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Destiny or Freewill as the Architect of Human Fate:
Perception in The Oduinke Artists' *Ojoadiji*

Iwu Ikwubuzo

In "The Carrier Ritual as Medium of Vision in Nigerian Drama: The Examples of Soyinka and Osofisan." Chris Egharevba rightly observes that the early pre-occupation

of writers like Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark, and Wole Soyinka consists of a reworking of societal myths as a means of portraying a moral value needed by the society (26). Similarly, Igbo writers represent Igbo myths in their works of art. The myth of destiny, for instance, is reflected in Igbo poetry, novels, and drama. This paper focuses on the representation of the myth of destiny in the Igbo play *Ojaadili* by The Qdunke Artists. In this play, although destiny can be seen as an ineluctable phenomenon or power that controls events, an individual can exercise freewill and be the architect of her/his fate.

In Igbo traditional cosmology, the concepts of *Chi* (personal creative principle) and *akàràakā* (destiny) are interwoven. One's *Chi* is entrusted with the actualisation of her/his *akàràakā*. *Chi* is believed to be a spark of the Supreme Being (*Chi Ukwu*) which he imprinted on the individual at creation. This is why it is believed that humans share in the divine nature of God through possession of *Chi* essence.

According to the traditional Igbo idea of *Chi*, similar to the Greek idea of *Atropos*, humans have an inescapable fate against which there is no appeal. This understanding implies that human fate has been predetermined, and there is nothing that can be done to change the course of events in one's life. In *Igbo Philosophy of Law*, Fidelis Okafor argues, "the role of *Chi* in an individual's life evokes a kind of fatalism" (21). In his opinion, "If the Igbo believe that one's fate is entirely in the hand of *Chi* and is determined by him, then relying on this belief, he would readily accept life's happening with blind resignation, which tantamount to fatalism." The Igbo concept of *Chi* may theoretically imply fatalism, but humans generally do not "readily accept" failures or defeats in life. There is a notion in the traditional concept of *akàràakā* that illustrates human's positive desire and faith which reject a fatalistic view of life. It is the traditional Igbo thought that *akàràakā* invests humans with some power in relation to the control her/his *Chi* can exercise. This concept finds expression in the saying: "*Onye kwe, Chi ya ekwe*" ("If one agrees, his *Chi* agrees"), which means that a person can change her/his destiny if s/he so desires. This indicates that though the Igbo believe in the notion of *Chi*, they do not maintain a rigid position on the subject. Igbo notions of *Chi* can, therefore, be categorized as follows: (1) *Chi* as the architect of human's fortune or misfortune, and (2) Humans as the architects of their own fate by the exercise of freewill, as encapsulated in the saying: "*Onye kwe, Chi ya ekwe*" ("If one agrees, his *Chi* agrees"). The following analysis focuses on how the second notion is given expression in The Qdunke Artists' *Ojaadili*.

In the play *Ojaadili*, the Qdunke Artists use the protagonist Ojaadili to illustrate that an individual's exploits, experiences, and fate are ordered by her/his *Chi*. However, as dramatized in the play, the realities of an individual's experience are represented as fulfilments of the agreement between the individual and her/his *Chi*. Destiny is never imposed on a person. A person may bargain and then agree with her/his *Chi* before a destiny is approved. Even such agreement, as represented in the play, cannot be altered through magical or medicinal means.

Ojaadili is a hero who fights to free his people from the oppressions of human and natural forces. After he defeats the human champion in the human world, the gorilla in the land of the animals, and different spirits in the land of the spirits, his *Chi* (symbolized by a tiny spirit) confronts him as a wrestling opponent. Ojaadili ignores Ogwumagana's (his guardian's) repeated warnings about the danger and futility of engaging his *Chi* in a wrestling duel. Since Ojaadili insists on fighting his *Chi* and gets killed in the process, it can be inferred that Ojaadili must have agreed with his *Chi* to wrestle him, which resulted in his tragic end. Otherwise, all the warnings about the looming danger would have served as a deterrent. The implication in the play is that if Ojaadili had declined the wrestling contest (in compliance with Ogwumagana's warning), his *Chi* (being his guardian spirit) would equally have agreed with him to give up the challenge. Ojaadili had the opportunity of escaping the tragedy that befell him if he had decided not to challenge his *Chi*. Ojaadili had freedom of choice, and he was not under any form of coercion. Regarding Ojaadili's achievements and tragic end, Ogwumagana reveals: "*O bu etu ahu ka Ojaadili na chi ya kwetere*" ("That is how Ojaadili and his *Chi* agreed.")

The play seems to suggest that Ojaadili is not greater than his *Chi* even though he determined his own actions. As represented in *Ojaadili*, the individual's *Chi* can be seen

as part of the collective unconsciousness of the Igbo people. The play dramatizes the notion that by the exercise of freewill the individual can be the architect of her/his own fate.

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