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ENIYAN, THE NATURE OF BEING HUMAN:
A NOTION CONCEIVED FROM ODÙ IFÁ

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By
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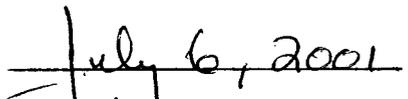
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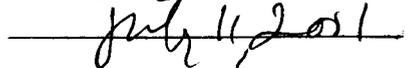


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Chapter One

The world and I have eyes in common,
I use them to look at it, it uses them to look at me.

If I weep, the world doesn't care.

But if the world weeps into me,
I flood my banks.

Like an infant messing itself with food,
I want to mess myself with the world's problems.

All over my face, my eyebrows,

my shirt, my trousers, the tablecloth.
The dress of my love, my mother,

the mountains and the sky, all the people,
the feet of angels.

---Yehuda Amichai

Let's do things with joy,
Definitely, human beings have been chosen
to bring good fortune to the world.

---Odu Irosunwori

The birth of this inquiry emerges from a pluralistic womb; the fused perspective of a religious and scholarly life. Prior to my attending graduate school and a desire to write this thesis, I had been initiated as a *Babaláwo* in the town of Ode Remo, Nigeria and was practicing, to the best of my knowledge and abilities, Yoruba religiosity in diaspora. Yet the confounding question for me, one shared by most diasporic practices, became the

tension and dialectic nature of a structure extracted from its original, cultural foundation attempting to establish itself in multiple and varied other cultural forms. Put in concrete terms, how can Yoruba religiosity be understood and practiced in contemporary America (or any of the Western, or 'first world' societies) given the nature of the historical relationship between the two and what amounts to the "dead language" status of the Yoruba language in the majority of practicing communities? If Yoruba language is not spoken, nor seen as essential to worship, how does the content of Yoruba religious and philosophical ideas arise and develop. Additionally, how can texts, *Ifá*, *oríkì*, *ìtàn*, etc. be understood if unavailable or when available devoid of the linguistic, philosophical and religious content embedded in the language? Out of the forms of ceremony/ritual, language and orality, how does one construct the necessary theories and schema essential matters addressed in Yoruba religious texts? If neglected, do these questions, and the myriad others that these imply, further entrench the "inventing of Africa" (Mudimbe) and the hegemonic relationship of the West to Africa?

To these questions I do not claim to have answers; perhaps there are none. But awareness aligned with action can provide an ongoing negotiation and discovery of the depth of these dilemmas and possible responses. For these reasons, my own journey required returning to school in order to engage these dilemmas from a standpoint that provided methodologies and theories by which to understand and interpret, and associations with people engaged in mutual and parallel inquiries. Through the course of my studies, I have reached a point in my own understanding as a Yoruba scholar and *Ifa* diviner, a need to address a fundamental human and philosophical question: who am I as a human being? My own three-year-old son posed to me this most profound

(confounding) question asking “Daddy, why am I a human?” to which I struggled for an answer. To my knowledge, this question had been addressed in sporadic form in diverse scholarly works regarding the Yoruba but never in an encompassing way. Some looked at *orí*, some looked at *ìwà*. Some have addressed it in the philosophy of ordinary language (Hallen, Sodipo) while others have referred to *Odu` Ifá* (divinatory poetic verses) for explanation (Abimbola, Lawal, Akiwowo). Given my predilections, I decided, in the spirit of multi-disciplinary practice, to combine both. In building a schema of personhood based in Yoruba thought, I confined the source of my components to *Odu` Ifá* for the building blocks while relying on scholarly works for elaboration, explanation, exegesis, context and content of words, idioms and ideas. As Dr. Karin Barber put so well, “There is an obvious and very good reason for taking an interdisciplinary approach to African oral texts, and that is that the text themselves can combine ‘literature’, ‘history’, ‘music’, ‘medicine’, ‘religion’, and other things. The unity of these fields within oral texts suggests that the method of interpretation should also be unified. Rather than a collaboration between specialists from different disciplines, what is needed is the reintegration of an artificially divided field.” (Barber 1989:13)

Scholars such as Karin Barber and Olabiyi Yai have developed sophisticated perspectives by which to view Yoruba verbal art and textuality. “We need to presume that textuality itself is culturally specific: that there are different ways of being “text,” and that genres recognized as distinct within a given cultural field may nevertheless share a common textuality. To grasp the specific aesthetic mode of any verbal art, then, we need to understand how it is marked, and constituted, as text.” (Barber 1999:17)

In his assessment of Yoruba textuality, Yai draws out the discursive and dialogical aspects of both the verbal and physical arts. “When approaching Yoruba art, an intellectual orientation that would be more consonant with Yoruba traditions of scholarship would be to consider each individual Yoruba art work and the entire corpus as *oríkì*.” (Yai 1994:107) Knowing that *oríkì* stand as a genre of Yoruba text, Yai’s comment expands the vision of textuality to the metonymic character of Yoruba “texts.” “I would like to suggest that the Yoruba mode of artistically engaging reality and their way of relating to one another, to the *òrìṣà*, and other cultures is more metonymic than metaphoric. To “*kì*” (perform *oríkì* verbally) and to “*gbé*” or “*yà*” (carve) is to provoke and be provoked. Art is an invitation to infinite metonymic difference and departure, and not a summation for sameness and imitation.” (Yai 1994:113) Therefore, from this standpoint, the texts of *Odu Ifá* offer a point of (infinite) departure for developing a theory of relationship of the self to the rest of the world. And this departure will exist within multiple realms of coexistence such as the intellectual, the religious, the political, the practical, etc.

As I mentioned above, most of the past research of personhood has predominantly focused on the spiritual entity and concept of *orí*. It is my belief that this represents an exaggeration of the concept due to the insistence of a Western gaze concerned only with what it thinks is valued by a people of single dimension; from an invented idea that Africans cannot and do not separate ‘religious’ thought from ‘empirical’ thought and therefore, ironically, see all things as ‘religious.’ In their book *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft*, Hallen and Sodipo use a philosophical language analysis of Yoruba terms for “knowledge,” and “belief” and their epistemological and philosophical comparison to the

English terms. At the conclusion of their analysis they state “We have previously remarked upon the erroneous English-language model that insists African propositional attitudes towards oral traditions are best translated as the equivalents of ‘knowledge.’” (Hallen, Sodipo 1986:80) Completeing this line of thought, they state, “How ironic, then, that the model for African thought systems produced by English-language culture should typify them as systems that treat second-hand information (oral tradition, ‘book’ knowledge, etc.) as though it were true, as though it were knowledge! This is precisely what the Yoruba epistemological system, as outlined above, outspokenly and adamantly refuses to do. But the English-language epistemological system does-grossly. *Therefore it, in the end, fits its own model for traditional thought systems better than Yoruba ever can!* [italics mine]” (Hallen, Sodipo 1986:81)

This self-fulfilling gaze can be seen also in the scholarly focus upon *ori* as personality and personhood. Because *orí* is a religious entity associated with the individual self, if one perceives the Yoruba, typical of all Africans, from this primitivizing gaze, as non-reflective, non-critically minded primitives in ‘supine acquiescence’ (Wiredu) to the mantel of tradition, magic, spirits, witches and gods, personhood could only be built from this region of the ‘religious.’ Only those cultural forms which could be seen as ‘worshipped’ could comprise a represented Yoruba notion of identity. But, as Hallen and Sodipo point out, this is exactly the problem, as the actual multiple, comprising factors are left unseen and neglected compared to the inflation of a single or few aspects. Such a gaze neglects the epistemological content of such an idea expressed in the language used to discuss and describe it as well as the texts from which it emerges. While *orí* is important, the myriad other aspects upon which it depends, the metonymic references of

orí to other qualities and functions within the texts of *Ifá* (intra-textuality), the very recognition of other qualities and faculties of being human (developed through inter-textuality (Barber) with other genres of text such as *oríkì* and *ìtàn*, as well as well as ordinary language use) cannot be deflated or denied and must be considered in sum. It is from this latter perspective that I originally sought to develop the concept of Yoruba personhood, narrowing my conceptual source to *Odu Ifá*, while expanding its inclusiveness through intra-textuality (multiple, dialogic verses of *Ifá*) and the explication offered by Yoruba oriented scholarly works. I, by no means, portray this inquiry as comprehensive nor finished. In fact, whatever it may accomplish, it raises many more questions that must be left for future research.

What I have focused on then are four concepts based in and explicated within verses of *Odu Ifá*: *orí*, *ìwà*, *èniyàn* and *àsùwàdà*. I have attempted to bring them discursively together in order to construct a schema in which these concepts (and others that would need to be added to it in the future) inter-relate and portray a comprehensive idea of what makes a person a person. The implications of developing such a schema become numerous in their topics and consequence. It is through understanding how any given language and culture explains humanity that its systems can be understood; systems such as medicine, law, rights, political structure, etc. Further, these systems can be interrogated and developed (something I would argue does happen by the best of the *babalawo* in Nigeria) without subsuming to the dominance of Western models of thought and prejudice. And it is from this type of inquiry that African systems of knowledge generation will avoid what Mudimbe refers to as *gnosis* where African systems are represented as information lacking self-reflection, critique, and development. “A future

in which the unequivocal recognition of the multiverse that constitutes our-thus far denied-historical and cultural specificity (i.e. our humanity) will become the basis for global earthly solidarity.” (Serequeberhan 1994:29)

In this thesis, I have attempted write from a position in which I take for granted African humanity and philosophy (at least in the sense of existing forms of self-reflective thought and critique) rather than the usual Western position in which these must be proved. The on-going dismissal of Africa in international political forums and intellectual fields cannot be ignored when engaged in a work such as this. Africa’s disgraceful position in relation to its European and American neighbors (along with other nations who profit from Africa’s resources) remains a glaring reality that little has changed in the ensuing eras since the 17th century. The current state of Africa’s people suffering from imperialist aggravated neo-colonial despotism, under-development, HIV, genocides, starvation, slavery, and too many other forms of inhuman subjugation and suffering are a mark of global(ization) shame. And the on-going under-response to it, even in these early days of the 21st Century, confirms a fear too great on the part of the responsible parties to acknowledge and be responsible to the humanity of Africa and the inhumanity of those who prosper from her suffering. ¹ “...I have railed against the thesis

¹ Consider at the time of this writing, April 18, 2001, that there sits a ship attempting to dock at a port in Benin that is carrying African children sold as slaves as its cargo. It has meandered in the Gulf of Guinea for days attempting to find port, the international community knowing its cargo and intentions. This same international community has approached this crime of humanity with tentativeness, reluctance, little media representation, and certainly not with the unambiguous zeal through action that would affirm the humanity of black children as being other than chattle and the unfortunate victims at the hands of their own people. But let us not overlook the omission as to why African nations exist with the national boundaries they do, the state of economic underdevelopment, etc.; the omission of historical Euro-American responsibility for the creation of an environment in which inhuman atrocities like slavery thrive. And settling between all the lines, whether spoken or written, like a hideous companion to omission, appears the subtly prevalent trope that blackness is ontologically bound to slavery- whether blackness enslaves or is enslaved.

that it was the Jewish Holocaust that placed the first question mark on all claims of European humanism-from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to present-day multi-cultural orientation. Insistence on that thesis, we must continue to maintain, merely provides further proof that the European mind has yet to come into full cognition of the African world as an equal sector of a universal humanity, for, if it had, its historic recollection would have placed the failure of European humanism centuries earlier-and that would be at the very inception of the Atlantic slave trade. This, we must remind ourselves, was an enterprise that voided a continent, it is estimated, of some twenty million souls and transported them across the Atlantic under conditions of brutality that have yet to be beggared by any other encounter between races.” (Soyinka 1999:38-9)

While this position may seem quarrelsome, controversial or even un-scholarly, I believe it to be necessary and justifiable. Just as Serequeberhan beckons, the very humanity of Africa, its intellectuals, its holy people, its artists, its children, its women, its men, this list could go on ad infinitum, requires acknowledgement backed by the intellectual, political, economic and humanitarian strategies that will elevate the cultures, the people, and the nations through implementation. Clearly this endeavor falls within the realm of most fields of scholarship and so the recognition of the very real situations that plague African people in contemporary times and how these plagues originate and perpetuate, in spite of how uncomfortable it may make any of us, must be faced with courage, tenacity and the will to improve the situation. Anything less cannot be acceptable.

Chapter Two

The purpose of this chapter is to look into *Odu` Ifá`* and how a concept of personhood could emerge from within it. This inquiry proceeds by focusing on the text of divination verses in *Odu` Ifá`* that strongly relate to human nature and the quality of being human. Such an effort becomes important not only to continue a discourse on Yoruba culture and intellectualism, but critical in order to assert cultural and intellectual identity in the face of globalization's homogenizing effects. Personhood as a philosophical and practical idea demonstrates its importance through social and cultural systems that use personhood as a tacit foundation for their action. Such systems as medicine and legal rights, even if not couched in such a Western biased term, rely on personhood as an *a priori* concept that validates later conclusions. Western biomedicine views personhood differently than *Ifá`* medicine, each relying on a distinct philosophical historicity conferring validity on diagnosis, explanatory and treatment practices within each. Looking to build a concept of personhood in Yoruba culture, or more accurately *Ifá`* culture, becomes an act of individuation and sovereignty directed towards systems that leverage themselves against it.

In this thesis, to interrogate and attempt to build this concept, I believe that *Ifá`* literature needs to be seen to function in a world of intra-textuality and that through this activity, concepts such as personhood develop general theoretical standing which are then applied by *babaláwo* in *dáfá`*. This dialectical relationship between theory and praxis allows for individual variation in perception and application, an important quality noted and discussed in works such as Apter, Barber, Prince, Buckley among others.

A flaw in past eras of scholarship regarding Africa has been to expect knowledge to be encoded in like manner to European systems, and if this has not been found to exist in another culture then primitiveness prevails. Post-modern critique of texts has opened closed Western eyes to be able to see myriad ways in which knowledge embeds itself in social forms. Yoruba scholars themselves have generated a formidable body of work that has articulated the complexities and sophistication of knowledge production and retention in Yoruba cultural practice.

A sort of liberation has been occurring simultaneously whereby Yoruba scholarship frees itself from the ingesting hegemony of Western epistemology and transformation of meaning through 'translation'. New terms, Yoruba terms, exist that do not have to be translated but stand on their own to signify concepts and cultural forms non-existent in English, French, Spanish, etc. Through their work regarding *oríkì*, *ìtàn*, *Odu* and ritual, current scholars such as Barber, Yai, Akiwowo, Lawal, Makinde and Apter, to mention just a few, have provided illuminating perspectives by which to understand and interpret *Ifá* literature. Their discussions seek to demonstrate that knowledge is embedded in oral/somatic performance, a reflexive relationship. As Barber put it, "... as 'performance theory' has demonstrated, all oral texts should be thought of as action rather than object, as process rather than pattern. They are fully realised only in the moment of performance." (Barber 1991:7) *Ifá* literature exists symbiotically with its retention in the memories of *babaláwo* and its practice/performance in *dáfá*. In order to develop a theory for the production of conceptual knowledge in *Ifá*, all three factors, literature, the holders of the literature, and *dáfá*, must be considered together. *Ifá* provides the source of information from which the *babaláwo* generates his theories and *dáfá* and medicine

(*oògùn*) become the field of praxis. The boundaries between these realms are not absolute nor are they closed to the influence of other sources of knowledge.

Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity, for now I will focus mainly on verses of *Ifá*. Since colonial times, writers, colonial authorities, travelogues, and researchers have documented the central social role of *Ifá* and *babaláwo*. Recently, (relative to the duration of interaction between Europe and Yoruba) Bascom, Abimbola, Akiwowo, Abiodun, Drewel and others have documented verses (*ese Ifá*) in writing accompanied by sophisticated reflections upon divination, ritual, orality, and various types of encoded knowledge and discourse. Studying this body of work, one recognizes the central importance of *Ifá* in Yoruba culture, somewhat like a Rosetta stone by which most practices and beliefs can be ‘explained’. *Òrúnmìlà* and his representatives, *babaláwo*, exist as voices of authority in many ways for the Yoruba.

The quality of authority that I am concerned with in this paper has to do with *Ifá* as a literature by which to build understanding. Because *Ifá* verses retain the explanations and directions for most things in Yoruba life and the world, they provide a vehicle for reflection. But, as Apter and Barber point out, not all explanations and directions are available without aid. The quality of embedded and secret knowledge (*ijìnlẹ̀*) hides meaning within meaning into unlimited layers of explanation and understanding. So are the words of *Ifá*. This quality of obscurity and abstractness of *Odu Ifá* leads to the importance of its priests, the *babaláwo*. Because of their training and initiations, the *babaláwo* learn the esoteric, philosophical and practical aspects of *Ifá* as a total system. It is through them that understanding of concepts like personhood form, become actualized and acted upon. Further, due to *Ifá*'s hermeneutic nature, *babaláwo* derive

individual understandings that undermine an expectation of homogenous, shared theory as in the West. Personhood, while requiring certain qualities that have developed importance within the *babaláwo* profession based on their existence in *Odu Ifá*, has variations in understanding and complexity varying with each individual *babaláwo*. Yet it is in two prominent *Ifá* practices that personhood becomes interrogated: *dáfá* and *oògùn*. These areas mark the arena where theory meets praxis, and whereby a *babaláwo* and his ideas become evaluated through effectiveness.

I propose that a state of intra-textuality (with influencing inter-textuality) predominates the building of conceptual ideas by *babaláwo* within *Odu Ifá* and thereby into the building of the theory of personhood. In this paper, I will inquire into the nature and relationship of four concepts of personhood that articulate together to form a larger schema: *àsùwàdà*, *orí*, *èniyàn* and *ìwà*. In *Ifá*, the interplay between verses discursively builds knowledge about an idea resulting in a general theory or concept of such. Each verse of an *Odu* narrates a story in oblique, poetic form about a character and his/her struggle with a particular dilemma. These verses contain embedded concepts, exegeses about the concepts and subtle, hidden “deep” (*jìnlẹ̀*) meaning about the concepts within the narrative itself. Gathering multiple verses about each of these concepts, one can see the discursive textual interplay building the larger schema. Traditionally, given that the *babaláwo* retained their verses through memorization, they become essential to the development of concepts from *Odu Ifá* for only they have a multiplicity of verses on which to reflect. Through their instant ability to cross-reference verses referring to a subject, they can reflect immediately and unlimitedly upon the texts in order to extract, and develop theoretical concepts and put them together as schemas.

Simultaneously though, because *Odu Ifá* is an unquantifiable body of literature, no *babaláwo* knows all existing verses. While some verses are known by most, if not all *babaláwo*, some verses are rare and known by a particular few. It is also for this reason that there exists not a homogenous ideal shared by all *babaláwo* regarding any particular concept, but a diversity and plurality of ideals. If a verse refers to a given concept, the *babaláwo* can reflect, immediately, upon other verses sharing the same concept or a related one, thereby developing and deepening its meaning. Though not entirely self-generated due to influence of teachers, professional check and balancing, and the stabilizing center of the verses themselves, theoretically, a *babaláwo* will develop theories through his continued reflection of known verses and the inclusion of newly learned ones. Hence a meaning of this line from *ese Ifá* saying, “Once I was initiated, I initiated myself.” The development of ideas can develop further as *babaláwo* discuss their understandings amongst one another professionally or within their *egbé* (the “union” or “association” of *babaláwo* within a town). Through this cross-referencing of multiple verses and concepts, and professional dialogue, theories accumulate substance and presence. Yet, hermeneutically speaking, the discourse of texts in the mind of each *babaláwo* allows for unique theoretical developments and nuances. Keeping theories from spinning off into total obscurity is their basis in *Odu Ifá* and their continued evaluation through application in *dáfá* and *oògùn*.

Foremost in the production of theory is the verses of *Odu* for the fact that all other genres, and, according to Yoruba themselves, all ritual and cultural practices derive their basis from *Odu*'s narratives and explanations. The central importance of *Ifá* positions it as a foundation of theoretical understanding. For this reason, particularly amongst

babaláwo, *Ifá* provides the authoritative body on which to generate theory. In daily circumstances which require explanation, many times a *babaláwo* will present a justifiable argument by referencing a verse of *Odu*. If arguing about the relationship of *Ifá* and Islam, the reason why an animal behaves the way it does, why gossip is damaging, and so on, it is an *ese Ifá* that *babaláwo* will quote. (Barber, 1999) But in order to build more complex schemas of representation, no single verse of *Odu* can suffice. Hence, the necessity to pull multiple verses that cross-reference ideas, concepts and features in order to progress towards more sophisticated and complete understanding of topics. It is this very quality that personhood necessitates.

With this in mind, I wish to look at four concepts which are as follows: 1) *orí*, understood as both the physical head as well as a spiritual entity of profound importance for every human; 2) *àsùwàdà*, a concept first explicated by the sociologist Akinsola Akiwowo, which narrates a beautifully eloquent view of sociation and individualism; 3) *èniyàn* which proposes an ontological imperative for each person to attain and by which one can fulfill destiny as a human being, and lastly; 4) *ìwà*, a philosophical idea that I propose horizontally articulates on the same level as the others while vertically exerts itself as a meta-practice by which to attain the goal of personhood. I will further my interpretations by referring to other scholarly works that have analyzed some of these concepts and propelled them forward. My basic schema of personhood posits that personhood requires association (*àsùwàdà*) in which a person fulfills his/her destiny (*orí*) along with a caveat and (hopefully) encouragement to strive for moral discipline (*èniyàn*) actualized through the practice of developing ‘character’ (*ìwà*).

Because personhood, in any system of knowledge whether it be biomedicine, Western psychology, Buddhism, or *Ifá*, arises out of multiple ideas which are not always explicit on a conscious plane requires a twofold inquiry. Firstly, one must research a historical progression of thought and formalism; in the case of *Ifá*, this becomes the literature of *ẹsẹ Odu*. Secondly, one must seek to give shape to the ghosts of implied ideas that give bulk to the formal concept. For this study, these implied ideas become the discourse of other literatures, proverbs, colloquialisms, and *oríkì*. To use *Orí* as an example, many scholars have recorded from informants the existence of aspects or constituent parts of *Orí* such as *orí inú*, *orí òde*, *iponri*, *ipin ijeun*, etc. These several concepts regarding *ori* seem to be derivatives of the general, formal concept, without their formal establishment in *ẹsẹ Ifá*. *Odu Ifá* speaks of *Orí* and *Orí* only and not derivative, or constituent qualities.

I readily admit that my knowledge is incomplete and verses exist that I have yet to learn that will expand and develop mass to the skeleton I am developing here. But variation amongst Yoruba specialists (*babaláwo*, *onísẹ̀gun*, *olórìsà*) has been acknowledged by many scholars such as Buckley and Lawal, which lends credibility to the view that divination and theoretical schema are a hermeneutical enterprise. I believe that derivations, like those of *Orí*, are born out of empirical observation on the part of healers and others who have sought to understand what goes in to building identity and being. It is likely for this reason that there exists so much variation on the theme of *Orí* alone. If this were to be a larger study, these derivations would have to be seen as valid and important in individual framing of personhood concepts, but in this study, I will restrain myself solely to the literature of *Ifá*.

Concurrent with the conversation between verses of *Odu* exists that of inter-textuality. Yoruba culture is wrought with a diversity of oral genres which are various in their function, performance style, scope, and subject matter. It is through the discourse across Yoruba oral genres that certain shared ideas amongst them grow in complexity and sophistication. While proverbs and excerpts of *Ifá* itself represent some of these genres, *oríki* is by far the most influencing. Not only do other genres interact with *Odu* to flesh out theory but also embedded in the text of these genres are principles of textual praxis; the intellectual positioning one should take in order to build theory. It is this aspect that I wish to look into now to help understand our later building of personhood.

Oríki is paramount as a ubiquitous genre addressing every aspect of Yoruba life and asserting itself into every form of social activity. *Oríki* are ‘utterances’ (Barber) that attempt to textually, verbally and aurally capture the essence of their subject. The Yoruba believe that all things in creation have associated *oríki*, trees, animals, people, towns, lineages, *Òrìṣà*, continents, etc. To call something by its *oríki*, whether a single reference or an extended call, is to summon its presence, to manifest its presence through building its identity, character, and essential qualities orally and aurally in the subject and any other hearers. The affinities between *oríki* and *Ifá* are too numerous and profound to elaborate here but focusing on the *oríki* of *Ifá*, I wish to look at those names which evoke qualities of *Ifá* extending beyond itself and into the realms of theory. Not only do *oríki* supplement concepts by adding their voice and knowledge to it but the deeper qualities of *oríki* describe and circumscribe a realm of methodology; how to perceive the textual discourse in order to generate knowledge.

Akiwowo discussed, through the referencing of *oríkì*, an appellation that ascends to the theoretical. “*A-o-ti-se-moṣṣ ni orukọ ti a n pe Babaláwo*. Translated, the statement is: ... ‘*Aotiseṣemoṣṣ* is the name given to the Babalawo.’ The word *aotiseṣemoṣṣ* is a question statement *bi-a-o-ti-se-moṣṣ?* Meaning literally how-do-we-proceed-to-know? Or how-do-we-act-in-order-to-know? By this statement, the Babalawo is generally speaking a philosopher; and specifically an epistemologist, as well as a methodologist.” (Akiwowo 1983:150) To this last statement, I would say a hermeneuticist as well as an epistemologist. As a process that establishes knowledge through edifying conversation, like discourse theory, hermeneutics can generate infinite possibilities for knowledge and its grounds for existence. It provides space for the emergence of new and evolving knowledge. I believe that this is compatible with the construction of concepts in *Ifá* literature; it is discursive by its cross-referencing of multiple verses in multiple *Oḍù*.

Additionally, *dáfá* itself maintains this hermeneutic tone due to its conversational, discursive interplay between its participants and the fact that the *babaláwo* interprets *Ifá* in order to find a solution to a problem. Because there exists this cross-referencing of ideas within *Ifá* literature and its priests and supplicants, *aotiseṣemoṣṣ* becomes a reflexive practice whereby the *babaláwo* self-consciously evaluates his application of knowledge and theory within *Ifá*. In light of building conceptual frameworks, *aotiseṣemoṣṣ* as a hermeneutics requires taking raw information as maintained in multiple *Oḍù*, drawing forth meaningfully related aspects which create cognitive boundaries along with the potential for new insights and developments. *Aotiseṣemoṣṣ* posits itself not just as a descriptive poetry of *Ifá/Òrúnmìlà*, but a guide by which the *babaláwo* creates theory while maintaining a quality of critique towards his theory and himself.

Yai offered an insightful approach to theory and methodology using the genre *itàn*, and which interestingly parallels Serequeberhan's *horizon* and *discourse* hermeneutic theory. "Etymologically, *itàn* is a noun derived from the verb *tàn*. *Tàn* means to spread, reach, open up, illuminate, shine. The verb *tàn* and the derivative noun *itàn* are polysemic and integrate at least three fundamental dimensions. First, there is the chronological dimension through which human generations and their beings, deeds, and values are related. Second, there is the territorial or geographical dimension through which history is viewed as expansion (not necessarily with the imperial connotation that has become the stigma of that concept in the English language) of individuals, lineages and races beyond their original cradle. In that sense it is important to observe that the Yoruba have always conceived of their history as diaspora. The concept and reality of accident, are rationalized in Yorubaland as the normal or natural order of things historical.

The third dimension of *itàn* has paradoxically and tragically been neglected by most Yoruba historians. This is the discursive and reflexive dimension of the concept. *Tàn* means to illuminate, enlighten, discern, disentangle. *Tàn* is therefore to discourse profoundly on the two dimensions earlier mentioned." (Yai 1994:108)

In considering the generating of knowledge through *Ifá* texts, I will extrapolate slightly upon Yai's first two dimensions while keeping the third unchanged. As these relate to *Ifá* literature, one can perceive the first, the chronological dimension, as that through which *Odu*, *ese* and associated genres are related. Second, the historical, temporal dimension through which *Ifá* knowledge can be seen to expand and develop

from generation to generation. The third dimension remains to discourse profoundly on the first two.

From this standpoint and in addition to the self-awareness and critique of *aotiyemo*, we have a powerful theoretical framework by which to perceive the building of concepts and schemas. *Tàn* requires the evaluation of *Ifá* as a body of texts as a whole that relate to one another. Not *Odu* alone, but also the *oriki* of *Òrúnmìlà*, of characters in *Odu* verses, of the divining implements used in *dáfá*, etc., *ìtàn* as a genre of history and explanation and also any other text which circumstantially compels itself to be considered. While surely possible to extract or reflect on any single verse or concept or character, *ìtàn* reminds us that these must be seen as constituents of a larger universe, one in which these are not isolated and autonomous, but are inter-relating and discursive. We must also consider when building theory, that which has come before us, the second dimension. As a disciplined body of knowledge, *Ifá* grows and expands in understanding and sophistication over time through its own discoveries and by adapting to external pressures. If each *babaláwo* seeks to improve the knowledge that he was given as an apprentice, to understand *Ifá* and the world more deeply, he will pass this on to his apprentices thereby elevating the level at which they begin their journey and he will share his insights with his friends elevating the professional discourse. In this way, *Ifá* knowledge expands and evolves, contrary to accusations of intellectual stasis. Further, *Ifá* expands as the world changes; *babaláwo* live and exist in diaspora (the author for example), *esé Odu* become printed as well as being retained by memory. The dilemmas that *Ifá* must solve shift depending upon the geographical location of a community, the political climate, social influences, etc. The knowledge and adaptation seen as a whole

within *Ifá* culture(s) become relevant to understanding the historical and expansive dimension.

Thirdly, and here most importantly as praxis, one must take the breadth of the former two into consideration when forming theory. The first two dimensions circumscribe the realm of *Ifá*'s horizon on which the 'profound discourse' occurs. To consider personhood, one must pull together multiple genres of text as well as familiarize oneself with current level of discourse and modern environmental (understood in the intellectual sense as well as the ecological) influences to produce a theory that can allow effective interpretation and solution of people's problems.

Demonstrating this reflexivity and textuality, I look again to the *oríkì* of *Òrúnmilà* which says, *Òrúnmilà òpitàn ilẹ̀ ifẹ̀. Òpitàn* etymologically comes from *O-pa-itàn*. *O* is the subject pronoun in this case meaning 'he.' (Yoruba pronouns are not gender specific.) Abraham says *Pa* is to "B. (3) break off, (4) cut open, (6) separate out and C. (1) bring things into contact with one another (2) become amalgamated." (Abraham 1958:538) And *itàn* we discussed above. *Ilẹ̀ Ifẹ̀* is not understood in this case as the geographical city of today in Nigeria but the primordial home of human beings and by extrapolation, the world. Again quoting Yai, "*Pa ìtàn* is to 'de-riddle' history, to shed light on human existence through time and space. No wonder *Òrúnmilà*, the Yoruba deity of wisdom, knowledge, and divination, is called *Òpitàn ilẹ̀ Ifẹ̀* (He who de-riddles *itàn*, i.e., unravels history throughout *Ifẹ̀* territory)." (Yai 1994:109) So in support of our discussion of the dimensional praxis of *itàn*, *òpitàn ilẹ̀ Ifẹ̀* tells the *babaláwo* that his role, like *Òrúnmilà*, is to 'de-riddle,' to deconstruct and dissect knowledge, texts and understanding in order to progress and push forward enlightenment and wisdom. Yet further, by the meaning of *pa*

‘to bring things into contact,’ the *Oríkì* supports the bringing together of diversity and a final re-assimilation of new understanding after the critical deconstruction has taken place. This last *oríkì* clearly positions the *babaláwo* with the proximal responsibility (by proxy because the *babaláwo* is the human representative of *Ifá/Òrúnmìlà* on Earth and must therefore strive to embody His enlightenment and character) of ‘de-riddling’ the text and by extension, the world.

Having argued in favor of the discursive and hermeneutic nature of *Ifá*, one can perceive that upon reflection, one’s deductions have infinite possibilities. In order to find validity and usefulness through history, any system of inquiry and philosophical discourse must be adaptable and be able to help its adherents negotiate their changing world. Religious fundamentalism and ideological, intellectual polemics make up two sides of the same coin. Neither provides enough flexibility to evolve past their self-induced boundaries. Herein lies a final aspect embedded in the *oríkì* for *Òrúnmìlà* that buffers any tendency towards polemics or fundamentalism in the development of theory. The *oríkì*, *Òrúnmìlà*, *Olúwa mi àmòìmòtan* conveys the intellectual balance just described. *Òrúnmìlà* of course is the source of knowledge in all of *Ifá*. *Olúwa mi* means My Lord or God, and *àmòìmòtan* means something producing infinite knowledge, unable to be completely understood. Through their efforts to embody the intellectual and moral principles of *Òrúnmìlà*, the *babaláwo* find a point of view from which to approach intellectual practice, *àmòìmòtan*. Humility along with persistent pursuit of ideas put into practice reveal knowledge, *imò*, while recognizing that this knowledge is incomplete and holds no monopoly of truth. One’s conclusions from *Ifá* are but one interpretation, but if born from intellectual discipline and effort, can withstand the tempering of critique and

establish their validity. Akiwowo writes, “It is for this reason, I believe, that the *Babaláwo* also refer to *Ọ̀rúnmilà* as *eni àmò̀m̀òtan*: one capable of generating infinite knowledge about himself, or one about whom there are infinite things to be known by those who seek to know him.” (Akiwowo 1983:148) Knowing that in Yoruba reference, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* can be used metaphorically for his derivative bodies of knowledge, *dáfá*, *oògùn*, *ebo*, etc., then Akiwowo’s statement confirms the praxis of humility and unlimited knowledge potential residing in *Ifá* intellectualism.

To further textually develop this stance I will cite Yai once more. “When approaching Yoruba art, an intellectual orientation that would be more consonant with Yoruba traditions of scholarship would be to consider each individual Yoruba art work and the entire corpus as *oríkì*. One advantage of such an attitude is that it allows the researcher... to raise new issues and inquiries, for by its nature an *oríkì* is an unfinished and generative art enterprise, as emphatically stated in the following *meta-oríkì*, that is, an *oríkì* that is a discourse on *oríkì: àkìkìtán* (the one whose praises are endless).” (Yai 1994:107) Again extrapolating from Yai’s statement, we can replace ‘art’ with ‘knowledge’ whereby we can infer considering these as *oríkì*. Because *oríkì* and their subjects are so intimately linked and reflexive, one implicates and evokes the other. To see the *ikin* of *Ifá* is to mentally trigger the *oríkì* of *Ọ̀rúnmilà*. To see the *òpèlè* is to mentally trigger the *oríkì* of *òpèlè*, etc. Conversely, to hear the *oríkì* of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* is to evoke his character somatically experienced through *dáfá*, *ikin*, etc. while recalling all of one’s knowledge of and past experiences with it. These *oríkì* illuminate not the physical nature but the meta-physical meanings of their subjects. Knowing that inter-textuality plays a prominent role in building understanding (*òye*), when considering the intellectual

potential of *Ifá*, the discourse across literary genres (a meta-practice or meta-*oríki*) sustains an “unfinished and generative *knowledge* enterprise,” *àkìkìtán*, one whose qualities and understandings are endless.

At this point, I would like to bring in an overarching theory and praxis that negotiates most *Ifá* knowledge: the concept *tibi tire ejiwapo*. *Babaláwo* explicitly use the idea as praxis in *dáfá* and theoretically the idea can be used as a larger philosophical tool for critique. I must credit the inspiration for my insights to the writings of Dr. Akinsola Akiwowo, and my teachers in Ode Remo, Olofin Adesanya, Babalawo Sina Kuti and Babalawo Lola Adesanya. *Tibi tire ejiwapo* means ‘the mutual coexistence of opposites.’ Here I am extending my interpretation from the work of Akiwowo’s writing on the theory. Akiwowo stated, “*Ire* may be interpreted as that end or goal which is patiently, diligently, and faithfully pursued or cultivated and attained...; while *ibi* may be interpreted as the force which calls into question the goals of ideals, or that which pushes aside hindrances that stand in the way of creating or attaining new ideals. In a different sense, *ibi* may be regarded as the force or consequences of criticizing.” (Akiwowo 1988:178) *Ire* therefore becomes an ideal, a theory that posits itself as a model which can be applied to any appropriate circumstance while *ibi* becomes its critique through application: theory and praxis. *Ejiwapo*, the mutual coexistence, situates both in a dialectical relationship in which they mutually critique one another promoting the improvement of ideals and possible new derivations. As this relates to inter- and intra-textual theoretical development, the *babaláwo*’s theory can be seen as *ire* and its application in *dáfá* or *oògùn* as *ibi*; the application seeks to refine or critique the

weaknesses in the theory. The value and validity of any theory in *Ifá* becomes revealed in its ability to interpret a client's problem in the verses and solve it.

Regarding the quality of *ibi*, which is important in refining theory, is its quantitative state. I believe that *ibi* represents an un-quantified quality, that which critiques, but it implicitly has quantitative variance in that it can wax or wane. For instance, looking at the *àṣùwàdà* concept that factors into personhood, we know that the *ire*, the ideal quality and quantity, of *àṣùwàdà* creates a balance of autonomy and community in which goodness for both is achieved in its highest form. But if *àṣùwàdà* wanes, a quantitative shift of *ibi*, one develops isolation (*àṣùwà*). On the other hand, if *àṣùwàdà* waxes, again a quantitative shift of *ibi*, one develops, say, nationalism.

I find a good analogy to be the pendulum of a clock. The ideal of *ire* would be the balanced vertical resting of the pendulum but the clock would stop working. It is the swinging back and forth of the pendulum, the waxing and waning of *ibi* alternately passing through *ire*, which propels that clock. The dialectic of *ibi* and *ire* in mutual coexistence, *tibi tire ejiwapo*, propels the world forward working in its multiple microcosmic levels: nations, societies, families, all forms of sociation. Applying *tibi tire ejiwapo* to *Ifá* knowledge and practice, we find an effective lens through which to view the relationship of conceptual development and application by *babaláwo*.

Additionally, what makes this interesting is the explicit expression of this paradigm in *dáfá* performance. After casting an initial *Odu* from which verses will be chanted, the *babaláwo* asks *Ifá* whether the predominant force of the *Odu* is with *ire* or *ibi*. *Ifá* will answer with one or the other. Given *dáfá*'s discursive quality in which personhood is always implicit (it is the *orí* of the client that is being questioned), the dialectic becomes

actualized in the very act of divination where theory (*ire*), as understood by the *babaláwo* from *Ifá* literature, wrestles with actuality (*ibi*), expressed in the particularity of the divination client, and is brought to the foreground so that the *babaláwo* can consider this in his interpretation. Ideal forms of personhood juxtapose themselves to actual persons. *Ibi* develops when critique exaggerates its function waxing or waning to the point of negating the *ire*; a person exaggerates their personal desires to the point that the *ire* of personhood begins to be negated. And it is the effort of the *babaláwo* and *Òrúnmìlà* to harmonize this conflict and inspire the person towards the ideal, *ire*.

Additionally, due to the discursive nature of *dáfá* in which there exist three conversing parties (the client, the *babaláwo*, and *Òrúnmìlà*), all parties participate in the negotiation of meaning. The client contextualizes the discourse by presenting a problem, joined with a set of circumstances, which needs to be solved. *Òrúnmìlà* provides an oblique, elusive answer in poetic form through an *Odu* and an associated set of verses. The *babaláwo* interprets the verses by applying prior knowledge of *Ifá*, in the form of theoretical schema, to the client's contextualizing problem. Because of his role as diviner, there exists the potential for the *babaláwo* to passively assume the position of omniscient representer of *Òrúnmìlà*. Yet, common sense tells us that no one can escape the fact of their humanity, that there is always more to learn. Even the *oriki* of *Ifá*, *àmòimòtan*, told us that *Ifá* is unknowable in its totality.

Recalling the method of eliciting from *Ifá* whether the *Odu* comes with *ire* or *ibi* in *dáfá*, it is possible that *Òrúnmìlà* speaks to the diviner in this revelation rather than singly focused at the client. If we consider that the *babaláwo*'s theory necessary to solve the client's problem represents *ire*, in Akiwowo's sense of an ideal, its validity is juxtaposed

to and critiqued by its potential to solve the actuality of the client's dilemma represented as *ibi*. What if the diviner's theory is somehow insufficient to solve the problem at hand? It could be too vague. It could be lacking in information from a critical verse unknown to the diviner. It may be of a sort in which the diviner has no experience. I offer that the possibility exists that *Ifá* would say *ibi* as a critique of the deficiency of the *babaláwo*'s theory. For without a proper ideal, a solution cannot be achieved. *Ire* and *ibi* are mutually dependant, mutually necessitating and generative, *tibi tire ejiwapo*. Without a sufficient theory there is nothing to critique and therefore, in the context of the *dáfá* conversation, *Ifá*'s message would be focused towards the relationship between the *babaláwo* and the client rather than solely on the client. Adding to the number of conversations occurring in the discourse, this particular layer of conversation provides an opportunity for *Ifá* to critique and refine the *babaláwo* who can critically self-evaluate himself in order to improve his understanding. While possibly a bit religiously radical, this thought develops out of perceiving *dáfá* as a discourse in which meaning is negotiated and contextualized by the participants. Therefore, all are implicated in the answers provided by *Òrúnmilà*. Though *Òrúnmilà* does remain as omniscient interlocutor, his answers are textual participants in the discourse subject to interpretation. Both human parties are implicated in *Ifá*'s answers and therefore, if the *babaláwo* is deficient or unable to understand, interpret, or affect *Ifá*'s help for the client, *Ifá*'s answer will express just such a critique. This hermeneutic tone becomes pervasive in much of *Ifá* practice.

Having established certain parameters of knowledge sources and knowledge production, theory and praxis, I will progress to an interpretation of the personhood

concept utilizing these same parameters. Relying on *Odu Ifá*, some *oríkì* and the discourse by *babaláwo* and Yoruba scholars, I will approach a construction of personhood; how being is perceived for those considered to be people.

Chapter Three

Ese Ifa/Verses of Ifa

Ori
Ofun-birete
Rowland Abiodun
[Verse 1]

1. Weriwari in heaven
2. Owewe who washes away poverty with perfection
3. Cast for only one Ori
4. And also for four hundred and one heavenly divinities
5. Who were going to Olorun the Creator-in-Chief
6. To attempt to split the kolanut of Ase
7. Ogbon (wisdom) directed them to make a sacrifice.
8. Four hundred divinities defied his order.
9. Only Ori complied and his sacrifice was accepted.
10. What was Ogbon's directive?
11. They were to wake up at the crack of dawn
12. And pay homage to the supreme creator.
13. All the Orisa overslept.
14. Only Ori woke up
15. Rolled himself on the ground in homage to Olorun.
16. After this,
17. They went to God, the Creator-in-Chief
18. Who asked Ogbon to present the kolanut of authority.
19. All tried but failed to split it.
20. Only Ori succeeded.
21. And when with the split Kolanut he divined,
22. The outcome was favorable.
23. A loud ovation followed,
24. There was excitement everywhere,
25. And great jubilation in heaven.
26. The highest and central place then belonged to Ori.
27. As Ori took his seat,
28. The other Orisa envied him,
29. And conspired to dethrone him.
30. Orisa (Orisaala) was the first to defy his authority.
31. Ori floored him and put him in Ajalamo.
32. At Ajalamo, Orisanla became the firing expert of moulded destinies.
33. Next Ori created Ifa, where Ifa became the expert on Ikin.
34. Next, Ori created Amakisi in the East,
35. Whence shines the morning light on Earth.

36. Ori overcame all the Orisa and created them where, today, they are revered.
37. Now that I am waking up
38. I pay homage to Olorun.
39. Let all good things come to me.
40. My Ori, give me life.
41. Empower me to overcome mortality.
42. I shall not die.
43. Let all good things belong to me
44. As light belongs to Amakisi.

Ori
Ogbeyonu
Wande Abimbola
[Verse 2]

1. It is a snare which strikes suddenly.
2. Ifa divination was performed for Oriseeku, the son of Ogun
3. Ifa divination was also performed for Orileemere, the son of Ija
4. Ifa divination was performed for Afuwape who was the son of Orunmila,
5. On the day they were going to the house of Olodumare to choose their heads.
6. These three people were all friends.
7. One day they deliberated together
8. And decided that they would go to Earth.
9. They decided that when they arrived to earth
10. They would settle down together there,
11. Maybe the place would be better for them than heaven.
12. They asked for advice from older people
13. And they were told that before going to earth,
14. They must first of all go to Ajala
15. To choose their heads.
16. They were warned thus; "You must observe on prohibition.
17. When you are going
18. You must not turn to the right.
19. Neither must you turn to the left.
20. You must go straight to the house of Ajala."
21. They were warned;
22. "Even if one of you hears his father's voice on the way
23. He must not go there."
24. They were told to go straight to the house of Ajala.
25. They were told that it was after they had chosen their heads from Ajala
26. That they should go the Earth.
27. They promised to heed the warning.
28. They prepared themselves

29. And started off on their journey to the house of Ajala, the potter who makes heads.
30. After walking for some distance
31. They reached "He who pounds yams with a needle" pounding yams with a small needle.
32. They said, "Father, we greet you."
33. The father replied, "Thank you."
34. They pleaded, "Please sir,
35. We are going to the house of Ajala."
36. He Who Pounds Yams With a Needle said he must first finish pounding his yams
37. Before he showed them the way.
38. Afuwape took the needle from him,
39. And started to pound the yams with it.
40. He pounded the yams for three days
41. Before he finished the pounding.
42. When he finished pounding the yams,
43. He Who Pounds Yams With a Needle told them that
44. They could go.
45. He told them that after traveling some distance,
46. They should turn to the right
47. Where they would find one gate-keeper.
48. They should ask for the way from him,
49. And he would show them the way.
50. After traveling some distance,
51. They got to a certain place.
52. Oriseeku, the son of Ogun, stood still
53. For he heard his father moving.
54. As his father took up his quiver,
55. As his father took up his bow,
56. Oriseeku, the son of Ogun, then said that he would go
57. To help his father prepare for war.
58. But his companions reminded him that
59. They had been warned
60. That they must not call anywhere on the way.
61. Then, Oriseeku, the son of Ogun, moved forward,
62. Saying that this was true.
63. And they continued on their journey.
64. After traveling some distance,
65. They came to the house of Orunmila.
66. They heard Orunmila striking his divining board loudly with his rattle.
67. Afuwape then stood still.
68. The other two urged him to let them go on.
69. But Afuwape said he wouldn't go on
70. Until he had seen his father.
71. They reminded him of the warning given to them

72. But Afuwape refused bluntly
73. And insisted that he must see his father.
74. He then hurried into the house.
75. The two others left him
76. And continued their journey.
77. When Orunmila saw Afuwape
78. He asked him where he was going.
79. Afuwape said he was going to Earth,
80. And he must first of all go to Ajala to choose his head.
81. Orunmila then took his divination instruments
82. And touched Afuwape's head with them.
83. When he cast the instruments on the ground
84. Ogbeyonu was the Odu that appeared.
85. When the Ifa priests of Orunmila's household studied the Odu carefully,
86. They said, "You Orunmila,
87. Your son is going on a journey to a certain place,
88. So that he might choose a good head,
89. Let him perform a sacrifice."
90. What would they use for sacrifice?
91. They were told to perform sacrifice with three bags of salt,
92. And three times twelve thousand cowries.
93. Orunmila offered all the materials,
94. And the sacrifice was performed for them.
95. Part of the salt was given to Afuwape
96. Together with twelve thousand cowries.
97. They then asked Afuwape to proceed on his journey.
98. When Afuwape came out of Orunmila's house,
99. He saw neither Oriseeku, the son of Ogun,
100. Nor Orileemere, the son of Ija.
101. They had gone.
102. When these two were going,
103. They got to the keeper of the first gate.
104. They asked for the house of Ajala.
105. But the gate-keeper said that the house of Ajala was too far.
106. He said that if it was not too far,
107. He would have taken them there.
108. They left him in anger,
109. And asked another person.
110. At last, they reached the house of Ajala.
111. When they got to the house of Ajala,
112. They did not find him at home.
113. They decided to wait for him.
114. When, on the second day, Ajala did not return,
115. They told the people of Ajala's household,
116. That they had come for a certain thing.

117. They said that they had come to choose their own heads.
118. The people of Ajala's household answered thus,
119. "If that is your mission,
120. Numerous heads are available."
121. They then took them to Ajala's storehouse of heads.
122. When Oriseeku entered,
123. He picked a newly made head
124. Which Ajala had not baked at all.
125. When Orilemeere also entered,
126. He picked one very big head
127. Not knowing that it was broken.
128. The two of them put on their clay heads
129. And they hurried off
130. On their way to Earth.
131. A little distance before they reached Earth,
132. It started to rain.
133. The rain poured down for a long time,
134. And the rain refused to stop.
135. Yet it was beating down on Oriseeku and Orileemere.
136. When the rain had beaten their heads for a long time,
137. The heads became waterlogged.
138. Then the heads expanded,
139. And started to drop off in bits.
140. The heads expanded more and more
141. Until the sides of the heads were completely worn away,
142. And dropped off in lumps,
143. So that what remained was flat and small.
144. It was in that state that they entered Earth.
145. When they got to Earth,
146. They worked and worked,
147. But they had no gain.
148. If they traded with one half-penny,
149. It led them
150. To a loss of one and a half-penny.
151. When they did this
152. For about ten years,
153. Without any hope for improvement,
154. They added two cowry shells to three,
155. And went to consult Ifa priests.
156. These wise men told them that
157. The fault was in the bad heads they had chosen.
158. They asked them, "When you were coming to Earth,
159. Were you beaten by rain?"
160. They answered, "We were."
161. They said, "When you were coming to Earth,

162. You chose bad heads.
163. If they were not unbaked heads,
164. They must have been broken ones.
165. As you were coming to Earth,
166. And you were being beaten by rain,
167. The bad heads you chose were wearing away,
168. And dropping off in pieces.
169. Before you arrived on Earth,
170. Your heads had become very flat.
171. Since then, all the gain from the work you have been doing,
172. You were using to make good the worn off parts of your bad heads.
173. It is when you have made them good sufficiently,
174. So that they are restored to their original sizes,
175. That you will begin to prosper very well.”
176. When Afuwape was coming,
177. He walked some distance
178. And got to the keeper of the first gate.
179. He asked from him the way to Ajala’s house.
180. The gate-keeper said he would first finish cooking his soup.
181. So, Afuwape sat patiently by him,
182. Helping him to kindle the fire.
183. As Afuwape was helping to kindle the fire,
184. He noticed that the gate-keeper was putting ashes into the soup.
185. He said, “Father, what you are putting into the soup is ashes.”
186. The father said that was what he always ate.
187. Afuwape then took one of his bags of salt,
188. And took a little salt from it,
189. And put it into the soup.
190. He asked the gate-keeper to taste it.
191. When the gate-keeper tasted it,
192. He asked Afuwape whence he got such a thing.
193. He then implored Afuwape to give him some more of it.
194. Afuwape agreed,
195. And gave the two bags of salt to him.
196. When they finished cooking the soup,
197. The gate-keeper stood up.
198. He led the way.
199. And Afuwape followed him.
200. They walked for long.
201. They walked and walked,
202. And then they came close to the house of Ajala.
203. They heard a noise of someone shouting.
204. The gate-keeper said, “That noise is from Ajala’s house.”
205. He said, “That shows that Ajala is not at home.
206. He has hidden himself to avoid his creditor.”

207. He asked Afuwape if he had money.
208. Afuwape said he had.
209. The gate-keeper said that if Afuwape saw Ajala's creditor,
210. He should help Ajala to pay up the debt.
211. When Afuwape arrived at the house of Ajala,
212. He found Ajala's creditor
213. Shouting, neighing like a horse.
214. Afuwape then asked him the amount of money involved.
215. The creditor said the amount was twelve thousand cowries.
216. Afuwape then opened his bag,
217. Brought out the money, and paid the debt.
218. After he had paid the money,
219. And the creditor had gone away,
220. Ajala jumped down from the ceiling,
221. Where he had hidden himself.
222. He greeted Afuwape,
223. And Afuwape also greeted him.
224. He asked whether Afuwape found someone in the house.
225. Afuwape said he found someone
226. Who said that you owed him twelve thousand cowries.
227. Afuwape said that he had paid off the money.
228. Ajala then thanked Afuwape
229. And asked him what he wanted.
230. Afuwape said that he had come to choose a head.
231. Ajala then took him,
232. And asked him to come along.
233. After some time,
234. They got to Ajala's store-house of heads.
235. They found two-hundred and one heads there.
236. Ajala threw his iron rod at one,
237. And that one broke into pieces.
238. Ajala said, "Don't you see?
239. That one is not good."
240. He saw another one,
241. And threw his iron rod at it.
242. That one also broke into pieces.
243. Ajala said that also was not good.
244. So, they went on searching,
245. Until Ajala saw one,
246. And threw his iron rod at that as well.
247. It gave a loud sound.
248. He then took it,
249. And threw it on the bare ground.
250. And it rolled all over the ground.
251. He gave it to Afuwape.

252. Afuwape asked whether that was a good one.
 253. Ajala said it was good.
 254. Afuwape then fixed it on his head,
 255. And he went in the direction of Earth.
 256. Just as he was about to get to Earth, it started to rain.
 257. The rain was very heavy,
 258. And it beat Afuwape so much that he became almost deaf.
 259. As this rain was beating Afuwape's head,
 260. The rain was dropping off.
 261. His head was quite intact when he arrived on Earth.
 262. When Afuwape arrived on Earth,
 263. He started to trade.
 264. And he made plenty of profit.
 265. When he had enough of good things,
 266. He built a house and decorated its doors.
 267. He had many wives,
 268. And he had many children as well.
 269. After some time,
 270. In due course,
 271. He was honored with the title of Orisanmi.
 272. When Oriseeku, the son of Ogun,
 273. And Orileemere, the son of Ija, saw Afuwape,
 274. They started to weep.
 275. Each said, "I don't know where the lucky ones chose their heads,
 276. I would have gone there to choose mine.
 277. I don't know where Afuwape chose his head,
 278. I would have gone there to choose mine."
 279. Afuwape answered them saying,
 280. "You don't know where the lucky ones chose their heads,
 281. You would have gone there to choose your own,
 282. You don't know where Afuwape chose his head,
 283. You would have gone there to choose your own.
 284. We chose our heads from the same place,
 285. But our destinies are not identical."

Eniyan
Irosun-wori
 Ode Remo
 [Verse 3]

1. Let's do things with joy.
2. Those who wish to go may go.
3. Those who wish to return may return.

4. Definitely, human beings have been chosen to bring good fortune to the world.
5. Omniscience, the diviner of Orunmila
6. Cast Ifa for Orunmila
7. Who was told that human beings would come
8. In addition, ask him a particular question.
9. He was advised to offer a sacrifice of fish and two hundred grains of cornmeal (aged).
10. Orunmila heeded the advice and performed the sacrifice.
11. One day, all kinds of people, including robbers and other evildoers,
12. Gathered themselves together
13. And went to Orunmila
14. To complain that they were tired
15. Of going back and forth to Earth.
16. Orunmila
17. Please allow us to take refuge in Heaven.
18. Orunmila said they could not avoid going to
19. And coming back from the Earth
20. Until they had attained the good position
21. That Odudua had ordained for every individual.
22. Only then could they reside in Heaven.
23. They asked, "What is the good position?"
24. Orunmila asked them to divest themselves of all negative thoughts
25. Before they could understand him.
26. They said, "We have divested ourselves from negativity
27. And would like to be given knowledge by Olodumare."
28. Orunmila said
29. The good position is the world.
30. A world in which there will be full knowledge of all things
31. Joy everywhere
32. Life without anxiety or fear of enemies,
33. Attack from snakes or other dangerous animals
34. Without fear of death, disease, litigation losses, wizards, witches or Esu,
35. Danger of accidents from water and fire
36. Without the fear of misery or poverty
37. Because of your inner power
38. Good character
39. And wisdom
40. When you refrain from stealing
41. Because of the hardship the owner suffers
42. And the disgrace with which this behavior is treated
43. In the presence of Odudua and other good spirits in Heaven
44. Who are always friendly
45. And often wish us well.
46. These forces can turn their backs on you

47. And allow you to return to the darkness of the world.
48. Bear in mind that you will not receive any favors
49. And whatever is stolen will be repaid.
50. All evil acts have their repercussions.
51. Individually, what will be needed to attain the good position is
52. Wisdom that can adequately govern the world as a whole.
53. Sacrifice or cultivating the habit of doing good
54. To the poor or those who need your help
55. Desire to increase the world's prosperity rather than destroy it.
56. People will continue to go to heaven and return to earth after death
57. Until everyone attains the good position.
58. There are a lot of good things in heaven
59. That are still not available on Earth
60. And will be obtained in due course.
61. When all the children of Odudua are gathered together,
62. Those selected to transfer the good things to the world
63. Are called eniyan, human beings.

Ayajo Asuwada
Ogundasa
 Akinsola Akiwowo
 [Verse 4]

1. Teeming heads congregate at the grove of Ogun.
2. The anthill is the morere of the eerun.
3. Asuwa is the morere of humankind.
4. It was with the principle of asuwa that the Heavens were established.
5. It was with the principle of asuwa that the Earth was created.
6. In asuwa forms all thing descended upon the Earth activated by purpose.
7. Complete and actuated for a purpose was iwa at its first emanations.
8. It was by asuwa the Ori was formed in order to be the Father of all.
9. Perfect, complete, and actuated for a purpose was iwa at first emanations.
10. For a set purpose was iwa when it poured down upon Earth.
11. Origun was the source of Oluiwaaye.
12. While Baba-asemuegun-sunwon was the emanate of Oluiwaaye.
13. Olofin Otete was the emanate of Baba-asemuegun-sunwon.
14. Olofin Otete it was who used a basketful measure of dust particles to create the Earth.
15. Olofin Otete it was who prescribed the cultivation of igbikugbin.
16. In this Father's soil.
17. Igbinkugbin is death.
18. Igbinkugbin is loss.
19. Igbinkugbin is ewe-ina.
20. Igbinkugbin is yeesi.
21. Igbinkugbin is anragba leaf.

22. Igbinkugbin is Yemoro.
23. Olofin Otete carried the basket of soil particles
24. And created ile ife.
25. All goodness together formed an asuwa.
26. When the assembly of hairs was complete
27. They took over the head.
28. When the assembly of hairs on the beard was complete,
29. They became ojontagiri.
30. When the clumping of trees was complete,
31. They became forests.
32. When the eruwa grasses were completely assembled,
33. They became savannah.
34. The agbon, when they assembled completely,
35. They uphold the roofing of a house.
36. When the ita assembled completely,
37. They covered the face of the Earth.
38. Girigiri is never absent
39. In the habitat of the aladi.
40. Girigiri is never absent
41. In the agiriyan of the eerun.
42. Alasuwada I invoke you.
43. To send iwa-susu down
44. To bear to me all ire gbogbo.
45. Origun, begot Baba Asemuegun-sunwon,
46. Olu iwaaye begat Baba Asemuegun-sunwon.
47. Baba Asemuegun-sunwon begat Olofin Otete.
48. Otete, you are alasuwada.
49. Asuwa:
50. Asuwa:
51. Permit all gbogbo ire compressed together to issue forth toward me.
52. Asuwa:
53. Asuwa:
54. Asuwa is what the oyin are.
55. Asuwa is what the ado bees are.
56. The eeran leaves grow in asuwa.
57. Asuwa is what broomsticks form.
58. It is in asuwa that the eeran leaves grow in the aare.
59. Asuwa is what the elegiri birds from
60. It is the coming together of a multitude of men
61. That we know as warfare.
62. It is as asuwa that one encounters the grassland.
63. It is as asuwa that locusts invade a farmland.
64. Alasuwaada, it is You I call
65. To send all goodness to me.
66. All forms of aisuwa, depart from me.

67. It is from Alasuwada that I emanate.
 68. I am he who is begotten of Alasuwada.
 69. In countless number, the yindinyin throngs their habitats.
 70. In countless number, swarms the Yaya in the hills.
 71. In several Asuwa the termites colonise their mounds.
 72. In several Asuwa we encounter the Ekunkun by the riverside.
 73. It is as Asuwa that we find the Labelabe by the waterside.
 74. It is as Asuwa that we meet the Oore in the swamp.
 75. It is as Asuwa that we behold the Lamilami.
 76. The leaf called Adosusu is never found singly.
 77. In Asuwa-far as the eyes behold-
 78. We encounter the Erimi tree.
 79. In Asuwa, we encounter the Egbele fish at sea.
 80. In Asuwa-far as the eyes behold-
 81. We encounter the crustaceans in the ocean.
 82. In Asuwa-far as the eyes can see-
 83. We meet the Eegun: Akaranba is the cognomen of Eegun,
 84. Which, when they feed in a school
 85. All other fishes follow in their trail.
 86. Origun Oluiwaaye
 87. Help me to achieve my goal.
 88. Ela, you are the offspring of Alasuwada!
 89. There is no Alasuwada like Origun!
 90. Origun, you are Alasuwada!
 91. The sediments of last year are found in the river.
 92. Performing their sacrificial rites in the undergrowths.
 93. Ela-wooro-wayi!
 94. Origun, come forth and collect sus-iwa-da for me.
 95. Ela-wooro-wayi!
 96. You are the Alasuwada!
 97. "Dews pour lightly, pour lightly
 98. Dews pour heavily, pour heavily
 99. Dews pour heavily so that you may pour lightly."
 100. Cast Ifa for Olofin Otete
 101. Who would pour myriads of existences down upon the Earth.
 102. On the day he was to receive the Ado of existence
 103. From the hands of Olodumare.
 104. On the day he was to release
 105. Existences on Earth,
 106. One particle of dust became
 107. A basketful measure of dust.
 108. A basketful measure of soil, became the earthcrust.
 109. Dews pouring lightly, pouring lightly
 110. Were used in moulding our earthly home.
 111. Dews pouring heavily, pouring heavily

112. Were used to mould the Earth
 113. So that ire-gbogbo may multiply upon it.
 114. Ire-gbogbo took the shape of asuwa.
 115. There is no luckless head in a companion of travelers.
 116. For ire-gbogbo is in form of asuwa.
 117. Yankangi alone it was
 118. Who strayed for a moment from his companion,
 119. Was said to have stolen iru to eat
 120. From Mother Olugamo's tray in Heaven.
 121. Asuwa!
 122. Asuwa!
 123. Iireee mi.
 124. Asuwa!
 125. Asuwa!
 126. There is one and only one Origun in Heaven,
 127. From which all varieties of Ori on Earth sprang
 128. In Heaven, there is no other Ori but Origun.
 129. There is no entity which can bind the soul of man other than Ori-
 130. Ori is the only entity that creates all things full and kneaded together,
 131. There is no other entity that kneads all things together, and full, than Ori
 132. It is only one's Ori which kneads one together and full.
 133. There is no luckless head in the domains of Ife.
 134. It is not being in tune with other heads that is the problem.
 135. Ire-gbogbo is in the form of asuwa
 136. Yet it is from the only-and-only-one Origun in Orun
 137. That each earthly Ori branches.
 138. Ire-gbogbo is in the form of asuwa.
 139. If one ori improves
 140. Its improvement will affect two hundred others.
 141. Orin: When one soul experiences a measure of goodness,
 142. That goodness affects two hundred other people.
 143. When one soul encounters good luck
 144. That good luck affects two hundred other people.
 145. When my soul encounters good luck
 146. That goodness will affect you
 147. When your soul encounters good luck,
 148. That goodness will affect me.
 149. When one soul encounters good luck
 150. Surely, the goodness will spread to two hundred other souls.

Iwa
Eji Ogbe
Modupe Alade
[Verse 5]

1. If we strike ragba against the calabash,
2. Iwa
3. If we strike ragba against the calabash
4. Iwa
5. If we take ragba against the stone,
6. Iwa
7. Cast Ifa for Orunmila
8. When the father was going to marry Iwa
9. The first time that Orunmila married a wife.
10. Iwa was the one he married.
11. And Iwa herself
12. Was the daughter of Suuru
13. When Orunmila proposed to marry Iwa
14. She said it was alright
15. She said that she would marry him.
16. But there was one thing to observe.
17. Nobody should send her away from her matrimonial home
18. That she must not be used carelessly as one uses rain water.
19. Nobody must punish her unnecessarily.
20. Orunmila said, "Orun will not let me do such a thing.
21. He said that he would take care of her.
22. He said that he would treat her with love,
23. And he would treat her with kindness.
24. He then married Iwa.
25. After a long time,
26. He became unhappy with her
27. He therefore started to worry Iwa.
28. If she did one thing,
29. He would complain that she did it wrongly.
30. If she did another thing,
31. He would also complain.
32. When Iwa saw that the trouble was too much for her,
33. Iwa said alright,
34. She would go to her father's house.
35. And her father was the first born son of Olodumare.
36. His name was Suuru, the father of Iwa.
37. She then gathered her calabash of utensils
38. And left home.
39. She went to Orun
40. When Orunmila returned,

41. He said,
42. Greetings to the people inside the house!”
43. Greetings to the people inside the house!”
44. Greetings to the people inside the house!”
45. But Iwa did not show up.
46. The father, Orunmila, then asked for Iwa.
47. The other house members said that they did not see her.
48. Where has she gone?
49. Did she go to the market?
50. Did she go somewhere?
51. He asked these questions for long until he added two cowries to three,
52. And went to the house of a babalawo.
53. They told him that Iwa had run away
54. He was advised to go and find her in Alara’s house.
55. When he got to the house of Alara, he said,
56. If we take ragba
57. And strike it against the calabash,
58. Iwa is the one we are looking for
59. Iwa.
60. If we take ragba
61. And strike it against the calabash,
62. Iwa is the one we are looking for.
63. Iwa.
64. If we take ragba
65. And strike it against the stone,
66. Iwa is the one we are looking for.
67. Iwa.
68. Alara, if you see Iwa, let me know.
69. Iwa is the one we are looking for.
70. Iwa.
71. Alara said that he did not see Iwa.
72. Orunmila then went to the house of Orangun, king of Ila
73. Offspring of one bird with plenty of feathers
74. He asked whether Orangun saw Iwa.
75. But Orangun said that he did not see her.
76. There was hardly any place Orunmila didn’t go.
77. After a long time,
78. He turned back.
79. And inquired of his divination instruments.
80. He said that he looked for Iwa in the house of Alara
81. He looked for her in the house of Ajero
82. He looked for her in the house of Orangun
83. He looked for her in the house of Ogbere, Awo Olowu
84. He looked for her in the house of Aseegbe, Awo Egba
85. He looked for her in the house of Atakumosa, Awo Ijesa

86. He looked for her in the house of Osepewuta, Awo Remo
87. But they told him that Iwa had gone to Orun.
88. He said that he would like to go and take her from there.
89. They said that was alright.
90. Provided that he perform sacrifice.
91. They asked him to offer a net, And give honey to Esu.
92. He offered honey to Esu
93. When Esu tasted the honey,
94. He said, What is this which is so sweet?
95. Orunmila then entered the costume of Egungun
96. And went to heaven
97. He started to sing again.
98. Esu then played a game of deceit,
99. And went to the place where Iwa was.
100. He said, A certain man has arrived in heaven
101. If you listen to his song,
102. He is saying such and such a thing...
103. You are the one he is looking for..."
104. Iwa then left her hiding place
105. And went to meet them where they were singing.
106. Orunmila was inside the egungun costume.
107. He saw Iwa through the net of the costume.
108. And he embraced her,
109. Those who change bad luck into good then opened up the costume.
110. Iwa why did you behave like that
111. And you left me on earth and went away.
112. Iwa said it was true.
113. She said that it was because of how he mistreated her
114. That she ran away
115. So that she might have peace of mind
116. Orunmila then implored her to please,
117. Have patience with him
118. And follow him
119. But Iwa refused
120. But she said that was alright.
121. She could still do something else.
122. She said, "You Orunmila
123. Go back to earth,
124. When you get there,
125. All the things which I have told you not to do,
126. Do not attempt to do them.
127. Behave very well
128. Behave with good character,
129. Take care of your wife,
130. And take care of your children

131. From today on, you will not set your eyes on Iwa any more.
132. But I will abide with you
133. But whatever you do to me,
134. Will determine how orderly your life will be.”

Otito
Osa Tura
Ode Remo
[Verse 6]

1. Osa Tura says, What is truth?
2. I say, What is truth?
3. Orunmila says, Truth is the Lord of Heaven guiding the world.
4. Osa Tura says, What is truth?
5. I say, What is truth?
6. Orunmila says, Truth is the unseen One guiding the world,
7. The Wisdom of Olodumare is using-great wisdom, many wisdoms.
8. Osa Tura says, What is truth?
9. I say, What is truth?
10. Orunmila says, Truth is the character/existence of Olodumare.
(*Orunmila I Otito ni iwa Olodumare.*)
11. Truth is the word that cannot fall.
12. Ifa is truth.
13. Truth is the word that cannot spoil.
14. Mighty power, surpassing all.
15. Everlasting blessing.
16. Cast Ifa for the world.
17. They said the people of the world should be truthful.

Constructing Personhood

For this inquiry of personhood as a theoretical schema, I will consider four mutually articulating concepts: *Àsùwàdà*, *Orí*, *Ènìyàn*, and *Ìwà*. The conclusion drawn implicates both the physical as well as the meta-physical while emphasizing the notion that humans are meta-physical beings first and foremost. “According to the perspective of a Nigerian humanist philosophy [*Ifá*] to which I referred earlier on, human beings are essentially metaphysical forms of expression. The purpose of the human physical form is the

transmission of certain spiritual values to the inhabitants of the Earth through human beings.” (Akiwowo 1980:11) This meta-physical state carries with it what I call an ontological imperative (Akiwowo’s ‘purpose’) which factors importantly into the schema of personhood. Admittedly, embodying the *àmòìmòtan* principle from the previous chapter, I acknowledge that this study does not represent a finality in theory. I offer this work knowing that it can be developed further with the inclusion of presently unknown (to me) verses of *Odu Ifá*, deeper understanding of those aspects hidden in *ìjìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀*, and other factors. The extreme reflexive nature of these verses cause multiple, simultaneous diverse associations; physical/meta-physical, individuality/community, constructive/destructive, life/death, spiritual/mundane (as opposed to secular) and so on. But I will try to approach them systematically.

I would like to begin considering the nature of physicality and meta-physicality. Looking at each of the four concepts, we find that each exists simultaneously in two states: *orí* (head) is spiritual as well as the head on our shoulders; *àsùwàdà* describes a divine organizing principle appearing throughout the universe as well as describing the physical amalgamation of our bodies, societies, environments, etc. in this world; *èniyàn* is a moral state of being as well as a physical reality. *Ìwà*, as an exception, exists metaphorically in these two states by remaining a spiritual and qualitative goal while tangibly expressing itself in the behaviors of people. To develop personhood in *Ifá* requires seeing both simultaneously while evaluating the produced outcome of the dialectic.

Orí has been the aspect of personhood most investigated and reported in Yoruba literature. While being of great importance, *orí* must be seen as a facet of any given

Here *Ori* succeeds where the other *Orisa* failed due to their lack of sacrificing. The result places *Ori* as the chief of all deities, people, and things. After their initial celebration, the other *Orisa* become jealous and it is through their attempts to dethrone *Ori* that they receive their destinies. Clearly this becomes analogous to the meeting of one's individual *ori* with *Ori Àpèré* (the *Ori* referred to in this verse) where we end up with our individual destinies.

30. Orisa (Orisaala) was the first to defy his authority.
31. Ori floored him and put him in Ajalamo.
32. At Ajalamo, Orisanla became the firing expert of moulded destinies.
33. Next Ori created Ifa, where Ifa became the expert on Ikin.

In these lines, the poem alludes to the fact that despite one's efforts to the contrary, one cannot go against destiny. Just as *Orisaála* attempted to defy his (*ori*'s) authority, *Ori* floored him. *Ori* can be seen not only as the supreme deity but the derivative personal deity of *Orisaála* comprising his destiny. It is *Orisaála*'s purpose to mold human beings in the womb and his efforts to go against this is an impossibility. Similarly, it was the *Ori* of *Ifa* that made him the expert of divination. What emerges is a convergence of immediate and distant realms. It is from *Ori Àpèré* that we receive our personal *ori* and between the two that an agreement is made regarding the content of our life's destiny. Through our individual efforts to fulfill and be in harmony with our destiny, we then succeed in molding ourselves whole through our *ori* while reflexively being molded by *ori* and the distant, divine *Ori Àpèré*. Before discussing this more, we must look a little further at the nature of *Ori*.

In *Odu Ogbeyonu* we see that, similarly to the *Orisa*, humans receive their *ori*, before arriving on Earth. The potter *Ajala* molds destinies (*ori*) from clay in his workshop from which every human comes to choose before his/her departure for Earth.

13. And they were told that before going to earth,
 14. They must first of all go to Ajala
 15. To choose their heads.
140. The heads expanded more and more
 141. Until the sides of the heads were completely worn away,
 142. And dropped off in lumps,
 143. So that what remained was flat and small.
 144. It was in that state that they entered Earth.
 145. When they got to Earth,
 146. They worked and worked,
 147. But they had no gain.
284. We chose our heads from the same place,
 285. But our destinies are not identical.

Lines 13-15 tell us that all people must go to *Ajala* in order to receive their destinies (*ori*). Because of his chronic indebtedness and irresponsibility, *Ajala* completes fewer heads than he leaves unfinished in some form: unfired, cracked, poorly formed, etc. Like the primordial *Ori Apere* who offered the sacrifice that he was told to make, the person who makes sacrifice, as did *Afuwape*, insures choosing a well made head. A well made head represents a life with success and a certain ease of accomplishment on Earth.

Lines 140-147 demonstrate the results for *Oriseeku* and *Orilemèrè* who did not do what they know they ought which was to make a sacrifice. And we see that by each choosing a defective *ori* from *Ajala*, their lives are difficult when here on Earth. They work and work with hardship but to no avail. In lines 284-5 we see reiterated that everyone must go to *Ajala* to receive an *ori* but the craftsmanship of that *ori*, the content of that destiny,

is unique. Only those who use wisdom and sacrifice before meeting with *Ajálá* can be assured of a good life on Earth.

A compelling symbolic act, which also shows up later in the *asùwàdà* concept, becomes the notion of molding clay. *Ajálá* molds clay to form our *orí*. Similarly, each of us is molded by our own *orí*. The presence that *orí* begins to take is that of an overarching boundary, the content of which is predestined, but it does not confer the quality by which we live our lives. In the West, we generally hold the notion that our personality is tied to our mind or head and this has been the major translation and correspondence made to the Yoruba *orí*. But as we will soon see, this is not the case. How we choose to live the content of our destinies, the Western notion of personality, manifests from other personhood aspects. Where the content of one's destiny will tend to manifest even if one is an offensive person, the internal and external experience of that destiny can be enhanced or diminished by how one chooses to live it.

It is here that we meet the observed sub-components that comprise personhood in relation to *orí*. *Orí* linguistically holds multiple meanings. *Orí* can mean simply the physical head on the shoulders of any animal. It can also be used to describe the "head" of an organization or town, like the king. At the same time, it can refer to this metaphysical concept of individual destiny that is intimately tied to the moral/sacred concept of *Orí Àpèré*. This is where the micro and macro, the personal and the moral meet. While *orí* can be lived as if devoid of qualitative values, the origin *Orí Àpèré* requires a qualitative morality. In *Odu Ogbe Alara*, one of its verses relates a story of a party that *Orí* threw for all the primordial, and at that time separate, body parts. During the course of the party, after plenty of drinking and eating, the body parts wanted to dance. They

agreed that by coming together and placing *Ori* as their director, they could accomplish this task. *Èsù* happened to pass by and was pleased by the sight and used his power (*àse*) to make the creation permanent. Since that time, the human body (*ara*) has maintained the form made on that day and remains under the direction of *Ori*. In this instance, we see that *ori*, in its physical manifestation, molded together the parts of the body in order to be whole and complete for life. And while referring to the physical head, there is evoked the knowledge that without our heads, we could not succeed in life, that it is an essential piece where others may be expendable.

In another aspect, *Ori Àpèré* molds *ori inu* as a meta-physical entity unique to each individual, an offshoot of *Ori Àpèré*, to interact with multiple other aspects of the person in order to be whole and complete for life. *Ori inu*, the individual *ori* chosen from *Àjàlá*, receives various names such as *ìpín* (fate, destiny), *ìponrí* (inner-head), *àyànmó* (that which is affixed) each of which focuses on the immutable features of a given individuals' life. Yet, there are other features that go into determining how any given individual will live out and express the content of their *ori*.

“Among the intangible attributes of man are *eeró* (thought) *imò* (knowledge), *ogbón* (useful insights gained from experience), *obaa* (wishes), *òrò* (the spoken word). The mental instruments employed by man to activate the intangible elements include *Ori Onise* (the actualizing self), *lakaayè* (the practical common sense), *iyè* (vitality), *òye* (ability to discern things). All these mental instruments, in my judgment constitute the brain power. The behavioural expressions of human consciousness are *ise* (doings, efforts or activities), *isesi* (pattern of doing, or simply action), *ifurasi* (hunch), and *ihuwasì* (behavioral pattern).” (Akiwowo 1983:13)

From these multiple features that in English we might qualify in sum as ‘personality’, we see a multiplicity of characteristics that go into developing the expression of individual uniqueness. It is *ori* that bounds the characteristics together contextualizing their expression in sum as they strive to fulfill the content of their boundedness, their *ori*. The situation is analogous to a basketball game in that the game is bound by the court, its rules, the necessity for scoring points by putting the ball in the basket, etc. Yet, each particular game is unique in how it is played and the dynamic of its manifestation and outcome. In this sense, *ori* correlates with the “court and rules” so to speak while the other factors of personhood determine how any individual will “play the game” the qualitative expression of one’s life. Therefore, *ori* molds these many facets like clay into a single individual human in a cohesive way. And this molded form maintains both a physical moldedness as a body, as well as a metaphysical moldedness as cognition, personality, action, character and destiny. Akiwowo later writes of this phenomenon that the Western mind/body duality does not actually exist in the *Ifa* point of view of personhood and that as a molded together form, the body, cognition, destiny, and ontology of humans form a unified whole. “It seems then that, in piecing together the available data from both oral literature and contemporary observations of Yoruba behaviour, we are led to hypothesize that the basic Yoruba concept of the person (devoid of ideas borrowed from other cultures), vis-à-vis body-mind relationship, is a unitary one. The body is the mind and the mind is the body.” (Akiwowo 1981:26)

Developing this further, I posit that an essential feature of being human, and the feature that distinguishes how each person expresses the content of their *ori*, is having the power of choice as embodied by the *tibi tire ejiwapo* principle. This tension results

between those qualities which originate with an ontological imperative, those which lie in the realm of *ire*, and those which are free of such, those lying in the realm of *ibi*. As *Ori Àpèré* emanates *ori-inú*, the latter retains ontological features, agreements between an individual and *Oloḍumarè* that must be fulfilled and which can be seen as *ire*. The other features comprising “personality” become free of ontological necessity and can be seen as *ibi*. As I mentioned above, *ori* represents certain events or features of one’s life that must inevitably present themselves but how we actually live out this content is determined by our choice; a dialectic and one well established in world mythology like the famous Greek heroes who grappled with personal desire and destiny. Additionally though, an encompassing dialectic between ontology and individuality (in the form of choice) presents itself as we will see that humans, as a whole, are compelled to choose certain qualities of living and this, far from being neutral in its outcome based in a self-centered notion of choice, effects our experience of the content of our destiny, our *ori*. (This harkens to the meta-practice of *Iwà* to which we will arrive later)

The concept *èdà* symbolizes the fundamental nature or being of an individual. “The term, *èdà èni*, appears to be the nearest Yoruba equivalent to the Western concept of personality.” (Akiwowo 1981:28) *Èdà èni* is comprised of *ìsesí*, the accumulation of behaviors in an individual in sum and from which other people build their understanding of the person. Lawal provides a more nuanced perspective by adding the concept *àbùdà* to *èdà* whereby *èdà* “refers to a living being and its ‘essential nature’” while *àbùdà* “emphasizes the innate physical and behavioral aspects defining an individual or a category of living things.” (Lawal 1996:27-8) From *ìsesí*, a person’s behaviors, we can infer their *ìwà*, their character, an external expression of the cumulative qualities of the

aforementioned. “This word, *iwà*, is the term for the more enduring behavioural characteristics which help to distinguish the person from others.” (Akiwowo 1981:29) Understood in this light, *iwà* connotes the previously referred to perceivable, mundane qualities. As we are about to see, these chosen behaviors of each human interact dialectically with their ontological counterparts as expressed in *Odu*. It is here that choice becomes so crucial, because each person can work against the morality he/she ought to be striving for. As *tibi tire ejiwapo* embodies the nature and dialectic of the mutual coexistence of opposites, it explains the nature of human choice and the crucial need to exercise a moral discipline with that choice. “Hence, there are those who may be identified as *asebi* or individuals whose actions are strongly motivated by and directed at creating *ibi*; and *asepe*, or individuals whose actions are directed at the creation and attainment of *ire*.” (Akiwowo 1988:178) Seen through this concept, human beings have and express both qualities and therefore personhood, as understood through *Ifá*, requires humans to wrestle with *ibi/ire* in order to effectively refine *ire* through the use of *ibi* rather than allowing *ire* to succumb to the negating effects of *ibi*.

In the *Odu Irosunwori* [verse 3], *Ifá* explicates the nature of being human, *enìyàn*. In line 4 of the verse,

Definitely, human beings have been chosen to bring good fortune to the world (*aye*), we can infer the dual nature of the responsibility where each individual human being has been chosen to bring good fortune to the world yet the consequence reaches into and influences the collective aspects of the world’s societies, nations, ecologies and so on; an affirmation that Earth’s inhabitants exist in various and multiple forms of sociation.

In my interpretation, I believe there exists a difference between *ile/Ile* (land/Earth as a spiritual force or deity) from *ayé*, the world. In light of work by Abiodun, Lawal, Drewel and others and applied to *Odu Ifá*, there exists a metaphysical distinction between the two, though they remain complimentary and intimately united. Many Yoruba scholars have established theories in which the earth, with a small or capital 'e,' is the physical land on which we live and the spiritual force with which we reckon thereon. But, *ayé*, the world, though sometimes used as if a synonym, like in the expression *ile ayé* (the physical world), can connote a difference between the Earth as the planet and supporter of all life and the multiple, created environments existent upon it. These take the forms of ecological environments, social environments, etc. as seen to be created by the interaction of entities encompassing human, plant, animal and spiritual (*Orisa, imale, ajé*, and so on). The dense weaving of relationships between all entities living on earth becomes the world, *ayé*. And it is in *ayé* that each negotiates their destiny and behavior recognizing that *ayé* contains both good and bad (*tibi tire ejiwapo*) providing us all with life's challenges.

This interpretation finds support in the verse from *Irosunwori* through the reference of *ipo rere*. In line 28, *ipo rere naa li ayé*, the good position/condition is the world, we find a connection that *ayé*'s qualitative state changes due to the behavior of humans. Lines 19 through 21 establish that humans suffer reincarnation because the world is not ideal yet humans could attain *ipo rere* through their own efforts thereby ending their suffering. Therefore, if people create and attain *ipo rere*, and *ipo rere* is the world (*ayé*), then *ayé* becomes the environment created by the earth's inhabitants as distinguished from the physical land or earth. Implicit in this theory is the understanding that what the

earth's inhabitants create can be both constructive or destructive yet we ought to, are compelled to, strive for *ipò rere*, the good position/condition. And ultimately, though the world is a product of the interaction of all things on earth, the greatest responsibility lies upon human beings to create this world as *ipò rere*.

Lines 29 through 35 describe *ipò rere* in which the qualitative state of living “without anxiety or fear” exists in juxtaposition to social dilemmas and undesireableness, furthering the idea that the world is a social creation of earth's inhabitants.

29. A world in which there will be full knowledge of all things
30. Joy everywhere
31. Life without anxiety or fear of enemies,
32. Attack from snakes or other dangerous animals
33. Without fear of death, disease, litigation losses, wizards, witches or Esu,
34. Danger of accidents from water and fire
35. Without the fear of misery or poverty

The dialectic of the individual to society reflexively describes that through individual efforts towards goodness, the world (*ayé*) as the dynamically created multi-verse mutually and reflexively created by every occupant of earth, becomes the good position. Through an individual's good deeds, the world as a whole becomes a better place to live and feedbacks goodness to the individual.

38. Because of your inner power
39. Good character
40. And wisdom
41. When you refrain from stealing
42. Because of the hardship the owner suffers
52. Individually, what will be needed to attain the good position is
53. Wisdom that can adequately govern the world as a whole.
54. Sacrifice or cultivating the habit of doing good
55. To the poor or those who need your help
56. Desire to increase the world's prosperity rather than destroy it.

These lines provide basic qualities necessary to cultivate as an individual that will help to manifest *ipò rere: agbára inu* (inner strength), *iwà rere* (good character), *ogbón* (wisdom), *ebo* (sacrifice) and empathy, an extrapolation from lines 39-40 and 52-54 which imply the interdependent coexistence of individuals. Each of these individually developed qualities find expression and meaning through social form: the world as a whole, doing good to the poor or those who need your help, the world's prosperity. We can see from this verse that personhood finds its meaning out of the reflexive dynamic of the self to the world, society and other individuals.

43. And the disgrace with which this behavior is treated
44. In the presence of Odudua and other good spirits in Heaven
45. Who are always friendly
46. And often wish us well.
47. These forces can turn their backs on you
48. And allow you to return to the darkness of the world.
49. Bear in mind that you will not receive any favors
50. And whatever is stolen will be repaid.
51. All evil acts have their repercussions.

In these lines we find that *enìyàn* live in relationship with each other, the other inhabitants of the world *and* with divine forces of nature (*Òrìṣà*). The *Òrìṣà* take great concern with the business of humans and can aid or hinder our dealings. Like judges maintaining ethical practice, the *Òrìṣà* require that every action receive its consequence, and that working against *ipò rere* has its own repercussions. Though not specified, I believe we can deduce twofold: 1) that these repercussions affect both *àsùwà* and *ayé*; and 2) that reflexively, the repercussions affect the actor. So we know that carelessness or destructive intent and action (*aṣebi*) work contrary to both the individual and global coexistence.

57. People will continue to go to heaven and return to earth after death

58. Until everyone attains the good position.
 59. There are a lot of good things in heaven
 60. That are still not available on Earth
 61. And will be obtained in due course.

Several important features appear in these lines. First is an explanation of reincarnation as seen through the perspective of *Ifá*. Both individuals and global humanity are implicated in 55-56 whereby we see that reincarnation occurs for a moral reason and that once everyone, individually and collectively, achieves the moral quality *ipò rere*, reincarnation could stop. This reinforces the conception that people are metaphysical by nature and come to Earth only temporarily. (*Ayé l'ojà, òrun ni ilé*. The world is a market, heaven is our home.) Secondly, our individual interests act within realms of sociation; our actions do not speak only of and for themselves but of and for everyone. The pain of continual reincarnation can only stop when each individual, and then by proxy, the world, exercises the discipline of *iwà* to attain *ipò rere*. A last impression regarding these lines considers the implication in this verse that when everyone attains *ipò rere*, the world itself will become heaven. Whatever it is that separates heaven and the world will dissolve and they will become one, a perspective distinct from heaven being a geographical place to which everyone would travel.

62. When all the children of Odudua are gathered together,
 63. Those selected to transfer the good things to the world
 64. Are called eniyan, human beings.

Here again is a reiteration of the ontology of *èniyàn*, human beings. Here also exist two aspects though: 1) that all people carry the ontological responsibility to bring good things to the world although not all strive to fulfill it; and 2) those that *do* are called *èniyàn*. Referring back to *tibi tire ejiwapo*, from this theory emerges the nature of choice in the universe. Quoting Lawal, he said “The full phrase is ‘*Tibi tire la dá Ilé Ayé*’ (lit.

The world is a delicate mix of the positive and negative). *Èsù Elégbára* is the agency of this interconnectedness of opposites.” (personal communication) “It suffices to say that since (in collaboration with *Ọ̀rúnmílá*) he [*Èsù*] eventually resolves all the conflicts in the universe, including those incited by himself, *Èsù* is a paradigm for the “opposites” inherent not only in the Yoruba cosmos but also in the *Àsùwàdà* principle.” (Lawal 1996:23) With the fact of coexistent positivity and negativity overseen and navigated by *Ọ̀rísà Èsù*, the freedom to choose becomes an important factor in the life of human beings. Despite our bearing the responsibility of bringing goodness, nothing forces us to do so except our own choice to practice the discipline. Although seemingly paradoxical, by merely being human one can be called *èniyàn*, but lines 60-62 imply that only those that exercise the discipline are called *èniyàn* in its full ontological and moral sense.

Because of its tonal properties, there exists a linguistic distinction in Yoruba between those people that strive to fulfill this moral responsibility and those that do not: *èniyàn* and *èniyàn*. The latter marks those people whose actions clearly seek to create disruption, chaos, violence, and other forms of anti-social, destructive behavior. Lawal writes as his definition in the glossary of *The Gelede Spectacle*, “*Èniyàn*, A human being (literally, ‘the specially selected one’); sometimes pronounced *èniyàn* to describe the wicked ones, or those working against human goodness.” (Lawal 1996: 293) This complements Akiwowo’s earlier quote noting that some people work towards disruption (*asebi*) while others work towards goodness (*asepe*).

Since the role of collectivity and association plays so strongly in this verse, next we will consider the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà* from *Odu Ogundasa* [verse 4]. In this verse, the

remaining two concepts (*iwa* and *asuwada*) are explicitly referred to furthering the intra-textuality and reflexiveness. In the *Ayájo Asuwada*, we see that as a primordial character of creation, all things exist in collective groups and that these are the forms in which goodness becomes actualized. In this verse what remained implied in the verse from *Odu Irosun Wori*, becomes explicit.

1. Teeming heads congregate at the grove of Ogun.
2. The anthill is the morere of the eerun.
3. Asuwa is the morere of humankind.
4. It was with the principle of asuwa that the World was established
5. It was with the principle of asuwa that the Heavens were established.
6. It was with the principle of asuwa that the Earth was created.
7. In asuwa forms all thing descended upon the Earth activated by purpose.
8. Complete and actuated for a purpose was iwa at its first emanations.
9. It was by asuwa the Ori was formed in order to be the Father of all.
10. Perfect, complete, and actuated for a purpose was iwa at first emanations.
11. For a set purpose was iwa when it poured down upon Earth.

Here we see that *asuwa* is the universal form by which all things have been created. *Asuwà* is the noun form meaning 'coexistence.' *Morere* is anywhere two or more individuals come together to deliberate or worship. (Akiwowo 1986:356) We see in line three, that *Olodumàrè* created humankind to coexist (*suwà*) in associations (*morere*); like the anthill is for ants so togetherness is for humans. More than that, *asuwa* formed Heaven (*Orun*), Earth (*Ile*) and the world (*Aye*). *Asuwà*, from the beginning of the verse, is established as a fundamental principle of creation. In fact, all existence (*iwa*) manifested and conformed to the *asuwa* principle creating perfection, completeness and purpose.

This stanza informs us that all creation, trees as forests, water as oceans, stars and planets as galaxies, people as societies, body parts as a body, exists in organized forms of togetherness revealing a purpose. Recalling the previous story from *Odu Ogbe Alara* that

told of the body parts coming together under the guidance of *ori* (page 41) supports the *àsùwà* principle in that the component parts of the body came together as an *àsùwà* in order to create a *morere* whose purpose is to provide a vehicle for bringing goodness into the world as *èniyan*. In line eight, we are told explicitly that it was by *àsùwà* that the *Ori* was formed to be the 'head' of all things. Two understandings can be extracted from this line: 1) that the physical *ori* (head) of the body is an *àsùwà* of its parts, these being the eyes, nose, mouth ears etc.; and 2) that the meta-physical *ori* of the person is an *àsùwà* of soon to be revealed parts. In terms of forming an idea of personhood, we can deduce that the component qualities of personhood will form an *àsùwà* themselves, and further that as an *àsùwà*, a coming together, personhood will be both a physical existence as well as a metaphysical one as has been demonstrated repeatedly by *èniyan* and *ori* up to this point.

In order to develop the understanding of *ori* as an *àsùwà*, we now utilize intratextuality in which the preceding referred to verses converge simultaneously to develop it fully. Continuing with the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà*,

11. Origun was the source of Oluiwaaye.
12. While Baba-asemuegun-sunwon was the emanate of Oluiwaaye.
13. Olofin Otete was the emanate of Baba-asemuegun-sunwon.
14. Olofin Otete it was who used a basketful measure of dust particles to create the Earth.

126. There is one and only one Origun in Heaven,
127. From which all varieties of Ori on Earth sprang
128. In Heaven, there is no other Ori but Origun.
129. There is no entity which can bind the soul of man other than Ori-
130. Ori is the only entity that creates all things full and kneaded together,
131. There is no other entity that kneads all things together, and full, than Ori.
132. It is only one's Ori which kneads one together and full.

Here are a series of emanations originating from *Origun*, the Source, the One Perfect Mind. (Akiwowo) What is described can be interpreted as increasing degrees of

tangibility and proximity with *Ilẹ̀* and *Ayé*. *Orígún* becomes (emanates) *Olúíwááyẹ* (Lord of All Earthbound Existence) who becomes *Baba-àsẹ̀mùègùn-sunwòn* (Father Who Selects and Makes All Things Perfect and Balanced) who becomes *Ọ̀lọ́fín Ọ̀tẹ́tẹ́* (Ruler of the Palace, Infinite Spaciousness). *Orígún*, so close to *Olódumare* (Creator), descends upon the Earth now as *Ọ̀lọ́fín Ọ̀tẹ́tẹ́*, and actually creates the solid ground of Earth with a “basketful measure of dust particles.” We understand that a divine consciousness, *Orígún*, formed the Earth and maintains a presence in its workings. Lines 126-132 further concretize *Orígún*’s descent upon the Earth by showing “all varieties of *Ori* on Earth” as emanating from *Orígún*. Here personhood becomes grasped out of this complex, esoteric elusiveness. *Ori* binds the soul of man, kneads one together and full. This addresses the double aspects of personhood that our bodies and *ori* are made of a primordial material seen as clay (science’s parallel is DNA and cells) and that our individual existence actually has multiple facets that must be bound together.

To address the former, it is believed that *Obatalá*, the *Ọ̀rìṣà* of artistry and ethics, actually forms the human body out of clay while inside the mother’s womb. If “no other entity kneads all things together, and full, than *Ori*,” we must infer that those *Ọ̀rìṣà* involved with the creation of humans extend from *Orígún*. In *Ifá* conception, all existences, including *Ọ̀rìṣà*, have their own *Ori*. Therefore, knowing that *Orígún* is the source of all *Ori* on Earth and in Heaven, *Obatalá* becomes an emanating character or aspect of *Orígún*. Referring to the verse from *Odu Ogbeyonu* [verse 5], we discover that another *Ọ̀rìṣà*, *Ajalá*, is the creator of heads that he moulds from clay. A humorous figure (as long as one is not having to choose an *ori*), *Ajalá*’s inconsistency produces a minority of well-made heads, while the majority are inferior and damaged in some un-

noticeable way. Again, we have an allusion made to humans being kneaded together. *Àjàlá*, like *Obàtálá*¹, becomes by proxy a facet of *Orígún* from which all *Orí* originate. But somehow we must account for the imperfection, the poorly made heads by *Àjàlá*, despite originating from perfection, *Orígún*, from which all *Orí* emanate. In line 120 of the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà*, reference is made to *Iya Olugamo*. “*Olugamo* is our Mother-in-Heaven, while *Èlà* is our Father-in-Heaven. In our view, *Olugamo* could be a shortened form of *Olu-gun-amo* (One-who-kneads-clay-together). Probably it is the clay which *Ajalamo* [*Àjàlá* mentioned above] used in moulding *Orí* in the mythical account of *Efuwape* [verse 5] that *Iya Wa Olugamo* kneads.” (Akiwowo 1986:355) Again, we have generational affinities of *Orí* through *Orígún*. If only *Orí* can knead things together and full, and it is *Olugamo* who kneads the clay and dispenses it to *Obàtálá* and *Àjàlá*, then each in succession becomes a descendant of *Orígún* ultimately forming the last descendant, human *Orí* and body.

Akiwowo’s mentioning of *Èlà* brings about an interesting connection as well. Lines 88-100 show *Èlà* as having affinity with *Orígún* who is the *Alásùwàdà*, “The Great Being who creates all existences in groups for a purpose.” (Akiwowo) Yet, who is *Èlà* and what is its connection to *Orí*? Here I rely on the work of Rowland Abiodun.

“*Òdùmàrè* [*Olódùmàrè*] sat back and thought about how to create more things in his universe. For this purpose, he realized he needed an intermediary force, since he was too charged with energy to come into direct contact with any living thing and have it survive. Therefore, he created *Ogbón* (wisdom), held it in his palm and thought where it could

¹ Looking at the line from *Odu Ofun Birete* [verse 1], “At *Ajalamo*, *Orisanla* became the firing expert of moulded destinies.” we see that *Ajala* could actually be an aspect of *Orisanla*. In those parts of Yorubaland where *Obatala* is worshipped, he also is seen as an aspect of *Orisanla* so there exists an affinity between the two in their roles of kneading together the bodies and destinies of human beings.

live. After a while, *Òdùmarè* released *Ogbón* to fly away and look for a suitable place to lodge. When *Ogbón* could not find a suitable abode, it flew back, humming like a bee, to *Òdùmarè* who took *Ogbón* and swallowed it. Similarly *ìmò* [knowledge, intelligence], and *òye* [understanding, discerning], which were also created, returned for lack of suitable abodes, and were swallowed for the same reason. After several ‘thousand’ years during which *Òdùmarè* was disturbed by the incessant humming of *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye*, he decided to get rid of them in order to have some peace. So he ordered *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye* to descend (*èp*) making the sound *hòò*. Thus the three heavenly bodies now known as *Hòò-rò* or *Òrò*, were evacuated, and set for their descent to earth.

In *Òrò*’s new state it is identified with *Èlà*, the deity which functions in the Ifá divination complex and is regarded by the Yoruba as the embodiment of wisdom, knowledge and understanding in all their verbal and visual forms. The names *Èlà* and *Òrúnmilà* are sometimes used interchangeably, even though *Èlà* is probably a separate deity in its own right within the Ifá divination system. Be that as it may, *Èlà* became the first recognized authoritative source of communication and explanation of the nature of *Òdùmarè* and all his creation.” (Abiodun 1987:254-5)

Now, putting the two together, *Orígún* emanates *Èlà* requiring that *Orígún* first emanates *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye* that become *Èlà*. Given the *Odu* narrated by Abiodun, he says that *Olódùmarè* creates *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye*, which leaves us with a question as to the relationship between *Orígún* and *Olódùmarè*. Are they one and the same or does *Orígún* emanate from *Olódùmarè* being an intermediary between *Olódùmarè* and *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye*? In spite of this question, we can proceed with our interpretations. Line 88

relates that *Èlà* is the offspring of *Alásùwàdà*, *Orígún*. We can now deduce that *Èlà* itself is an *àsùwà* by virtue of being the product of the coming together of *Ogbón*, *Ìmò* and *Òye* and being the offspring of *Alásùwàdà*. Line 93 is an invocation for this spiritual essence to descend and effect the situation of the reciter of the verse. The situation, understood by line 94, makes a connection between *Èlà* and *Orígún* as if they were synonymous to come to the supplicants aid and to *ṣù-ìwà-dà*, to collect beings together for a common goal and good.

As we established in our prior discussion of *Odu Irosunwori* [verse 3], *ipò rere* (good condition/position) is *ayé* (the world). Humans can, by choice, create *ipò rere*. Since we embody, in latent potential, the essential perfection of creation, we must appeal to that perfection in order to attain our highest stature as *èniyàn*, *ipò rere*, and *àsùwàdà*. Thus, we invoke the aid of numinous qualities like the *Alásùwàdà* to fortify, inspire and challenge/elevate ourselves in order to succeed in these divine requirements. For this reason, the lines 49-53, 64-68, 86-96, become this appeal for aid.

49. Asuwa:
 50. Asuwa:
 51. Permit all gbogbo ire compressed together to issue forth toward me.
 52. Asuwa:
 53. Asuwa:
64. Alasuwada, it is You I call
 65. To send all goodness to me.
 66. All forms of aisuwà, depart from me.
 67. It is from Alasuwada that I emanate.
 68. I am he who is begotten of alasuwada.
86. Origun Oluiwaaye
 87. Help me to achieve my goal.
 88. Ela, you are the offspring of Alasuwada!
 89. There is no Alasuwada like Origun!

90. Origun, you are Alasuwada!
 91. The sediments of last year are found in the river.
 92. Performing their sacrificial rites in the undergrowths.
 93. Ela-wooro-wayi!
 94. Origun, come forth and collect su-iwa-da for me.
 95. Ela-wooro-wayi!
 96. You are the Alasuwada!

Here we hear the plaintive call for help in which associations are reinforced. Firstly, *ayé* is made by the multiple relationships of Earth's residents. In line 51, the chanter requests divine intervention by the *Aláṣùwàdà* in order for life to be good; for life to be filled with *gbogbo ire* ("common good, all good individually viewed"). (Akiwowo 1986:348) In lines 93-96, the appeal for divine intervention involves explicitly *Èlà* and *Orígún* to descend and collect the goodness of togetherness for humans. Knowing that *Èlà*'s sound is *òrò*, we have a powerful utterance in which the sound of *Èlà* is used to invoke his presence to support existence. This is made additionally powerful knowing that it was *Èlà*, an *àṣùwàdà* himself made from *ogbón*, *ìmò* and *òye*, that helped to make and mediate the world. ("Since they [*ogbón*, *ìmò* and *òye*] were heavily charged life-forces from heaven, their descent was accompanied by lightning and thunder. All solid matter melted and became jelly-like. For a while, *Òrò* was suspended in mid-air like an egg and did not melt, but then it dropped to earth and split (*là*)). (Abiodun 1987:255) Secondly, lines 67 and 68 concretize the direct connection, as a form of descent, between humans and *Aláṣùwàdà* (The Creator of All Things, also known as *Orígún* and *Èlà*). As a result, a "geneological" moral imperative establishes itself that *èniyàn* must strive for the attainment of living according to the divine principles *ipò rere*, *ìwà*, and *ire gbogbo*

(“all existing good collectively viewed, the sum total of goodness”). (Akiwowo 1986:348)

In terms of perceiving personhood, the *Ayájo Àṣùwàdà* relates that as humans we need to be in associations and that if we lack these, we exist in a marginalized, unhealthy position.

115. There is no luckless head in a companion of travelers.
116. For ire-gbogbo is in the form of asuwa.

The verse here tells us that through various forms of relationship with people as we travel through life (explained through the proverb *ayé l'ájò*, life [lit. the world] is a journey) we cannot be unlucky for ‘the sum total of goodness’ is in the form of togetherness.

134. It is not being in tune with other heads that is the problem.
135. Ire-gbogbo is in the form of asuwa

And in these two lines we find explicit mention that through ‘not being in tune with other heads’ we experience problems. Supporting this are two other references in the verse. In line 66 the verse states,

66. All forms of asuwa, depart from me.

And lines 117-120 state,

117. Yankangi alone it was
118. Who strayed for a moment from his companion,
119. Was said to have stolen iru to eat
120. From Mother Olugamo’s tray in Heaven.

Àṣùwà means isolation, the opposite of *àṣùwà*. The reference to *Yankangi* becomes the establishment of a moment in time when *àṣùwà*, as a principle in dialectic relationship with *àṣùwà*, becomes present and potential. Isolation is seen as a state of

being that is undesirable and something to be prevented. Knowing that individualism is shunned as a moral value, there seems to be the recognition that the self is morally and irrevocably socially bound. “Morality is more than a matter of personal conscience (*èrì okan*). The moral is determined in a context that is by convention social. My efforts to fulfill my destiny, including those involving the most agonizing, personal, introspective turmoil, take place in a society. That society itself rewards certain forms of behavior and punishes others. This means that my moral self is defined as much by others as by myself.” (Hallen 2000:63)

Given an establishment of the concepts of *orí*, *èniyàn* and *àsùwàdà*, it is time now to look into the workings of *ìwà*. In the discussion of *orí*, *ìwà* represented the qualitative sum of a person’s actions. But what has been built up now is a moral quality to *ìwà* that requires personal action towards this established morality. In developing this conception of *ìwà*, and unlike other discussions of *ìwà* before which perceive *ìwà* as a variable state of being, I posit that *ìwà* is a fundamental practice that surrounds and governs the lives of humans so that they can attain the goodness that *Olódumarè* has charged us to strive for. In previous analyses of *ìwà*, two positions have evolved: 1) that *ìwà* is a value-neutral term referring to the actual state of being encompassing all varied qualities of existence or character; or 2) that *ìwà* actually has moral connotations. What I suggest concurs with the second position and develops it further. I believe that within the bounded space of *orí*, in order to attain the position of *èniyàn*, *ipò rere* and *àsùwàdà* that manifests *ire gbogbo*, each individual, in relationship to the self and to the world, must practice *ìwà*.

The work of Yoruba scholars utilizing indigenous texts, derive an understanding that *ìwà* contains moral and ontological content. Due to the prominence and authoritative

position given to *Odu Ifá*, the multiple range of meanings from explicit to hidden and embedded, construct and imbue words with meaning that ‘ordinary language’ might not. Not to say that one is more correct than the other but given the Yoruba affinity for verbal ambiguity and layered meaning (*ijìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀*) the content of meaning that exists in *ese Ifá* opens a myriad of possibilities and implications. It is for this reason that *Ifá* verse has become a central aspect to scholarly work while remaining elusive and cryptic, as it is (theoretically) *Babaláwo* who maintain the knowledge of verses and therefore hold a privileged position for understanding and interpreting the consequential meanings. Particularly in light of the necessary intra-textual reference that must be used to build an effective, accurate theory, one must approach semantic and contextual meaning through multiple verses of *Ifá* addressing and referring to the same idea. It is from our several *ese Ifá* at the beginning of the chapter that I will build an understanding of *ìwà* as a dynamic application or performance of moral qualities rather than a mere statement of a moment’s snapshot in summation of a person’s ‘character.’

A sort of debate has arisen in Yoruba scholarship as to the meaning and epistemological reference of the word *ìwà*. *Ìwà* comes from the verb *wà* which Abraham’s Dictionary lists as “A.(1) exists, (2) is alive, (4) state of existence, (5) is situated.” (Abraham 1958:660) An early essay by Abimbola supports this viewpoint. “The word *ìwà* is formed from the verbal root *wà* (to be, to exist) by the addition of the deverbative prefix *i*. The original meaning of *ìwà* can therefore be interpreted as ‘the fact of being, living, or existing.’” (Abimbola 1975:393) Yet this apparently morally neutral content of *wà* seems to metamorphize when transformed into a noun. Again, Abraham’s dictionary states for *ìwà*, “B.(1) (a) character:temperament.” (Abraham 1958:328)

Although still apparently neutral, it is at this point that positions diverge. Some believe that any moral innateness to the word derives from colloquial injection rather than semantic reality. Lawuyi and Taiwo state, “We propose to use Abimbola’s explication [a morality-free content] as the basis of our own interpretation. *Ìwà* is Being *sans* determinations. All things that are have *ìwà* (being).” (Lawuyi, Taiwo 1990:68)

If we begin by looking at the verse from *Eji Ogbe* [verse 6] which portrays *Ìwà* as a main character, we notice that *Ìwà*, through ‘lineage’ descent, is the grand-daughter of the creator of the universe, *Olódùmarè*, whose son, *Ìwà*’s father, is patience (*Suùrù*). Lines 11-12, and 35-36 clearly state that *Ìwà* acquires divine and moral status from such pedigree,

11. And Iwa herself
12. Was the daughter of Suuru

35. And her father was the first born son of Olodumare.
36. His name was Suuru, the father of Iwa.

In juxtaposition to mundane use of the word *ìwà*, possibly free of moral or ontological value, *Odu Ifá* positions *Ìwà* as a divine essence with associated morality therefrom. Scholars such as Thompson and Hallen have established the aesthetic, epistemological and moral significance of *Suùrù*; “A moral character marked by patience (*ìwà suùrù*)- this is the best of all forms of good character (*ìwà*). [a quote from one of the *onísègùn* in conversation with Hallen] If patience (*suùrù*) becomes an aesthetic value associated with certain norms of appearance in Yoruba culture, the more profound reason for its becoming so is the instrumental benefits that derive from it *as an epistemic virtue*. A character (*ìwà*) that assigns a high priority to patience (*suùrù*), especially in difficult or

problematic situations, informs a consciousness that maintains self-control and optimal communication with its environment.” (Hallen 2000:71-2)

As we proceed through the verse, in lines 16-19, we find conditions with which *Òrúnmìlà* must comply in order to marry *Ìwà*.

16. But there was one thing to observe.
17. Nobody should send her away from her matrimonial home
18. That she must not be used carelessly as one uses rain water.
19. Nobody must punish her unnecessarily.

In my opinion, because *ese Ifá* acquire their meaning through the performance of *dáfá* (*Ifá* divination), a correlation arises in which the character in the verse represents the person for whom *Odu* is cast. “... each verse cites a precedent—an antecedent divination, which serves as a model or map for the present situation the diviner is investigating and the future course of action of the client.” (Barber 1999:22) In the case of the above lines 16-19, the reference in the text to *Òrúnmìlà* becomes a reference by proxy to all human beings when quoted or referenced outside of any particular divination event. Therefore, *all* people must observe one thing, the nurturing of *Ìwà*. She said not to send her (*Ìwà*) away, not to use her carelessly or punish her unnecessarily. Through poetic language and allegorical trope, we can infer that people *choose* (reaffirming our prior discussion regarding choice) to cultivate and practice the discipline of good moral behavior understood as choosing to marry *Ìwà* and not send her away from her matrimonial home. This becomes further reinforced as a necessity by virtue of being *èniyàn* and recalling the aforementioned content of *tibi tire ejiwapo*. We live each moment with an ontological compulsion to choose to marry, subsequently cultivate and gently nurture *Ìwà* who becomes the expression of our moral existence. The result of abuse is the degradation

and eventual loss of *Ìwà*, having significant negative effects on an individual's standing in their world.

Supporting this is an excerpt from another version of this verse in the same *Odu, Eji Ogbe*, where we see the effects of *Ọrúnmìlà*'s loss of *Ìwà*, "But almost immediately, after she left his house, *Ọrúnmìlà* discovered that he could hardly live without her. He lost the respect of his neighbours and was despised by the community. Furthermore all his clients deserted him and his divination practice was no longer profitable. He lacked money to spend, clothes to wear, and other materials which he could use to live a good and noble life." (Abimbola 1971:396)

After searching for *Ìwà*, finding her and unsuccessfully pleading for her to return home with him, the *ese Ifá* finishes,

116. Orunmila then implored her to please,
117. Have patience with him
118. And follow him
119. But Iwa refused
120. But she said that was alright.
121. She could still do something else.
122. She said, "You Orunmila
123. Go back to earth,
124. When you get there,
125. All the things which I have told you not to do,
126. Do not attempt to do them.
127. Behave very well
128. Behave with good character,
129. Take care of your wife,
130. And take care of your children
131. From today on, you will not set your eyes on Iwa any more.
132. But I will abide with you
133. But whatever you do to me,
134. Will determine how orderly your life will be."

It is in these lines that we find an important transformation in our relationship with *Ìwà*. Understanding the poetic nature of the verse, it is understood that *Ìwà* was not some

beautiful woman whom men competed for in ancient days, but that *Ìwà* is an intangible and elusive, really numinous quality whose presence beautifies anyone. Hence her portrayal as living in *Òrun* with her father *Sùúrù*. Yet she states, “I will abide with you, but whatever you do to me will determine how orderly your life will be.” It is here that *Ìwà* becomes representative of the orderliness of one’s life. “The meaning of this [verse of *Ifá*] is quite clear. It means that *Olódùmarè* himself is the embodiment of good character. He therefore expects human beings to have good character as well. It is a sin against the divine law of *Olódùmarè* for anybody to deviate from *the path of good character*. (italics mine)” (Abimbola 197 :416) But most importantly, a sub-text reveals itself in that *Ìwà* can only be obtained through action, both verbal and physical (Hallen). It is this fact that elevates *Ìwà* to a meta-practice in the lives of human beings. *Ìwà* is the simultaneous cultivation of spiritual/religious morality and aesthetic as well as mundane (not secular) actualization of a cool, productive, enjoyable life. At the risk of being reductive and essentializing, the following analogy makes its point. *Ìwà* is the *Ifá* companion to Christian forgiveness, Buddhist mindfulness and Islamic fidelity to *Allah*. Certainly from the beginning of the verse one can deduce that *Sùúrù* ought to be first and foremost a quality to exercise in creating an orderly life in the practice of *ìwà*. But what is the additional content of *Ìwà*, its epistemological basis? “All the things which I have told you not to do, Do not attempt to do them.” What becomes the content of *Ìwà*’s admonition as we do not have the list of those prohibitions in this verse. To answer these questions we must turn now to other verses.

Returning to *Odu Irosunwori*, in lines 36-38, we find personal aspects necessary to fulfill the role of being *èniyàn* which must be incorporated in practicing *ìwà*.

36. Because of your inner power
 37. Good character
 38. And wisdom²

It is ‘good character’, *ìwà rere*, that is necessary to become human, in its ontological manifestation according to *Irosunwori*. The fact that *ìwà* is mentioned with the conditional (*rere* meaning good) does not necessarily negate the premise that *ìwà* is essentially a moral attribute. There seems to exist a dual reference to *ìwà* in which the word can refer to any quality of behavior, relative in its evaluation such that there can be good or bad *ìwà* and secondly, that *ìwà* simultaneously can be referred to in the abstract (*Ìwà*) as the numinous, divine morality for which everyone must strive. These two meanings exist simultaneously and symbiotically. Also, a modifier can specify and highlight which quality of a person’s *ìwà* about which another person is speaking. The goal of being *èniyàn* seeks to create *ipò rere*, the good position in the world. To achieve this, humans must use inner strength (*agbára inú*) and wisdom (*ogbón*) along with good character (*ìwà rere*). Given the way these are listed in the verse, one is lead to believe these exist in horizontal parity with one another, but knowing that *ìwà* is the quality in sum of one’s verbal and non-verbal actions (Hallen, Akiwowo), inner strength and wisdom become features, vertically that go into the fulfilling of *ìwà*. And as Abimbola stated, “the path of *ìwà*” is a dynamic process chosen by those who wish to cultivate it and fulfill their destiny as *èniyàn*.

From this verse of *Eji Ogbe*, *ìwà* becomes a moral and ontological imperative in order to complete, finish and polish ourselves resulting in the unification of Heaven (*Òrun*) and

² See Hallen, *The Good, The Bad, and the Beautiful* for a discussion of the features, and epistemological makeup of these three aspects of *eniyan*.

the world (*ayé*). Through the cultivation, the daily practice of *ìwà*, we can achieve a world as described in lines 30-62 of *Irosunwori* [verse 3]. So we see that *ìwà* requires the embodiment of divesting from negativity, humility, wisdom, sacrifice, social and global awareness to increase the world's prosperity (understood in multiple forms not merely monetary). The three features listed in lines 53-56 allude also to the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà* by placing one's character in a social environment, and in this case this environment is inclusive of the world's total ecology and not just human societies. In his manuscript, Epega mentions at the end of this same verse of *Irosunwori*, "*Awon omọ Oduduwa ni igi oope, eranko ati ekolo, eniyan ati awon ohun niran bi bee*". The children of *Oduduwa* include the palm tree, animals and earth worms, Human beings and things like this." (Epega 1964) And furthering this global situating of *ìwà*, Abimbola states, "Ifa has long ago divided the globe into five regions, namely:

- a. *Ìko Awúsí* (the Americas)
- b. *Ìdòròmù Àwúṣè* (Africa)
- c. *Meréetélú* (Europe and Asia)
- d. *Mesin Àkáárúbà* (Arabia, the land of the worship of Kaaba)
- e. *Ìwónran níbi ojúmó tí Í mọ́ọ́ wá* (which refers to Australasia)

As far as the Yoruba are concerned, all the above mentioned parts of the world are all lands of Ifa." (Abimbola 1983:80) Considering this geographical vision in conjunction with the scope of the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà*, the encompassing of humanity in *Irosunwori* and the universal morality of *ìwà*, the actual practice of *ìwà* as a mundane, daily effort to nurture *ìwà rere* requires and takes place within a consciousness of local and global proportions, actions and consequences.

Continuing with the content of *Ìwà*, we can look at lines 8-10 of an *ese* from *Odu Osatura* [verse 7]. This verse seeks to describe the essence of Truth (*òtító*).

8. Osa Tura says, What is truth?
9. I say, What is truth?
10. Orunmila says, Truth is the character/existence of Olodumare.
(*Otito ni iwa Olodumare*)

Reinforcing the ontological and moral status of *Ìwà*, this verse positions Truth as a quality present throughout the universe but particularly as a quality obtainable by humans which is necessary for proper maintenance of the world and development of one's *ìwà*. Line ten says that "Truth is the character/existence of Olodumare." In his philosophical assessment of linguistic epistemology, Hallen points out regarding the phrase *Ìwà l'ewà*, "...that when two nouns are joined by the verb "is" in such a phrasing, the class named by the word succeeding the verb is meant to be included in or subsumed by the class preceding the verb." (Hallen 2000:127) Therefore, in this case one could deduce the position that *ìwà Olódùmarè ní Òtító*, the character/existence of *Olódùmarè* is Truth. Almost regardless of whichever translation of *ìwà* one prefers (moral character, or neutral existence), in this case *Òtító* is made explicitly divine and relates to the nature of *Ìwà* itself. *Ìwà* is the grand-daughter of *Olódùmarè* (see above in *Ejiogbe*). *Olódùmarè* itself has *ìwà*. *Òtító* is *Olódùmarè*'s own character or existence (*Ìwà*). So all existence, even the creator itself, has *ìwà* along with the fact that *Ìwà* denotes a set of divinely originating moral qualities. If humans are to do everything for *Ìwà*, then the *Ìwà* of all human beings retains this divine and moral status compelling humans towards *Òtító* and multiple other forms of moral behavior. *Ìwà*, even in human form, is a primordial, divine essence

which must be elevated to its greatest heights and illumination in the individual behaviors and existence of each particular person.

If we return back to the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà* of *Odù Ogundasa*, we can elicit more understandings of *ìwà* from the verse. At its core, the principle of *àsùwàdà* itself incorporates and generates *ìwà*. The word *àsùwàdà* is formed from three separate words, *ṣu-ìwà-dà*. *Ṣu* means to compress, mould, knead, teem, crowd together. *Dà* means to create pour, melt, sling, drape, coil up, turn back, drive along or out. Given this multitude of meanings, I refer to Akiwowo for clarification. “[T]he Alasuwada Oral Poetry begins with a declaration of a principle, called *asuwa*, by which all things on and in Earth and the Heavens were created (*da*) and given form.” (Akiwowo 1986:345) Deferring to the meaning of *dà* as ‘create’ and then putting the three together, *àsùwàdà* conveys the idea of moulding existence/character together for creation of something new, or as Akiwowo puts it, actuated for a purpose; “[A]su-iwa-da (literally meaning that which kneads or moulds *ìwà*, ie., beings, states of existence or characters so that they can live together in harmony for a purpose or common end).” (Makinde 1988:63) So *ìwà* lies at the center of this principle as the fulcrum of meaning. Considering the tone of the poem in sum, it is not unreasonable to derive an understanding in which the *àsùwà* principle and its *ìwà* component are deeply reflexive and mutually address one another. And the total image evokes a high morality and ontology regarding both *ìwà* and the *àsùwà* principle itself, factors that comprise the meta-physicality of being human.

In lines 7-10, one sees a clear implication of the central role of *ìwà* in creation:

Asekun-suwada nigba Iwa se.
Asuwa la fi da Ori tii se Baba won nigba Iwa se.
Origun, Asekun-suwada nigba Iwa gun.

Asuwada nigba ti Iwa ro.

7. Complete and actuated for a purpose was iwa at its first emanations.
8. It was by asuwa the Ori was formed in order to be the Father of all (when iwa first emanated).
9. Perfect, complete, and actuated for a purpose was iwa at first emanations.
10. For a set purpose was iwa when it poured down upon Earth

Here is narrated an evolution of the nature of *Ìwà*: first when *Ìwà* initially emanated (*igba ìwà se*) complete and actuated (*Asekun-sùwàdà*), second when *Ìwà* became perfect in its completion and actuation (*igba ìwà gun*) and third when *Ìwà* poured down upon the Earth (*igba ìwà rọ*). So *Ìwà* is shown to evolve from completion and actuation to a level of perfection after which *Ìwà* descends or pours down upon the Earth. All existence in its total expression of forms, from primordial to Earthly manifest, adheres to this divine and moral stature described in these lines. Beyond just existing though, existence itself becomes divine and charged with a purpose (*Ìwà*). Recognizing that in line eight, *Orí* becomes the ‘Father’ of all creation, and that in referring back to lines 139-141 all other *Orí* emanate from this perfect *Orí* known as *Orígún*, a link is established between the *Orí* of human beings and the perfect, complete and actuated existence of *Ìwà* to which *Orí* is bound. In the eyes of *Ọrúnmilà* and *Ifá* culture, personhood inherits these traits of origin that cannot be abandoned nor discarded.

Referring to Akiwowo’s seminal essay on the *Ayájo Àsùwàdà*, he derives several propositions which bear on the question of personhood. He states,

“1. The unit of social life is the individual’s life, being, existence, or character. [*Ìwà*]

2. Although each human being is metaphysically a unique emanation-an *èmí*-of a Divine Being, yet each individual's life, as a corporeal self, needs the fellowship of other corporeal selves to feel and be whole and complete.
3. The corporeal individual, essentially, cannot continue-in-being without a community.
6. A genuine social being is one who works daily, and sacrifices willingly, in varying ways, his or her cherished freedom and material acquisitions for self-improvement as well as for the common good. For without one, the other cannot be achieved." (Akiwowo 1986:353)

These propositions clearly show the reflexive nature of the *àsùwà* principle and its cornerstone, *ìwà*. And the consequence regarding personhood is to establish that humans must also reveal, through their behaviors, the divine content of existence through their own particular *ìwà*. Also, that in order to be human and achieve these necessities, humans must recognize their social nature, *àsùwà*, (lines 1-6, 67-68, 115-116) through which they fulfill their destinies, *orí* (lines 7-10, 126-132, 136-137) and the ultimately shared ontological challenge which is to be *èniyàn àsùwàdà*, the chosen ones selected to bring goodness into the world through the acknowledgement of their mutual dependence on and nurturance of all life here on Earth. While each of these components builds the schema of understanding personhood, it through the practice of *ìwà* that these ontological challenges/requirements become catalyzed and achieved. *Ìwà* is the understanding and wise application of types of behavior (*ihùwàsi*) over time becoming *isesi* (a pattern of behavior) whose tone, character, or expression of existence will, in ordinary language, be called a person's *ìwà* yet metonymically, will evoke and invoke all of its other divine and ontological qualities.

Chapter Four

In constructing this particular vision of personhood, I have focused on four components that can be seen to inter-relate as essential features that must be in place when considering humanity and its individuals. These features are 1) *Orí*, 2) *Ènìyàn*, 3) *Àṣùwàdà*, and 4) *Ìwà*. Each retains certain characteristics regarding the makeup of people:

Orí- 1) *Orí* is the content of one's destiny. 2) It is also a spiritual entity appealed to for support of a successful endeavor and/or life in general. 3) It is the physical head. 4) It is the most senior *Òrìṣà* 5) It is the primordial creator (*Orígún*) from which all other *orí* emanate.

Ènìyàn- 1) In ordinary language use, it refers to any person. 2) It is the ontological status as "the chosen ones" to bring goodness into the world. 3) A moral status tied to the attainment of *ipò rere*. 4) A status, in its fullest moral and ontological expression, achieved by choice. 5) A term inclusive of all people of the world.

Àṣùwàdà- 1) "The unit of social life is the individual's life, being existence, or character. 2) Although each human being is metaphysically a unique emanation-an *èmí*- of a Divine Being, yet each individual's life, as a corporeal self, needs the fellowship of other corporeal selves to feel and be whole and complete. The corporeal individual, essentially, cannot continue-in-being without a community." (Akiwowo 1986:353) 3) A genuine social being is one who works daily, and sacrifices willingly, in varying ways, his or her cherished freedom and material acquisitions for self-improvement as well as for the common good. For without one, the other cannot be achieved. (ibid.)

\iwa- 1) The practice of fulfilling all the above criteria. 2) Each person's personal expression of quality of existence, understood in the moral sense.

This list of features regarding the four components being interrogated in no way represents the exhausted possibilities, nor does it negate or deny the conclusions drawn in other studies of any one or combinations of these components. What I have attempted is to pull together multiple concepts that have heretofore been addressed separately, yet when brought together articulate in such a way as to reveal a complex and full picture of what it is to be human. Additional linguistic, textual, philosophical and performative information will, in the future, clearly expand on this principle of humanity.

Now though, what follows the conclusions drawn from attempting to answer a question such as the one in this thesis? The topic itself tends to point towards its own necessities. Just as the development of fields in the humanities and sciences rest on a concept of personhood as evolved through the particular socio-cultural, religious historicity of Europe, so might analogous fields amongst African socio-cultural, religious systems. And behind us on the 'horizon' (Serequeberhan) of such a development might come the legitimization of cultural forms (like medicine), dismissed by Western epistemological hegemony, to be re-evaluated and evolved further once more. Akiwowo, addressing African scholars of sociology (but his point is well taken whatever the discipline) stated that they (we) have a particular challenge before them (us). "[T]hey will have to meet the challenges of developing for sociology a particular approach or perspective derived only from (a) an African philosophy or (b) a European philosophy not hitherto used as the foundation of a science; or (c) from a combination of complementary African and European philosophies." (Akiwowo 1980:25) But

commensurate with this development of ideas is the application of methods for their arrival and subsequent progress, the praxis of theory.

In line with the very imperatives of personhood as expressed in *Odu` Irosunwori* and *Ogundasa*, I align myself with Akiwowo and Makinde in their discussion of *Ifogbóntáayése* as a practical challenge. *Ifogbóntáayése* conveys the meaning using-wisdom-to-remake-the-world. “In the wider context of which I am using it, by *Ifogbóntáayése* is meant, roughly in the Yoruba philosophical thought, the conscious employment of human knowledge, reason and wisdom for the understanding and improvement of the world (both the mental and the physical), of the human relationship to the physical world and to fellow human beings, and the improvement of the general condition of people on earth.” (Makinde 1988:71) Makinde, in this same essay, placed considerable weight on the necessity for cooperation between fields of intellectual discipline, seeking a unity of knowledge. I would add, harkening back to the hermeneutical quality of *Ifá*, the adoption of self-conscious hermeneutics in the sense of ‘edifying conversation’ (Rabinow), ‘interpretative understanding’ (McCaskie), and the negotiated meanings between participants seeking the minimization of power differential and its consequent oppression of legitimacy and humanity.

Ifogbóntáayése, this morally concerned discourse, appears to align itself with the intellectual and cultural orientation of Yoruba. “The intellectual climate of the region [Yorubaland] was and still is largely characterized by a dialogic ethos, a constant pursuit to exchange ideas, experience, and material culture. Each city was a locus of intellectual interaction between intellectuals (*babaláwo*, herbalists, poets, artists, et al.), and Ile-Ife

was regarded as a sanctuary and the university par excellence in the etymological sense of this word.

“The degree to which polyglottism and multiculturalism was highly valued, and indeed required of intellectuals, is expressed in the well-known *oríki* of Orunmila, the god of divination. He is known as *Afèdèfèyò*, that is ‘He who speaks all languages and Yoruba.’” (Yai 1994:109) Yai goes on to discuss the historical nature of Yoruba intellectual desire for discourse through an account of the famous Ulm divination tray (*opón Ifá*). “For want of a better term, the Ulm divination tray is an important ‘text.’ ... [T]he divination tray is an agent in the Yoruba mode of relating to other cultures. The Ulm *opón Ifá* is also symbolic of the will of the West African elite to engage European cultures in a dialogue on an equal footing.” (ibid.:110) Negotiating the discourse between King Felipe IV of Spain and King Tezifon of Alada, during the 17th century, was the exchange of texts; from Spain, the Bible, from Alada, *Opón Ifá*. “I surmise that Tezifon’s gesture was one of diplomatic and cultural reciprocation. As European kings sent to West Africa missionaries who were perceived as the most representative wise men and intellectuals of their respective nations, the king of Alada in an attempt to establish an equal cultural and political exchange, must have thought of sending to European kings a divination tray that he perceived as the perfect equivalent of the text European missionaries carried with them along the West African coast. Tezifon, therefore, was engaging the contemporary European elite in a cultural dialogue, and exchange of texts or discourses.” (ibid.:111)

It is in the spirit and historicity of this dialogic ethos that I seek to place this thesis. I like to think of this work as a conversation- one that is polysemous in its realms of

discourse and personalities involved. First, I humbly present this inquiry to the community of scholars who study Yoruba culture/society/religiosity. Recognizing the modest stature of this work, I present it as a seed for future development and growth that might help to push our understanding and field further along. I would hope that in the spirit of discourse, this work could be a springboard for new questions and topics of inquiry, both methodologically as well as informationally.

Second, this thesis becomes another voice in the conversation between European/American systems of thought and structure and African parallels. My desire remains, despite my own unconscious shortfalls, to place our shared humanity and equality as *the* horizon on which we hold our discourse. Implications for studies such as this one, in which fundamental philosophical/theological concepts are interrogated, harken towards some of the most controversial topics of global discourse. President Thabo Mbeki's questioning of the workings of HIV/AIDS can be seen as an effort to question Western hegemony that might mistakenly project its own ideas into an African context. President Mbeki's efforts may stem from variant conceptions of personhood, etiology, health, illness, treatment, etc. If seen through this lens (not to be misunderstood as a blanket condoning of any behavior), variant intellectual frameworks can (ideally) generate beneficial strategies of action while avoiding the perpetuation of Western cultural, political and economic hegemony.

Third, this work reveals a dialogue between myself and *Ifá* as I have plunged myself into the reading of *ese Ifá*, explanatory works of Yoruba linguistics, semantics, philosophy and theology, and plenty of reflection while appealing at *ojúbo Ifá* (the shrine

of *Ifá*) for inspiration and the hope that I might actually find something beneficial to say and add.

And fourth, I feel that this thesis actualizes a merging of perspectives if seen through Western eyes yet what might be a normative vision through Yoruba eyes: the consonant reunion of “religious” and “secular” discourse. Western scholarship and intellectualism cast disparaging glances towards their once-upon-a-time friend, religion, and with understandable reasons given the censorship and oppression of church control in European 17th and 18th centuries and even contemporary American Christian fundamentalism. But Western history’s religious oppression and hegemony on intellectual development does not necessitate its corollary in other cultures. With post-modern efforts to allow for the internal views of other systems of knowledge to maintain their own normative vision, the acceptance of the complementary workings of “religion” and “secularism/empiricism” (in quotes so to be understood in their Euro/American compartmentalization and mutual off-setting of one to the other) must have room made for it. Particularly when it is predominantly Western ambivalence and fears that mark this separation and its maintenance whereas in Africa, this can hardly be said to be the case. “How do we analyze ‘religion’ in a society in which the concept of ‘religion’ is absent? This question arises because in the past most African languages did not include a word which could be convincingly and unequivocally translated as ‘religion’.

Nonetheless, most studies of African societies treat ‘religion’ as an institutionally and conceptually distinct category of analysis *as if* the author knew precisely what it was, not only for himself, but for the members of the societies under study as well. The result has

been that, consciously or not, external concepts have come to define ‘religion’ in Africa.” (Brenner 1989:87)

Therefore, it is with *ìfògbóntáayése* in mind as a practical goal that I conclude this thesis. As I claim to take the imperatives of *èniyàn*, *àsùwàdà*, and *ìwà* seriously, Makinde’s and Akiwowo’s call to utilize *ìfògbóntáayése*, particularly regarding scholarship and its products, reveals another feature in the practice of *ìwà* in order to attain the goodness described in the aforementioned concepts of *Odu Ifá*. It is my wish that this work might help to bring goodness into the world.

Glossary

<i>Àmòìmòtan</i>	That which cannot be fully understood.
<i>Àsùwàdà</i>	A universal principle of creation by which things form together in groups which provide the vehicle of goodness.
<i>Babaláwo</i>	A diviner and priest of <i>Òrúnmìlà</i> , the god of wisdom.
<i>Dáfá</i>	The performance of divination by a <i>Babaláwo</i> .
<i>Èbo</i>	Sacrifice
<i>Èmí</i>	The animating “soul” of each person.
<i>Èniyàn</i>	Literally “the specially selected ones” used to speak of a human being.
<i>Eṣe Ifá</i>	A verse of <i>Ifá</i> poetry within any given chapter of <i>Odu</i> .
<i>Ibi</i>	A philosophical and spiritual quality of deconstruction and critique.
<i>Ifá</i>	The divination system of <i>Òrúnmìlà</i> used by <i>Babaláwo</i> .
<i>Ìfogbòntáayése</i>	Literally, “using wisdom to remake the world.”
<i>Ikin Ifá</i>	The palm nuts used in divination by the <i>Babaláwo</i> and considered the physical representation of <i>Òrúnmìlà</i> on Earth.
<i>Ipò rere</i>	The good condition/position
<i>Ire</i>	A philosophical and spiritual quality of construction and ideal.
<i>Ìtàn</i>	The oral stories associated with historical events and meaning.
<i>Ìwà</i>	Existence as a natural fact but also, the quality of an individual’s patterned behaviors over time.
<i>Odu Ifá</i>	The two hundred fifty six chapters of the divination signs of <i>Ifá</i> and their associated verses.

<i>Olódùmarè</i>	The Universal Creator
<i>Oògùn</i>	Medecine
<i>Ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀</i>	The chain of seed pods used for divining by <i>Babaláwo</i> .
<i>Ọ̀pọ̀n Ifá</i>	The carved trays used by <i>Babaláwo</i> used for marking the <i>Odu</i> during divination.
<i>Orí</i>	Literally “the head,” but also denoting one’s personal deity and destiny.
<i>Oríkì</i>	A genre of orally performed texts designed to evoke the inner essence of any particular being to whom it is directed.
<i>Ọ̀rìṣà</i>	Deities of the natural world concerned with worldly affairs.
<i>Ọ̀rúnmilà</i>	The god of wisdom and <i>Ifá</i> divination.
<i>Tibi Tire Ejiwapo</i>	Literally, “the mutual coexistence of opposites.” Used both as a spiritual principle and a philosophical theory.

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