-chose a destiny if the present one s/he is trailing is bad?
- Is it possible to take a different route beyond that which has been destined for one?
- Assuming it is possible to cheat destiny, what is the consequence if one does not follow the route assigned to him or her?

All these questions and many more are premised upon the assumption that Destiny, like a shadow remains forever attached to its owner; like thunder and lightning, they are forever inseparable. Also, its presence, through uncontrollable circumstances comes and provides imagery of the owner’s internal reality.

So, how does one accurately define the concept of ‘destiny’ as a macro-cosmic entity within the peculiarities of the micro peculiarity of the civilization, religion, and culture or people whose worldview is being mirrored? The Online Dictionary simply defines destiny as ‘an event (or a course of events) that will inevitably happen in the future’. Upon further explanation; it adds that ‘destiny’ refers to ‘the

ultimate agency regarded as predetermining the course of events...' Studying the meaning and context of usage further, 'destiny' has 'fate' as its synonym. Some dictionaries use 'destiny' and fate interchangeably. However, they both carry distinct connotations. In a clearer form of language usage, fate is the unseen force that orchestrates the course of events. It is the power governing and setting in motion the occurrence of earthly events as already predetermined by destiny. Etymologically, destiny is coined from the Latin word '*destinare*' and also has its root in the French word 'destinee'; that is, that which has been settled to occur in the future without the possibility of amendment. It could thus be defined as 'the path allotted (by fate) for every human being to travel on in the course of their lives.

Drawing from more religious and distinct geographical definitions, destiny can still be defined in an array of ways. While 'fate' is called '*kadara*' in their language, the *Yorubas* of the South-Western region of Nigeria refer to destiny as '*ayanmo*'. This refers to 'that which has been assigned to an individual before birth'. To the *Kalabari* of Delta in Nigeria, it is known as 'teme'. Ijaw people of the same region refer to destiny as '*Oru Agbani*'. In Upper Benue of Nigeria, the Idoma people call it '*Owo*'. To the Nupe indigene in Niger State in Nigeria, destiny is '*Kuci*'. To the *Akan* people of Ghana, destiny means '*Okra*' while to the Greco-Romans, it means 'fate'. (Orangun, 1998:1).

In religious circles nonetheless, destiny has different nomenclatures. In Islam, it is '*Qadar*' or '*Taqdir*' while in Christianity, it is referred to as 'predestination'. In Greek and Roman mythology, fate is represented by any of the three goddesses assigned to determine and apportion human destinies. Starting from the era of Hesiod the poet, fate is personified and kept under the watchful eyes of three old women (gods) who spin the threads of human destiny. Amongst the three, *Clotho* is the Spinner of the thread. The second one *Lachesis* who is the Allotter while the last personality, *Atropos* cuts the thread to ensure nothing stops destiny from coming to pass once it has been apportioned to an individual. (Orangun, 1998:4). In relation to the belief in fate, the Fates Sculpture has been well captured by Gottfried Schadow and it forms part of the tombstone for Count Alexander von der Mark in the Old National Gallery in Berlin.

## 2. Culture and the Role of gods in the Affairs of Men

Societies are built and sustained by shared values. Culture is one of them. Every human society has unique components of revered ideals that act as the

bedrock of their culture unifying their identity. For instance, the Greek and Yoruba societies have certain similar cultural beliefs. Before delving into these cultural beliefs, the need to understand what constitutes society is sacrosanct as it will aid the picking of the thread of logic in a smooth transition. This is why we shall rely on Zerihun quotes on *Calhounet al's* submission that 'a society is an autonomous grouping of people who inhabit a common territory, have a common culture... and are linked to one another through routinized social interactions and interdependent statuses and roles'. (Zerihun, 2005:62). Going further to provide a more comprehensive definition, he adds that; a society is 'a large grouping or collectivity of people who share more or less common distinct culture, occupying a certain geographical locality, with the feeling of identity or belongingness, having all the necessary social arrangements or insinuations to sustain itself.' (Zerihun, 2005:62). Looking at the Latin word as its root, '*socius*' connotes association, gregariousness, and togetherness'. It is a word that connotes the fusion of a group of people into a distinct unit, identifiable and separate from similar others.

Basically, the human society is made of people sharing a specific geographical location with a sense of belongingness shared by all. However, the heart of a society goes beyond the location, it is the common values shared by the people that define their territory and make it distinct from the others. These shared values are embedded in their cultures and cultural beliefs and practices. These indicate how social groups are formed, structured, and function. From the aforementioned, it is clear that each society has inherent features; people, location, and culture. More often than not, in addition, they share a common origin. To this end, we could have the African society or the European society. These societies are identified and distinguished by their idiosyncrasies.

As earlier indicated, culture is the soul of every society. It is what makes it unique and easily identifiable when it occurs in the company of similar societies. This is why Sofola defines culture as 'the learned pattern of behaviour, ideas, beliefs, and the artifacts shared by a people and socially transmitted from one generation to another'. (Sofola, 1973:5). In order to shed more light on his definition, Sofola indicates that culture is the thing that throws more light on the peculiar character or distinctiveness of a people that distinguish them from other people. These; according to him include the social institution of family, language, systems of economy and government, philosophy, mode of dressing, etc.

While redefining culture to show what it is not and set the record straight regarding some misconceptions about it; Zerihun points out it is different from the term 'kulture' in German which refers to being civilized. He states 'culture includes more than refinement, taste, sophistication...' (Zerihun, 2005:70). Pressing in on wider definitions, Zerihun clarifies culture as 'the whole ways of life of the members of a society...what they dress, their marriage customs...art...' (Zerihun, 2005:71). Among its many features highlighted by Zerihun, a prominent one stands out; and that is the fact that culture is 'symbolic'. These symbols are the 'central components' of culture as 'they refer to anything to which people attach meaning'. Going further, 'these symbols can be strung together to convey more complex meanings' (Zerihun, 2005:75).

For instance, a common denominator between Greek and Yoruba societies is their possession of a culture that believes strongly in the existence and omniscience of gods. In the traditional Yoruba religious view, according to Hearst, 'the world is made up of two connected realms'. Explaining further, Hearst sheds more light in stating; 'the visible world is called 'aye' while the spiritual world ruled by the 'Orisas', the ancestors and the spirits are called 'orun'. (Hearst, 2004:21). In traditional Yoruba religion, it is believed the earth functions as a result of the interface of two planes; heaven and the earth. There is a belief in one sovereign God working in conjunction with myriads of other gods.

In a similar vein, due to the polytheistic nature of their religious viewpoint, the Greeks also possess a pantheon of gods presiding over every human activity and every sphere. Hermes (the winged Mercury) is the god of travelers. Athena is the god of wisdom and Apollo is the god of sunlight. It is generally believed that these gods uphold the smooth running of the course of the universe. In the words of Tatlock, 'physical events, like the rising and setting of the sun... the springing and ripening of the grains ... are actions of the beings identified with the sun or grain.' (Tatlock 1917: xix).

There are also many important Yoruba deities according to Hearst. These guide events occurring on the two planes; the celestial and terrestrial. *Esu* (Satan) is a great trickster who equally acts as a messenger for the other deities. One of his functions, according to Yoruba belief is to 'assist *Olorun* (God) and the other gods to cause trouble for anyone who offends or fails to worship them.' (Hearst, 2004:24). *Ifa* is the god of divination. To this end, he is 'a great wise man, and he acts as the interpreter between all gods and humans'. Continuing further in the same light, Hearst states the

roles assigned to the other deities. *Ogun* is the god of iron and war. *Sango* is the god of thunder and is married to *Oya* the goddess of the Niger River. (Hearst, 2004:23).

In order to court their favour and have them work for their fortune, people worship these deities. Being the god of iron and war, *Ogun* is revered. He is a great craftsman. To this end, blacksmiths and other craftsmen (including those who use iron objects in their line of trade and engage in the use of iron; e.g. commercial drivers) worship him. Hunters equally pay homage to him. This is understandable. For instance, Hearst points out that 'without *Ogun*, people would not have tools to farm the land that they live on.' (Hearst, 2004:23). As the god of thunder, *Sango* lives in the sky and works closely with the deity assigned to rainfall. He oversees divine judgment. It is his duty to create thunderbolts and kill those who offend *Sango*. *Sango* works alongside his wife *Oya* who comes to the earth as a strong wind before *Sango* fights his victims with thunderbolts.

In order to appease them and win their favour; in traditional Yoruba society, and even in contemporary times, Yorubas who worship these deities make it a sense of duty to live in awe of them as well as bring offerings to their shrines from time to time. Not only that, they abstain from acts that can incur their wrath. One of such ways is to eat or bring them food items that trigger their wrath. For instance, *Esu* is invoked to fight with anyone who brings *adin* (palm kernel oil) to him.

According to Yoruba culture; as a well-ordered whole, the *cosmos* must be preserved by continuing in these age-long traditions of acknowledging and respecting the structured order of the universe.

Another way of staying in tune with supernatural forces in Yoruba culture is through *ifa* divination. By acknowledging and succumbing to a higher force, mortals seek divination to unravel mysteries surrounding their human existence on this terrestrial plane. They consult *Olorun/Olodumare* (the supreme God) and His messengers (the gods) through divination. *Babalawo* are *ifa* diviners and they are charged with owning divine/ancient wisdom that is not at par with common human beings. These diviners are consulted regarding a wide range of problems that humans find incomprehensible. They in turn inquire from *ifa* ('*eleri ipin*' – the witness to a man's foreordained destiny) to reveal what the troubled mortal's *Ori* has chosen so that necessary rituals can be carried out, and the required instructions adhered to overcome dilemma troubling the human soul.

### 3. Ori as the Medium of Destiny

In Yoruba culture, *Ori* (an individual innermost personal god) is acknowledged and revered like the aforementioned deities. There is an interconnectivity between *Ori* and other aspects of a wo(man)'s personality. *Ori* is an individual's 'soul', the spirit of that person; i.e. the central component that initiates and supports external events. Actually, *Ori* is a shortened form of *ori inu* (an individual's innermost being/god).

Amongst its numerous functions, *Ori* protects, wards off evil, and attracts fortune to an individual. Thus, a person with 'good' *Ori* is 'blessed'; that is, divinely empowered to prosper, while the person with a 'bad' *Ori* experiences maledictions. The Yoruba philosophy of *ori buruku* and *ori rere* (where *buruku* and *rere* signifies bad and good respectively) attests to this concept. *Ori*, being the personality soul, 'the inner person'; according to Sofola, 'rules, controls and guides the "life" and activities of the person. Aside from its symbolic representation, *Ori* basically refers to 'head' in Yoruba. It refers to the head of a person which makes for identity and description of his/her personality. Beyond the physical explanation of its being a part of the human body, Sofola deepens one's knowledge of *ori* by showing how it is interwoven with one's destiny at a deeper level. In his words:

*Ori* and *ipin* (destiny or portion) are closely related... in consequence of their connection, one is loosely conceived synonymously with the other. ...however, the distinction is clear because in the act of taking one's destiny from the origin of life, it is the *ori* that kneels down and chooses or receives it from the Maker. (Sofola, 1973:104).

The explanation of *Ori* in the words of Sofola sheds light on why it is an object of worship to the Yorubas. To this end, it is a regular occurrence in Yorubaland to see people appeasing their *ori* while killing chickens or other animals. In the words of Sofola, 'two important reasons make the *ori* an object of worship'. First of all, according to him 'it is the essence of personality'. To this end, 'it must be kept in good condition so that it may be well with the person'. Secondly, 'one must be on good terms with it, so that it may favour one'. (Sofola, 1973:105).

The concept of *ori* does not stop in Yoruba beliefs. In Nigeria, there are three major tribes; *Yoruba*, *Hausa* and *Igbo*. *Ori* is 'analogous' to the Ibo's *chi*. In Igbo's metaphysical thought, an individual possesses a triad of gods. These are the *ashi*, *nkwa*, and *chi*. On its part, the *ashi* maps out a man's journey from the womb. It

shines light on what his *nkwa* (destiny) is. The *chi* takes over from the *nkwa*. It takes over also from the *ashi* and guides the person through life so that everything that the *ashi* mapped out will be lived out and come out as true.

*Moremi* a play by Lekan Balogun, gives a graphic illustration between *ori* and destiny. Through *Araba* (a character in the play), the *ifa* speaks about three friends; the Masquerade, the Drum and the Gong. The three of them are told to 'seek the support of their *ori* before embarking on their journey to the earth'. The Masquerade and the Drum forgot the instruction but the Gong complied. At the beginning of their journey, popularity and great substance trailed them until they encountered misfortune that led to their ruin. The Gong on the other hand complied and even though he encountered the same misfortune, he bounced back stronger and was fully restored. (Balogun, 2004:19).

The above story in *Moremi* strengthens the claim by Orangun referring to *ori* as 'the spiritual guardian or man's double associated with him from birth through the passage of life'. The duty of *ori* remains to 'guide, protect and advise'. It is also 'the pathfinder or the forerunner on the earthly 'bush/jungle' to lead man to his fortune.' In addition, *ori* is 'the superior guardian, it wards off evil before man and shields him from evils behind'.

In a nutshell, *ori* 'is the personality soul that makes a person whatever he is.' (Orangun, 1998:33). In addition, '*ori* is the personal guardian that determines the earthly success or failure in a man's life.' This is revealed in the following *ifa* corpus:

Ori ni sin ni  
It is *ori* that guides us to a state  
Ori la fi n d'ade owo  
Where we walk with royal beads  
Ori la fi n t'epa ileke  
Ori is the jewelry chain  
Ori lokun  
Ori is the source  
Abaniwaye ma ju gbagbe  
He who creates and never forgets his creature  
Ori pele o  
Hail ori  
Bi mo ba lowo laye  
If I am rich in the world  
Ori ni n o ro fun  
It is *ori* I shall tell  
Ori mi iwo ni  
My *ori* it is your doing  
Ori mi pele o  
I will hail you my guardian.

The depth of respect accorded *ori* is succinctly captured in E.B. Idowu's book '*Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*'. The book presents well-researched details regarding Yoruba traditional religion where God is the Supreme Being who works in conjunction with other deities, with *ori* being one of them. This is woven alongside Judaeo-Christian attributes of God being regarded as: all-knowing, all-seeing and an all-loving Creator of everything. The reason behind the reverence accorded *ori*; (being a person's guardian angel who accompanies him/her in his/her earthly sojourn) as analysed by Idowu is quoted in Orangun:

The Supreme Being is the Head Source (Orise); the fountain of life, the Author and Disposer of man's destiny... the offspring of the Supreme Being (*Olodumare*) is the personality soul which is the inner person and the name for it is *ori*, the essence of personality which derives directly from the Head Source (Orise), who is *Olodumare*. It has its physical symbol in the human palpable head which is also called *ori*. It is this *ori* that rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of man. (Orangun, 1998:24).

In Yoruba belief, *ori* can encounter several misfortunes. Orangun makes it known that '*Orunmila* (the divinity who was a witness when individuals chose their *ori*) is in a position to alter destiny or modify it'. Not only that, 'the people of the world; *omo araye* in whom evil forces are vested can change the good predestined lots of man to bad'. To that end, one can deduce that a good destiny can be swapped.

As earlier indicated, in naming human body parts, *ori* refers to the physical head. However, to the Yoruba race, *ori* means so much more. Typically, it is an extension of an individual's core being; the '*ori inu*' which is the symbol of the inner person that represents the essence of a man's personality. *Ori* is significant to destiny as it picks what has been destined for a wo(man). Sofola shows the difference of both. According to him, 'the distinction is clear because in the act of taking one's destiny from the origin of life, it is the *ori* that kneels down and chooses or receives it from the Maker' (Sofola, 1973:105).

#### 4. Destiny Through Many Lenses

Going further in this discourse, destiny will be examined from religious' (Islam and Christianity) point of view in addition to the exposition of the selected play texts; *The gods are Still Not to Blame* by Rasheed Otun and *Rebirth* by Felix Emoruwa. Before engaging the texts, it is important to point out that *The gods are Still Not to Blame* is an adaptation of *The*

*gods are Not to Blame* written by Ola Rotimi, which in turn is an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. *The gods are Still Not to Blame* treats the same theme as the parent text (*The gods are Not to Blame*). The only difference is, while the former adopts a contemporary Yoruba setting for the play, the latter was placed in an ancient setting, it dates back. *The gods are Still Not to Blame* is an adaptation of *The gods are Not to Blame*.

Adaptation, the retelling of a story refers to the narration of the same or similar story in a new light. Concerning adaptation, Balogun states 'adaptation practice has a complex history of recasting preexisting texts in order for them to speak to the purposes, fantasies and anxieties of various historical movements' (Afolayan, 2021:106). In the words of Iji, quoted by Balogun, adaptation becomes essential in order to 'localize the universal or universalize the local' (Afolayan, 2021:106).

The examination of the expression of destiny orchestrated by fate is dramatically represented in *Oedipus' Sophocles*. The Sophoclean narrative has since been written, adapted, rewritten, and examined closely via numerous dramatic texts to examine the theme of fate and destiny being an inseparable pair of twins that visit mortals at different places and eras; no matter the geographical location and period of occurrence, they leave the same mark. The playwrights who live in different eras and soils examined how destiny turns the hands of the clock to favour one man and place the other at peril. Sophocles (*c.496-406 BC*), Olawale Rotimi (1938-2000), and Ismaila Rasheed Adedoyin planted the concept of destiny in a prince who has been ill-fated to commit the error of killing his father and marrying his mother in the course of living. The subject matter of 'destiny' is expressed in story form in the sequence of: 'from the distant past in Greek culture', to the 'not too distant past of Yoruba culture' and finally, in the contemporary period of 'here and now'.

Listed in order of writing; *Oedipus, The gods are not to blame* and *The gods are still not to blame* point to the relevance of the concept of destiny through the ages and across cultures. On the other hand, Emoruwa planted destiny and its expression (albeit against the wishes of the villain) in a common, every day man. This indicates both the noble and the common man are under the grip of destiny, and can be visited at will.

Literary circles witness the retelling of identical or the same stories using various mediums and in different manners. Sophocles penned *Oedipus Rex* and planted it within Greek setting. Taking the same story, it is planted in the African continent (the Yoruba race) by

Ola Rotimi in *The gods are not to blame*. Taking the story further, Otun Rasheed wrote a contemporary version by engaging the story for modern readers while reiterating the theme of the aforementioned parent texts. Following this adaptation trend, *Othello* written by William Shakespeare becomes *Otaelo* written by Ahmed Yerima. On her part, *Wedlock of the gods* was reshaped by Zulu Sofola to reproduce the dominant theme in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

It is vital to note that novels, plays and biographical accounts can be written and reproduced via films. Such are targeted towards telling the same story in a new/deeper light to take the themes farther to a wider audience and preserve its authenticity/relevance. Plays like *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, *Fences* by August Wilson and *Cabaret*, (a musical) by Joe have been reproduced into films. The culture of adaptation reinforces the need to reiterate universal themes or recurring subjects that people need to learn from, pay attention to or preserve for generations.

For instance, the trio of *Oedipus Rex*, *The gods Are Not to Blame* and *The gods Are Still Not to Blame* reiterates the main theme of man's helplessness against fate, and how men sometimes move closer toward their destiny as they struggle fiercely in a bid to move away from it. On its part, *Rebirth* engages the subject of destiny as being changeable and restorable. One should call to heart that, while *Oedipus Rex* is planted within the Greek culture, *The gods Are Still Not to Blame* is planted within the Yoruba culture. Both cultures share a common denominator; their belief in gods in addition to belief in fate as presiding over humans. The latter reflects in their practice of inquiring into a child's future to know what will befall the child on his/her earthly sojourn, in addition to his or her preordained life's path/assignment.

Destiny can also be examined through various religions. For instance, Islam religion is built on tenets; six of them. Belief in oneness of God is the first one followed by belief in angels. The third pillar is belief in the holy books while the belief in all prophets comes as the fourth pillar. Coming fifth as a tenet in Islamic religion is belief in the Day of Judgment; while belief in *al-qudir* (destiny) is the last one. These articles are outlined in the Holy Quran; *Surat Al-Qadr* 97:1-5.

Islam believes destiny exists. To that end, mortals are exhorted to succumb to the sovereign will of Allah as expressed through their preordained destiny. This calm acceptance and disposition towards one's fate is prescribed as the pathway to bliss. Thus, the saying:

'*Kadara a'allahu*' translated in Yoruba as '*ka gba f'Olohun n'isinmi*'. Translating this in the English language, this means 'a mortal's path; (according to this religious view), has been carved out before that wo(man) was brought forth through creation to the earth on this transient terrestrial place of sojourn. To that end, humans are advised to accept the Creator's sovereign grand design without any form of questioning or desire to alter life's events. This has been certified as profitable; as adhering to this leads to a tranquil life'.

In Christianity, destiny occurs as 'predestination'. It is believed that some people have been appointed to carry out certain 'unpleasant' assignments and they cannot run away from such no matter how hard they try. For instance, the bible talks about people being 'predestined'; Romans 8:28-29, being 'foreknew'; Romans 8:28, 'chosen' Ephesians 1:11 and 'elected' Titus 1:1. According to Mark 14:17-21; Jesus pointed out one of the disciples (Judas-a traitor) was going to betray Him. He added 'it would have been better if he had not been born'. The prophecy concerning his bargain for the terms of the 'trade', requesting for 30 pieces of silver to betray the Master was given in Zechariah 11:12-13 and fulfilled in Mathew 26:14-16. It could be deduced that his greed for money was the tragic flaw that led to his eternal damnation.

The story of predestination is further strengthened in Genesis 25:23 concerning Esau and Jacob where the younger had been ordained to be served by the older. In the same light, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt might be considered as another epitome of predestination. In refusing the children of Israel to return to their land of nativity, the bible says 'his heart was hardened' (Exodus 9:12). As a result, he perished in the Red Sea.

## 5. Names as Reflection of Destiny

In line with the aim of moving towards the fulfillment of destiny, or in a bid to deviate from its actualization; names are generally believed to be reflectors of a man's ultimate destiny. To this end, they are chosen carefully in a bid to avert unpleasant incidences regarding the fulfillment of destiny. In several cultures of the world, a child's future is mirrored ahead of time through consultation carried out from several platforms.

In Yoruba culture, names are symbolic. They give insight into the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, the lineage the child is born into and the hopes attached to the future of that child. To this end, the items used in naming a child reflect the future anticipated for the child. For instance, salt, sugar cane,

and honey are used during naming ceremonies and passed around for those who come around to partake to share in the parents' joy. Naming ceremonies in Yoruba land are held in awe and it takes place amidst celebration because it is believed that a child becomes an identifiable entity after being named. It can thus be deduced that a child's life is unveiled during the naming ceremony as his or her *ori* becomes activated to function as a companion/guardian of the child's life's journey.

Furthermore, naming a child in Yoruba culture is a collective effort. Parents, siblings, members of the extended family and grandparents name a child. In some instances, friends and other distant kinsmen are not left behind. This explains why a child can have numerous names in Yoruba land. Those names are pulled together from various sources. Within the Yoruba culture, every of name is tied to a particular journey. In Yoruba worldview, the world is seen as a market place where all and sundry came to sojourn and also to trade. In order to trade profitably, a child's *akosejaye* (fate) is looked into, in order to be named accordingly.

It is not only in Yoruba culture that names are held in awe. All over the world, certain names have been tagged 'accursed' due to some negative historical occurrences of certain people who had earlier been given such names. Two of such readily comes to mind; Jezebel and Delilah. For instance; within Christian circle, people desist from naming their children with such 'stained' names as it is believed a child named after such undesirable characters might live out their woes and fall into their errors.

A similar thought of holding names in high esteem runs through *The gods are Still not to Blame and Rebirth*. For instance, in the former, Yeye Oba (the king's mother) being a devout Muslim had prepared the names for her grandson. She has chosen the names for the child in anticipation whilst waiting for the arrival of the Muslim clerics who will perform the naming ceremony. According to her, 'my son's names are Saliu Abisoye, Adeniyi, Akinloye'. (Otun, 2018:3) She reminds the king of her decision based on the fact that the deceased king, (her husband and the current king's father) was a Muslim before his demise. On a conflicting note, she states her displeasure in the king's decision of having Christian priests come around to name 'her' son. The king had converted to Christianity while in the university and named his prince Samuel.

Another conflict ensues regarding the choice of names in *Rebirth* between the father and mother of Esubiyi who are *Ogun* and *Osun* worshippers respectively. The

father, a hunter and an *Ogun* faithful had purposed to name the child Ogunbiyi. The mother on the other hand prefers to name him Osunbiyi. The argument that ensues between both parties is laid to rest when the Ifa diviner who came to name the child concludes his name is Esubiyi (Esu's own child).

The boy's father sits among his hunter colleagues while the mother, amidst Osun worshippers...the father suggests Ogunbiyi while the mother insists that the boy's name shall be Osunbiyi.

Baba: (*Cast the Opele – an instrument of divination*)

... Ha! Esubiyi?

Man: ... So Esubiyi became my name. (Emoruwa, 2011:26).

In Yoruba culture, it is believed that a child will eventually live out his/her name. Hence the proverb '*oruko ni i ro omo*'. The same worldview is reflected in *Julius Caesar* where Cinna the poet suffers for the sins of Cinna the conspirator by virtue of bearing the same name.

Third Citizen

Your name sir, truly

CINNA THE POET

Truly, my name is Cinna

First Citizen

Tear him to pieces; he's a conspirator

CINNA THE POET

I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet

Fourth Citizen

Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses

CINNA THE POET

I am not Cinna the conspirator

Fourth Citizen

It is no matter, his name's Cinna; pluck but his

Name out of his heart, and turn him going. (Shakespeare, 2001:49).

In the biblical account recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, Jabez means 'sorrow'. His mother named him 'sorrow' because she bore him in pain. Jabez believes the name has placed a lid on his flourishing on life's journey and had to decide against further answering to the name.

Sofola sheds light on the meaningfulness and profundity of African names by stating that names have 'names have sociological and cultural significance'. Not only that, he states 'there are fundamental philosophy which determines the attitudes of the ethnic groups towards names and naming.' These provide the social, religious and psychological significance that names are, in Sofola's words 'pregnant with' (Sofola, 1973:103). Sofola emphasizes the Yoruba belief that 'there is an agreement between the name given a child and that

child's soul'. To that end, he concludes by indicating that when a name is given to a child, the child's soul or spirit must give assent by saying "yes" to the name. (Sofola, 1973:104). To show the value of this line of thought, Sofola reveals that:

'Yoruba naming ceremonies' (which are usually performed on the eighth or ninth day of the child's birth) serve the dual propitiatory purposes of appealing to Supreme God and Maker and appeasing the child's ori that needs must say "yes" to the name given at the naming ceremony.

To answer the question of 'what's in a name'? Sofola replies, 'to us names are cultural. They tell us who we are...they express our relations with our Maker. Above all, they help us to relate ourselves to the order of things.' (Sofola, 1973:106).

#### 6. The Desire for Early Comprehension of Destiny

As earlier stated, the two texts primarily engaged in this discourse are rooted within the Yoruba culture. The global theme of destiny earlier examined in *Oedipus Rex* has come home to roost in Otun's *The gods are still not to blame* and Emoruwa's *Rebirth* as both texts plant the theme of destiny within the Yoruba culture. Within both play texts, naming a child generates conflict during the naming ceremony; the point at which parents are eager to send the child's life on course via meaningful names that portray their expectation for the child's life. Furthermore, there are other things that are worthy of paying a closer attention to regarding destiny in these two.

The first point that leaps out within the two texts is the fact that mortals realize there is a higher force that governs events in the physical realm. This higher force is the first point of contact that a newborn is exposed to immediately after birth. The first contact is made by the parents/guardians of the child to know what fate holds as they consult the higher force via the deities representing him.

This is done in their quest to know a child's life's mission and the path carved out for his/her life's journey as soon as possible to prepare the child for the road ahead. The journey of fate unfolds in *The gods are still not to blame* as Samuel (also referred to as Saamu) is born to Oba Adedoyin and Olori Ademorin in the land of Agbaye. During the naming ceremony, a priest and an imam were invited to name the child. The essence of this lies in the fact that these 'men of God', aside naming the child will invoke supernatural blessings on his earthly sojourn. (Otun, 2018:3-7).

At the point of naming Saamu, the priest (a Christian) that arrived first for the naming is tagged as 'the most revered priest of all men of God in the land of Agbaye, and is equally a renowned gateway to the divine door, reputed home and abroad'. After naming the child, he felt into a trance and gives prophecy in this state. The prophecy states 'This boy...he will kill his own father and then marry his own mother'. (Otun, 2018:7). Shortly after the priest's utterance, the Chief Imam (a Muslim) walks in and points to the child and says 'this boy ...this boy, he will kill his own father and marry his own mother!'

The same thought of evoking supernatural presence/beings to have a glimpse of the future is seen in *The gods are not to blame* where baba Fakunle (a seer) is consulted when King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola gave birth to a son.

[Enter BABA FAKUNLE, a purblind old man, led by a small boy.

BABA sits on the ground, and begins to cast his Opele, stringed objects of divination]

NARRATOR: BABA FAKUNLE,

Oldest and most knowing

Of all Ifa priests in this world...

What is it that the child has brought

As duty to this earth

From the gods?

BABA FAKUNLE: This boy, he will kill his own father,

and then marry his own mother! (Rotimi, 1979:3).

The culture of being eager to know a child's destiny is equally grounded in the Greek culture as shown in *Oedipus Rex* when Oedipus born to King Laus and Queen Jocasta. Retracing the theme from the most recent to the oldest version regarding the concept of fate, it is glaring that humans are conscious of the presence of 'destiny' and are always eager to discover its expression as determined through fate. People want to know whether it is favourable or otherwise as soon as a child is born, and then move on to the next line of action regarding this.

*Rebirth* on its part tells the story of Esubiyi whose naming ceremony was done amidst conflict regarding the choice of name from the two religious sects (although both are Yoruba traditional religious sects) invited to conduct his naming ceremony. During the naming ceremony, the father invited hunters who are *Ogun* worshippers while his mother sticks to *Osun* worshippers to name her son.

Call to mind that in Yoruba traditional religion, *Ogun* is the god of iron, he is a custodian of iron-related professions. He is thus revered and addressed as 'the

one who bathes in blood'. It is thus expected that Esubiyi's father, a hunter will desire the blessings of *Ogun* on his son. *Osun* on the other hand is the god of fertility. Equally revered and worshipped, she is the custodian of fertility and she gladdens the heart of the barren. The two gods; *Ogun* and *Osun* are regarded as custodian of whatever belongs to their worshipper, it is to this end that their presence and input is sought at Esubiyi's naming.

### 7. In a Bid to Outwit Fate

The second point regarding destiny hinges on the fact that, even though humans know there are some forces in charge of their earthly existence, they are not willing to resign to them if they bring evil regarding their lives. Humans reject dancing to their doom as ordained by fate and revealed through destiny. Rather; if possible, they want to avert the ills on life's journey and savour the good part. As stated earlier, 'in the act of taking one's destiny from the origin of life, it is the *ori* that kneels down and chooses or receives it from the Maker'. (Sofola, 1973:104). The moment a child is named and his/her *ori* receives life's lot, mortals try to see ways of averting a pronounced negative allotment accorded to a child.

Dating back to the ancient past, humans have always made attempts to upturn the table regarding destiny as ordained by fate. This approach reflects in *The gods are Still not to Blame* and reinforced in the parent texts. Having discovered Saamu will kill his father and then marry his mother, the king decided hurriedly to put a stop to the possibility of the prophecy coming to pass. To achieve his aim, Oba Adedoyin sends his son to Princess Aderayo his elder sister in the US. He tells his wife the doctor indicates the child has serious complications and must be flown abroad immediately. After departure, the king and the queen had another child and Saamu is left overseas to be taken care of by his aunt.

It is always very frustrating for mortals when they find it hard to outwit fate and stop whatever plague is making their lives unbearable. In *Rebirth*, Esubiyi states 'I became the perfect puppet they destined me for...and became a pun, an instrument of destruction ...' (Emoruwa, 2011:27). Whenever he is taken over by *Esu*, he kills people unconsciously. The first time this happened, he killed a fellow laborer accidentally. The second time, he kills his father; and the third time, he kills Iya Onidiri, his aunt who is responsible for his woes.

It should be noted that, at the point of trying to erase a negative destiny, life becomes void of the joy of living

for the person whose destiny isn't comely. At his point in his journey, in agony, Esubiyi cries out 'Out of no will of my own I kept hurting, killing and destructing.' (Emoruwa, 2011:32). Being dissatisfied with his way of living, and in an attempt to redefine his existence, Esubiyi explains the remedy he embraced by stating '...my mother, in her maternal anguish sought a way of putting an end to my malady...we met Baba, same one who presided over my naming ceremony'. (Emoruwa, 2011:33). Regarding the pain that comes from being unable to pull out from the grip of fate, looking at Esubiyi's case, we can deduce that no mortal willingly resigns to fate and sit back to accept what destiny brings hook, line and sinker.

### 8. The Quest for Rebirth

There is another paramount thought regarding the existence/expression of destiny. For instance, in Yoruba culture, it is well-known that a man's destiny can be altered by evil people. When such happens, destiny is said to be reversed. In Yoruba parlance, it is termed '*pa kadara da*'. In such cases, the person's enviable destiny is swapped and his/her life is afflicted with untold woes and agonies.

Esubiyi provides a graphic illustration of an altered destiny. He is a child well-sought-after. His parents gave birth to him after nine years of infertility. Rather than rejoice at his birth, his mother's sister, Iya Onidiri loathes his birth right from the time he was in the womb and seeks his hurt before being born.

The origin of the hatred could be traced to the vacuum in Iya Onidiri's life. Being Esubiyi's aunt, she was initiated into witchcraft by her deceased mother. However, she chose to be second in command and the cost of that stool is her childlessness. Knowing that she apparently can't bear children anymore, she asks a favour from the cult. She demands that: 'As the second in command to Yeye, I decree that my sister must not bear the baby in her womb'. In addition, she states '... I place a curse on the child, let evil follow his path'. (Emoruwa, 2011:22-23).

Despite the child being shown as 'a strong one', she goes ahead to ask for his life's path to be crooked. In order to incur *Esu*'s wrath and agitate him to fight the child's cause, Iya Onidiri gives '*adin*' to *Esu*. In Yoruba culture, '*adin*' is a forbidden food that triggers *Esu*'s wrath.

In order to pitch an innocent person with *Esu*, the aggrieved person can go to *Esu*'s shrine and give him '*adin*' while informing *Esu* the act is being carried out as a representative of the person he/she wants *Esu* to afflict. This action unleashes *Esu*'s fury and it forever

seals the pact. This act perpetrated by Iya Onidiri is what brings Esubiyi at loggerheads with Esu. That marks the point at which his life start travelling southwards. When Esu came visiting, he informs Esubiyi; 'our bond transcends what ordinary mortals could decipher...not even death can snatch you off me...as long as you live, you have no right to divorce me.' (Emoruwa, 2011:30). Iya Onidiri typifies people who are evil for no just cause and will stop at nothing to hurt other people and truncate their choiced destiny and replace it with a plagued version of forced destiny.

Mortals live in constant quest for rebirth. This explains why humans are never satisfied until they reach the point, they are convinced they are living their best life having cheated fate's cruel path earlier marked for them. Different people take several routes to achieve this. In *The gods are Still not to Blame*, King Adedoyin arranges for his son to be taken out of Agbaye town and flown to the US in order to live his life differently from what has been prophesied concerning him. It is the same trend in *Oedipus Rex* and *The gods are not to Blame*. The first thing people do is flee their current geographical location to avert the imminent doom. Many people are of the opinion that the hands of fate might be unable to reach them if they leave the vicinity where what has been predicted concerning them can easily come to pass.

Esubiyi has been in the claws of destiny for long and he has perpetrated acts he wouldn't want to be associated with. While working as a laborer in the farm, his anger rose up for no just cause against a fellow laborer and he killed him. At that point, he contemplated suicide. On another occasion, in his attempt to separate his father and his mother while they were fighting, he kills his father. At that point, according to him, 'he has become an angel of destruction that everyone runs and he ends up being friendless' (Emoruwa, 2011:32). His forced destiny on another occasion pushed him to kill his mother unintentionally. Out of anger, and with the knowledge of Iya Onidiri being the culprit behind his woes, he goes on to commit another murder by strangulating Iya Onidiri.

There is also the possibility of rebirth as people consult supernatural forces to interfere on their behalf. Some might consider changing their names to add the prefix of the new deity they currently believe in, in order to be integrated into the new life they want. They are of the opinion that changing their names will cut them off from the forces behind that name.

Regarding the consultation of supernatural forces, the parents of Esubiyi made efforts on his behalf to intercept the hands of fate and restore him to his

original state as ordained before his earthly journey started.

*... there is small respite as a group of Aladura church members come in company of Esubiyi's mother to conduct a prayer and deliverance session... Also, Esubiyi's father accompanies a group of Muslim led by the alfa... they too form their own praying arena on behalf of Esubiyi...* (Emoruwa, 2011:29).

At his rebirth, Osun wipes the mark on Esubiyi's forehead and Ogun also collects the sword. After his rebirth has taken place, Esubiyi is charged to 'go ... be fruitful...impact the world positively...make exploits' (Emoruwa, 2011:43). With his life, one understands that choiced destiny and forced destiny are two sides of the same coin. To this end, while one tends to evil, the other builds up. After his rebirth, Esubiyi is transformed from a child of mischief to a leader that will chart a new path for his people.

Interestingly, the Quran tells the story of a poor couple who were 'destined' by fate to be poor all their lives. They prayed about their impoverished condition and got answers. Their status changed with the promise of having the respite to enjoy the wealth for a while. But at the point of becoming rich, they started reaching out to poor people and surprisingly enough, their wealth was sustained to their amazement. (The Quran, 15:1-11, 13:42). A similar story occurs in the bible about a man named Jabez who is living a life that is not as 'honourable' as his brothers'. In two verses, we read:

*9 'And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bare him with sorrow.*

*10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested', (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).*

## 9. Conclusion

It is established that there is no culture or civilization known to man that does not acknowledge the fact that destiny exists. This is further shown through Otun's *The gods are Still not to Blame* and Emoruwa's *Rebirth* being the texts adopted for this study even though allusions were made to other religious, social, and cultural characters and circumstances to firmly underscore the universality of this claim. In addition, it has been proven that destiny can be altered in both ways; either from good to bad or otherwise. Iya Onidiri

is a good example in *Rebirth* showing how destiny can be swapped and damaged in the process.

Finally, we have argued that battered or contaminated destiny can also be restored. This thought is reinforced in the story from the Quran and its biblical counterpart. Emoruwa's *Rebirth* helped in no small measure to help underscore that a default button can still be pressed to restore order and balance if and when destiny gets misdirected or misinterpreted. To achieve this, prayer is offered in both Islam and Christianity while 'etutu' a sacrifice is carried out in Yoruba traditional religion through the right quarters.

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