



## Orí O! The idea of person, the issue of destiny, and the ritual of *bṛí* among the Yorùbás and a look at Candomblé

Orí O! A ideia de pessoa, a problemática do destino e o ritual do *bṛí* entre os *yorùbás* e um olhar ao candomblé

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the idea of person among the *Yorùbás* from West Africa, through the conception of *orí*, i.e. the head, understood by them as bearer of personality and destiny, an idea widespread in the literature on the matter of human personality and the meanings of destiny. By means of *orí*, we will introduce the issue of predestination among the *Yorùbás* and the meaning of the ritual of providing food to the head, that is, *bṛí*, among them, referring to Afro-Brazilian people from Candomblé. The discussion drives us to find out the object's interpretive plurality and, at the same time, it leaves us in face of the linguistic issue of translating the concepts, a fact that influences on the very theological construction. Besides, we face the historical construction of the *Yorùbá* religion, notoriously a dynamic and mutable religion that is manufactured through dialogues with Christianity and Islam. Transformation processes that, by the way, may be transposed to Brazil, where the celebration of *orí* takes a different way from that of the African autochthon reality.

**Keywords:** *Yorùbás*; conception of person; *Orí*; predestination; *Bṛí*.

### Resumo

Este artigo analisa a ideia de pessoa entre os *yorùbás* da África Ocidental, a partir da concepção de *orí*, isto é, a cabeça, entendida por eles como portadora de personalidade e destino, ideia amplamente difundida pela literatura sobre a matéria da personalidade humana e os sentidos de destino. A partir do *orí*, será introduzida a problemática da predestinação entre os *yorùbás* e o sentido do ritual de alimento à cabeça, o *bṛí*, entre eles, com referência aos afro-brasileiros do Candomblé. A discussão conduz à constatação da pluralidade interpretativa do objeto e, ao mesmo tempo, deixa-nos diante da questão linguística da tradução dos conceitos, fato que influi na própria construção teológica. Além disso, estamos diante da construção histórica da religião *yorùbá*, notoriamente uma religião dinâmica e mutável que se fabrica nos diálogos com o cristianismo e islamismo. Processos de transformação que, aliás, são transponíveis para o Brasil, onde a celebração do *orí* se apresenta de modo diferenciado da realidade autóctone africana.

**Palavras-chave:** *Yorùbás*; concepção de pessoa; *Orí*; predestinação; *Bṛí*.

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*Àjàlá mo orí mo yọ àlà forí kọ`n*  
*E àgò fì rí mi.*  
 [Àjàlá made my orí, germinated me, and made me grow,  
 Alá that holds and keeps my head].  
 (OLIVEIRA, 2003, p. 152)

## Introduction to a people made of peoples

The *Yorùbás* from Africa constitute an “imagined community” (ANDERSON, 1991) that derives from a long historical process whose roots touch the rise and fall of the *Ọ̀yọ́* Empire, the release of Dahomey and Lagos’ renaissance (MATORY, 2005). This renaissance is, also, the result from an identity purification (as individual and/or collective edification through a set of signs and aesthetic, symbolic, and ritual references undergoing a process of alterity) made in diaspora, i.e. the assumption of an identity named *Yorùbá* derives, first, from the export of the political-cultural model of *Ọ̀yọ́* and *Ilé-Ifẹ̀* and, second, from the experience of alterity (LAPLANTINE, 2000) of the proto-*Yorùbá* peoples undergoing a forced diaspora, when they constructed the identities *Sàró*, in Sierra Leone, *Nàgó*, in Bahia, Brazil, and *Lukumí*, in Cuba. Thus, there emerged a plurality of niches of “imagined communities” that, by returning, constructed a broader idea of identity: *yorùbá*nity, in a process of true “tradition invention” (RANGER; HOBSBAWM, 1992).

The constitution of a cultural identity comprises weaving a religious model: *ẹ̀sìn ibílẹ̀*, i.e. the “traditional religion” of the *Yorùbás* that, in fact, shows up as neo-traditional<sup>1</sup>, given the historical circumstances of the composition of *Yorùbá*’s ideological narrative, i.e. the passage from a model of religious localisms to globalized localisms and the consequent accommodation of standards to a common modeling. This means, in ultimate analysis, that “traditional religion” emerges

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<sup>1</sup> For the analysis of the concept of *Yorùbá* religious “neo-traditionalism”, see Ferreira Dias (2011).

from self-consciousness, i.e. from the experience of alterity of the autochthon cults in face of Islam and Christianity (particularly the Evangelical Anglo-Saxon).

Well, once constituted the “traditional religion”, then, the religious patterns that provide some uniformity to the plural discourses of the proto-Yorùbá peoples<sup>2</sup> are formulated, a uniformity that is not independent of a universalist and modern sense of the *Ífá* System (ILÉSANMÍ, 1991), considerably different from the other cults to *Òrìṣàs*. However, for what concerns us here, it is precisely this constitution of the neo-traditional religion that postulates the issue of predestination and the idea of person, religious values marked by a religious-philosophical formulation and, from this perspective, less originally African.

This paper aims to understand the Yorùbá conception of person and destiny, measuring its particular tensions and issues that allow understanding that the Yorùbás’ religion is neither linear nor uniform, or, as Ilénsami (1991, p. 219) says: “The fact of historical heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, led the various ‘Yorùbá’ dialect groups to see themselves as separate entities rather than as a nation”.

### **Bọrí Orí Èlèdà! Orí o!**

The Yorùbá anthropological conception (i.e. thought about man) sees the human being as made by *àrá* (body), *ẹmí* (breath/soul/life element), *orí* (head/receptacle of destiny and personality), and *ọkàn* (heart, conceived as bearer of intelligence and knowledge). However, it is the head (*orí*) that receives particular attention, and it is regarded as key element in the subject’s identity, the bearer of destiny and personal deity (BALOGUN, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> We regard as “proto-Yorùbá” peoples those speaking the Yorùbá language in their various forms, which would be named Yorùbás due to the construction of the same narrative (see FERREIRA DIAS, 2011).

*Orí* is, therefore, much more than the physical head. Being the canister of personality and destiny, *orí* is conceived as a personal deity, that is why *orí* is the target of specific ceremonies, for potentiation, balance, and food, so that the individual is always enjoying good mental health and her/his destiny (*ìpin*) unfolds as revealed by the oracle. Thus, *orí* receives all honors received by an *Òrìṣà*, although, of course, they are honors having an individual feature and, this way, without the collective impact of popular gods. Furthermore, *orí* is still regarded as an intermediary between the subject and *Òrìṣàs*, the vehicle through which deities interact with human beings.

Well, *orí* contains, we saw, the very idea of destiny (*ìpin*), criss-crossing so that all rituals related to the subject's destiny occur in *orí* (head), because this is the gourd (to use an image from the *Yorùbá* tradition) guarding the individuality/personality and, along with it, the biography prescribed in the "other world", *òrún*. Of course, this tradition linked to *orí* seems to stem from the theosophical trend of *Ífá*, particularly if we observe its correlation to *Olódùmarè*.

Still, it is an integral part of the *Yorùbás'* everyday life religious imaginary, participating in the neo-traditional *Yorùbá* religion. However, the religious conception around *orí* opens the doors to the idea of predestination. Salami (2007, p. 263) summarizes the issue very well by saying:

In the *Yorùbá* concept of predestination, a molded body, already infused with life spirit by *Olodumaré*, comes and takes an *orí* (the bearer of destiny). Sometimes, people think that this destiny or *orí* is imposed on the individual. Destiny, chosen or assigned this way or imposed, encloses all successes and failures which the human being must go through during the course of her/his existence in this world.

This idea is quite widespread among the *Yorùbás*, although it is difficult to know about its antiquity among the proto-*Yorùbá* peoples. Returning to Balogun (2007), this author states that, according to the *Yorùbá* conception, the subject,

once she/he is born, already has her/his destiny drawn, registered, so that all acts and deeds are missing free will, only contributing to fulfill what has been predetermined. There is, of course, a deterministic tradition contained in this assumption that, however, does not seem to coincide with the everyday life ritual practice of *Yorùbás*. Whether the subject chooses her/his *orí* (*akunleyan*: what someone chooses on her/his knees) or this is imposed on her/him (*Àyànmọ*: what is attached to someone; *ìpin*: what is put on a person) (SALAMI, 2007), the truth is that according to the neo-traditional *Yorùbá* conception, the subject does not know whether *orí* is good (*olóri rere*) or bad (*olóri burúkú*), i.e. whether it bears a favorable or painful destiny to the individual when it is assigned to her/him or chosen by her/him. Clearly, the assignment has the particularity of allowing the subject to take refuge in determinism to justify her/his actions and, ultimately, avoid taking liability. In turn, regarding the choice, the subject is rather attached to the liability of her/his actions.

But this is not, in fact, the key issue for the *Yorùbás*. What matters is knowing whether *orí* is good or bad, because this will cause the subject to lead a good or bad life and whether destiny is something totally sealed or likely to change. Knowing the subject's destiny will be the least complex part (though loaded with drama on the part of agents), because it will be revealed, according to the *Yorùbá* belief, by the oracle of *Ífá* (the most usual among the *Yorùbás* from Nigeria, although the oracle of sixteen cowrie-shells, *ẹ̀rìndínlógún*, can also reveal the subject's destiny, despite this is rather related to the cult to *Òrìṣàṣ* than to the specific consultation to *Ífá*, destiny revealing *par excellence*). Regarding the determinism contained in *orí*, this seems to lie on the complexity up to the point that we will chose the name *soft determinism*. Ekanola (2006, p. 43) writes:

The opinion that destiny is irreversible is reflected in many Yoruba proverbs and wise sayings. For instance, the Yorubas often say *Ohun Ori wa se ko ma ni salai se eo* (what the ori has come to achieve must definitely be fulfilled).

Well, the “must” contained in this proverb does not provide us with a deterministic reading, but an ideal determination, something which is much different. Ekanola (2006) brings the perspective that *Àjàlá*, the potter god, manufactures the *orís* with big imperfections because he, in fact, has a drinking problem, but, from the moment the *orí* is chosen, there is no other route but that of fulfilling what has been determined. Despite this statement, Ekanola (2006) also cites Olusegun Oladipo, and, according to the latter, destiny is an agreement made between the individual and *Olódùmarè*, the “supreme being”, and this will also be made by *Oníbodè*, *òrún’s* gatekeeper, but it may be changed under some conditions. Although citing, Ekanola (2006, p. 45-46) seems to disagree with Oladipo in terms of argumentation, preferring to emphasize the claim that destiny is something unavoidable:

Abimbola seems to be quite right to have stated that it is simply because people find it to be quite difficult to accept a bad destiny that they make serious, but fruitless, attempts to rectify or alter it, even consultations with oracles and the offering of relevant sacrifices cannot bring any change in human destiny.

This statement reveals a thought structured through the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic codes (observed in the *Ífá* System) that tend to take value from traditional customs, bringing into focus a determination of divine nature with a monotheistic kind, where the approach to divine is undertaken through the leap of faith, philosophical reflection, and acceptance of the determination and nature of events. This attitude is unorthodox among the *Yorùbás*, constituting a significant leap beyond the African borders of action-reaction, i.e. offering/sacrifice – consequence/gift, and, thus, a dive into the religious thought structure typical of monotheisms of Jewish tradition. However, our analysis and direct experience with the *Yorùbá* religious universe allows us to state that, although it is difficult, destiny may be changed or, at least, potentiated. This opens a door, albeit tenuous, to external influences on the seal of destiny, because if destiny is an agreement

between the subject and *Olódùmarè* or between the subject and *Àjàlà*, according to tradition, the agreements always have the possibility of canceling but this will mean, admittedly, opening a vast theological and philosophical discussion on the theme that would not be independent of the possibility of influencing the neo-traditional understanding on the matter.

Salami (2007) raises an interesting question, concerning the affiliation between the subject-body and the subject-soul. Making his words ours: “Can a case of continuous uninterrupted existence be established between the two entities?” (SALAMI, 2007, p. 5). This is a question whose answer is found in belief. The Yorùbás believe that the subject who chooses *orí* in the “other world” is the same who embodies in *àiyé*, the earth, under a human shape, in other words, the human subject is the incarnation of a pre-existing identity in a supersensible space. Only this correlation allows taking the idea of predestination. Without a prior existence that configures the identity, the earthly subject could never have her/his life pathway more or less defined. The so-called “seal of destiny” requires an individuality that, if not everlasting, is at least previous to birth, although the concept of “always existing” perfectly fits the Yorùbá imagination that takes reincarnation as reality. But this is a concept that must be taken as immaterial, because, as said by Salami (2007, p. 267): “If the individuals in *isalu orun* are already full human beings, it will be a problem to effectively deal with the biological processes of conception and the fetal development stages before the actual birth of a human baby”. In this sense, it is clear that the immaterial identity of the subject is previous to birth in the earthly world, so that the spirit’s dive into the fetus represents a classic dive into the river of forgetfulness. The memory of drawn/sealed/established/agreed destiny will be revealed by *Ífá*’s divination.

Interestingly, Ekanola (2006), by entering a perspective he names naturalist, brings us another reading for the issue of predestination. If the traditional view bails us that the choice of *orí* corresponds to the more or less

hermetic definition of the subject's destiny, Ekanola (2006), positioned within the naturalistic model focuses on the possibility that the subject, operating on *orí*, change her/his social and environmental conditions, naturally through offerings and ritual sacrifices. At the same time, Ekanola (2006, p. 50) removes the emphasis from predestination as an operative factor, opting for willful action as a mechanism to change social conditions: "Thus, it is not unusual for the Yorùbás to attribute individual success to factors such as hard work, consistency, and patience, without any references to destiny". Surely, Ekanola (2006) have forgotten to mention that obstinacy as a pathway to success is a secular view of social phenomena (i.e. a position on the issue independent of religious dogmas, values, and principles), whereas predestination operates within the religious imaginary, although it is possible to merge both versions of the real by claiming that a good *orí* is linked to good character (*ìwà pẹ̀lẹ̀*), and, thus, to good choices and the consequent success.

The issue addressed, only by means of the authors, already shows up as being complex, as we have seen so far. However, if we start from the statements by our interlocutor, Adekanmi Adewuyi<sup>3</sup>, with the issue of *orí* and *ìpìn*, we get into a third road, not addressed by the authors. Contributing to the definition of *orí*, our interlocutor tells us that

*[...] orí, linguistically, means "head". In the Yorùbá religion, the head is conceived as a deity, also in a spiritual sense, there is a need to offer sacrifices regularly and such sacrifices include the food we eat, by organizing a celebration in which we offer food and drinks to people.*

Translating *orí* into "head" could never be avoided. The conception that *orí* is a divinity, an *Òrìṣà*, was also highlighted by us at the beginning and it is patent in the Yorùbá proverb saying that no *Òrìṣà* is more important than *orí*.

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<sup>3</sup> Adekanmi Adewuyi, born in Ilésà, Nigeria, *Oniṣẹ̀gùn* (master in medicinal plants). His testimonials are from an interview conducted by e-mail in August 2011.



Despite the transversality of the concept of propitiatory rite, expressed in the idea that *orí* must be fed often, the truth is that there is a clear distinction between the rite described by the informant – constituted by the symbolic and communal sharing – and the complex ritual named *bọ́rí* or *ẹbọ́rí*, which should be translated as “sacrifice to the head” and it is defined, nowadays, as “feed the head”. The ritual of *bọ́rí* – performed in traditional Candomblé having a *Kétu* matrix<sup>4</sup> – has been extensively described by Barros, Vogel, and Mello (2001), where the symbolic and practical meaning of the ritual is very well exposed. The *Ìyálóòrìṣà* (“mãe-de-santo”), “Yeye Sussu” of *Ọ̀ṣun*, *Ilé Àṣẹ̀ Ìyá Odò*<sup>5</sup>, tells us about *bọ́rí*:

*Bọ́rí* is a very important ritual, it is a beginning in Candomblé, representing a link between “filho-de-santo” and his *Òrìṣà*, between “filho-de-santo” and *Òòṣàálá*, who does the heads. The individual who underwent “*bọ́rí*” starts having a link with *Òrìṣà*, but it is not as strong as initiation, because this has *ẹ̀jẹ̀* and the razor on the head. *Bọ́rí* is something that must happen sometimes lifelong, because the head needs to keep eating so that life of “filho-de-santo” keeps going well, so that he is enjoying peace and harmony with *Òrìṣàs*, particularly with *Òòṣàálá*, who does the heads<sup>6</sup>.

Despite *bọ́rí* emerges differently, at the ritualistic level, in Candomblé and Nigeria, the truth is that at the symbolic level the sense of feeding the head remains present, although destiny is less aimed (something which reflects the lesser presence of theo-philosophical narratives of *Ífá*) and the direct relation to *Òòṣàálá* is present. We also notice that *bọ́rí* falls within the sense of ritual integration to Candomblé as an initiation stage, emerging before the initiation itself, described in the current language of Candomblé as “making” or “doing the head”, although *bọ́rí*

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called *Kétu* Candomblé refers to the Afro-Brazilian religious construction occurred in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Bahia, involving slaves that have left the Dahomean city of *Kétu* and from other places of *yorùbáland*, in a defined ritual and theological harmonization. According to the imaginary of the Afro-Brazilian communities and in the academy devoted to study the African cults in the diaspora, the “nation” of *Kétu* Candomblé is regarded as that having the greatest African originality. Something that, in our view, is not necessarily true. The yard used as object in the work, today named Axé Miguel Couto, is related to the root of Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, the most traditional temple of the Brazilian Candomblé. Formerly called Nossa Senhora das Candeias, Axé Miguel Couto was founded by the deceased priestess *Ìyá Nitinha*, an inescapable character of Candomblé in Bahia and Ro de Janeiro in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> “Filha-de-santo” for the deceased Areonites da Conceição Chagas (*Ìyá Nitinha*; whose house is the subject of the work cited above) and for *Bàbálóòrìṣà* Air José do Pílão de Prata (after the death of the previous one); the *Ilé Àṣẹ̀ Ìyá Odò*, located in Portugal was given this name by *Ìyá Nitinha* and her carnal son Leo, *ogan* of Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, and it is the central temple of the Portuguese Community of *Yorùbá* Candomblé (see <http://cpcy.pt>), and it is from the *Kétu* root of Casa Branca do Engenho Velho.

<sup>6</sup> Face to face interview in Benavente, Portugal, on March 15, 2012.

is present in it as well. In any case, the dimensional whole of the ritual of *borí* in Candomblé and its extensions and adjustments to *Yorùbá's* thought requires further analysis. Thus, it was worth mentioning the primary theological reference, considering that the scientific scenario has greater familiarity with regard to Candomblé, a religion formed in Brazil through the trans-nationalized African composite.

Well, the issue of links between head and destiny gets complicated when our interlocutor draws a distinction between *destiny* and *fate*, i.e. between *ìpin* and *àyànmọ́*. As we saw with Salami, *àyànmọ́* is something attached to someone, while *ìpin* is something put on the person. Of course, such terms may be understood as different adjectives referring to the same concept, to which we can add *àkúnlẹ̀yàn*, i.e. events we choose before birth, and *àkúnlẹ̀gbà*, the environment where the subject acts to fulfill destiny (IFALAYE, 2011). All these terms seem to us developments that seek to make sense not only to the complex idea of destiny and predestination, but also to the events over the subjects' life, both connected, in the *Yorùbá* case, to the *Ífá* System. As we have seen previously, the *Ífá* System is born and grows in a close relation to the autochthon religious encounters with Islam and Christianities (predestination is a theme having a Biblical breath), the reason why the issue of *ìpin* and the idea of *orí* are necessarily connected.

In the classic *Dictionary of Yoruba Language*, published by the Church Missionary Society (CMS, 1918), revised edition of the first dictionary published by Samuel Crowther in 1843, who relied on the contribution of T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, the term *destiny* is translated into *Yorùbá* as “*opin*”, “*nkan*”, “*tabi*”, and “*ẹ́nikan*”, while the term *ìpin* is translated as “portion”. This fact is particularly interesting, since none of the terms used to translate “destiny” is part of everyday language on the subject. Moreover, the translation of *ìpin* as “portion” is particularly interesting, since it perfectly leads us to the idea that *ìpin* refers to the portion of

energy that is reserved to each subject and/or the individual portion of the collective destiny, both of them can fit the definition of *orí*.

Well, as for the term *fate*, this appears, indeed, translated as “*ìpin*”, “*opin*”, “*idarisi*”, and “*iku*”. What we have, here, is a mix, natural, between *destino* and *fado*, using the terminology in Portuguese. And, observing the English translation of *fate* as “prophetic utterance” and “final determination of the sequence of events”, we may say that both concepts are two sides of the same reality – the individual destiny is the unique portion of the order of universal events.

We still have to check the term *àyànmọ́* in that dictionary. According to this, *àyànmọ́* is translated as “fate”, “destiny”, and refers the reader to check the term *àbáfù*.

So, we see that “*fado*” and “*destino*” remain as synonyms. Following the prescription of the same dictionary, *àbáfù* comes to us translated as “luck”, “fortune”, “*fado*” (fate), offering the example of *abafu mi ni*, i.e. “é meu fado” (it is my fate). Well, then we understand that there is a clear link between the terms and their translations into other languages. Naturally, we take, by referring to the dictionary, two conclusions: first, the concepts are dynamic realities that reflect the construction of language and cultural atavism, second, that such transformations are not independent of religious meetings, as the *Dictionary of Yoruba Language* was produced within the CMS, which naturally used their categories to produce the translation of concepts, even if agents were *Yorùbás* that, despite this fact, were already Christianized.

However, what is most surprising is not observing the plurality of terms that operate as synonyms – our cultural imaginary is processed in an analogous way – these are, thus, the statements by our informer Adekanmi Adewuyi. According to him, *ìpin* has a different nature from that showed so far, “*ìpin* is the witness to *orí*, *ìpin* is the witness of our fate, what must happen to us in life”. Well, the definition

of *ìpin* as “witness”, thus providing it with an anthropomorphic identity, gets very close to the figure of *Òrúnmìlà/Ífá*, a divination and, simultaneously, divinity method, the reason why we ask in the following terms: “Elerin *ìpin*?”, i.e. “witness of destiny”, an epithet given to *Òrúnmìlà*. The following answer was given to our question:

*Eleri means witness, eleri ni ipin means that ipin is a witness. e.g. if you are going through a situation that needed solution that you don't know or have, ori may help you to get a link to a person accidentally, because it is your fate and the person you meet will provide the solution, that person you know meet become ipin in your fate in life. Ipin is fate while destiny is ayanmo.*

Given this, it is possible for us to understand that our informer observes the idea of *ìpin* in a dual function. On the one hand, *ìpin* is the person who witnesses our destiny, with a possibility of taking an active part in it or not, while the act of witnessing is also related to the divinity *Òrúnmìlà*; otherwise, *ìpin* is our fate, defining destiny as *àyànmo*. However, as seen through the dictionary produced by CMS, the terms are not clearly separated. In the links between *orí* and *ìpin*, i.e. under the form of “good” and “bad” *orí* conditions the subject’s course of life, our interlocutor questions: “But we've the chance to change our destiny or is it pre-written?”. The respondent says:

*[...] Luck goes in many ways to assist our prayers, e.g. two people of same sex, age, education may not be equally successful because of ori, ipin will come in to take care of their chances and opportunity. Destiny cannot be changed but some bad people may delay it, then one have guide his destiny always by sacrifice, prayers and concentration.*

We have, thus, the issue already resumed. The possibility or not to change destiny greatly varies from priest to priest, author to author, although there is a rather dominant tradition of thinking that it cannot be changed, there are, indeed, negative forces that are able to delay it.

It is worth, however, also observing the work by *bàbáláàwó* Philip Neimark, *The way of the orisa*. In it, the author provides us an interesting insight into the problem, resuming some of the terms used throughout this paper. According to the author, the subject's fate may be divided into three complementary parts: *akunleyan* (what we choose on our knees), which will be the subject's requests at the house of *Àjàlá*, i.e. the number of years of life, the number of children, the kinds of relationship, etc. *àkúnlègbà*, which will be the environment provided for fulfilling destiny, as in the case of someone who wishes to die due to disease and is born within a period of general epidemic; while *àyànmọ́* is something that cannot be changed (NEIMARK, 1993). The author also refers us, with *àyànmọ́*, to something that cannot be changed, while the two other elements can, according to the author.

## Conclusion

Well, from here we can advance towards a conclusion that allows us to bifurcate the interpretations on the concept of *orí* and *ìpin*: a) in a rather traditionalist/conservative view, the *Yorùbás* think that the subjects come into the world with their destiny already preconceived, through a ritual that took place in the divine sphere, *òrún*, where *Olódùmarè* or *Àjàlá* (depending on the religious tradition/current) seals the destiny posed/chosen/assigned to the subject, which will be up to her/him to fulfill it during her/his earthly experience and that it will be revealed to her/him through the oracle of *Ífá*. This destiny will be very hard to change, and the only mission of rituals is potentiate its fulfillment; b) destiny is an open manuscript, a script with which the subject manages her/his activities, enhancing the positive factors, bypassing the negative ones, according to the individual nature, *ìwà*, and determination, persistence, and a good nature are essential for constituting the a “good life”, which is expressed by a good *orí* (*orí rere*). They are, thus, two sides of the same coin, two interpretations of the reality of human becoming, successes and failures.

Notwithstanding the bipolar reading, the truth is that *Yorùbá's* thought about destiny it is extraordinarily complex, resulting from a plurality of interpretations and influences. This fact is patent in the plurality of terms in the *Yorùbá* language to translate what is meant by destiny. Meanwhile, while we notice a distinction between the chosen and posed destiny, we also observe a differentiation between “destiny” and “fate”, between goal and result achieved. If we take the issue of fortune expressed by our interlocutor and the terms *ìpin* and *eleri* as destiny witness of destiny, we have a truly complex context, which is reinforced by a rather secular reading that emphasizes individual persistence and tenacity.

In turn, *bọrí*, the ritual of feeding the inner head, *orí ninu*, i.e. the spiritual head, the intangible content of personality and fate, is, however, perceived in a

different way in Africa and Candomblé. While, in *yorúbáland*, *bṛí* tends to be celebrated as a producer of society and manipulation of destiny according to a rationale increasingly related to the religious thought patterns derived from the *Ífá* System – where the issue of destiny is strongly present, an inheritance of the Abrahamic traditions on its structure of theological and philosophical thought –, in Candomblé (not referring only to Brazil, but to Candomblé as a religious experience also undergoing a diaspora) *bṛí* comprises a ritual step within a greater rationale of initiation and participation within the religion, whose perception rather derives from *orí*'s need to get into the world, i.e. feed the head so that the immaterial head is fully united to the spiritual one and, thus, *Òḡṣàálá*, the *Òrìṣà* who is father and potter of *orís*, also known as *Àjàlá*, while we begin to seal the neophyte's connection to the religion and to her/his individual *Òrìṣà*, to a lesser extent, since, ultimately, *bṛí* is, as we saw, aimed at *Òḡṣàálá*.

This conceptual and ritual differentiation (knowing that in Nigeria *bṛí* is a simpler and collective ritual, which seems to mix “sacred” and “unholy” if we get into the categories and the Western conceptual bipolarization system) can have something to do with the very history of *Yorúbá*'s conceptual transformation. While in *Yorúbá*'s space the “traditional religion” goes on by reconstructing and adapting, producing a synthesis of itself, acculturating and accommodating itself, therefore, turning from generation to generation into another religious reality of itself, particularly because of the impulse from the *Ífá* System, Candomblé, cosmologically, corresponds to a conceptual crystal, since it is made of a cultural and religious proto-*Yorúbá* synthesis, it comprises the religious thought patterns from the period of its formulation: the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As it is a resistance religion, Candomblé represents an “invented tradition” undergoing a process of civilizational clash, i.e. faced with repression, Candomblé activates its mechanisms of conversation between paradigms, crystallizing an ideal and a model, being less open to the transformation dynamics (although Candomblé has been present in the Brazilian religious market), as in Africa, where changes occur more quickly, in

response to stimuli from the “religious encounters” (PEEL, 2000) and from modernity, in face of a religion that that largely represents a rural and imperial ideal, i.e. an old *Yorùbá* cultural paradigm. Of course, this is precisely what the *Ífá* System seeks to counteract, constituting a modern alternative to the old cults of *Òrìṣàs*. The narrative rationale of *Ífá* comprises exogenous concepts<sup>7</sup> with regard to the African standards, such as “salvation”, “sin”, and Manichaeism of the tradition with a Jewish descent. This way, the *Ífá* System is becoming a modernized African belief and inscribed in the religious market, operating with the categories of competing religions, particularly the Evangelical Christian movements, such as *Aladura Church* (PEEL, 1968) and the mystical Islam.

Well, this is precisely the difference between crystallization and reconfiguration operating on the neo-traditional *Yorùbá* religious understanding and on Candomblé. The perception we have of *orí* and, according to it, of destiny is a space where we increasingly notice this dialectics.

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<sup>7</sup> As “exogenous concepts” we understand the categories and conceptual tools imported from the Jewish-Christian-Islamic imaginary, as expressed by Olabiyi (1993).



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