



Fagunwa and the Regeneration of the Òrúnmìlà Muse

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ABSTRACT

This article builds on the concept of regeneration or renaissance from the perspective of Yorùbá ancient

history and observes that Daniel Orowale Olorunfemi Fagunwa, author of several Yoruba language novels, was affected in many ways by the prevailing Christian faith in Okeigbo, his birthplace. The paper argues that many characters and events in Fagunwa's stories are sourced in Ifá orature. The research presents selected characters in Fagunwa's stories; situate them in their original form in Ifá oral corpus and asserts that since Ifá narrative predates Fagunwa's writing, Òrúnmìlà the legendary author of Ifá could be regarded as the muse from which Fagunwa draws his inspirations. The paper, while commending the timely, patriotic and culture conscious work of Fagunwa, contends that his works have laid a concrete foundation for a positive valuation of Africa's indigenous lore towards development in contemporary era.

Keywords: Folkism, Extended metaphor, Muse, Cultural propagation, regeneration.

Introduction,

It is pertinent to begin the paper with some explication of key concepts. Regeneration or re-birth implies arousing or setting off a seemingly latent force. In Psychoanalytical sense, it refers to the state of being present in the subconscious but yet to be consciously expressed. It also indicates that there had been some measure of proactive engagement prior to a noticeable lull. The invasion of the Yorùbá indigenous system by Christian and Islamic missionaries ignited passive disposition to home-grown knowledge and practice. This period is referred to as a period of stillness. Òrúnmìlà philosophy as encapsulated in Ifá was principally rendered in oral form and that made it highly susceptible to manipulation, distortion and domination.

In another regard, Muse is the name of one of the ancient Greek deities of the arts. In English language, the term *museology* refers to "the design, organization and the management of museums; while *museography* is the description of museum collection. Thus, the term "museum" originated from the ancient idea of the deity of arts – the Muse. A typical museum, even of arts collections, exhibits the history, philosophy and culture of the artefacts. In the same spirit, the novels of D.O. Fagunwa, as pieces of arts, encapsulate other contents of Yorùbá culture and philosophy. These cultural and philosophical elements explored by Fagunwa emanated from a spring of ideas that are closely representative of the Yorùbá worldview.

The central research questions that are addressed in the study include the following: Who came first, Ifá or Fagunwa? Did Fagunwa benefit from Ifá esoteric wisdom by tapping into the original muse, the ÒpitànElufè, the sage historian of Ife who is also known as Òrúnmìlà? Were the stories adaptations or mere coincidences drawn from mere abstractions? To this end, the paper seeks to prove that Fagunwa's works drew from the inexhaustible bank of Ifá lore described by Olajuwon Epega (1932:11) as the system that "opens the door to the knowledge of the purpose of man on earth; thus enhancing the intellectual equipment needed by man to function in his physical, as well as, his esoteric environment". Ifá as a mystic system has the potential to affect the personality of anyone who decides to drink from its esoteric well. Epega cites one poem of Ifá to explain his position:

Ese Ifá

À b̀̀sorònilfá;
 À b̀̀sorònioògùn
 Ifánikíawomáawá
 A d'ifáfúnAyòKenke Tókó'Fádìè, tójùúsílè
 Ó wípèdunkòlówólówó
 Ó wípèdunyóòmáasiséájé
 Wónnieníbákó'Fáyanjú;
 Kípónjúowó.

Transliteration

Ifá is a spring of wealth
 Medicine is a spring of wealth
 Man should seek Ifá (sacred Knowledge)
 The divination for Ayo Kenke
 Who abandoned his study of Ifá
 That he would trade
 Anyone learned in Ifá
 Never lacks wealth.

The narrative here extols the value of education and information as central to the acquisition of knowledge.

The study attempts an intra-textual analysis of Fagunwa's writings. It also draws on evidence from oral history provided by members of Fagunwa's family, including his wife, Mrs Elisabeth Fagunwa. Two aged cousins of Fagunwa (who would prefer to be addressed as children of D.O. Fagunwa), also provided recorded *Oriki* (cognomen) of their lineage, in which lies a deeper sense of the family's affiliation to indigenous culture and tradition of the Okeigbo/Ifewara of Yorùbá nation.

2. Between ÒRÚNMÌLÀ and IFÁ

From the onset, it is imperative to make some clarifications. Òrúnmìlà is not Ifá, just as for instance, Ogun is not Iron, Mohammed is not the Qur'an and Moses is not the Bible. Òrúnmìlà is the harbinger and interpreter of the Divine Message of Olódùmarè. That message is Ifá. Clearly, Òrúnmìlà hears and understands the message. He is different, but not detached from the message. In Yorùbá cosmogony, Òrúnmìlà is regarded as the Deputy of Olódùmarè in all things pertaining to omniscience, wisdom and spiritual salvation; He knows the secrets of man's being because Òrúnmìlà is believed to have been with Olódùmarè at the beginning and knows how creation was begun and completed.

However, Òrúnmìlà is often taken to be synonymous with Ifá. This may only be appropriate in instances where a scholar argues that the medium may actually be the message; because one massages the other. Marshall McLuhan (1966: 7-21) expands this argument. Although MacLuhan discusses the effects of technology on the media of communication, his analogy explains the synergy that often results between a message and the carrier of the message. WandeAbimbola (1973: 11) subscribes to this synergy as he asserts that;

- IfátàbíÒrúnmìlà,
 kíniiyàtòtówàninúorúkoméjèèjìyí?
 ÀwonelòmírànnsowipeÒrúnmìlànioruk
 oÒòsàyígan. Ifásiniorúkoohunèlòtiàwonbabaláwo fi máanseàyèwò (Ikin, Òpèlè, Ìròké ...)
 Bí a bá wo inú ese Ifá, a ó ríiwípékòsîyàtòlaarinorúkoméjèèjìyí;
 IfáàtiÒrúnmìlà...(Èmiò
 ríojúapérémopéte...a
 díáfúnÒrúnmìlà, Ifánsòwòdepo lo iléllawè.)

Transliteration

Ifá or Òrúnmìlà, what is the difference between the two names? Some persons opine that Òrúnmìlà is the name of the Oracle. Ifá is the name given to the paraphenelia of divination such as Ikin, Opele, Iroko.... If we search in Ifá we will discover that there is no difference between the two names. For example, a verse in Ifá reads; (I do not see the face of Aperemopete... the diviner for Òrúnmìlà; Ifá is trading in palm-oil, going to Ilawe.)

This study admits that there are several verses in Ifá that juxtaposed the names of Ifá and Òrúnmìlà just as the message may be made synonymous with the messenger; the message is often interpreted with a bias for the medium. Obviously, the snail is seldom mentioned without the shell. Òrúnmìlà is the shell that housed Ifá in ancient history.

Òrúnmìlà is endowed with the extraordinary wisdom and foreknowledge, an attribute that allows Him to perceive the beginning and end of all things. He is believed to have been present when each individual was created and when each individual's Destiny was sealed. Thus, Òrúnmìlà can predict what will come to pass and also prescribe remedies to adversities or totally avert them. He is Òrìsà (deity) who also divines for fellow Òrìsà. This, perhaps, introduces another dimension to what Ifá is.

Wole Soyinka (1999: 25) in *The Seven Signposts of Existence* links Ifá to the Òrìsà; observing Ifá as the religion, as well as the philosophy, of the Òrìsàs.

Man may speak Oya,
Osun, and Òrìsà-Okò ...
Yet mind and spirit
encompass more than a
mere litany of names.
Knowledge is Òrìsà.

As the divine message, Ifá is the *Word*, which was with Olódùmarè in the beginning. Soyinka (1999: 34) brings forth a reminder:

... O hesitant one, Man's conceiving is

fathomless; his community will rise beyond
the present reaches of the mind. Òrìsà reveals
Destiny as Self – destination.

It is our contention here that the *word* Olódùmarè (Almighty), in as much as it cannot be divorced from its owner. Fagunwa calls the word "Adiitu Olódùmarè". Idowu Boloofinde Odeyemi a professor of Geology who is also very learned in Ifá, provides more explanations on the word/Ifá which this study finds very germane. According to Odeyemi:

In the many aspects which comprise human existence on earth, Yorùbá and other Africans consult Ifá in order to know the wishes of Olódùmarè. Ifá, throughout the history of Yorùbá over the past several millennia, has always been an essential part of life. The real key to the life of the Yorùbá lies in Ifá. (2007: 4-6)

To the Yoruba people, Ifá forms the foundation of the all-governing principle of life. Before marriage, before a child is born, at the birth of the child, at successive stages in one's life, before an Oba is enthroned, before a chief is installed, before anyone is appointed to civic office, before a war is prosecuted, before a journey is made, in times of crises, in times of sickness and so on, Ifá is consulted for guidance and assurance. Because Òrúnmìlà is the great

interpreter of Ifá and witness to destiny, both He and Ifá are held by Yorùbá in awe and reverence. In all, Ifá has a link with human beings, animals, plants and natural elements from the perspective of Yorùbá cosmology.

On D. O Fagunwa, some mythical aura¹ surrounds his personality, as asserted by Fagbenle (2010):

No one could actually say if he was a real person for his books could have, like we were made to believe of the Bible, have been written by spirit, angels or what have you and dropped from heaven. And if D.O. was a real person he must be in commune with the spirit world – his mind was fertile with imaginations, surreal and frightening imageries, and his command of the language daringly creative, intensely philosophical and beautifully romantic all at once

Fagbenle's comment succinctly elevates Fagunwa to the status of Òrìsà in Yorùbá pantheon and also eulogises his efforts at promoting Yorùbá language and literature. However, the extra ordinary personality of Fagunwa is also reinforced by the Oriki(cognomen) of his lineage chanted by Chief Aaron Ajibise, the Agba Akin of Oke-igbo and Madam Esther Ogunwale who are members of D.O. Fagunwa's extended family. Part of the Orikiis chanted below:

*OmoOlúpúrun, Olúpégba
OmoTimiÀgbàlémaápon, a rokol'Éde
Onígborí, ebo ò lódòmó
Omi Ikúlà n yóó mu...
... Lánrékèòò
Omo é lutènígá, omo é lutènígáòòFágúnwà
Omo a sùngangat'òpèlèlòrùn
Àgbàsùúrùigbòàsábárí
IgbórúruníwájúOlógun ...*

Transliteration

Descendant of fierce warriors
In the lineage of Timi, with a farmstead in Ede
Hail the head-hunters, no way to appease mother earth
We share from same spring, aware of the omnipresence of death
Lanrekeoo...
Progeny of the powerful...
One who anchors his peaceful sleep on *Opele*
The elders have a vault filled with patience...

3. Fagunwa and the Concept of ÒRÌSÀ (the Gods)

Òrìsàis derived from *Orísádá* which means: "especially selected by destiny at creation". Issues about destiny are regarded as being sacred among the Yorùbá. This is captured in the expression: a kunle a yanipin, a dele aye tan; ojuwanyanwa (we knelt before the creator and chose our lot, but on getting to the world, we pant in haste." Every family has a chosen one that acts as a touch bearer for the rest. Oftentimes, a race may have one of such divinely selected individual who would tower above his peers. Such a divinely gifted individual succeeds where others fail. Every Òrìsà has a unique characteristic that distinguishes the being from others. The concept of Òrìsà extends beyond humans. Animals and trees as well as other creations of Olódùmarè; sometimes enjoy divine gifts that place them at the hallowed pedestal of the deities; Òrìsà. For instance, *igiasorin*, also called *Okpobrisi* amongst Isoko people is a uniquely deified tree. It is because of *asorin* that the Ikole's will never sweep their market with commonplace broom.

Human beings who exhibit the attributes of Òrìsà are often regarded as people who came generations ahead of their time. They are the AdiituOlódùmarè (Gods' mystery) who possess the magic wand to cause the impossible to happen or render unattainable, that which is seemingly undemanding. According to Soyinka in an interview with Ulli Beer

It is a very curious phenomenon that Yorùbá scholars are reluctant to come to terms with Yorùbá (Ifá) religion. The worst part of it is that

those fellows who speak about “false consciousness” ... are all totally preconditioned. Even when they are trying to be objective about ‘African religion’ in general, they are totally incapable of relating to it. They say: this is a contemporary world. What use is Traditional Religion today? ... and I feel tempted to say to them: What use is a system of beliefs like Islam or Christianity in the contemporary world? And they cannot see that they have totally failed to make the leap: to take Yorùbá (Ifá) religion on the same level as any system of belief in the world; that they are committing a serious scholarship lapse. (p. 8)

4. Themes and Characters from IFÁ Lore in Fagunwa’s Novels

Let us now consider some themes, characters and ideas in Fagunwa’s works that have basis in the corpus of Ifá, beginning with IrekeOnibudo which refers to the title of one of his five novels and also the eponymous hero of the novel. The expression in full is “Ireke O n’ibudo, ibiori da nisi la nse). The idea is from EjiOgbe:

*Ìrèké ò níibùdó
IbiOrídánisílànse
Eégúdungbú mi Itàpé
DíáfúnOlomoAjíá
A búfúngbogbolrúnmolè
Níjótí won nlogbaobiipínlódòOníbodè
OníbodèniOlódùmarèfúnniobiayànpínlátí fi léowóenirere...
Gbogboàwonakínkanjúòrìsàwafúnobiýí, Oníbodèkòfún won
Ògún, Obàtálá, ÒrúnmilàkòríobiýígbàlówóOníbodè.
OrínìkanlóríObìgbà.
InúbíàwonÒrìsàtókù*

Transliteration

The sugar cane has no permanent abode
Destiny decides where everyman thrives
Eegundungbu, the diviner of Itape
When all the deities were to collect kola nut of destiny from Olódùmarè
The Gateman of Heaven was empowered to offer the single kola nut of destiny to deserving deity.
He refused to offer the kola nut to all the famous and the powerful deities that came.
They include, Ogun, Obatala and Orunmila.
Ori

Another verse in EjiOgbe reads:

*Ìrèké ò níibùdó
IbiOrídánisílànse
Eégúdungbú mi Itàpé
Díá fun OlomoAjia
Ifá kilo irinkiri fun OlomoAjia*

The sugar cane has no permanent abode
Destiny decides where everyman thrives
Eegundungbu, the diviner of Itape
Divines for OlomoAjia
Ifá warns that she avoids wandering

ÀdiitúOlódùmarè exemplifies a unique story of a man that transits from the lowest ebb of penury to the highest pinnacle of wealth and fame. The Ifa corpus Irete-Iwori also called IreteOlogotun outlines the path of destiny of any person born or initiated under the Corpus as a typical example of a character that would naturally experience the two extreme poles of poverty and riches.

Ojúaléníí san omoawosí..

Ìròlédèdèdèlààròmílórún.
 Bíèfótí a lésìàkùrò.
 Aronipinèniyànniífúnninîjàngbònadiye je.
 DífáfúnÒrúnmilàtínfarasofàlónàméfà
 Tótúnphòhàèlèèkeje

Transliteration

The evening becomes conducive for the faithful,
 It is in the cool evening that things will become soothing for me,
 Like the vegetable planted on wetland,
 It is the pessimist that gives a guest the lower jaw of chicken,
 Such was the divination for Orunmila
 Doing menial jobs to repay loans in six locations,
 While begging for a seventh loan

The story of Ajantala, the problem child narrated by Irangbeje to the hunters-pilgrims during their sojourn on Mount Langbodo in *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* is worthy of note as it has its root firmly in Ifa corpus - OsaEsu (OsaOgbe). The verse goes thus:

*Ìwákuwaní fa ìríkuri
 A dífáfúnàgànOlorilààfin
 Níjótínfomijúsògbèèrèomo A níkó fi ìgbínboÒòsà
 fúnòsèmerindínlógún;
 Ó níojúnkànòun...*

Transliteration

Unreasonable anxiety bears bad fruit
 The divination for a barren queen
 Who was lamenting her childlessness
 She was advised to propitiate Oosa with snail
 For sixteen weeks
 But says she is in a hurry!

From the above, it is shown that the desperation of the parents for a child impels them to seek one at all cost and they end up, according to the story, with this tribulation of a child that respects no one, no matter how highly placed, including its parents.

Everyone who associates with him always end up in regret, including the parents, the Ifá priest, members of the household, neighbours, friends, animals and so on.

Another memorable character in the novel is Paminku, the wife of Kako who is slain by the latter in anger while she tries to frustrate his bid to go and join his colleagues on the expedition to Mount Langbodo. Leaving for the expedition would mean abandoning her to her fate in a callous and lonely world, a fate she reasons, that she does not deserve, having discharged at all times, her domestic responsibilities as expected of a dutiful and loyal wife. Considering the moral lesson that Fagunwa seeks to impart through the story, of relevance is the Ifá corpus - OgbeOgunda also called Ogbe Pele which underscores the need for patience in dealing with a very naughty and stubborn woman. According to the Odu:

*Sùúrùni Baba Ìwà
 Àgbàtónísùúrùohungbogbolóní
 A 'díáfúnÒrúnmilà
 Baba nsaworòdelwó
 A búfún won lódelwónijotayedota
 IyatiÒrúnmilà je ni ode Ìwónii je Ìyà-Ìwó*

Transliteration

Patience is divine
 A patient elder has all things
 The divination for Orunmila
 During a mission to Iwo

Same counsel for the two people during a crisis
The acronym iyawo is from iya-lwo

The character of Esu had attracted many unhealthy nomenclatures such as referring to Esu as the Devil, especially by Christians and Muslim faithful. It is the view propagated by Fagunwa in his description of "EsuKekereOde" in *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmole*. In OdiMeji, Ifa explains the character of "EsuKekere Ode":

Ìdíméjìtòlówórèjoko;
DífáfúnOlúbodèodèrò;
Tíyòòjókólójúkanmáagbaigba ore;
ÈsùÒdàràniOníbodèodèrò
Ìtagbangba, tàbíOrítaniibùgbéerè.

Transliteration

A pair of buttocks is sufficient for the owner to sit;
The divination for the gate keeper of Odeero
Who would sit at a spot to receive several gifts;
EsuOdara is the gate keeper
His office is located at crossroads.

The corpus OyekuMofun explains, Ifá's lesson about "pride goes before downfall" which is illustrated in the tragedy that befalls Ojolalbinu in (*Igbo Olodumare*)

From the foregoing, it is clear that through effective application of Ifá lore, Fagunwa brings to the fore, the salient content of Yoruba folk stories. His works establish that Ifá is not a message for the Yorubá alone; it is the universal Message of Olódùmarè to mankind and for all those who seek to imbibe it. Ifá's universal relevance lies in the fact that, when an individual from any race, colour or creed approaches an Ifá Priest for a personal message, Ifá may reveal a message of national, continental or even global importance. For instance, the message may be a warning of an approaching war, famine, or pestilence, although the message – seeker may be concerned only about marriage or something else.

5. Fagunwa as a Researcher

The careful handling of every subject matter that Fagunwa chose to discuss points to the fact that he was a very careful observer of nature. Mrs Elizabeth Fagunwa attested to the fact that he was interested in everything happening around him. According to her; "My husband would stop to watch whatever event that caught his fancy. He loved to watch festivals of all shades and coloration. But he was never initiated into any cult."



However, Chief Aaron Ajibise admitted that his uncle and father (Fagunwa) was born into the practice of Ifá and that his name at birth was Orowale, but he later stuck to Olorunfemi, having embraced Christianity. According to Chief Ajibise, their father, Pa Joshua Fagunwa had two other siblings that share the Ifá heritage names; they were Fabunmi and Odugbemi. The three brothers share in the heritage cognomen "Omoasugangat'Opelelorun"; One who anchors his peaceful sleep on Opele – Ifá divination chain.



6. Extending the ORUNMILA Muse

Admittedly, if Fagunwa had openly canvassed for authentic indigenous cultural communication pattern in his writings at the time that he was writing, not many people would have taken him seriously. In fact, he would not have received any encouragement from the church missionaries who were his publishers. His literary interventions were consequently conditioned by his time and environment. It is in this sense that we note the translations of Fagunwa novels into other languages and other artistic genres. These efforts are directly and indirectly spreading the message of the original muse as encapsulated in the novels. Of import here are the open identification with the muse as evident in the later efforts of YemiElebuibon, WandeAbimbola, William Bascom and others.

As a result of the spread of Ifá over the millennia, it has assumed different names in different countries and among different races. It is called *Ifá* among the Edo of Nigeria, *Eva* by the Nupe, *Fá* among the Fon of Republic of Benin, *Afá* by the Ewe of Togo, *Ifá* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam and Haiti, *Ephod* by the Jews as well as *RamakorHati* by Arabs. *Ifá* divination system is also widespread in West Africa especially in Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is practised among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the Kamuku and Gwari of Northern Nigeria, the Ebira in Central Nigeria, the Jukun of North Eastern Nigeria, and also among some other ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region of the country.

Indeed, since Ifá is coexistent with Olódùmarè, the actual title of Ifá is *IfáOlódùmarè*. And Olódùmarè has a name in all the cultures; the Yorùbá call Him *ÒrìsàAgbaye* (Lord of the Universe), Olorun (Owner of Heaven), Oodua (creator of Character and Destiny). The English call him God, the Muslims Allah (and 98 other names), the Jews, Jehova and so on. Every African culture has a name for this Supreme Being. None of these names is inferior to the others. Nothing about Africans, therefore, deserves to be rated inferior if we learn to appreciate indigenous cultures and not subordinating them to the cultures of colonisers. A comparative analysis of the coding systems in YorùbáIfá and the Chinese *I-Ching* will further drive home the universality of the Orunmila School of esoteric wisdom.

A comparative analytical appraisal of the Chinese *I-CHING* with 64 hexagrams in 8×8 or 2^4 reveals a correlation in the coding format of YorùbáODU-IFÁ table with 256 corpuses in 16×16 or 2^8 . Findings indicate that the divinatory processes in *I-Ching* and Ifá help the user to make fundamental choices based on intricate probability. The Chinese *I-Ching* (Book of Change) is presented in a table of matrix of 64 hexagrams in 8×8 and the YorùbáIfá hex-table in 256 notations in 16×16 .



CHINESE I-CHING with 64
hexagrams in 8x8 or 2^4



YORUBÁIFÁ TABLE with 256
CORPUSES IN 16X16 OR 2^8

This compendium of *Ifá* constitutes the AKASA (a kind of ether or superior atmosphere serving as abode for the Supreme Deity) kept by Olódūmarè, from which revelations are made to man throughout the entire length and breadth of the universe. These revelations are made through the medium of selected individuals called “Prophets”, “Messengers”, “Apostles”, “Saviours”, “Avatars”, “Messiahs” Òrìsà and so on. *Ifá*, therefore, represents the Greatest Unwritten Holy Book on Earth, a perennial fountain of esoteric knowledge from which all Prophets, Messengers, Messiahs, Apostles, past, present and future sip and which message they spread at different times in human history to diverse peoples in their respective habitats. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (1981: 253) in his English translation of the Holy Quran puts it very clearly in Suratul Al Nahl (The Bee) Chapter 16:36 “Among every nation, we raise a Messenger with the message: serve God and eschew the Devil”

It is quite important for people to see Yorùbá (*Ifá*) literature as just another belief system, world view or cosmogony like other ones from Europe and Asia. Only this position can guarantee a meaningful comparative study. But when scholars, including Africans, set out from the view point of inferiorising Africans’ indigenous knowledge and culture, coming up against their own indigenous philosophy, there is a problem. Interestingly, Fagunwa has made his own marks. His exploration of indigenous lore has provided some concrete steps forward in addressing this epistemological anomaly. It is up to contemporary Africans and scholars of African Studies to make more meaning out of their world, then, now and in the future.

Notes

1. Mrs. Elizabeth Fagunwa, however, debunked this mythical perception in an interview with me 23rd March, 2014 at her Residence in Oke Igbo, Ondo State. In her words, “When they asked me the question, I told the people that I was married to a man, human, flesh and blood; for whom I bore five children; not a spirit”.

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