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# Revisiting Ori: Human Destiny and Human Agency in Yoruba Thought System

Onifade, Abayomi Temitayo\* 

\*Department of Philosophy, Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosó, Oyo State, Nigeria. E-mail: [atonifade@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:atonifade@lautech.edu.ng)

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### Abstract

The idea of humans possessing a destiny or having predestination among the Yoruba is an offshoot of the Yoruba cosmology. This is embodied in the concept of ori and have evoked various ethical, existential, humanistic and ontological perspectives that have influenced deep rationalisations and further speculations among African philosophers. This study attempts an examination of the complex concept of ori (human destiny) in Yoruba culture, exploring its relationship with human agency, and the pursuit of a purposeful life. It follows previous examination of the impact of the notion of destiny in actualising human life/living, however, it proceeds to examine the interplay between human destiny (as represented by the Yoruba “ori” and human agency. The paper challenges the common notion that ori implies fatalism, and explores the multifaceted nature of human existence and the various paths individuals can take to fulfil their life goals and purposes. It employs a thorough qualitative approach and critical analysis at investigating the existential, ethical, and metaphysical implications of ori, highlighting its role in shaping the human experience. The research finds that there exists among traditional Yoruba an interplay between human agency and ori in the actualization of life expectations; with the Yoruba involving a harmonization of a person’s ori and human agency, as well as establishing and developing character (iwa) in other to make wise choices and take deliberate actions that align with ori. By analysing the intersections of personal endeavour and destiny, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Yoruba philosophy, provides answers to lingering questions on the vicissitudes of life.

**Keywords:** Ori, Human destiny, Human agency, Iwa, Ese

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## 1. Introduction

A strong belief of Sophie Oluwolé<sup>1</sup> concerning African philosophy is its capacity to create a sense of authenticity which while not despising new and contemporary ideas, it also does not “abolish” nor destroys its ancient or traditional ways. Thus, Oluwolé holds that the humanistic aspect of African philosophy is not concerned with analysis of concept or abstract thinking, but dedicated to finding purpose and meaning in life and existence.<sup>2</sup> This thought as championed by

<sup>1</sup> Oluwolé, Sophie B. (1999). *Philosophy and Oral Tradition*, Ikeja: ARK Publications.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

\* Corresponding author: Onifade, Abayomi Temitayo, Department of Philosophy, Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosó, Oyo State, Nigeria. E-mail: [atonifade@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:atonifade@lautech.edu.ng)

Oluwole serves as core motivation in doing a critical evaluation of the implication of *ori* (human destiny) alongside “human agency” among the Yoruba of west Africa. The perspective here is to forge further interrogations on the attainment of personal successes, achievements, and life progression as it fundamentally anchors on a pre-destination/idea of destiny, our “freedom of choices” or rather “freedom to choose”, and situating it in a Yoruba socio-ontological world view.

The critique herein is based on traditional Yoruba frameworks from Yoruba traditional epistemic technologies, particularly the *Ifa* corpus. Traditional Yoruba are believed to hold a general concession on the *Ifa* divination system and establishes its efficacy, and role as the “mouth piece of all other divinities”<sup>3</sup>. The research picked its initial focal point from three *Odu Ifa*, namely: *Ogunda Meji*, *Irosun Meji* and *Obara Meji* that reveals (respectively) that “no divinity or god will bless any human without the consent of his *ori*”; an *ori* can aid its bearer to success; and an *ori* can be unfortunate, rendering the affairs of the human carrier ill-fated.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of *ori* among Yoruba is among the numerous controversies that have influenced conversations on the existence of Yoruba-African philosophy, with various perspectives and contributions on its core humanistic and ontological state leading to more “criticalness” of thought and have become issues that have influenced very deep rationalisations and further speculations among African philosophers.<sup>5</sup> In these regards the Yoruba concept of *ori*, which revolves around freedom and pre-determinism, has always remained a central focal part of the conversations relating to human destiny in African philosophy.

In the thought of Olomu and Lawal-Dosumu<sup>6</sup>, the Yoruba see the universe as governed by an anthropological pattern that sees the human person beyond the tripartite, i.e. the body (*ara*), breath/soul/life element (*emi*), and head/reception of destiny and personality (*ori*) to include the heart (*okan*), which is conceived as the bearer of intelligence and knowledge. The summary notion of *ori* comes as the ideal representation of the “human destiny”. It is quite different from the physical head and thus referred to as *ori inu* (inner-head). Among the Yoruba, it is taken as the bearer of human destiny.<sup>7</sup> It is the actuality or essence of what a person becomes. In other words, *ori-inu* is destiny in traditional Yoruba thoughts and cosmogony. Various appellation, linguistic coinage, adaptation etc. surrounds *ori*, for instance: *Akunleyan*; *Akunlegba*; *Ayanmo*; *Adamo*; *Akosile*; etc. are other appellations<sup>8,9</sup>.

Thus, the typical believe on destiny is situated in the poetry:

*Akunleyan ni adayebe, a kunle a yan ipin*  
*Adaye tan oju nnkan gbogbo wa*

## 2. Literal Translation

We kneel to choose our destiny is the norm, we kneel to choose our portion

We got to the world and then we are in haste

The idea of a pre/destination in a Yoruba cosmology is in most event an offshoot of the Yoruba cosmology which Oladipupo<sup>10</sup> sees as presenting

“...man, as a solitary individual who is left to pick his way through a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, and many ambivalent, seeking to placate them.” And within all this, and travails, is the traditional thought that man is accompanied by his *ori* which was pre-chosen before his existence on earth.

For Ebijuwu<sup>11</sup>, the conception of a fatalistic resolve to the idea of *ori* among contemporary Yoruba belief system is as a result of an evaluation of “the state of the nation and the despair associated with the complete loss of hope of many

<sup>3</sup> Olomu, O. and Lawal-Dosunmu, Y. (2023). Qui Sera-Sera: Yoruba Epistemological Representation of Destiny in Ifa Corpus. *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 1(4), 965.

<sup>4</sup> Abimbola, Wande, (2014). *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Amodu, A. (2000). A Critical Unloading of a Burden Concept. *Journal of Philosophy and Related Discipline*, 1(1).

<sup>6</sup> Olomu and Lawal-Dosumu Qui (2023). *Sera-Sera: Yoruba Epistemological Representation of Destiny in Ifa Corpus*, 965.

<sup>7</sup> Elebuihon, Y. (2004). *Ifa the Custodian of Destiny*, Ibadan: Penthouse Publication, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Wande Abimbola. (1976). *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa literary Corpus*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 113.

<sup>9</sup> Orangun, Adegboyega. (1988). *Destiny: The Unmanifested Being – A Critical Exposition*. Lagos: African Odyssey, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Layi Oladipupo (2025). The Metaphysics of *ÈSẹ̀* and the Question of Inalterability of Destiny in *Yorùbá* Culture, in *Философски алтернативи*, 34(1), 102-115. <https://eclipse.unwe.bg/catalog/view/QY23TZ2ZVQ>

<sup>11</sup> Temisan Ebijuwu (2023). Sartrean Existentialism and Yoruba Philosophy: Interrogating Diverse Paths to Freedom and Human Destiny, *Cogito: Journal of Philosophy and Social Inquiry*, 1(1), 3.

people in the society, occasioned by the distance of the state from the people” is a reason for clamouring and clinging to fatalistic and destiny related explanations. This aligns with Oladipo’s<sup>12</sup> thought that sees the application of the Yoruba concept of human destiny as explicated by the ides of *ori* with the inescapable and non-palatable events that befalls a man in contemporary society. In Ebijuwá’s<sup>13</sup> explication, the resulting impact of this line of thought is “a characteristic grunt”, or as he describes it in Durkheim’s words “a state of anomie”. It is in providing an explication or justification for this state of harsh reality that contemporary society seek credence within the postulation of “a pre-destination”. Or else, in what other way can it be explained as the reason why contemporary society(is) have failed to associate good happenstances with the already “burdened concept” of destiny.<sup>14</sup>

At the centre of the traditional Yoruba world-view is *Olodumare* who is the referenced and referred Supreme Being, or the “Supreme Deity” and wields the power of the ultimate sanction or reward; the acceptance or rejection of any act of worship; or the blessing of any enterprise. *Olodumare* is in Yoruba ontology the ultimate cause.<sup>15</sup> However, it is believed that there exists such “non” and “other” persons who provides interference in the cosmic and social sphere that influence the course of events.<sup>16</sup> The resultant factor here is the possibility of a manipulation to the idea of predestination in humans. Thus, if we agree to the roles of divinities, ancestors, spirits, ghosts, witches, divination, magic etc. as cogent factors of blessings, favour, curses or influences in relation to activities of the human person on earth, we must also look inwards and critically assess the assertion of having a predetermined “fixated” life which in most cases cannot be averted.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, how do we explain such other factors that are capable of influencing different aspects of our lives different ends.

According to the Yoruba mythological account the creation of human beings is a four staged affair. First, *Orisanla* makes the *ara* (body); *Olodumare* (the supreme) gives the moulded body *emi* (life); third, the activated body goes to the house of *Ajala* to choose his *Ori*; and fourthly, he moves to the world. In the third stage where the *Ori* is being chosen, *Ifa* (*Orunmila*) is believed to be present and an eye witness.<sup>18</sup> Howbeit, the role of *Ifa* divination in traditional Yoruba cosmogony is multifaced with *Ifa*, having the capacity to act in different functional roles, core of which are: guidance (*Ita*), (*Eji Ogbe*); problem-solving (*Iwori*), (*Oyeku Meji*); prediction (*Ifa Awo*), (*Irosun Meji*); diagnosis (*Ono Ifa*), (*Obara Meji*); prescription (*Ase Ifa*), (*Ogunda Meji*); education (*Itan Ifa*), (*Eji Irosun*); conflict resolution (*Ire Ifa*), (*Oturupon Meji*); spiritual growth (*Iwa Ifa*), (*Osa Meji*)<sup>19</sup>.

A core role of the *Ifa* divination system is in its essential capacity for identifying the “right” sacrifice for the right god, and at the right time for the right purposes. *Ifa* or *Orunmila* (god of divination) in Yoruba traditional religion is believed to possess all knowledge. And according to the Yoruba creation myth, accords the *essence* of *Ifa* to be present when every human selects his destiny. Adopting the responsibility for guidance in the understanding of the different divine or predetermined roles attributed to every human. Abimbola<sup>20</sup>, Makinde<sup>21</sup>, Gbadegesin<sup>22</sup> and other scholars have indicated *Ifa* (or *Orunmila*) for the Yoruba as the only possessor of the content of the Human destiny.

### 3. The Place of *Ori* in Traditional Yoruba Worldview

In a non-controversial position, the Yoruba people have come to see the Human personality having two main components the physical and the spiritual, otherwise known in the western philosophical tradition as body and mind (soul). The physical component of the human person is the *ara* (body), while the spiritual aspect as composed of the *emi* (soul) and the *ori* (inner-head, human destiny). Basically, for the Yoruba, *ori-inu* is a spiritual component of the human personality and is symbolized by the physical head *ori*. The concept of *ori* in Yoruba thought is used to refer to the unconscious set which makes a free choice of one’s life before *Olodumare*; and it also refers to that which is chosen by the individual destiny or portion”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Oladipo’s. (2020).

<sup>13</sup> Temisan Ebijuwá. (2023). *Sartrean Existentialism and Yoruba Philosophy: Interrogating Diverse Paths to Freedom and Human Destiny*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Bolaji, Idowu. (1962). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman.

<sup>16</sup> Bewaji, J.I. (1998). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil. African Quarterly*, 2(1).

<sup>17</sup> Idowu. (1962).

<sup>18</sup> Makinde (1985). A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concept of Ori and Human Destiny. *International Studies in Philosophy*, 18, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Wande Abimbola. (2014). *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press,

<sup>20</sup> Wande Abimbola. (1976). *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa literary Corpus*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Akin Makinde (1985). A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba concept of Ori and Human Destiny, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Segun Gbadegesin. (1984). Destiny Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: Yoruba Perspective, *Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Inter-disciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding*, 7(3), 181.

<sup>23</sup> Egun Oduwole. (1996). The Yoruba Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny: A Fatalistic Interpretation. *Journal of philosophy and Development*, 2(1 & 2), January.

The *ori* as the personal spirit or guardian ancestors of an individual is looked up to as the determinant of one's success or failure in life. And the way of finding out what sort of thing one has been destined for, is by consulting *Orunmila* the god of divination. Through it was the individual who made the choice of the *ori* before coming to the world. However, the choice of *ori* is forgotten as he enters the world. *Ori* is seen as the indicator of one's purpose in life. It has the secret of the deity's plan for a person.

The Yoruba belief system takes destiny, determinism and freedom as compatible. *Ori* refers to a symbol of free choice which everyone receives from the spiritual world. And it is believed to be the embodiment of the success or failure of individual persons. The content of the *ori* remains unknown to the Individual except *Orunmila* who is a permanent witness whenever the *ori* is chosen. After the *ori* has been chosen, *Olodumare* seal the Destiny with his authority and such individual depart from heaven.<sup>24</sup> The Yoruba world view sees man's fate as determined because he wasn't conscious of the selection of the *ori* he made. However, on getting to earth the content of the *ori* he selected can be revealed to him through divination, and he also has a chance of making rectification sacrifices by the *Ifa* priest if the need arises.

Makinde ascribed the theories of freewill and determinism to all thinkers of all races. He takes predestination, otherwise known as destiny, as a concept popularly discussed, not only in African societies but in Western and Eastern societies as well, the Western conception of destiny for him refers to a fixed and inevitable future. Etymologically, it is that which is ordained or appointed.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, pre-determinism from the Western view point says the future is fixed, but that our present actions which are determined by the past will affect or bring about what it turns out to be. In the same vein, fatalism from the western view point is closely related to the western inception of determinism fatalism in this vein claims that no action can affect the future (already determined) for good or evil. In Makinde's view, fatalism affirms that whatever events happen could never be otherwise regardless of whatever else happened. This is to say that certain events are such that they cannot but occur no matter what else happen, and fatalism is to the future only.

The core extractions from Makinde's evaluation of *ori* and the concept of destiny are: that the act of choosing ones *ori* is not of free choice; a deep relationship to predestination; and the act of petrification of a bad *ori* through sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> Among the Yoruba generally, and as explained in the work of Abimbola; predestination is always associated with the *Ori inu* (inner head). For Abimbola the act of selecting an *Ori* in the store house of *Ajala* in heaven is one of a free choice. Every individual is expected to select any *Ori* he desires. Makinde's position here is that if it is a choice, then there will be room for preference. He went further to compare the choice of *ori* and destiny in heaven as purely a matter of luck, like playing a lottery ticket. And as no one willingly chooses a losing Lottery ticket, no one also willingly chooses a bad *ori*.<sup>27</sup>

In a more general view, destiny connotes a purpose of life known possible events that is unalterable. However, the Yoruba traditional thought allows for an examination of the consistency of the possibility of a particular *ori* being influenced, assisted or changed by means of sacrifice or propitiation. This indicating the effect that its corresponding destiny could be altered. This is justifiable with the plausibility of intervention by non-human characters, who are believe to play assigned roles in human livings. It is in this view that the Yoruba make efforts to win the favour of the god/gods. However, it is established that "no divinity *orisha* or god blesses a man without the consent of his *ori*." In the *Ifa* corpus, *Ogunda Meji*<sup>28</sup> is the thought expressed that no idol will bless a man without the express permission of his *ori*.

### 3.1. Translation

... Ifá ni orí	Ifá is <i>ori</i> (human destiny)
Orí nìkan ló tó	Only <i>ori</i> is required
Aláásán bá ròkun	In accompany Alaasan to journey on sea
Bii mo bai loiwòì loòiwòì	If I am rich,
Orí ni ñ o rò fún	I will relate this to my <i>ori</i>
Oriù mi ilwoò ni	It is to my <i>ori</i>
Bii mo bai biimòò laiyei	If I birth children
Orí ni ñ ó rò fún	I will relate with my <i>ori</i>
Kol' soio'Isòal' tii il' Daini gbei leòiyiIn Oriù eòni.	There is no deity that support like ones <i>ori</i>

<sup>24</sup> Segun Gbadegesin. (1984). *Destiny Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: Yoruba Perspective*, 7(3), 181.

<sup>25</sup> Akin Makinde. (1985). A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba concept of Ori and Human Destiny. *International Studies in Philosophy*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Akin Makinde. (1984). *An African Concept of Human Personality, the Yoruba Example, Ultimate Reality and Meaning*.

<sup>27</sup> Akin Makinde. (1985). A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba concept of Ori and Human Destiny,

<sup>28</sup> Wande Abimbola. (2014). Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun, 16.

There is no deity that support like ones *ori*. Thus, Makinde<sup>29</sup> discusses the philosophical question that arises from this perspective, that the choice of *ori* and hence of destiny cannot in the Yoruba concept be a free choice, since what is being chosen is unknown, thus eradicating a point where the concerned makes an informed decision. For many, the choice of *ori* is an act of free choice, since one personally goes into *Ajala's* house and pick one. However, it is quite obvious that the option of not choosing an *ori* does not exist. This insinuating a presence of constraint which does not exemplify freedom, and by logic, choosing an *ori* becomes a task that “must be done”. In other words, it is compelled. Makinde however maintained that an individual’s choice of *ori* is an act of free choice. He further argues that no one who is rational will choose a bad *ori*. And if there is freedom of making a choice (in the real sense of freedom), then it should necessitate the knowledge of what each *ori* contains, i.e. the absence of restraint and constraint.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. The Interplay between *Ori*, Human Agency and *Iwa*

Within the Yoruba worldview is the undoubting and underpinning position that establishes a philosophical framework that lays emphasis on the importance of human agency in the actualization of life expectations. At the core of this framework is the acknowledged role of a person’s *ori* in shaping his life path. A major focus of Oduwale’s conversation on the idea of inalterability of destiny is premised on the thought that “what happens to anyone in the journey of life cannot be by chance or accident, but what has been pre-destined”. However, Ebijuwa takes exception to this and describes it as a representation of “an elicit philosophical challenge” that seems to undermine the true understanding of the Yoruba conception of “*ori* and human destiny”.<sup>31</sup>

The Hobbesian conception of human agency as discussed by Gantt and Williams<sup>32</sup> sees the position of man as capable of doing what he sees as appropriate especially as such that help him avoid unpleasant happenings like pain or even death. This is also represented in Hegel and post-Comtean analysis; with the Hegelian conception taking “human agency” as the characteristic definition of the human person. Though this does not come as a construct of the human person, it is in a way a cumulation of the entire essence of the human person, and that includes training, education and other personal efforts.<sup>33</sup>

Undoubtedly, Ebijuwa sees the Yoruba perspective of an *ori* as the carrier of a human-person’s predetermined destiny, chosen before birth, as not necessarily fatalistic, i.e., not believed to be totally fixated, or strongly/hardly determined. In his position there is rather a dynamic and multifaceted concept that encompasses both destiny and human agency. The notion of human agency as conceptualised refers to the individual’s ability to make choices and take actions that shape their life and destiny. The complexity of this position for Yoruba traditional thought sees a merger between predestination and existentialist thoughts. On the one hand, the idea that *ori* is a predetermined guiding force that shapes an individual’s life path and destiny seems appealing and non-rejectable; and on the other is the role of human agency in actualizing their life expectations and getting to fulfil their destiny.<sup>34</sup>

Within this framework, is the Yoruba philosophical emphasizes on the relevance of a mutual beneficial and important harmonious interaction between one’s *ori* and such other characterised traits responsible for the actualisation of life/living expectations. This is anchored in Ebijuwa on the resolve of “choice”. Thus, he acknowledged the roles of both destiny and human agency in shaping an individual’s life path. Or put differently, Ebijuwa see “choices” of actions that exemplify “human agency” to be capable of rewriting human destiny. Thus, the idea remains that irrespective to the choice of ones *ori* every man has the liberty of making a right choice that can affect his future, family, neighbour and/or society. Thus, in Ebijuwa do we find an existential import that places “one’s choice” as a powerful tool to unleashing such incredible human potential and aspiration.<sup>35</sup>

The human agency interplay in the actualization of life expectations as critically studied among the Yoruba involves the harmonization of a person’s *ori* and human agency, requiring individuals to establish and develop constantly good

<sup>29</sup> Akin Makinde (1985). A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba concept of Ori and Human Destiny. *International Studies in Philosophy*, 18,

<sup>30</sup> Akin Makinde (1984). *An African concept of Human Personality, the Yoruba Example, Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Inter-Disciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding*, 7(3).

<sup>31</sup> Temisan Ebijuwa (2023). *Sartrean Existentialism and Yoruba Philosophy: Interrogating Diverse Paths to Freedom and Human Destiny*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Gantt, E.E. and Williams, R.N. (2019). Psychology and the Legacy of Hobbesianism: Egoism, Motivation, and the Inescapability of Nihilism. in *The Bi-Annual Conference of the International Society for Theoretical Psychology; August 19-23. Copenhagen, Denmark*.

<sup>33</sup> Gantt, E.E. and Williams, R.N. (2019). “Psychology and the legacy of Hobbesianism: Egoism, motivation, and the inescapability of nihilism.

<sup>34</sup> Temisan Ebijuwa (2023). *Sartrean Existentialism and Yoruba Philosophy: Interrogating Diverse Paths to Freedom and Human Destiny*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

character (*iwa*); and make wise choices and take deliberate actions that align with ones *ori*. Thus, the concept of *iwa* (character) plays a crucial role in the interplay between Ori and human agency. The Yoruba philosophical framework emphasizes the importance of cultivating good character (*Iwa*) in order to actualize one's life expectations and fulfil one's destiny. *Iwa* refers to an individual's character or personality, which is shaped by their choices and actions. From a more distinct dimension, the word "*iwa*" can be used to denote "being" or "nature". *Iwa* is a central notion in the Yoruba moral system and this is evident in various proverbs, folklore, and other oral traditions which are a means by which members of the society pick up the knowledge of the moral norms. The Ifa corpus emphasizes the importance of human agency in shaping one's own destiny. This is reflected in the concept of "*Iwa*" (character), which refers to an individual's character or personality. The Ifa corpus suggests that *Iwa* is shaped by an individual's choices and actions, and that it plays a crucial role in determining their destiny.<sup>36</sup>

Typical among the Yoruba is an understanding of the relationship between *ori* and human agency which cogently have a significant implication for human agency and morality. By emphasizing the importance of human agency in the actualization of life expectations, the Yoruba philosophical framework affirms the individual's responsibility for their choices and actions. At the same time, it also acknowledges the role of *ori* in shaping individual's life path. *Iwa* underscores the importance of humility and recognition of the limitations of human knowledge and control. As such, encouraging the individuals attempt at cultivating a sense of moral responsibility and accountability for their actions, while also acknowledging the complexities and uncertainties of life.

The implication of "human agency, and influence on *ori* is that it indicates alterability. This has examined in the work of Abimbola<sup>37</sup> led to philosophical blocs. On one side is the position of an existence of a strong relationship, rather than a fusion, between *ori* and human destiny. This is indicative in the fact that once an *ori* was chosen, it becomes impossible to alter. Thus, the reference by Abimbola to a strong sense of destiny. And to this, the quest for alterability is not applicable. The second however asserts a weak relation between the *ori* and human destiny and it is explainable in the weak sense of destiny. In Oladipupo is the thought that predestination very much occurs as an explanatory model often adopted in occasions where there are no natural explanations for happenstances or events.<sup>38</sup> Even at such, the fact still remains that "the concept and idea of human destiny is one of the pristine concepts that have received wide philosophical interrogation" based on it's been a part of the tripartite that composes the Yoruba essence of the human person.

Ebijuwa<sup>39</sup> attempts "a re-aligning of present social and existential realities for the activation and sustenance of the matrix of social and human development through a resurgence of existence of "hope" that should emanate from making choice(s)". This further bringing to fore the question of the inalterability of *ori* among contemporary Yoruba societies. From Ebijuwa, we come to the reality that the presence of hopelessness can lead to a conscious realization of an assumed detection of "fatalism" especially from a pragmatic reality where "individual efforts can no longer lead to the attainment of goals and aspirations".<sup>40</sup> Oladipupo, however explains that an initial look at destiny in the Yoruba perspective will present an appearance of a non-negotiable position that does not give way for self-actualization. Thus, this tilts towards an explanatory model for those who are believers in the fatalistic "belief system". In this way tenacity, self-discipline, self-actualization, appeasement and propitiations (through sacrifice), character and other external agencies or personal efforts appears not to count.

Abimbola expresses that the fatalistic position of the notion of destiny puts the gods or divinities in no position to alter the destiny of any person. However, his conception of Yoruba cosmological composition presents a position that allows influencing or enhancing the *ori* to fulfilment. Thus, the exhibition of *ebo* (sacrifice) and *esè* to effectively impact or influence the outcome of any *ori*.<sup>41</sup> A sacrifice for Abimbola has complementary impact on *ori*.<sup>42</sup> So also the role of the *esè*, which is the symbol of hard work, struggle and resilience. Balogun went on to add that the role of *ori* and its pre-deterministic conditions in influencing human agency does not remove the part played by freewill, as acts of *ebo* (sacrifice), *esè* (strife), and *iwa* (character) are unconstrained exercise of freewill.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Wande Abimbola (1976). *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa literary Corpus*.

<sup>37</sup> Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa literary Corpus*, 115.

<sup>38</sup> Layi Oladipupo (2025). The Metaphysics of *ESÈ* and the Question of Inalterability of Destiny in *Yorùbá* Culture, in *Философски алтернативи*, 34(1), 102-115. <https://eclipse.unwe.bg/catalog/view/QY23TZ2ZVQ>

<sup>39</sup> Temisan Ebijuwa. (2023). *Op cit*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Wande Abimbola (1976). *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa literary Corpus*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 115.

<sup>42</sup> Layi Oladipupo (2025). The Metaphysics of *ESÈ* and the Question of Inalterability of Destiny in *Yorùbá* Culture, 110-111

<sup>43</sup> Oladele Balogun (2007). The concept of *ori* and Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(1), 123.

Kola Abimbola<sup>44</sup> presents a clear-cut position that shows without doubt the inalterability of human destiny taking his source from the *Ifa* corpus. He went ahead to describe the *ẹsẹ* as a key player in self-actualization. For him, *ẹsẹ* represents the essence of individual strive and struggles.<sup>45</sup> Agreeing with this position, Balogun describes *ẹsẹ* “as a catalyst of realization or otherwise of one’s destiny”.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the Yoruba believe that:

Ibi ori ba ma gbe ‘ni de, ese o nii s’alai de be.

#### 4.1. Translation

Where the *ori* is taking one to, the leg will inevitably get there

### 5. Conclusion

The Yoruba philosophical framework offers a nuanced and dynamic understanding of the relationship between *ori* (human destiny) and other characterised human effort in the actualization of life expectations. By emphasizing the importance of human agency, cultivating good character (*Iwa*), and living in harmony with one’s destiny (*ori*), the Yoruba philosophical framework provides a rich and complex approach to understanding human agency and morality. So far, the crux of this work highlights the unnecessary need for emphasizing a fatalistic interpretation of the Yoruba ontological explanation to human destiny. The idea of human destiny is symbiotically related to freedom and determinism, yet they are tied to human events, actions and inactions. Though certain events in human life are characteristically restricted and not his choice to make due to such issues as religion, culture/tradition, location etc. yet man is essentially responsible to navigate his route and rite of passage to his freedom and choice of a life.

In conclusion, the *Ifa* corpus provides a nuanced and complex understanding of *ori* and its relationship with human agency. When thoroughly observed, the *Ifa* corpus suggests that Ori and human agency are intertwined, and that they interact and influence each other in complex ways. By emphasizing the importance of human agency and character in shaping one’s own destiny, the *Ifa* corpus provides a powerful framework for understanding the human condition and the nature of destiny. This then casts doubts on the misunderstanding of *ori* in Yoruba philosophy as implying a fatalistic worldview. However, in this paper is the explication of the view that a closer examination of Yoruba philosophical frameworks reveals a more nuanced understanding of *ori* that acknowledges the interplay between destiny and human agency. Through a critical analysis of Yoruba texts, oral traditions, and philosophical frameworks, this paper demonstrates that Ori is not a fixed or determinate concept, but rather a dynamic and multifaceted idea that encompasses both destiny and human agency. It highlights the importance of human agency in shaping one’s own destiny, emphasizing the role of *iwa*, *ese*, choice, moral responsibility, etc. in determining one’s life path.

The concept of *ori* if well and properly understood through a cognitive analysis of the understanding of the balance that exists between individuals, spirited forces and the universe will allow for an argument that disagrees with the inalterability of destiny. The conception that destiny cannot be altered in the Yoruba worldview thus appears incomplete, fragmental and opposed to the Yoruba existential, social and communistic ethics that emphatically believes in “taking one’s destiny in his hands”. Thus, the idea of a fixated essence that predates existence that beats cultivated skills, developed mindsets, character and moral developments, psycho-physical and spiritual manipulations, environmental considerations etc. appears inconsistent with the Yoruba cosmogony and social-cultural space where efforts and results get rewarded. Furthermore, it alienates the function-ability of human developmental processes such as: self-discovery, self-actualisation and self-reliance, etc. which are core and intentional ways to which man defines and shapes his life outcomes. It is clearly not in anyone’s “right” or “place” to pronounce that the traditional Yoruba worldview clearly accrues to man the capacity “to be, or not to be, what he wants to be”, however, this paper clearly demonstrates that Yoruba philosophy is more than a simplistic fatalism; it is a rich and complex system of thought that acknowledges the intricacies of human existence.

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<sup>44</sup> Kola Abimbola (2006). *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*. Birmingham: Iroko Academic Publishers.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Oladele Balogun, The Concept of Ori and Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(1), 126.

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