

PART C

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**THE DESTINY AND REINCARNATION:
A TRADITIONAL AFRICAN MAN'S PERSPECTIVE.**

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Abstract

This paper explains the destiny and reincarnation as traditional African man's perspective. It also gives a brief history of law of destiny, African conceptualization of destiny and reincarnation in relation to life and birth, death and reincarnation. Destiny can be defined as power believed to control event. It can be known or remain hidden. The researcher relates the work to other parts of the world and advanced conclusion and recommendations which will help in educational enterprise, religion, and the philosophy of African man. References were also made for the interest of the reader of this work.

Key words: Law of destiny, African conceptualization of destiny and reincarnation as destiny of humanity.

Introduction

Uzoma (1993) in Aristotle (384-322 BC) Noted: "All men by nature desire to know." This is the opening statement of Aristotle's metaphysics. All human being have some ideas concerning materials or physical object, living human being, the meaning of life, nature, God, death, goodness, badness, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, sadness and joy, pleasure and pain, reincarnation, destiny and birth.

All men are endowed with cognitive power of external senses and the internal senses namely, common sense, imagination and memory. All the senses communicate knowledge to man. Any belief or legend or any tribe or race always wrap with myth and mystery. Man's destiny in a traditional African perspective cannot be exceptional.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) stated: The beginning of every discussion starts with the definition of the term. The word *destiny* has been defined by educationists, prophets and philosophers. According to the Dictionary or Contemporary English destiny can be defined as power believed to control events. It can as well be seen as that which happens to a person and also the thought or as determined in advance by fate.

According to Samuel JonabLonghak in Parrinder (1996). African Traditional Religion described fate and destiny in different meaning. "Despite the fact that destiny is used simultaneously with fate. It has a different meaning. Destiny could be defined as that which a person or thing is bound or destined." It is an inevitable necessity, that which is destined to happen, fate, power that forever claims overruling, on invisible necessity "Fate" and "Destiny" therefore, means the incomprehensible force that propels human life. It plays a leading, role in the affairs of human beings. Every mortal soul is its victim. One cannot see it but wherever one goes, it accompanies him and takes hold of him when it deem fit. Nevertheless that the two concepts are used together they have slight differences, one is the consequence of the other. It is fate that leads to destiny. Fate is the belief that one's controlled by an unknown force. Destiny is where one has reached the fate goal. Destiny and fate are therefore two faces of one coin.

This therefore means that all planets including the earth and everything in it moves according to predetermined laws. So man is infinitely governed by these same laws, also that man's fate and destiny is already predetermined. For the purpose of this study the researcher focuses on law of destiny, African conceptualization of destiny in relation to life and birth, death and reincarnation.

Law of destiny

The issue of destiny is both a religious and philosophical problem, Damian Opata (1998). It operates at the level of belief as an ideological guide to human action, reminding us that we are still all too human, regardless of our fervent aspiration for godhood. Destiny is both gift and decree from the creator. Every individual or people, group of families have their own unique destiny decreed for them by the creator. It is a given fact, it cannot be changed. Destiny is meant to be accepted with gratitude. It's one's lot. Destiny is decreed and it's in vain one tries to change it. Attempt at changing it can only result in devastating consequences, Yusuf Taraki (1980).

Destiny can be known or remains hidden. Some people seek to enquire about their destiny from diviners. However, one can be denied achieving his/her destiny in life by others or by spiritual powers. This knowledge can lead to serious social conflict between individuals or people, groups, destiny is a *whole sale* package which contains both good and evil whatever comes blessing or otherwise is to be accepted at one's lot or fate. However, curse or bad omens are signs of evil which come from the intrigues of spiritual powers and not from destiny. One's attitude, behaviour or practices can bring such upon oneself as well.

In spite of all that has been said about destiny, sometimes individuals or groups have attempted to determine or ascribe destiny to themselves or other. When such occurs, it

is great potentials for conflict. People usually ascribe to themselves superior destiny but to others they prescribe an inferior one. When such occurs, they are meant to be fixed and unchangeable. This sometimes develops into caste and social classes.

In modern Africa, one bears witness of how certain ethnic groups have claimed themselves to be from a superior human stock and for this reason, have a destined right to rule and control others. The designation of some ethnic groups in Africa as "natural rulers" by the colonial masters or by self-proclamation has created serious political crisis in post-colonial Africa countries. Yusuf Taraki (1980) defines caste system in terms of destiny in modern Africa has had devastating consequences. Some groups have been denied political participation and representation because of caste or of perceived destiny. The maintenance of status quo and the principles of successions and leadership have been interpreted in terms of decreed destiny changing such perceived social facts have often landed in serious tensions, violence and conflicts.

The moral law has affected the behaviour attitudes and practices of individuals and ethnic groups. The destiny of all human beings lies in the hands of the Supreme Being (God).

African conceptualization of Destiny

One probable way of explaining the notion of destiny among Africans would be to examine their cosmological ordering of reality. The Africans believe that there is only one God and that God has his agents or servants. God, in Africa has many names according to the language spoken by the people.

God as ChukwuOkike called by Igbo in Nigeria meaning (God the creator) is normally supposed to be in charge of all things. According to African belief there is another small god called *Chi* (personal God).

Damian (1998), Chi, variously interpreted as the guardian angel or the personal spiritual guardian of every individual appears to play a more active role in the affairs of any individual. African mythology is replete with examples illustrating the fact that this Supreme Being used to be close to individual, and in fact used to intervene in the affairs of individuals and communities, until it was annoyed by the aberrant behaviour of some individual's women especially, who transgressed one overriding code or the other. Within this concept of an absconded deity, deusotons. The Chi is given a prominent role in the affairs of individuals in the African perception of the ordering of reality. Consequently, the concept of the personal god would be very important in our appreciation of the concept of destiny among the Africans.

Damian observed:

Apart from the ideas of spirit (Mmuo) soul (Nkpuruobi) Body (ahu), life (ndu) etc. all connected with the belief about the precise nature of man it is believed that each individual has a destiny ascribed to his destiny. The idea of personal god which controls his destiny. The idea of personal god explains the element of luck and fortune, destiny and other unique and individual characteristics. They say of a lucky man "Obuonye Chi oma" -he has a beneficent (good luck, fortune) for a very unfortunate man, they say NwuoJeeLoghariauwaoma - die and go and ask for a better

destiny. If a man wills, his Personal god wills also. Thus the element of fatalism (where a man is left to the mercy of destiny) is mitigated by ascribing some will power and initiative to man. One can influence his personal god "by brave or good conduct" and this knocks the horn out of fatalism in Igbo philosophy.

An example of this can be seen in King Oedipus Rex, a play written by Sophocles, a Greek playwright whose adaptation is Ola Rotimi's The gods are not to blame. In this play, the protagonist King Oedipus, in his destiny attempts to escape from the forces of fate which is continuously being led by the forces to his destiny. This means that, only what a man can do in the hands of destiny is to achieve a certain degree of independence within this circumscribed time. Wordsworth therefore believes that every man on the face of the earth is governed by destiny and therefore man continued struggle against this unseen forces in his environment.

It is in line of thought that J.P. Clark in his work "Ozidi" attempts to tell the world that man's actions are shaped by destiny. Man can try as much as he could to avert this invisible force, but the more he tries, the quicker these forces envelope him. Old-Ozidi in J. P. Clark's was advised by his wife Orea not to go for the raid amidst his fellow warriors. "Ozidi I still do not think you should go on today's raid, I have an evil vein tugging at my side.

Despite of these warnings from his wife, destiny pushes him to go; and there he meets his end as it appears to Osewole in Ola Rotimi's "The god. are not to blame" tries to avert the wrath of fate and destiny when he runs away from the people he thinks are his parents in an attempt to escape, fate runs to fate. The oracle advises him not to run away, but since his "swayed" by the forces beyond his understanding and controlled he refuses to comply with the advises.

**"You have a curse on you son you cannot run away from it,
the gods have willed that you will kill your father and
marry your mother."**

To run away will be foolish. The curse is to perform an abomination of patricide and incest. This tells us that no matter how he tries, he cannot avoid his destiny.

As regards this on-going discussion, therefore, one will say that fate and destiny is a living but invisible and immortal being that moves around every person on earth having a power of what will become of him or her.

Life and Birth

All Africans have belief in a Supreme Being who is the creator of all things both physical and spiritual. The Mende people of Sierra-Leone believe that God existed from the timeless beginning. He is the author of life and birth, the controller of the visible world of spirits. Life and Birth are two different things but would be looked simultaneously. Life is the state of existence as a human being while birth is the process of being born, coming into the world. Life begins from the womb that is when a woman is pregnant certain rituals must be observed. It is forbidden for her to eat certain animals or food or have sexual intercourse for a period of time. Every good thing is done in order to protect the life of her baby and hers.

After childhood of a child, it still has a long way in life, certain considerable ceremonies and rituals are observed.

Example: Ashanti girl, after the first menstruation undergoes certain ceremonies, prayers are offered by deity with rites. There is usually a five day feasting after the girl is regarded as mother. She can now be engaged and get prepared for marriage. In certain areas circumcision the male marks the change from childhood to adulthood.

Africans common element has to do with priorities in life. In African tradition, emphasis is always made on the events of life, more than schedule and time as found in European and American countries respectively. Igbo people in the South-East of Nigeria give their children such names like -"Ndukaku" - life is superior to wealth, "Chinwendu" – life belongs to God.

Jacobs (1997) the birth of a child is a process which begins from pregnancy to delivering.

To Africans the birth of a child is not only the concern of the society at large. It is also of the ancestors. However, the child comes into the world with his destiny wrapped up throughout the days of his life. It is also concern of the ancestors of the family so much that a child may be regarded as a reincarnate of their family.

It is the desire of Africans to the human race to know the reasons or the child's existence. The man through philosophizing would come across the following questions what is his origin? What is his ultimate destiny? Why is he here? What happens when he's forced out of this life? Is he completely part of nature or does he transcend nature? Is the difference between him and the lower animals a difference in degree or a difference in nature? What he is living for? Has his life any ultimate meaning? Is there a force over and above man that controls all these? If there is such a force can it be known? These and similar questions are fundamental questions about the human person.

The name, a person bears always reflect on his action throughout his life. Africans have date for naming of a child when he is born. And every name given to a child must have situational meaning unlike Westerners that give their children names like Bush, Dog, and Hills.

Death according to African belief as man's destiny

According to African belief death does not bring life to an end completely. But it is the most fearful thing that ever faces humanity. As soon as he grows up, he comes face to face with the realities of being or existence in human form and sets out in search of power organization, society or honour which will either offer him protection or assure him that at death, things become rosy for eternity.

NwankwoNnabuchi (1987). The fear of death has given rise to the formation of a lot of religious, occult, traditional or mystical groups. Each provides reasons why it is the only route established by divine will through which man must make contact with his creator.

Death has various definitions. But for the interest of this research, death can be defined as permanent seizure of human body as known to have existed at a particular time track and at a definite place.

Africans belief that before a man is born he has appeared already before Deity to receive his destiny. He goes through the necessary rites and initiations. Africans belief that

nothing happens without cause, every crisis in life happens as a result of external agent being responsible for it and hence every human death must have an external causes. So, death is seen in its natural and unnatural senses.

According to African belief; complete death is when one reaches old age by implication death is meant for the old aged people. That is why when an old man dies it is believed that he has gone home but if a young man dies or their lives are being terminated prematurely, it is believed that he/she will come back again to complete his life.

In traditional African, man's death is regarded as his destiny can be seen in the events or the types of life he lives. In the Yoruba set-up before a person is born the ancestor "Ori" in heaven chooses his destiny. It is called the "predestined share" or Ori. It determines a person's characters, occupation, succession in life, behaviour and time of death.

In African literature; *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *the gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, *Ozidi* by J.P.Clark and *Weep not Child* by Ngugi Warthong. In Ola Rotimi's book which we have discussed earlier, we could see that Odewale has been destined by the gods that he would kill his father and marry his mother, it was seen as unbelievable to the king's servant, in that, he gave the child, Odewale to be killed by one of his servants. The servant rather gave him to a farmer. As it was predestined by the gods through the seer, he did all what they feared to happen, but finally, Odewale later killed him (his father).

In the Igbo setting with reference to the novel *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe, Okonkwo does not want his son Nwoye to be controlled by the destiny that controlled his lazy father for he is a hard working son. Even, when a person dies at a ripe age, they attribute it to the desire of his destiny. Just like an Innocent lad Ikemuefulu who was destined to be used as sacrifice, no matter his good works, helps and security he gave to Nwoye, he was finally killed as destined by gods.

Even in the Western world, Julius Ceaser was destined to be killed by his subordinates. His wife tried all her possible best through vision to stop the death but all were abortive. In the Holy Bible, Jonathan was destined to die in order to give King David his intimate friend chance to rule.

Finally, it is the logical end of birth which in itself metaphysically, is a beginning of life as Africans may put it. This will take us to another great phenomenon of man's destiny, in relation to reincarnation.

Reincarnation as destiny of humanity

Africans philosophical understanding of death is relevant to their conceptualization of reincarnation especially as it concerns the possibility of life after death. (Damian Opata, 1998). To the whites, the black man's belief is fetish, i.e. belief in animate objects - these things which have ears yet they cannot hear those things which have eyes yet they cannot see. Some whites even go further to ask - how can the untutored African know God.

Ukazu, J. C. (1999), If white men could come to Africa and convince us about the mystery of Trinity and the Prophet Mohammed's vision of religion, Africans should wake up and go for missionary work to explain to each and every part of the world the mystery of reincarnation as destiny of man. Philosophically, anything that has name exists, therefore, reincarnation is a name of a thing and it exists.

Reincarnation as religious doctrine of Africa, explains that the soul enters, after

death into another human or animal body. Africans believe that a deceased person can return or reincarnate in form of a child that is why in the Igbo culture when a child is born and on the naming ceremony, the diviner is called upon to observe the child carefully and see if he/she possesses some qualities of a deceased person. The child is then named after the deceased. The same thing happens in Yoruba like this name "Babatunde" father come again, "Iyabode" mother comes again.

A close look at Africans' belief on man's destiny in relation to reincarnation can be seen in Wole Soyinka's *Abiku* (Ogbanje or Changeling) and J. P. Clark where the Ogbanje child has been destined to die and reincarnate again by the same spirit. Destiny is the presiding power of reincarnation.

According to Igbo belief one person can reincarnate up to seven people because man's head is like yam, if one head-tuber of yam is planted, during the harvest it may produce up to six or seven tubers. In Africa, people that commit atrocities do not reincarnate as normal human beings. At times they reincarnate as wicked animals, trees and rocks. One can only reincarnate in his family or to his relatives.

Finally, reincarnation is the divine act of the Supreme Being which is a mystery in nature and controlled by man's destiny on earth followed by his work and his behaviour towards his living. A man is called English man because he speaks English and also a man is called Igbo man because he speaks Igbo. Therefore the destiny of man should be given serious attention by the academic scholars to challenge the Western view about our continent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Having discussed and defined the concept of man's destiny, a traditional African perspective. This paper wishes to conclude that Africans should internalize their natural values and give respect for their custom. Man should stay away from evil in order to reach the climax of his destined position from the Supreme Being.

The following recommendations were advanced.

- (1) Africans should convince Western Nations about the mystery of reincarnation.
- (2) Whatever man sows is what he reaps. Africans should stay away from evil and allow the Supreme Being to control their events.
- (3) A general course should be developed for each and every child in the formal institutions to learn Philosophy of African man and his destiny.

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