

CONCEPT OF DESTINY IN IGBO AND YORUBA PERSPECTIVE OF PERSONHOOD

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Abstract

Wonder, expectations, uncertainty of our future throws us into different dip layers of worry, sometimes confusion which leads us into questioning, meditation and worship to a God. Inquiries about our purpose of existence are inquiry about human destiny; destiny becomes a determined or an already established pattern or end to human existence. Philosophers, theologians and scholars have made attempts into defining and developing composite ideologies of destiny, an adventure that has led to a confusion between the definition and usage of destiny and fate. This work tries to define the concept of destiny and its ideology in *Igbo* and *Yoruba* worldviews: destiny is a predetermined, preordained existence. Destiny is believed to be the unique individuality of every individual journey on earth. Invariably, destiny is the catalyst for human development in *Igbo* and *Yoruba* worldview. A person cannot become what he/she is not destined to become. Destiny in the *Igbo* worldview is a dynamic one; although predetermined by one's *Chi*, humans have the freedom to change or improve on it. This dynamism is absent for *Yorubas* as destiny remains permanent once chosen at conception. The effect of the dynamism and determinism of destiny to human development of the *Igbo and Yoruba* person will be examined within the framework of analyzing the concept of destiny in the different worldview. This work adopts the research methodology of hermeneutics and analysis. These methodologies are adopted because interpreting and analysis of the various etymological terms and concepts of destiny is paramount for adequate comprehension. The research through analysis discovers the loophole of. Man's laziness and nonperformance of certain religious rites and rituals as causes of unachieved destiny thus a meaningful life is one lived with wholesome knowledge of one's destiny, carried out through hard work and performance of necessary rites and rituals. This is the principle of a good life.

1.0 Introduction

In antiquity, Aristotle in his *Nichomecian Ethics* captions destiny as *telos*; destiny is the ultimate end of man. A summary of Man's existence, that is essence; the aim and goal every human hopes to achieve. For Aristotle, this *telos* is a happy life through an intellectual practical living. Destiny as a happy life is similar to the notion of destiny in indigenous *Igbo* and *Yoruba* people but the recommended mode of living to achieving by Aristotle is not necessarily similar to them.

Etymologically, destiny is derived from the Latin word, *destinare* which connotes to decree beforehand, to determine, to settle; it is that which has already been firmly established. Destiny is as "power believed to control events that happens to somebody. It is an idea that somebody has been determined in advance by a superior power, eg., either by God, fate or a person."¹ Destiny is a "predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency."²

K. Gyekye expressed Akan's concept of destiny is a message borne by the soul of an individual which determines the overall structure and design of the individual's life in the world. It determines the personae of the African person. Thus, "it is your destiny...that makes you, you and my destiny that makes me, me."³ Destiny is the individuality of a human person; it is what makes one unique and special among other persons.

The *Igbo* tribe is a major tribe in Nigeria, occupying mostly the South Eastern region of Nigeria. They (Ndi *Igbo*) predominantly speak *Igbo* as a native language. Hence the word *Igbo* has two facet meaning; as a tribe/race and as a language. The *Yoruba* is also a major ethnic group in Nigeria West Africa; effectively occupying the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Lagos and a substantial part of Kwara State.⁴

The concept of destiny occupies a very center stage in the philosophy of African philosophy likewise in the metaphysics of the *Igbo* and *Yoruba* thought system. The question about the origin, nature, responsibility of human destiny forms the onus upon which a good individual life and communal life is lead in an *Igbo* and *Yoruba* Cosmology. An *Igbo* or *Yoruba* person constantly ponder on how free and independent is he/she? Or is he/she totally predestined to be either great or not? Is he or she free to choose how he will die or not? When he will die or not? Even if he/she destiny has already been determined, is there a chance that his destiny can be altered, changed or destroyed?

The concept of destiny in both the *Igbo* and *Yoruba* worldview is generally determined by the *Igbo* and *Yoruba* Metaphysical and Ontological supreme beings (gods and

deities), thus, for one to adequately understand the concept of destiny among these two worldviews, an on look into the different ontological being and hierarchy will be required.

A dual usage

of the words Igbo and Yoruba to mean tribal identity and a race will be employed periodically in this work. Also, an interchanged use of the native terms of destiny will be applied.

2.0 Destiny in Igbo Worldview

The concept of destiny is not amiss in the Igbo cosmology, ontology and world view in general. In the Igbo world view, destiny is represented with the word *akala aka*. *Akala aka* literally translates to the lines on a person's palm; the two or three patterned lines on one's palm. Michael Echeruo in his Igbo dictionary *akala aka* as personal destiny; one's pre-determined luck; a literary lines on one's palm.⁵ When an Igbo speaks of *akala akam*, he/she does not refer to the lines on his palms, rather he is speaking of his destiny (*akala aka m* here means my destiny). The idea or belief of destiny in the Igbo cosmology is not an unalterable one. The Igbo worldview uphold that destiny although it is predetermined by your God through your *Chi* can be changed, improved or even destroyed by one's life style, decisions and actions. Umeogu in his article, "Akala Aka N' Ala Igbo" describes *akala aka* as "the personalization of the past, the present and the future conditions of an individual's possibility and reality of life and being...kpakpa ndu (star), that is life propeller, life predictor, life shelterer, life controller, life manager, life administrator"⁵. It is a gift from God to man to help man in living a good life, what man then chooses to do with that gift is upto him. Based on this belief system, *akala aka* now connotes 'the already given' (*akala*) and 'the fruit of hand work' (*aka*)⁶. Here, *akala* is predetermination of one's destiny while *aka* is the freedom of man to choose the path of and to his destiny. Similar it Aristotelian-Thomistic thought, destiny is potency; man's potency.

The ultimate aim, goal or mission in life in the Igbo world view is for man to realize or achieve his destiny. A person who has not discovered his destiny wastes his energy doing things apart from his destiny. But, how does one come to know his destiny? How does one achieve his destiny? In answering the question about how one can know his destiny, Ukwamedua and Omokpo assert that "destiny is the life-line pattern of an individual. Destiny is that which comes your way after you may have tried your best. In other words, any success, progress or failure that comes your way in life is seen as your destiny."⁷ This assertion seems to be problematic as one can only deduce his destiny at the summary of his life thus meaning that one cannot still know of his destiny prior to making efforts towards it.

How does one attain his destiny? In the Igbo concept of destiny, there is a tripartite ontological relationship between *Chi*, *akala aka* and *ikenga*. *Chi* can mean: the creator, the guarding spirit given by the creator to man, and destiny⁸. However, in this analogy *Chi* is God, *akala aka* is destiny and *ikenga* stands for man's talent, strength, enterprise and achievement. *Chi* that bestows on every person his or her *Akala aka* and one's *Akala aka* is attained through *Ikenga*. Therefore, three basic factors determine the success or failure of destiny attainment in Igbo worldview, first, "the benevolence of one's *Chi*; secondly, one's own effort symbolized by the *Ikenga* and thirdly, one's conscious effort to maintain the law and customs of the community."⁹ In addition, one success in attaining his destiny "depends on how he marshals the favourable forces through rituals, sacrifices, prayers, vows, offerings, making of good medicines, charms, and so forth, to neutralize the machination of evil forces."¹⁰ It is important to seek the help of the god, good deities, ancestors through making rituals and sacrifices, seek support of family, lineage, clan, kindred and other social institutions.

Ndi Igbo understands that possessing a good *Chi* alone will not guarantee a wealthy destiny or life progress, rather will hard work alone result to a successful life on earth nor by performing countless of good sacrifices, rituals and medicine. Destiny can not be achieved by isolating the three condition or performing one and disregarding the other; the conditions are not independent of the other, they are interwoven and After understudying the Yoruba concept of human destiny, it is derivable that human destiny is both free and determined at the same time. It is free in the sense that a person has the freedom to choose his destiny, whether good or bad however, once the choice is made, the destiny becomes determined at birth. Thus, the power of predetermination of one's destiny falls on the individual.

therefore, all three must be performed or present before one can achieve his or her destiny. In this regard, in Igbo cosmology, a successful man is one who his *Chi* has ordained his destiny, who performs his communal duties and is hardworking and who does not relent in his worship and thanksgiving to his gods, deities and ancestors. Also, who aside these, he protects his destiny against counter interference by protecting himself with good medicines and charms.

3.0 Destiny in Yoruba Worldview

Human destiny is represented as *ori* in Yoruba worldview. *Ori* represents the individuality element in a person. *Ori* is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. *Ori*, an immaterial entity, otherwise called 'inner-head' is intractably connected with human destiny.¹² It is believed that it is the *ori* that determines a person's success or failure in life.

How does one acquire *ori*? According to the Yoruba belief, before birth, everybody was obliged to go and choose an *ori* from among a large number of *oris* stored in *Ajala's* warehouse.¹³ *Ajala* who is a potter is responsible for the creation of destiny. He (*Ajala*) molds different heads of different shapes and qualities (good and bad qualities). Every person before coming into the world will have to choose his own *ori* and at birth, goes through the water of forgetfulness called *Omi igbagbe* which is the boundary between heaven and earth.

Bolaji Idowu explained further the process of *ori* acquisition; the choice of a person's destiny could be made in three ways:

A person may kneel down and choose his destiny, this is called *A kun le yan* (that which is received kneeling). He may kneel down and receive his destiny-that is called *A kun le gba* (that which is received kneeling). Or he may have his destiny affixed on him-for this, Yoruba give the name *Ayanmo* (that which if affixed to one).¹⁴

Once an *ori* (destiny) is chosen it becomes permanent; it cannot be altered or changed. As capsulated in the *Yoruba* Worldview, destiny takes the central place for the development of the human person and personae. The destiny (*ara*) chosen is what forms and shapes personality, substance, every events follows the guild of the *ara* until the end of the individual's life. Hence the first action point to a successful life is destiny discovery. Once this is achieved, every other activities for development including, intellectual, emotional, social, vocational, religious e.t.c will be fashioned in direction to the dictate of destiny.

4.0 Conclusion

From the above understudy of the Igbo and Yoruba concepts of human destiny, it is notable that both the Igbo and Yoruba concept of destiny identifies or attributes the source of destiny to a spiritual/ metaphysical being; this being is superior and supreme over man and his world. And this being predestines man's essence and existence. Consequently, destiny is the compass upon which all individuals potency is dependent upon. Destiny forms and shapes an African personae and personhood. One can not possess a personality independent of his destiny: it is destiny that forms, directs and sustains a man's becoming therefore to understand one's personae, we would first to inquire into the person's destiny. This is the reason for the importance of knowing your destiny for the Igbos and Yorubas: *igba afa* takes a sacrosanct place in destiny discovery in the igbo Worldview same as *Ifa* divination in the Yoruba tradition. *Ígba Afa* and *ífa* divination are both acts of fortune telling. These are performed with the aim of destiny discovery and achievement. Due to the determinism of destiny, human development do not enjoy total liberty of freedom. While destiny in *Igbo* cosmology offers soft determinism

to human development, the determinism of destiny in *Yoruba* cosmology is hard, permanent and unchanging.

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