

Situating the Yoruba Concept of “Ori” within the Soft-Deterministic Frame Work

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Abstract

The concept of Yoruba belief in *Ori* and its significance in destiny determination have been interpreted to make Yorubas hard determinists. Several scholars and Yoruba Philosophers have tempted to interpret the concepts of *Ori* to be the sole-determinant of a man's destiny in Yorubas' theology. Though the plausibility of hard-deterministic thesis may first appear great but, according to Oladele Balogun, a critical and objective look at the salient issues that surround Yoruba religio-philosophical notion of *Ori* shows that the role of *Ori* in relation the conception of personhood to be determinism and predestination has been exaggerated and misunderstood. Virtually all Yoruba African scholars and philosophers (Olubi Sodipo, Moses Makinde, Egun Oduwole, Samuel Ali, Toyin Gbadamosi, Bolaji Idowu, Joseph Awolalu, Ade Dopamu etc) who have commented on *Ori vis-à-vis* the freewill-determinism problem have overlooked a point that the Yoruba theology of *Ori* can be used to solve the traditional freewill-Determinism Debate. But this can only be possible if such a concept (*Ori*) of a vast importance is well understood. Therefore, this is paper, using ethnographical method, investigates the possibility and plausibility of situating the concept of Yoruba notion *Ori* within the frame work of soft determinism.

Keywords: Yoruba, *Ori*, Soft-determinism, Hard determinism, Freewill

Introduction

The issue of freewill versus determinism has occupied the mind of philosophers, psychologists and theologians for centuries. According to those who believe in determinism, people's actions are totally determined by external and internal forces operating on them, contrarily, those who believe in freewill argue that matters are more complicated. Most of them accept that human beings are free to act and not to act.¹ This is the dilemma that constitutes freewill versus determinism debate. As this debate has been ongoing among the Western Philosophers, some African Philosophers, particularly within the Yoruba ethnic group, have also brought their voice to the fore on the debate. Many African scholars have done a lot of research as to what constitute the debate in the contexts of Yoruba ethnic group. However, the style of the debate in Yoruba context is not mostly Freewill versus determinism debate but “Hard determinism” versus “Soft determinism” debate. The crux of the matter in Freewill-determinism debate in Yoruba context is on whether the concept of *Ori* constitutes the notion of hard determinism or soft determinism. The major problem in the Yoruba fashion of determinism debate in relation to the theology of *Ori*, centers on the philosophical nature and the extent to which we can refer to *Ori* as hard determinant of human destiny.

The debate on the philosophical nature and significance of *Ori* and human destiny in traditional thought has been controversial. Several metaphysical interpretations have been given by various African Philosophers. According to Oladele Balogun, some of these interpretations have been in tune with fatalism, predestinationism, and hard determinism.² Works from African Philosophers like Balogun, Wande Abimbola,³ Bolaji Idowu, Segun Gbadegesin,⁴ Kola Abinbola, M.A Makinde⁵ E.O Oduwole⁶ and others reveal that the component of human personality in traditional Yoruba thought have been extensively discussed by various scholars in the field, with no definitive conclusion to be reached as to may be the Yorubas should be categorized as “hard determinists” or “soft determinists” Oladele Balogun opined that some Yoruba Philosophers are of the opinion that Yorubas are hard determinists while few others argue that the Yorubas are not hard determinists but soft determinists.

This paper argues that the Yorubas are soft determinists contrary to the view that the Yorubas are hard determinists as opined by some scholars. The view of the researcher of this paper is that an in-depth look at the religio-philosophical concept of *Ori* among the Yoruba will reveal that Yorubas are soft-determinists. This argument will be done by examining the works and arguments of those who believe in hard-deterministic

¹ A. Bell, 2001. *Debates in Psychology*, London: Routedge, 1.

² O.A Balogun, Oct., 2010. “Ori as the Sole Determinant of Human Personality in Traditional Yoruba-African Thought” *LUMINA*, Holy Name University. Vol 21, no 2

³ Wande Abimbola, 1971. *The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality*

⁴ Olusegun Gbadegesin, 1983, *Destiny, Personality and the Ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective*

⁵ M.A. Makinde, 1985. *A Philosophical Analysis of the Yoruba Concept of Ori and Human Destiny*

⁶ E.O Oduwole, 1996. *The Yoruba Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny: A Fatalistic Interpretation*

interpretation and those who believe in soft-deterministic interpretation and the plausibility of both shall be weighed.

Brief Definition of some Key Terms

Some key terms are very important to easy understand of this paper; therefore the researcher thinks it wise to briefly define them:

- a. Determinism- This is the theory that everything in the universe, including human actions, is entirely determined by causal laws, so that whatever happens at any given moment is the effect of some antecedent causes.
- b. Soft Determinism- This is the view that though an action can be determined but freewill can still play its role. This view does not preclude moral responsibility from an agent of an action. This view is more plausible than hard determinism in respect to the concept of *Ori* in Yoruba religio-philosophical notion and that is the argument of the author of this paper.

Who are the Yoruba?

The origin and philosophy of Yoruba are not in obscurity. Yoruba ethnic group occupies the South-western Nigeria and they are said to have sprung from Lamurudu, one of the Kings around Mecca or Egypt. The Lamurudu gave birth to Oduduwa and it was Oduduwa that migrated to Ile-Ife and founded the ethnic group now known as the Yorubas.¹ In a book written in Yoruba language by T. A. A. Ladele, Oyebamiji Mustapha, I.A Aworinde, Oydemi Oyerinde and Olatunbosun Oladapo,² the authors argue that though there are many and diverse stories and legends as to the origin of the Yorubas, one thing that is certain is that Oduduwa was the key progenitor of the Yoruba.³ Also, the authors posit that the origin of the Yoruba is Ile-Ife where the Yoruba's sub-ethnic groups migrated; some to Igbomina area, some to Yagba, some to Ekiti, some to Ondo state and so on and so forth. Adeleke Fakoya in his own account of Yoruba and their philosophy argues that Yoruba are a people of unique peculiarities; their history, names and names-giving, religions, politics, sociology, lifestyles, music, art, trade, oral tradition are numerous unique features by which the Yorubas can easily be identified.⁴

The Yoruba constitutes one of the major ethnic groups of modern Nigeria and they effectively occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Lagos and a substantial part of Kwara State. Apart from those found in Nigeria, the Yorubas can also be found in some parts of the Republic of Benin, Togo and Dahomey in West Africa and also some parts of South Africa. There are also some diaspora Yorubas in South America and the Caribbean, particularly in Brazil and Cuba. This paper shall focus on the Yorubas in Nigeria simply because, other Yorubas living elsewhere originated from Nigeria and their culture is very similar with little or no variance.

The traditional Yoruba are associated with various beliefs that cut across different strata of human existence. One of the most important among the Yorubas' belief is the their theology of *Ori* as determinant of one's destiny. According to Oladele Balogun, there is a well-developed body of literature in Yoruba theological studies which have dealt with the theology of *Ori* and human destiny. The Yoruba's theology of '*Ori*' and its relationship to the issue of determinism cannot be discussed adequately without discussing Yoruba's anthropological view, how do Yoruba view man and what constitutes a "man" in Yoruba philosophy?

Yoruba's Anthropological Conception

According to Hallen and Sodipo, a person in Yoruba thought is made up of three important elements: *ara* (body), *emi* (life giving element) and *ori* (spiritual head which is responsible for human destiny). This position is referred to as "tripartite." In Yoruba conception of man, *ara* (body) refers to all the tangible elements that make a person both externally and internally such as brain, intestine, heart and others. *Emi* is believed to be the immaterial element that provides the animating force or energy without which a person said to be living talk less of being conscious.⁵ Bolaji Idowu concurs with this submission when he also opined that *Emi* (life giving part of

¹ Samuel Johnson, 2009. *The History of the Yorubas from Earliest Times to the Beginning of British Protectorate*, Lagos: CSS Bookshops Limited, 3.

² T. A. A. Ladele, Oyebamiji Mustapha, I.A Aworinde, Oydemi Oyerinde and Olatunbosun Oladapo, 2006. *Akojopo Iwadi Ijinle Asa Yoruba*, Ibadan: Gavima Press, 1.

³ The space and length of this paper will not allow me to itemize and discuss the several different stories that have advanced by historians in regard to the origin of the Yorubas nevertheless one thing that is certain is that Oduduwa was the progenitor of the Yorubas and that he founded Ile-Ife, a city in the Southwest of Nigeria, and that it is from this place that the rest Yorubas left or migrated to their present settlements. See Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* for more information.

⁴ Adeleke A. Fakoya, 2009. "The Pragmatic Import of "Ori" in Yoruba Conversational Discourse" *ACTA LINGUISTICA* Lagos Vol. 3, 55.

⁵ S. Oladipo, 1992. "Predestination in Yoruba Thought: Philosopher's Interpretation" *Orita Journal of Religion* XXIV (1 &2): 45.

of man) is the life force of man, its presence or absence in man makes the difference between life and death.¹ According to Oladele Balogun, the third element in the componential analysis of man in Yoruba belief is 'Ori'. Ori represents the individuality. Ori is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. Ori is an immaterial entity; otherwise called inner-head and is intractably connected with human destiny.²

Segun Gbadegesin in his own analysis of the Yoruba concept of man, considers *ara* (body), *okan* (heart), *emi* (life giving entity) and *Ori* (inner-head) as the componential elements of a person.³ To Gbadegesin, *ara* is the physic-material part of the human and unlike Sodipo, Blaji Idowu and Wande Abimbola, that categorise *Okan* as part of *ara*, Gbadegesin distinguished between the two. Gbadegesin argues that *Okan* is not only the physical heart of a man but that there a metaphysical *okan* that helps man to take some conscious and free decision on heart. This is one the argument for soft-deterministic interpretation of Yoruba concept of man. The paper shall address it in great length later. Bolaji Idowu gives a trimorphous conception in Yoruba conception of *Ori* in relation to destiny formation.⁴ In the opinion of Bolaji Idowu, *Ori* is not only the bearer of destiny but also to be the essence of human personality which rules, controls and guides the life and activities of the person.

Kola Abimbola seems to go beyond the views of Sodipo, Gbadegesin, Idowu, Dopamu and Awolalu, and Hallen when he added the fourth element to the tripartite conception of man. To Kola Abimbola, the fourth element is *ese* (leg) which also has dual characters. Literarily *ese* means physical 'leg' but within the context of human destiny and personality,⁵ it means strife, hard work, and struggle; in short it means one's contribution to his destiny. Because of this Kola's assertion he cannot be referred to as hard determinist. This paper will address his standpoint in detail later. This third element referred to as *Ori* is the immediate concern and the point of the attention of this paper. The next section discusses, in brief detail, the myth and Concept of *Ori* in Yoruba Theology. For it is *Ori* that receives particular attention, and it is regarded as key element in the identity and destiny of a person.

The Concept and Myth of 'Ori' in Yoruba Theology

Ori (spiritual) is the ancestral guardian soul, having its physical symbolization as the physical head. *Ori* is regarded as the individual personal god who caters for individual and personal interest and needs. It is in line with this notion, that Abimbola argued that *Orisa* (gods) will not give or attend to any request from a man if such request has not been sanctioned by his *Ori*, because no *Orisa* (god) blesses a man without the consent of his or her *Ori*.⁶ Joao Ferreira Dias discussed in detail the concept of propitiating *Ori* so as to align itself to the goodness from *Orisa*.⁷ Accordingly, *Ori* as a lesser god has its own paraphernalia; the most important of which is a conical material made up leather to which cowries are sown in rows. The material according O.A Balogun,⁸ is known as *Ipori* and sacrifices are put on it during the process of the propitiation of *Ori*.

In the attempt of the Yorubas to explain how *Ori* is acquired in *Orun* (heaven) there are various myths on the methods of acquisition of *Ori*. Though this paper will not attempt exhaustive examination of these cosmological myths, some of the important points that have a great deal for a thorough understanding of the concept of *Ori* as believed by the Yorubas will be briefly mentioned.

Yorubas believe that before coming into the world, everybody was obliged to go and choose an *Ori* from among a large number of *oris* stored in *Ajala's* warehouse. *Ajala* is not a god but a superhuman being.⁹ He is the person in charge of molding *Ori* in heaven. *Orisanla* (arch divinity) is the divinity involved in the creation of man's body, *Olodumanre* (Supreme being) is the person that will put life in the body but the person will thereafter asked to go and pick one *Ori* at *Ajala's* warehouse. Meanwhile, the personality trait of *Ajala* is not

¹ E.B Idowu, 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, 123.

² O.A Balogun, 2007. "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation" *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16 (1):118.

³ Segun Gbadegesin, 1991. *African Philosophy, Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Conemporary African Realities*, Chicago: Gateway, 37.

⁴ This trimorphous conception is referred to as *akunleyan*, *akunlegba* and *ayanmo*. E.B Idowu, 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, 173.

⁵ Kola Abimbola, 2006. *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*, Birmigham, Iroko, 3.

⁶ Wande Abimbola, 1971. "The Yoruba Concept of Human Personality." *La notion de Personneen Afrique Noire Colloques Internationale de Center National de la Recherche Scientifique* (544): 82

⁷ J. F. Dias, 2013. "Ori O! The Idea of Person, the Issue of Destiny, and the Ritual of bori among the Yorubas and a look a Candomble" *Horizonte: Dossie: Religioes Afro-Brasileiras- Artigo Original*. Vol. 11, n. 29, 75.

⁸ O.A Balogun, 2007. "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation" 119.

⁹ O.A Blaogun argues on this point that is not all supernatural entities in Yoruba religion are gods or goddesses. *Ajala* is supernatural but not a god or goddesses.

very good and interesting; he is described as a debtor, drunkhard, careless and irresponsible, though a skilful potter. It is from his store that anyone coming to the world would take his own *Ori* after this *Ori* selection, the person will pass through the water of forgetfulness, which is the boundary between heaven and earth¹ Wande Abimbola, Kola Abimbola and others are scholars uphold this variant of the *Ori* Myth.

Meanwhile there is another myth, advanced by scholars such as Bolaji Idowu that excluded personality trait of the Ajala. Bolaji Idowu, Ade Dopamu, and Joseph Awolalu were not at home with the personality trait of Ajala, to them how somebody who is concern with such a sensitive assignment can would be a drunkhard, debtor and irresponsible, such a person is of a questionable character.² Therefore Bolaji Idowu and other scholars of the same camp with him support the other mythological account of *Ori* selection. In the myth advanced by these scholars, the choosing and acquisition of *Ori* is done by kneeling before *Olodunmare* (Supreme Deity) and this is done in the presence of the arch-divinity "*Orunmila*" that is why he is referred to as "*elerin ipin*"

The differences in these variants notwithstanding, all acknowledge the Yoruba belief in the importance of *Ori* in relation to a person's destiny. These two cosmological myths involving the acquisition of *Ori* show that the concept of *Ori* holds a great deal of metaphysical relevance among the Yorubas. Firstly, when the *Ori* is chosen in heaven the person concerned is not conscious, and the act of the choosing is free not coerced. Second, the content of the *Ori* chosen by the concerned person became unknown to him latter because of *Omi Igbagbe* (water of forgetfulness). These then made the *Ori* to become the personal spirit or guardian of one's destiny. It is the indicator of one's destiny in life. The choice of a good *Ori* ensures one to be successful while the choice of bad *Ori* is otherwise. This is the origin of the concepts of "*olori rere*" and *olori buruku* among the Yorubas. That is, the events in individuals' lives are the determinant factors of ascertaining the types of *Ori* one is bearing.³

Awolalu and Dopamu stress that it is *Ori-inu* housed by the physical *Ori* that helps and guide the life of a person from birth to death and that is why the Yoruba would say:

Ori laba bo

Ti aba fi orisa sile

Nitori oogun lo ni ojo kan iponju

Ori eni lo ni ojo gbogbo

That is, it is *Ori* that needs to be worshipped and not deities. For charms are for the troubled days only, only one's *Ori* stands by man every day. Following the above explication of the Yoruba belief in *Ori* and human destiny, some scholars and philosophers have interpreted the concept of *Ori* to represents hard-determinism. This paper now shifts its attention to how the concept of *Ori* as interpreted by the hard-deterministic interpreters.

Hard deterministic interpretation

It is good to briefly look at the hard-deterministic interpreters' arguments. This will allow for a thorough and scholarly critique of their position. The hard deterministic interpreters argue that the acquisition of *Ori* in heaven signifies that every activity of man on earth has been pre-ordained at the point when man chose his *ipin-ori* with Ajala or Olodunmare. They argue that since man's *Ori* has been chosen from heaven there is not anything a man can do to alter any part of his or her destiny. This is equal to fatalism, a form of hard determinism. Some of the scholars in this school of thought include Taylor Richard, E.O Oduwole , Bolaji Idowu, Salami Y.K and others. These scholars interpret Yoruba concept of *Ori* hard-deterministically.

Taylor argues that the fatalistic interpretation fits most to the Yoruba theology of *Ori*. He opined that the important episode in the life of a typical Yoruba man have been chosen, sealed and extremely difficult to change.⁴ In the same manner, E.O Oduwole argues that Yoruba concept of *Ori* should be interpreted as indicating hard-determinism. As cited by Oladele Balogun, Oduwole, she argues that the concept of *Ori* among the Yorubas points to the fact human biography has been written coming in to the world, such that whatever he does is done out of free will but because it has been pre-determined. She argued that even the choosing of *Ori* in heaven is not a freewill case, but a determined case, because one is not free not have chosen his or her *Ori*. Therefore she posits that the concept of *Ori* among the Yorubas preclude any trace of freewill, any possibility of destiny alteration and any case for moral responsibility. These hard determinists argued that the notion of chance or freedom or freewill for man is an illusion with respect to the Yoruba theology of *Ori*. They are of the opinion that once one's destiny has been chosen, it becomes doubly sealed and totally impossible to change. Wande

¹ O.A Balogun, 2007. "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation" 122.

² Uchenna Izuogu, 2000. *Concept of Human Personality: Ayanmo, Akunleyan, Akinlegbe, Kadara and Akosile as Believed by the Yoruba*, p12.

³ O.A Balogun, 2007. "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft Deterministic Interpretation" 124.

⁴ Richard Taylor, 1983. *Metaphysics*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 52.

Abimbola appears to be a hard-deterministic interpreter in his earlier works such as “Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account, but in his later works.¹ In his latter works, Wande Abimbola argues in favour of soft-deterministic interpretation of the concept of *Ori*. His argument will be discussed later in this paper.

The hard deterministic interpretation of *Ori* discussed above is not appropriate and philosophically inadequate and does not represent the Yoruba concept of *Ori* very well. The argument fails to properly the other factors that are necessary for the determination of man’s destiny in Yoruba context, it also fails to account for the moral standard as uphold by the Yorubas. If hard deterministic interpretation is accepted, then the question of moral responsibility will be absent, and this will be in stark conflict with Yoruba understanding of *Iwa* (good character). This paper turns its attention to the soft-deterministic interpretation of the concept.

Towards a Soft-Deterministic Interpretation of Yoruba Concept of *Ori*

The temptation to consider the metaphysical nature of the Yoruba belief in *Ori* and human destiny in light of fatalism or hard-determinism may appear natural but it is incorrect. (and this is Balogun’s thesis). Some of the scholars who support the soft-deterministic interpretation are Oladele Balogun, Wande Abimbola, Segun Gbadegesin and others. The paper gives the arguments for soft-deterministic interpretation in the following paragraphs.

First, a critical and a deeper look at Yoruba concept of *Ori* does not preclude other important entities in the determination of one’s destiny. In other words, it is not *Ori* alone that determines all aspect of a man’s destiny. There are other factors that are involved in destiny determination, and some of these factors do not lie at the frame work of predestination, coercion or fatalism, rather on the framework of human freewill. As advanced by Oladele Balogun and Wande Abimbola, *Ori* is limited to the issues of material success or material misfortune; things like wealth, riches and success in one’s life. *Ori* has nothing to do with moral character; therefore it does not affect all aspects of human destiny. If *Ori* has nothing or less to do in determining one’s character that means the concept of *Ori* among the Yorubas is not to be interpreted within the line of hard determinism. Nowhere in Yoruba’s tradition is there a trace of *Ori* determining human character and moral life. Juxtaposing the hard deterministic interpretation given to Yoruba concept of *Ori* and that of soft-deterministic interpretation, one we easily notice a problem with the hard deterministic interpretation. The hard-deterministic school tends to have pressed too far and exaggerated the role played by the *Ori* in Yoruba view of destiny. This exaggeration is in conflict with the concept of personal morality and good behaviour as upheld by the Yorubas. If *Ori* determines everything exclusively, then can there be any room for morality, sin and punishment, and good behaviour and reward. This posits a great ethical problem. Meanwhile, soft-deterministic interpretation solves this dilemma. *Ori* does not preclude the importance of *Iwa* (morals) from the making of a destiny, and then establishing the case for soft-determinism becomes more resonant with the Yoruba cultural belief.

Secondly, the tenacity with which the concept of creativity, and spirit of hard working are held among the Yorubas conflict with the hard-deterministic school. Yorubas believe that one need not to be passive in his affairs. Man, in Yoruba thought, is to work hard and bring to himself a good future. In view of this, if Yorubas are fatalist as some people have opined, then it means there is nothing a man does that affect his fate. This is in conflict with Yoruba concept of virtues like “hard working”

Also, the fact that a destiny chosen by one’s *Ori* cannot be altered, as advanced by the hard deterministic school, is only plausible at face value. According to Oladele Balogun:

Upon a deeper reflection and practical experience, several factors have occasioned an alteration in destiny on earth; either for good or bad. An individual’s destiny may be changed for good or for bad. Instances of this abound within the Yoruba cultural milieu. The Yoruba believe in the consultation of the god of divination (*Orunmila*) to know the kind of *ori* one had chosen and to perhaps alter an unfavorable destiny through the help of some spiritual forces and by the application of the right type of sacrifices. *Ebo* (Sacrifice) among the Yoruba is believed to be capable of influencing human destiny either for good or bad. Sacrifice is a form of communication between the natural and the supernatural realms of the Yoruba cosmos.²

Kola Abimbola agrees with this Balogun’s assertion when he avers that sacrifice and other religio-cultural activities can indeed alter one’s destiny. This conclusion resonates well with the concept of God and divinities among the Yorubas. The Yorubas believe the man-God relationship is on the basis of reciprocity. That is, when God is appeased via sacrifice or other means, then God also will bring good fortune to the person concerned. It is believed by the Yoruna that “*Riru ebo ni n gbeni, ai ru ebo kii gbe eniyan*, that is ‘making or offering a sacrifice favours one but refusal to do so is not profitable.’ Since the concept of appeasing gods and goddesses is a viable

¹ Wande Abimbola, 1975. “Iwapele: The Concept of Good Character in Ifa Literary Corpus” *Yoruba Oral Tradition*. University of Ibadan, Ibadan 406.

² O.A Balogun, “Ori as the Sole Determinant of Human Personality in Traditional Yoruba-African Thought,” 125.

belief in the Yoruba religio-cultural milieu, then the hard deterministic interpretation is not plausible. Because Yoruba believe that one's life can be made better by appeasing to a god, this then points to soft-determinism, a case whereby there is a cooperation between an agent external to one and one's effort.

Furthermore, Yorubas believe that there are factors at inter-play that can make what *Ori* has chosen in heaven to come to pass. If these factors are not in place then *Ori* cannot bring to actualization that which it has chosen in heaven. Wande Abimbola and Kola Abimbola added the concept of metaphysical *ese* (leg) and *Okan* (heart). Accordingly, *ese* is the principle of human strife, which means that even if one has chosen good *Ori* in heaven, he still needs to struggle so that his *Ori* will be realized. Accordingly *ese* is like a catalyst to the realization or otherwise of one's destiny.¹ Wande Abimbola in his work title "*Iwapele: The Concept of Good character in Ifa Literary Corpus*" argues that when a person chooses good or bad head from heaven, he or she needs to compliment it with the use of "*ebo*" and "*ese*". The use of *ese* involves decisive struggle and hard work to achieve a desirable personality.² Wande Abimbola argues that it is not only *Ori* that determines solely one's destiny but it is the function of components of *Ori*, (metaphysical head), *ese* (metaphysical leg), and *Iwa* (Character), *ara* (metaphysical body), *emi* (metaphysical soul), that jointly determine human destiny in Yoruba thought. This position is plausible when one looks at what Ifa literary corpus *Ose Meji* verse ten says about the importance of *iwa* (good behaviour) and its relevance to the actualization of one's destiny:

Inu bibi o da nnkan, suuru baba iwa;
Agba t'oni suuru, ohun gbogbo l'o ni;
Dia fun ori, a bu fun iwa.
T'iwa nikan lo soro;
Ori kan o buru n'ile Ife; t'iwa nikan lo soro.

Indignation does not bring forth anything good;
Patience is the best of character
A patient elder has everything;
The truth of this thesis is adequately demonstrated
in the incidence of destiny that lacks character.
Nurturing as well as exhibiting good character is difficult;
No destiny is bad in pristine Ife;
It is only nurturing and exhibiting good character that is difficult.³

According to Fayemi Ademola and Oladele Balogun, in Yoruba thought, *Ori* is not in the part of freewill of man but his *Iwa* (character) is within the part of his free will. This then points to soft-deterministic interpretation of the concept of *Ori*.

Kola Abimbola and Segun Gbadegesin's addition of *Okan* (heart) as part of man components also posts a great problem to the hard-deterministic interpretation of the concept of *Ori* among the Yorubas. Accordingly, *Okan* also plays a very vital role in man's decision making. Yorubas have the notion of "*eni ti ko ni okan*" that is somebody who does not have heart. This does not mean that that person does not have physical heart but metaphysical one. This metaphysical heart can be equaled to one's act of rashness or patience which can affect one's destiny. It is believed that a man that does have good *Okan* can be impatient and this can affect his destiny. Therefore *Okan* also has a role to play in the making of a destiny. Therefore, the Yorubas can be referred to as soft-determinists not hard-determinists because the said *Okan* is under the control of the person concerned and lies within the frame work of his freewill.

Another argument that can be advanced in favour of soft-deterministic concept of *Ori* in Yoruba context is the Yoruba theology of self causation. The Yoruba, according to Oladele Balogun, traces the cause of some events to the individual person who performs the action and not any supernatural force outside of man. Such actions are located within the realm of what they call "*Afowofa*" (the infliction of a problem on oneself or causation of a problem by oneself). It is believed that apart from what *Ori* has chosen in heaven, there are other things a man can do to affect himself or herself. This then suggests that in the analysis of concept of *Ori* in Yoruba thought, the Yoruba fall within the gamut of soft-determinism. Because a man in Yoruba thought, is held responsible for present actions deliberately performed by them.

In line with this concept of self-causation is the case for "*Iwa*" It is believed by the Yorubas that *Iwa* constitutes part of what make one destiny in Yoruba thought. *Iwa rere* (good character) constitutes a fundamental moral and psychological attributes a person is expected to have, along with being truthful and

¹ O.A Balogun, 126.

² Wande Abimbola, *Iwapele: The Concept of Good character in Ifa Literary Corpus*, 32.

³ Fayemi, Ademola Kazeem., 2009. "Human Personality and the Yoruba Worldview: An Ethico-Sociological Interpretation" *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 2, no.9, 170.

honest.¹ In Yoruba philosophy of life, there are three types of *Ire*. They are “*Ire Owo*” (material fortune), *Ire Omo* (fortune of fertility), and *Ire aiku to pari Iwa* (fortune of health that is associated with good character). The only *Ire* that *Ori* chooses for a person exclusively, according to Wande Abimbola, is *Ire owo* (material fortune). Other *Ires* (other fortunes) are to be chosen by the man himself. No matter how good the *Ori* chosen by a man is, it cannot give him *Iwa rere*. *Ire Iwa* is to be chosen by freewill by each person who wishes so. Therefore, the concept of *Ori* among the Yorubas is not tending toward hard-determinism as some people have opined.

Another argument is the argument from Yoruba scriptures. As argued by Wande Abimbola nowhere in any of the ancient, Yoruba scriptures like *Ifa*, *Ijala*, *Esa Egungun* and others, is there a claim that moral character can be predetermined by *Ori*. For example *Ifa* poems make a very clear cut distinction among the portion of human destiny that is to be chosen by *Ori*, the part that is to be chosen by *ese* (leg) and the part that is to be chosen by *Iwa*. In the very book of *Ifa* literary corpus, *Eji Ogbe*, a major distinction is made between *Ori* and *ese* (leg).

To ba se pe ori gbogbo nii sun posi
Iroko gbogbo I ba ti tan nigbo
A difa fun igba eni
Ti n'torun bo waye
To ba se ori gbogbo nii sun posi
Iroko gbogbo iba ti tan in gbo
A difa fun igba ese ti n torun bow aye
Owere la n ja gbogbo wa
Owere la n ja
Eni ya ori re o to nkann,
*Owere la n ja gbogbo wa Owere la n ja.*²

Had it been that all “oris” were meant to sleep in coffins
The “iroko” tree would have become extinct.
Which divines, for two hundred “ese” (leg). When they were coming to “aye”
(world) from orun (spirit world above). We are all exerting
great effort to succeed, all of us. We are all exerting great
effort to succeed. Those who selected “ori” for material
successes are few. We are all putting in great effort to succeed.

This shows there are few people who have chosen good *Ori* but even the bad destiny chosen by *Ori* can be made by *Owere*. This *Owere* involves good character, striving and hardworking and correct application of ebo (sacrifice). The arguments presented so far on the soft-deterministic interpretation of *Ori* among the Yoruba are very plausible and grounded in the Yorubas’ religio-cultural belief system than that of hard-deterministic interpretation.

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper has established that the concept of *Ori* and human destiny in traditional Yoruba thought should be placed in soft-deterministic interpretation and not hard-deterministic. The argument in this paper supports that of Oladele Balogun, who opposed the hard-deterministic interpretation by some scholars. Some of the reasons why some scholars are hard-deterministic in their interpretation of Yoruba thought on *Ori* has been discussed and are found to be baseless and a sheer exaggeration. This paper has brought out some of the salient difficulties that are inherent in such a hard-deterministic approach.

It is in this regard that this paper, following Oladele Balogun, Wande Abimbola, Segun Gbadegesin and others, argues that the best interpretation of the Yoruba religio-philosophical concept of *Ori* is instead to be put in soft-deterministic framework. Yoruba concept of ethical living, need for hard working and pro-activeness toward life, anthropological conception, self-causation (*afowofa*) and some verses in *Ifa* corpus support the fact that *Ori* should be interpreted in soft-determinism. This argument is tenable because, among other things, it correlates rightly with the Yoruba moral and ethical notion as part of one’s destiny.

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² Ifayemi Elelbuibon, 2004. *Ifa: The Custodian of Detsiny*, Ibadan: Penthouse Publications, 11.

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