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THE METAPHYSICAL CONCEPT OF ORI AND IPONRI In-depth metaphoric and mythical comparison in the study of the Yoruba tradition of Ifa.

by: Adeyinka Olaiya / Brazil



In Yoruba theology, perhaps nothing is more complex than Ori's metaphysical concept, associated in various ways with the physical head (the skull), personal Orisa, consciousness, destiny, human soul and ancestral guardian angel. It can be considered as the Yoruba theory of consciousness, or as the Yoruba theory of destiny, or both. In my view, our Ori is our soul, which contains consciousness (knowledge, wisdom, thought and emotion) as well as our predetermined destiny and is our connection to the source, as well as all things that contain consciousness. Within the mystery of Ori is another mystery, "Ori Inu", our inner self; the divine spark. A third component of the "Ori complex" is "Iponri"- our higher self. It is our mirror image that resides in Orun, the invisible kingdom of immortals.

The Yorubas believe that creation exists in two complementary dimensions: the visible world, called Aye, the physical universe in which we live, and the invisible world, called Orun, inhabited by supernatural beings and the "doubles" of everything that manifests in Aye. (In Odu, there are references to seven planes in each dimension). These dimensions are not to be confused with heaven and earth. There is no strict division; they exist in the same space. Aye is a "projection" of the essential reality that takes place in Orun. Everything that exists also exists in Orun.

It is necessary to understand that Aye and Orun constitute a unit and, as expressions of two levels of existence, they are indivisible and complementary. There is a complete identity between them; one is just an inverted image of the other (Teixeira de Oliveira). The Yoruba also believe in reincarnation (Atunwa), and atunwa is the

basis of the ancestors 'reverence . The world is seen as a continuous cycle of life and death ; the universe being a fusion of the material and the spiritual in a rhythmic cycle , there is a constant interaction between the visible and the invisible kingdoms (Adekunle Aderounmu).All forms of good and evil begin in Orun . There are supernatural powers that are good and bad (Prof. Wande Abimbola) . Our ancestors and Orisas are basically good, although if you are not aligned with them , it can cause bad things , supernatural powers that are inherently evil are called Ajogun . Yoruba cosmology says that all things are conscious , including mountains , rivers , rocks and trees



Odun-Ifa in Igbo-ifa . Dec. 01-2020, Saopaulo, Brazil

In order to understand the Ori complex , we need to start at the beginning, the Yoruba creation myth . There are variations in the myth and , in my opinion , there are actually two separate story lines . One is cosmogenic .The two intertwined in the most popular version. In this cause , the concept of Ori is a connector to understanding the metaphysics of the Yoruba religion.

Ori, Obatala , the Olumori, and the Yoruba creation myth .

Orisanla(Obatala) was the arch deity chosen by Olodumare to create a solid land out of the primordial abyss that constituted the land and to populate the land with human beings . Olodumare (the creator) called Obatala (Head of the White cloth - meaning the fabric of creation) for Ikole Orun (the kingdom of the ancestors) on the day that he wanted to create dry land in the waters of Ikole Aye (visible kingdom) Obatala knelt before Olodumare and said that he did not know the Awo (mystery) of creating

land in Ikole Aye . Olodumare told Obatala that he would give him Ase(power) to make land in Ikole Aye . He descended from Orun to Aiye in a chain , carrying a snail shell full of soil , palm kernels and a five fingered chicken . He should empty the contents of the snail shell in to the water after putting some pieces of iron in it and then placing the chicken on the ground to spread it over the primordial water , doing what the chickens do , which is scratching the ground . According to this version of the myth , Obatala completed this task to the satisfaction of Olodumare .He was given the task of creating the physical body of human beings , after which Olodumare would give them the breath of life (Emi) He also completed this task and that is why he has the title “ Obarisa” , the king of Orisas

Another variant of the cosmogenic myth does not attribute to Ọbatalá the completion of the task. Although he admits that Ọbatalá was in charge of the task, he says that Ọbatalá got drunk with palm wine before he even arrived on Earth and fell asleep: Ogun took all the Iworo (gold) and forged a long ewon (chain)which he launched towards Ìkọ̀lé Aye (land). Ọbatalá put his ase (power) in a bag and began to descend the ewon. When he reached the bottom step, he saw that he was still some distance from the primitive waters.

Ọbatalá removed the igbin shell (snail) from its bag and sprayed the soil in the primitive waters. Then he removed the five-fingered etu (Guinea fowl) and threw it on the ground. As soon as the etu reached the ground, it began to scratch the ground, spreading the dust over the surface of the primary waters. Seeing that the ground was firm, Ọbatalá removed an ikin (palm nut) and threw it on the ground. The ikin sprouted and became a palm tree. When the palm grew to its maximum height, it reached the last ring of the ìwòrò ‘won (gold chain). Obatala was able to pass from the ewon to the palm tree. After descending the tree, Ọbatalá began to mold humans from the clay of the Earth. While working, he got tired and decided he needed to rest. Taking the fruits of the palm, he made palm wine and drank until he was ready to go back to work. The humans he molded while drunk didn't look like the others, but Obatala didn't notice and kept drinking until he fell asleep. While Ọbatalá slept, Olodumare gave the task of finishing Creation to Odùdúwà (sometimes said to be Obatala's brother). Olodumare waited for Ọbatalá to wake up from his drunken sleep and told him it was taboo for Ọbatalá to taste palm wine again. When Ọbatalá saw what had happened to the humans he had created while drunk, he agreed to protect all children for future generations. It is said that Ọrúnmilà had warned Obatala not to make his clothes dirty, but they got dirty during drunkenness. It was Obatala who said he would never let his white clothe get dirty again. To date, those that adore Obatala says

“Ọbatalá o su n'nu ala,

Ọbatalá o ji n'nu ala,

Ọbatalá o tinu ala dide,

ba Ọbatalá",

The Head of the White Cloth sleeps in white, The head of the white cloth wakes up in the White Cloth, The head of the white cloth gets up from White, I greet the head of the white cloth

In the above interpretation, Odùdúwà is the founder of the Yorùbá people, nothing more, nothing less. However, in the first interpretation, there is no Odùdúwà. If we look at Odu, we will find mention of Odùdúwà feminine. If we analyze the name Odùdúwà, it is obvious that we have the word "Odu", which means uterus and is always used to express the mystery of the feminine principle. So we have "dudu", which means black or dark; and "iwa", which means character. So, what we have is: "The mystery of the character of the dark womb". The dark uterus is the source of the feminine principle, so something like "manifestation of the dark principle". It then appears that this female entity was at some point transformed into the male parent of the Yorùbá. Could this have happened when the matrilineal system was changed to patrilineal? Translator's note: (Here we see a distortion with the names of Odùdúwà-Odua / Odùdúwà, the female deity and the warrior coming from the East that unifies the Yoruba peoples and is considered the father of the nation). Whatever the case, land construction is a symbolic reference to the foundation of the Yorùbá kingdoms, which is why Odùdúwà is credited with this achievement. Odùdúwà's progeny were sixteen in number and became kings. So Odùdúwà was the first king of the Yorùbá nation and founded Ile Ife, the old capital, creating a succession of kings all related to him. Again, this version incorporates the story into the creation myth. Establishes the divine nature of the founder Odùdúwà. Some say that before Odùdúwà's time, the story did not involve atalbatalá getting drunk and Odùdúwà finishing the job. However, as interesting as this debate is, it is really not important for Ori's discussion. What is important is the symbolism. The chain is representative for Ogun, in fact we are talking about the DNA chain. How can atalbatalá reach Earth? Ogun paves the way. Ogun pushes creation to evolve, to move forward. Atalbatalá arrives at Ile Ife and starts to make his way through the forest, but he cannot do it with his silver machete, the metal is very soft. So Ogun takes over with his iron machete.

The five-fingered hen represents Osun. Five is the sacred number of Osun, the Yorùbá goddess of love, fertility and abundance. In the early stages of evolution, diversity is created on the earth's surface through the interaction, combination and recreation of the basic elements. This diversity is an expression of the fertility and abundance manifested by Osun's power. Walnuts (ikin) represent Ọrúnmilà. Obatala can create the land, but needs Osun to "fertilize it" and Ogun to create civilization. However, Ogun cannot create a policy. For that, we need Ọrúnmilà, which brings the ethical basis to society. These Ọrìṣà, in combination, represent unity and a balance of forces. Unity and balance (in a cosmos of dualities and diversity) become the central paradigm of Yorùbá metaphysical thinking. In the words of Awo Fatunmbi:

“ the world begins with one , the one that is formed through the perfect balance between the powers of expansion and contraction, light and darkness ... the balance between the male and female powers , and this is a microcosm of everything that is ...

" In addition, the Ikin (palm oil nut) grow on the palm (the sacred palm of Ifa) which Obatala descends. Within the Ifa religion, the palm tree is considered the sacred tree of life. Most Earth-centered religions designate a specific tree to symbolize the transformation of all things as they progress through the cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth. Here is an excerpt from Falokun Fatunmbi on Obatala and the metaphysics of the creation myth:

Ọbatalá is the spirit of the head of the white cloth in the West African religious tradition called "Ifa". The word Obatala is the name given to describe a complex convergence of spiritual forces that are key elements in the Ifa concept of consciousness. The Spiritual Forces that form the basis of the role of Ọbatalá in the Spiritual Kingdom are related to the movement between dynamics and form, as it exists in the universe. According to Ifa, dynamics and shape represent the polarity between the forces of expansion and contraction. Together, these forces create light and darkness, which in turn sustain and define everything that is. Ifa teaches that it is the interaction between light and darkness that generates the physical universe, and it is Obatala that brings this interaction to the Being.

Obatala's power is described by Ifa as one of the many spiritual forces of nature that are called "orisas". The word Ọrìṣà means "Select Head". In a cultural context, Ọrìṣà is a reference to the various Forces of Nature that guide consciousness. According to Ifa, everything in nature has some form of consciousness called "Ori". The Ori of all animals, plants and humans are believed to be guided by a specific Force of Nature (Ọrìṣà), which defines the quality of a specific form of consciousness. There are a large number of Ọrìṣà, and each Ọrìṣà has its own awo (mystery). The unique function of Obatala within the realm of Ọrìṣà Awo (Mysteries of Nature) is to provide the spark of light that animates consciousness. To call a Ọrìṣà "Head of the White Cloth" is to make a symbolic reference to that substance that makes consciousness possible. The reference to White Cloth is not a reference to the material used to make the cloth, it is a reference to the fabric that unites the universe. The threads of this fabric are the layers of consciousness at various levels that Ifa teaches that exist in all things, at all levels of Being. Ifa teaches that it is the ability of the Forces of Nature to communicate with each other, and the ability of humans to communicate with the Forces of Nature that give the world a sense of spiritual unity. It is the understanding of this ability that gives substance to the Ifa concept of good character, and it is Obatala that guides us to the development of that understanding

Ifa teaches that all Forces of Nature arise through the manifestation of energy patterns called Odu. Ifa identified and labeled Odu differently, which can be thought of as different expressions of consciousness. But since consciousness itself is generated by Ọbatalá, every Odu contains an element of Obatala ase (power). In metaphysical terms, this means that all Creation is linked to Ọbatalá as the Source of Being. Ifa teaches that all forms of consciousness contain a spark of Ọbatalá ase (spiritual power), and it is this spark that links everything that is, to its shared beginning. Western science teaches that all of Creation evolved from the light produced during

the primordial explosion in the beginning of time. Ifa teaches that all Creation evolved from the white mantle of Ọbatalá. Remember that Ọrìṣà and other entities presented in the Yoruba myths, itọn and Odu, have deep philosophical connotations that start at the metaphysical level, descending in aesthetics and then epistemological, moving on to ethical meanings and, eventually, to positive or negative social effects. (it is easy to get caught by the personalities themselves). Individual metaphysical phenom come together as a unit of substances in a universe of relativistic existence (Adeyinka Olaiya/Igbo-Ifa, Brazil). This idea is expressed in the most convincing part of the story; the snail full of earth dust. In Odu Okanran Ọ̀gúndá, there is another version of the creation myth that is not well known. In this version, it is Orunmila who carries the snail shell full of the substance that creates earth in primordial waters. The Snail was removed from Olodumare's headquarters and handed over to Orunmila with authority to create the land. In the process of creation, Ọ̀rúnmìlà dipped his hands into the snail shell and took measurements of the earth's dust (this dust is called Oro, primordial matter and God's word) with which the earth was created in the primordial waters. Odu Ọ̀sá 'Ọ̀gúndá

There were no living things.

The priest of the Earth

What was suspended but did not come down

The priest of heaven

Everything was just empty space

Substance –free

It was the mid -air priest

Ifa was launched for Aye and Orun

In the two empty snail shells

There were no birds or spirits living in them

Odumare was then created

Being the primary cause

Aye's only stage

He is the only cause in creation

The only sage in Orun

Who created humans

When he had no companion

He applied wisdom to the situation

To avoid any disaster

He alone The only one in Orun

It's the name of Odumare

The only sage

Appreciate

The only knowledgeable mind

You created man

Hearing one side of argument

You judge and everyone is satisfied

Ase oo!

Oro, cause of great concern for the wise and experienced. Sounding, "Ku" (making the heart skip a beat) "Ke" (like a heavy object hitting the ground) "Gi" (making the last sound before silence) "La", with a loud popping sound, is transformed into a new state called "Elà". The oro that falls from the elderly is wonderful It was guessed to Oro-oro oro That I had no one to communicate with and then started to moan.

It is part of the Ọrúnmilà complex. Ọrúnmilà can be considered the anthropomorphic representation of Olódùmarè's wisdom, "ogbon", knowledge - "imo" wisdom and "oye" sensitivity; the most powerful particles or elements in earth dust or excrement Orunmila's connection with Ori is fundamental to the Ori complex. He is "Eleri ìpìn", the deity of destiny. He was present at the time of creation and therefore knows the destiny of all Ori. He acts as a mediator between a person and his Ori through his ability to speak Ifa's words, when they relate to the individual Ori and his destiny. Ifa is Oraculo. It is the invisible energy that moves between the oracle and Ọrúnmilà, and between Ori and Olodumare - the umbilical cord. Elà is Oro after reaching the primordial abyss. This means that the substance of creation, when it passes from Ọrùn to the visible realm, undergoes a change; it becomes "physical" or "manifested". Oro, as a primary matter, has an innate desire to communicate:

HOORO, HOO-RO! (Ogbon, Imo, Oye, come down!) Olodumare made HOO (Ogbon, Imo, Oye) HOO went down to become Hoo-ro Elà made Oro digestible and useful for human needs It is the manifestation of the primary desire to communicate. It is the link between human and God; human and human; and human and the universe. This extensionist concept, prevalent in all religions, is Oro, which manifests itself as Elà. Its individual manifestation is Ori. The Snail can be seen as the principle of natural extensionism that forms a basis for what can be seen and what cannot; the physical Ori (your skull) and Ori-inu (consciousness, soul). There is a Yorùbá phrase, Ori-Ooro, which means "head at dawn", dawn being the beginning obviously. So, on a level of meaning, that is, as oro is the dust of the earth in the snail shell and each ori has a small pinch inside it, we can say that Ori is Oro and Oro is Ori:

Ori lo nda eni

Esi ondaye, Orisa lo npa eni da

O npa Orisa da

Orisa lo pá nida

Bi isu won sun

Aye ma pá temi da

Ki Ori mi ma se Ori

Ki Ori mi ma gba abode

Ori is the creator of all things Ori is the one who makes everything happen, before life happens He is the Òrìṣà who can change humans No one can change Òrìṣà Ori, the Òrìṣà that changes man's life like cooked yam (abundance) Yes, don't change my destiny Ori don't let people disrespect me Ori don't let me be disrespected by anyone My Ori, do not accept evil This extensionist concept (from God to human), that our Ori is composed of a portion of Oro (each Ori receives a portion with its own special combination of elements contained in the dust of the earth - oro - of the snail shell, therefore, each ori an individuality), is further clarified in the words "Ori lo da ni, enikan o d'Ori o" (It was the head that created us; no one created the head) and, "ori eni, l'Eleda eni" (A Someone's head is the Creator), and also in the following oriki:

Ori lo da mi

Eniyan ko o

Olorun ni

Ori lo da mi

My ori is my Creator

Not a man

Olorun created me

My Ori is my Creator

Olodumare created Hoo, which is composed of three of the most powerful elements contained in the "dust of the earth" sprayed on the snail shell - Ogbon (wisdom), Imo (knowledge) and Oye (sensitivity). "Ro" means to descend, as in the song: "Elà ro, Elà ro, Elà ro". Olodumare is said to have created Ogbon, Imo and Oye as an intermediate force to create more beings. He tried to find a place to live, but they came back to him, humming, and Olodumare swallowed them. They hummed within him for millennia, so He had to get rid of them. Olodumare ordered them "ro" to come down, saying "hoo-ro". Oro, the solid matter, melted and was suspended in the air like jelly. Oro then fell and "la" - entered a new state called E-la, or Elà. Ọrúnmilà functions in the Ifa

divination complex as the personification of Ogbon, Imo and Oye. Elà is the recognized authorized source of communication and explanation of the nature of Olodumare and of all his creation (Abiodun). Oro is "divine energy" because it exists at the source (Olórun). As Ọbafẹmi jégédé says: "Elà is the downward force or energy, which brings everything to reality. Therefore, the word oro means that which descends, while Elà is the power that makes it explicit". Okanran Meji:

Tá lo ko wi ?

Ela lo ko wi

Tá lo ko so ?

Ela lo ko so

Ta wa ni en pe ni Ela?

Hoo to ro na

Ni an pe ni Ela

Ase !

Who was the first to speak? Elà was the first to speak. Who was the first to communicate? She was the first to communicate. Who is this Elà? It was Hoo who came down that we call Ela

Oro is also the word of "God" who created the universe. This is a central principle of Ifa; the power of the spoken word. Some use Oro and Ofo interchangeably, but I see Oro as the general energy of sound and Ofo as enchantments. According to Ọbafẹmi Jegede, a word said in the atmosphere can travel for two hundred years before becoming extinct. The spells travel through space to do what they were sent quickly. Sound travels at 340 meters per second. Every sound has weight (ro) "ki, ku, ke" as it reverberates; what we call transcendental vibration. Spells are used by awo to manipulate physical and nonphysical forces to fulfill a desire for themselves or others. Ofo can be used for good or bad purposes. In odu Eji Ogbè, we learn that good and bad experiences in our lives are interconnected to fulfill our destiny. In Odu Ọ̀gúndá Ogbè, we find more references to Caracol and Oro: He did the divination for the snail in Orun . "Aba se kere mu leégún, Adifa fun ibikunle to ma nu kan kunle ara le"



Yoruba traditional worshippers in Brazil

The umbrella tree is short when young, but a little later it will become taller than the roof of the house. That was the name of the Awo who did Ibikunle's divination, when she alone would occupy her home alone (Ibikunle is a praise name for Caracol and means the one who produced enough children to fill her home). She was advised to make ebo with chicken, mouse and fish. She made the ebo and started producing children to fill her house. Later, he guessed to his friend "Oro poki poki, Erigidí pa , adifa fun Oro niyo ti Oro wo orun kenge kenge"

High-pitched sound and a loud sound are the names of the Awo (priest) who made divination for Oro when he was so sick that he thought he was going to die (note that the snail is referred to as her and Oro as he) when he was looking down at *Ọ̀rùn* , its place hovering in the air. He was advised to make ebo with eko, akara, mouse, fish and chicken. After preparing the ebo, the Ifa priests told him to carry it on his head (ori) to Esu's sanctuary. He was also told that, upon arriving at the sanctuary, he should turn from the shore and lean his head back, so that the ebo would fall into the sanctuary (recognizing Esu as the hole space between *Ọ̀rùn* and Aye, dark and light). As soon as he allowed the sacrifice to fall into Esu's sanctuary, while still retreating to Esu, a voice instructed him to stretch his hands and feet (hands and feet working in unison; alignment with destiny) forward. First, he stretched the left limbs and then the right (with the help of Esu, he transitions from the invisible to the visible plane. Darkness of the left limbs, light of the right limbs). The moment he did this, the illness (ibi) that had hit his body to the point of incapacitation suddenly disappeared. From the sanctuary, he started dancing and singing in praise going towards Awo's house. Awo praised Ifa, and Ifa praised Olodumare. When he started dancing, Esu put a song in his mouth:

ljo logo ji jo, erigidi kpíi, erigidi

Ijo logo ji jo , erigidi kpi kpi kpi, erigidi

In the ẹṣẹ (verse) above about the snail , we see that the snail is also known as Ibikunle, "the one who produced enough children to fill his house". That is a name of praise. It refers to the role of the Snail in creating everything in the universe, in this case, the Earth, including humans. In the verse following that of the snail, about Oro, we find in the names of the Awo, reference to the sounds of Oro falling and becoming Elà. Elà speaks through Owe (proverbs, Odu, oriki, chants, ofo ase, etc.) and Àrokò (codified symbolic messages - drums, sculpture, dance, music, poetry, etc.). Owe is Oro's horse; if Oro gets lost, Owe is employed to find him. It is the Spirit of Elà who gives the chance to invoke Odu and all the Spirits who manifest themselves through Ifa's oral scriptures. The historical prophet Ọrúnmilà was an incarnation of the Spirit of Elà and the alignment of Ori with Elà is known as "going back to the time when Ọrúnmilà walked the earth". This alignment occurs as a result of consistent attention to the Ifa discipline of singing oriki .



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