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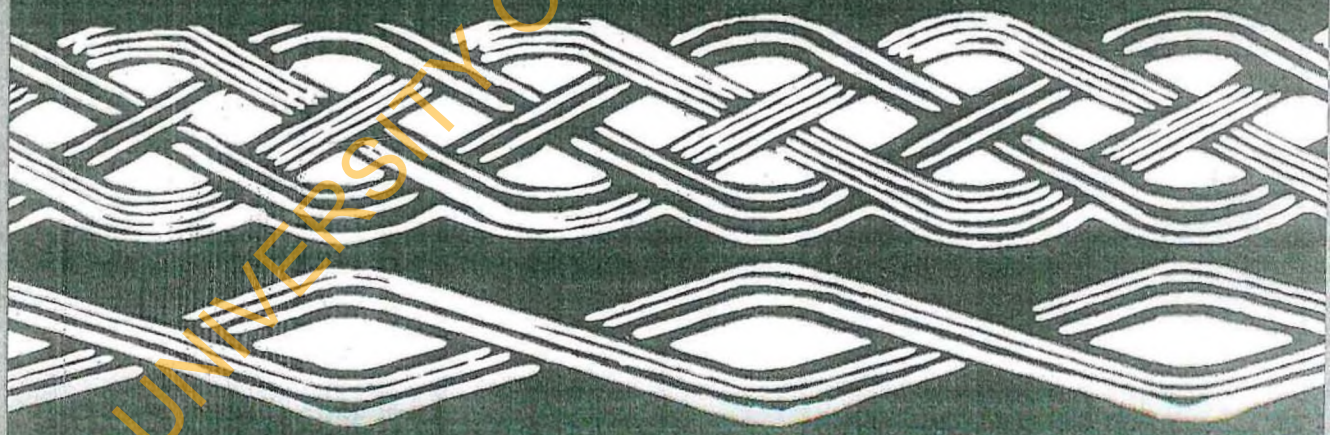

# IBADAN JOURNAL OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES

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# A Re-evaluation of the Theme of Fate in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*

BOSEDE ADEFIOLA ADEBOWALE

## Abstract

Intertextuality presupposes the linkage of subjects, ideas and themes between and among texts. Although numerous scholars have carried out intertextual readings into various texts, only a few have delved principally into cosmological connectives within texts from the cultural perspective of fatalism. The universality of the theme of fatalism and its rootedness in virtually every religion around the world necessitates this work. This study, therefore, investigates the textual hybridisation and thematisation of apparently contrasting worldviews (Greek and Yoruba) in order to improve the body of existing intertextual literature on fatalism. This study is anchored on the philosophical concept of determinism. Two texts were purposively selected – Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (OR), a classical play, and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* (TGB), a contemporary play, for contextual and intertextual study. The study finds that *TGB* shares more than superficial semblance with *OR* though textual variations exist between both. *TGB* is considered a perfect hybrid that thematically draws parallels from *OR*, foregrounding the integral and unique religio-cultural affinity that exists between the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria and the Greek of the Classical era. Fatalism, being a fundamental aspect of the ancient Greek cosmology, was often thematised in Classical Greek writings as reflected in the text, *OR*. The study then concludes that the Yoruba people, like the ancient Greek, acknowledge the important role of fate as determinism in human life and as a reality beyond the control of the individual.

**Keywords: *Oedipus Rex*, *The Gods are not to Blame*, Greek, Yoruba, Fate**

## Introduction

*Oedipus Tyrannus* (*Οδίπους Τύραννος*) by Sophocles is popularly known by its Latin title, *Oedipus Rex,* and its English version, *Oedipus the King*. The play is one of the famous tragedies written in antiquity and it is among the series of plays written by Sophocles of Colonus, Greece, who lived between 496 and 405 BC. It is assumed that Sophocles must have written over a hundred tragedies, but only seven have survived till the modern time. The play was first produced in Athens around 430BC during an annual

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religious and cultural festival held in honour of the Greek god, Dionysus, at the Great Dionysia.

The tragedy, titled *The Gods are not to Blame,* was adapted to the Yoruba cultural milieu by a Nigerian playwright, Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, popularly known as Ola Rotimi. Ola Rotimi was born in 1938 during the colonial period in Sapele, a town in Delta State of Nigeria, formerly Bendel State. He died on 18 August, 2000 (Lloydetta, 1996, pp.38-39). Like many African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who preferred to be recognised by their African names, Ola Rotimi dropped the colonial master's names - Emmanuel Gladstone - and held onto his African appellations. This attitude suggests a break from the colonial practice of adopting the colonial master's name (Lloydetta, 1996, p.39). Ola Rotimi wrote *The Gods are not to Blame* in 1967, seven years after Nigeria's independence and a year after the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war. The play was first published in 1971. It was first produced by the Ori Olokun Acting Company at the Nigerian Festival of the Arts in 1968 and has been staged in other West African Countries since then. It was awarded the first prize in the d'Afrique playwriting contest in 1969. Ola Rotimi was a prolific writer. Among his works are *Kurunmi, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Holding Talks* and *Hopes of the Living Dead.*

Generally, Greek tragedies have been used and re-used in various adaptations by different writers in different cultures by re-contextualising them to depict a living image of their contemporary issues. For instance, Olanipekun Esan adapted *Trojan Horse* as *Ẹsin Atiroja*; Femi Osofisan adapted Sophocles' *Antigone* as *Tegonni*, and Euripides' *The Trojan Women as Women of Owu*. Ola Rotimi adapted the most salient tragedy of all time (OR), coming up with a completely new creation (TGB).

With their tragedies, Sophocles and Rotimi not only represent the cultural beliefs of their respective societies but also present texts that reflect common themes and in particular cosmological connectives. Such common connectives within texts have been referred to as 'intertextuality'. Intertextuality presupposes the linkage of subjects, ideas and themes between and among texts. Many scholars have carried out intertextual readings into various texts; a few have also delved principally into cosmological connectives within texts from the cultural perspective of fatalism. For instance, Conradie (1994) discusses *The Gods are not to Blame* as the version of the Oedipus myth, while Lloydetta (1996) analyses the Greek tragedy in African context, bringing out the differences and similarities in their contexts. Some have also appraised the two texts from other perspectives, such as the role played by Apollo in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (Stuart, 2008) and the philosophical issue of moral responsibility of the main character, Oedipus (Adebowale, 2017).

Fatalism is the belief that what happens had been destined to happen

and nothing can be done to avert it. The justification for this perspective lies in its universality and its rootedness in virtually every religion around the world. Thus, in this paper, the concept of fate is examined from socio-cultural perspective, using the philosophical concept of determinism which claims that events that take place are determined by preceded events. The terms 'determinism and fatalism' are used interchangeably to stress the futility of human efforts in attempting to contain the foreordination of fate (Adebowale, 2018, p.33).

**The Adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* as *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi**

The word 'adaptation' derives from the Latin infinitive '*adaptare*' which means 'to fit', and has been defined in various ways. For instance, Snodgrass (1988, p. 30) describes adaptation as the process through which something changes or is changed in order for it to be used in a different condition. She further explains adaptation as:

> …an act of reshaping an existing order, form, structure; scope, time; a kind of an adjustment; an innovation so as to suit the interest of the person changing it and the people that the change is meant for.

Hutcheon (2006, pp. 8-9) summarises the definitions of adaptation as:

> An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.

In a nut-shell, adaptation refers to the reworking, recreation or reinterpretation of an existing literary work either in the same language (intralingual adaptation) or in another language (interlingua adaptation) to produce a target text that cannot be considered as a translation but can be traced to a source text (Ngongeh & Awung, 2018). This submission shares affinity with the above explanation on intertextual connectivity of texts.

Bastin (1993, p. 473) prescribes two types of adaptation, namely local

and global adaptations. He describes local adaptation as a translation technique employed in order to resolve translation problems when faced with a source text situation that does not exist in the target audience's culture. Only a minor part of the translation is affected while the target text still bears most of the characteristics of the source text in terms of meaning, form and text. In this case, the target text is not considered an adaptation of the original but a translation. This is so because it affects only very few parts of the text and the target text remains very close to the source text in language and culture. It also has a very limited effect on the generality of the text in terms of meaning, form and style (Bastin, 1993, p. 477).

Global adaptation, unlike local adaptation, strongly affects the entire target text, making the target text different from the source text in terms of form and style. The only thing the target and source texts have in common is the themes. By this type of adaptation, a novel can be transformed into a play or a film in the same language (intralingual adaptation), or into another language (interlingual adaptation). Bastin then outlines some characteristics of global adaptation as follows:

a). It disconnects the target text from the source text in terms of genre and style.
b). It affects the text in its entirety.
c). It only upholds the themes or the global objectives of the source text.
d). It can bear the adaptor's name as the author and not the translator of the resulting target text. In this case, it is not considered a translation but an adaptation (1993, p. 478).

The Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, has been translated into English by various translators. Rotimi made a global interlingual adaptation of *OR* of Sophocles and produced a target text from the source text. A close reading of the two texts, as we shall see below, clearly shows that common intertextual setting, characterisation and theme run throughout the plots.

To start with, Sophocles wrote for the Greek audience while Rotimi wrote for the Nigerian (African) audience. In territorialising, annexation and naturalising, Rotimi gave his target text some characteristics to make the text identify with its new environment. In the literary domain, adaptation usually has target audience and the text is thereby fashioned according to their taste and culture (Ngongeh & Awung, 2018). In translating *OR* into English, different translators maintained the Greek names as they are found in the original text. Rotimi, in his adaptation, replaces the title of the play with *TGB*. He substitutes Yoruba names with Greek names to suit his target readership. This is a case of re-territorialisation. *Oedipus Rex* is derooted from its original culture as reflected by the names of the characters and rooted in a new culture

(the Yoruba culture of Nigeria). The substitutions of characters' names, as displayed below attest to the workings of re-territorialisation in *The Gods are not to Blame*:

| *Oedipus Rex* | *The Gods are not to Blame* |
|---|---|
| King Laius | King Adetusa |
| Queen Jocasta | Queen Ojuola |
| Oedipus | Odewale |
| Creon | Aderopo |
| Tiresias | Baba Fakunle |
| Priest | Priest of Ogun |
| Shepherd | Gbonka |
| Messenger | Alaka |
| King Polybus | Ogundele |
| Queen Merope | Mobike |

Further alterations were made by Rotimi at the level of the relationship between the characters. In *Oedipus Rex,* Creon is Queen Jocasta's brother, hence Oedipus' brother-in-law, while Aderopo, named after Creon in *TGB* is Odewale's (Oedipus') blood brother, born two years after the assumed death of Odewale. This change is necessary because, in an African patrilineal society like that of the Yoruba people, it would be unusual for the brother of a king's wife to be crowned king after the death of his brother-in-law (Njoku, 1984, p. 90). Oedipus (Odewale), in *OR,* is credited with two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, whereas in *TGB,* Rotimi presents Odewale as having four children, two males: Adewale and Adebisi; two females: Oyeyemi and Adeyinka. It should be noted that Odewale has a second wife, Abero. This is quite peculiar to the Yoruba traditional setting, where a man of substance, like a king, is expected to have a number of wives he can support.

Rotimi, as a master storyteller, also reworks the setting. While the translators, like Grene and Storr, retain the Greek setting, Thebes, Rotimi gives the play a Yoruba setting, Kutuje. King Laius (King Adetusa), according to Sophocles, was killed at a crossroads as a result of a quarrel that led to a fight over whose chariot has the right-of-way. On the other hand, in *The Gods are not to Blame,* King Adetusa was killed in Odewale's farm near Ẹdẹ because he (King Adetusa) mocked Odewale's dialect group. It is clear here that the cause of the fight that led to the tragedy in the targeted text, *TGB,* has been manipulated. Rotimi did this to suit his audience who take their ethnic groups seriously and will never entertain any derogative words or insult against them from anyone, no matter their status.

Rotimi, in reworking Sophocles' tragedy, incorporates his African heritage in his target text. He brings in African idioms and proverbs as well as Yoruba religious rituals and traditional ceremonies. For instance, in the prologue of the play, the Yoruba tradition called *àkọsejayé ọmọ* (checking of

child's destiny) is introduced. In this tradition, the parents of a new born child take the baby for divination in order to find out about the future of the child. In *TGB,* after the narrator has declared that a child has been born to King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola of Kutuje land, Rotimi states:

> It is their first baby,
> so they bring him for blessing
> to the shrine of Ogun,
> the God of War, of Iron,
> and doctor of all male children.
> Then they call
> a priest of Ifa,
> **as is the custom**, (the emphasis is mine)
> to divine
> the future that this boy
> has brought with him. (The Prologue)

It is during the divination that the destiny of Odewale (Oedipus) is revealed to his parents that he would kill his own father and then marry his own mother.

African use of magic and incantations also finds its way into Rotimi's play text and these incantations reflect in many aspects of the text. For instance, Odewale brings out a tortoise shell talisman pendant and holds it towards his assailants and mesmerizes them, chanting incantations that make his assailants fall fast asleep (Act three, Scene 1). King Adetusa also pulls out a charm of dried eagle's skull, vulture's claws and bright red parrot tail-feathers and begins his own incantations. As the battle in the supernatural realm between Odewale and the old man continues, Odewale begins reciting incantations relating to the mythological figure of Ogun (Yoruba god of war and iron, and also of hunters) who slaughtered the people of Ire. He chants:

> When Ogun, the god of iron,
> was returning from Ire
> his loincloth was
> a hoop of
> Fire.
> Blood ... the deep red stain
> of victim's blood
> his cloak (Act Three, Scene 1)

While still chanting, Odewale takes a hoe and strikes the old man with one fatal blow which led to the death of the old man.

Again, Sophocles makes *Oedipus Rex* end with Oedipus going into exile all alone, leaving his two daughters in the care of Creon, and the chorus

making reference to Herodotus' parable saying: "count no mortal happy till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain" (*Oedipus The King*, lines 1529-1530). On the other hand, Odewale, in *The Gods are not to Blame,* goes into exile with his four children and uses a Yoruba proverb that is as pungent as that of Sophocles to draw the play to a close. Rotimi concludes:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bí | When |
| Àrígisẹ́gi | The wood insect |
| bá sẹ'gi tán | Gathers sticks |
| orí ara rẹ̀ | On its own head |
| ni yóò fi gbé wọn | It carries them (Act Three, Scene 4). |

(The translation is mine).

Although Ola Rotimi makes a number of other changes to Sophocles' tragedy in his work in order to bring his story to the African milieu, he still maintains the focal idea, the major theme that a man, Odewale/Oedipus (in his ignorance) kills his own father and marries his mother as predicted by the oracle and *Ifa* priest. This aspect brings us to another important area of focus of this paper: the theme of fate.

**The Theme of Fate in Oedipus Rex and The Gods are not to Blame**

There are several related themes present in Sophocles' *OR* and Rotimi's *TGB* which can be read as intertextual connectives. Such themes include mistaken identity, heroism, responsibility, price of disobedience, etc. Of all these, the central theme of fate strikingly stands out. Generally, the concept of fate involves interpreting the fortune or misfortune of a person's life as an outcome which is meant to be. Though traditions differ, but almost all religions and traditions integrate into their cosmology some idea of a supernatural power that shapes human life with overlapping forms of fatalistic thinking. Both Greek and Yoruba traditions express the belief in fate and destiny; these concepts are often depicted in their myths and texts such as the one under consideration.

The Latin word for fate is *fatum* and it is derived from the Latin verb *fari* "to speak". Bollas (1989, p. 32) asserts that "*fatum* is a prophetic declaration" since *fatus* refers to an oracle. The term 'destiny', on the other hand, is from the Latin word *destinare*, which means "to fasten down, secure, or make firm". In an effort to differentiate between fate and destiny, Bollas compares fate with prophetic declaration, and links destiny to action rather than words. Quoting from the *Webster's New Twentieth Dictionary*, Bollas (1989, p. 32) further explains that fate is "the power supposed to determine the outcome of events before they occur." In other words, fate comes from the word of the gods while destiny is the preordained path that man can fulfil.

Hence Bollas expounds:

> Fate stresses the irrationality and impersonal character of events.... The word is often lightly used.... Destiny emphasizes the idea of an unalterable course of events and is often used of a propitious fortune (1989, p. 32).

The concept of fate was a vital part of ancient Greek's life and frequently occurred in classical Greek literary works. The Greek people recognised the important role played by fate in shaping and determining human life as a reality beyond the control of an individual. The Greek people generally believed fate to be the will of the gods that could not be prevented (Adebowale, 2017, p. 44). The Greek myths attributed the inability of any human to forestall the intended outcome of fate to the activities of the three sisters collectively called the Fates: Clotho, the spinner who spins the thread of life; Lachesis, the apportioner of lot who assigns individual's destiny and Athropos, the unturnable who snips the thread of life at its end with a scissors she carries about (Plato, *The Republic*, lines 617c-d). With the doings of these three divinities, the Greek people acknowledge the important role fate plays in shaping and determining human life as a reality which is beyond the control of any human. This means that, regardless of any precautions taken, nothing can be done to avert or alter one's destiny in life.

This really is the case with Oedipus, who after knowing his destiny, tries frantically to prevent it from running its course. Although he flees from his place of birth to avert the fulfilment of fate, his actions only pushed him steeper into his destiny when he unknowingly kills his biological father, King Laius, at a crossroads. An oracle has earlier declared that Oedipus is fated to kill his father and marry his own mother. In order to avoid this misery, Laius and Queen Jocasta hand over the baby to a shepherd to do away with. The shepherd, out of sympathy, gives the baby out for adoption to the King in Corinth. As an adult, Oedipus runs away from Corinth after knowing his fate so as to avert it. On his way, he ignorantly quarrels with and kills an old man who later happens to be his real father at a crossroads. He continues his journey and gets to Thebes where people suffer from the Sphinx which slays its residents. Oedipus kills the Sphinx and is made king, and to follow the customs and for the prophetic declaration to come to pass, Oedipus has to marry the queen of the former king, who, in reality, is his mother; she later becomes the mother of his two daughters. From the forgoing, it is evident that fate determines the outcome of events before they occur; since the declaration comes from the gods, nothing could be done to avert it.

In Greek myths, many characters are portrayed as going to great lengths in attempts to alter or avert their fates. For example, in the myth of Achilles, Achilles was destined to lead a glorious but short life if he took part in the

Trojan War. Thetis, a sea-nymph and mother of Achilles, tried to secure immortality for her infant son and did everything within her immortal power but to no avail. Achilles, after killing Hector, "led the Greeks to the walls of Troy where he was mortally wounded in the heel" and killed by Paris (Adebowale, 2017, p. 45).

At the prologue of Rotimi's *TGB,* Odewale, like his Greek counterpart, Oedipus, is fated to kill his father, King Adetusa, and also marry his mother, Queen Ojuola. To avoid this calamity, both the king and queen decide to kill the baby. They give the boy to Gbonka, the palace messenger who is expected to take him into the forest and kill him. Gbonka, however, pities the boy and hands him over to a hunter. As a grown-up in his new home, a foreteller reveals his fate to him and tells him that he cannot run away from it. Odewale decides to flee from his supposed parents to avert the tragedy. He arrives at Ede and becomes a farmer. One day, Odewale meets strangers on his farm and challenges them, the strangers start to make jest of his tribe and parentage. Out of anger, Odewale fights and kills the leader of the team who, unknown to him, is his real father. Feeling guilty for killing the old man, he flees from Ede and arrives at Kutuje where he finds the city in a state of chaos and rescues them from their enemy. Odewale is rewarded with the position of a king. According to the customs of the Kutuje people, he marries the queen of the late king who, unknown to him again, is his biological mother and later becomes the mother of his children.

The various events presented in the two plays reflect intertextually the interwoven concepts of fatalism and determinism. As explained above, fatalism is the idea that "all events take place according to a predetermined and inevitable destiny that cannot be controlled or influenced" (Adebowale, 2017, p. 45). Ordinarily, the concept of fate is a philosophical question that has generated various debates with regard to its correlation to the problems of freewill and moral responsibility. Oedipus' and Odewale's inability to avert their fates alludes to the cosmological belief of Greek and Yoruba peoples that no man or god can change a person's predestination. The more the protagonists, Oedipus and Odewale, try to run away from their fates, the closer they get to fulfilling them. Such is the power of fate in both cultures of Greek and Yoruba peoples and this is duly reflected in *OR* and *TGB*.

Ordinarily, from Rotimi's tragedy, the allusion to the Yoruba cosmological belief in the inevitability of fate is glaring. When Odewale, like Oedipus, asks the *Ifa* priest about who he is, the priest, instead of telling him who he is, says:

> You have a curse on you, son...
> you cannot run away from it, the gods have willed
> that you kill your father, and then marry your
> mother (Act Three, Scene 3).

The statement, 'you cannot run away from it' shows that Odewale could not do anything to avert his destiny because it is the will of the gods. Here, like the Greek people, the Yoruba ascribe fate to the will of the gods.

Rotimi has been criticised for presenting the Yoruba as being fatalistic. For instance, Etherton (1982, pp. 124-125), criticising Rotimi, states:

> The traditional Yoruba concept of fate is only superficially the same as the Greek concept as expressed in King Oedipus ... Yorubas traditionally believe that your fate is your own doing: ... it is intrinsic to the Yoruba cosmology that a person's fate is never irreversible, and it can be changed from evil to good by appropriate sacrifices which the Ifa oracle at Ile-Ife will, in the last resort, always determine.

Etherton is of the opinion that the Yoruba concept of fate is flexible because the Yoruba also express the belief that one's fate can be altered either for good or bad. Other scholars have argued about the flexibility of the Yoruba conception of fate and predestination. It can however be argued that certain terms used by the Yoruba express a fatalistic attitude that nothing can be done to avert or alter the course of fate. Such words include *ayanmọ́* (destiny), *ìpín* (fate), *àkúnlẹ̀yàn* (that which is chosen while kneeling), and *akúnlẹ̀gbà* (that which is received kneeling), *Àkọsílẹ̀* (pre-destination) which originated with Christianity and the Arabic word *Qadar* known as *kádárá* in Yoruba (as a loanword for fate or destiny from Arabic language).

Again certain expressions among the Yoruba reinforce the submission that fate is inevitable and that nothing can be done to change or avoid it. Such expressions include: *ayanmọ́ ò gbóógun, orí lélẹ́jọ́* (destiny is unchangeable), *ẹni tí kò bá gba kádárá yóò gba kodoro* (he that does not accept his fate or destiny, will be forced to accept emptiness), *àkọsílẹ̀ kò lee tasé* (that which is written cannot go unfulfilled). *Ayanmọ, ìpín, kádárá and àkọsílẹ̀* are various terms for destiny believed to be a mysterious power controlling human events. This mysterious power is usually accredited to Olódùmarè, the Supreme Being. He is believed to have pre-existentially fixed all the events that would take place in a man's earthly existence. Hence, the saying: *Ewé kan kò leè já bọ́ lára igi kí Ọlọ́run má mọ̀ si* (No leaf drops off a tree without the approval or knowledge of God). The implication of this expression is apparent; nothing can happen to a human in this life without God's knowledge and sanction. Awolalu (1979, p. 15), in support of the above elucidation, asserts:

> The Yoruba believe that Ọlọ́jọ́ (the controller of daily events), another name for the Supreme

> Being, has pre-destined what will happen to everybody in every moment of his life on earth, including when he would die.

In the several arguments of the Yoruba scholars in regard to destiny, another concept is attached to human destiny and this is the concept of *orí*. Abimbola (1976, p. 115) argues that it is almost impossible to alter a man's destiny once a person has chosen his destiny by selecting an *orí*, pointing out that even the gods do not have the power to avert human destiny. Oduwole (1996, p.48) extensively argues for the possibility of giving a fatalistic interpretation to the Yoruba concept of *orí* and human destiny. She claims that, for the Yoruba, a person's biography has been written before the person's coming into the world in such a way that the individual's whole life is guided and controlled, not by the person's choice, but by preordained destiny. Oduwole (1996, p. 52) maintains that a fatalistic interpretation of the Yoruba conception of *orí* and human destiny is more consistent with Yoruba belief than any other interpretation. The rigidity of the Yoruba notion of fate also reflects in some Yoruba traditional and modern songs, as found in the songs of the popular Yoruba *Juju* musicians like Chief Ebenezer Obey and King Sunny Ade as illustrated below:

| | |
|---|---|
| Àyànmọ́ mi, kò sẹ́'da tó lè padà | My destiny can never be changed by anyone |
| Ẹlẹ́dá mi yé mo bẹbẹ ó | My creator I plead |
| Àyànmọ́ mi lat'ọwọ́ Olúwa ni | My destiny is from God |
| Èda aye kan kò lè ṣí mi nípò padà | There is no human that can overturn my position |
| Ẹlẹ́dá mi yé mo bẹbẹ yé | My creator I plead |
| Ẹlẹ́dá mi gbé mi lekè aye | My creator put me above the world. |

(Chief Ebenezer Obey; in *Board Members*, 1974) [The English translation is mine].

> Destiny, can never be changed at all,
> My destiny, can never be changed at all.
> Nothing can change my destiny,
> Nothing can change it,
> Nothing can tamper with my destiny.
> Oh destiny, I choose from God
> Destiny, destiny, destiny,
> My destiny can never be changed at all.
> (King Sunny Ade, *Destiny*, *Full Album* 1988).

The above songs confirm the Yoruba belief that nothing can change one's allotted destiny.

In another vein, some scholars, arguing against the rigidity of the Yoruba concept of fate, believe that the Yoruba cosmological concept of fate is flexible. For instance, Idowu (1996, p. 186) submits that the Yoruba philosophical concept that destiny is unchangeable has been significantly modified. In other words, Idowu opines that the Yoruba considerably believe that a man's destiny "can be altered one way or the other, either for good fortune or misfortune". Makinde (1985, p. 132), on the issue of fate among the Yoruba, asserts:

> ... as far as the Yoruba concepts of *orí* and Human Destiny are concerned, two philosophical schools of thought are likely to emerge ... The first position maintains a "strong" relation between *ori* and Human Destiny to the effect that once an *ori* was chosen in heaven, it becomes impossible to alter it in life. ... The second position asserts something quite different from the above. That is the claim that once an *ori* was chosen in heaven, it cannot be altered unless one takes the trouble to make some sacrifice to one's *ori* just in case it was a bad one, or work hard in order to be successful even if the chosen *ori* was a good one.

With all these assertions, it is evident that debates on the Yoruba concepts of fate and pre-destination are elaborate and inconclusive. In spite of this complexity, the scholars maintain one fundamental fact that the Yoruba strongly believe that all humans are predestined; their predestination shapes and controls the events of their life.

In *TGB,* Rotimi transforms *Oedipus Rex* and links the Sophoclean tragic character with the Aristotelian models and at the same time maintains the African worldview. In an interview in *Dem Say,* conducted by Lindfors (1974), Rotimi explains:

> The idea of absolute subservience to the gods, and acceptance of the immutability of fate which is a recurrent motif in early Greek drama to a large measure dictated the direction and outcome of the original Oedipus tragedy. Quite interestingly, traditional Nigerian religions also do acknowledge the power of predestination. Furthermore, our religions appreciate the wisdom in personal submission -

> submission not only to the gods of the land but also to the memory of departed ancestors (pp.62-63).

Rotimi utilizes his knowledge of the ancient Greek's mythological, religious and socio-political life and relates it with his African experience and culture. Discussing the issue of the gods' decree on the new-born child, Sofola (1979) opposes Rotimi's presentation of the Yoruba gods decreeing such abominable acts on society. Hence, she states:

> In Greek cosmology destiny is forced on individuals who are thus helplessly burdened with what they can neither influence nor alter. They may try to run away but they cannot escape. Their natural impulse is to fight these natural and supernatural forces in order to survive. Africans, on the other hand, as we have seen, actively participate in their own destinies, and irrational and intolerable arrangements of their lives rarely occur. Hence it would be inconceivable that an African would ever be destined to kill his own father and marry his own mother. Nor would an African god have ordained that a child should commit a murder in order to right a wrong which was still unrighted, but which had been committed earlier in his life (p.134).

She further argues that the "complex nature of this situation is compounded by the fact that the destiny is often forgotten by a person after birth, though the oracular art can be consulted for recollection and redirection (Sofola, 1979, p. 129). From Sofola's argument, it is evident that Olódùmare, the Supreme Being, is the only one who remembers the individual's destiny. Thus, the need for consultation of the oracle and whatever is proclaimed during the divination ceremony cannot be contested.

While the Yoruba conception of fate reveals that Odewale chooses his own fate, it is clear that Sophocles' Oedipus does not choose his own fate; rather, the gods chose his fate for him. However, Oedipus makes choices that lead him right back to the declaration of the gods. On the other hand, Odewale was given explicit instruction by Ifa Priest before he decided to flee from his supposed parents. The discussion goes thus:

> VOICE: 'You cannot run away from it [the curse], the gods have willed that you kill your father, and then marry your mother!'
> ODEWALE: 'Me! Kill my own father, and marry my own mother?'
> VOICE: 'It has been willed.'

> ODEWALE: 'What must I do then not to carry out this will of the gods?'
> VOICE: 'Nothing. To run away would be foolish. The snail may try, but it cannot cast off its shell. Just stay where you are… Stay where you are ...stay where you are …' (Act Three, Scene 3).

Odewale, unlike Oedipus, disobeyed the instructions of the oracle not to run away in order to avoid the will of the gods, his fate to kill his father and marry his mother. One thing however is common to both, Oedipus and Odewale's efforts against all odds do not avert the fulfilment of the oracles; on the contrary, their attempts at avoidance lead to the fulfilment.

Explaining the premise on which he developed the text's divine/human relationship, in an interview with Ossie (1984), Rotimi says:

> When one says, 'the gods are not to blame', one must contemplate the world view of the African people; particularly the Yoruba concept of destiny. This is that, a person chooses his own destiny from a sort of *tabula rasa* mind, before he descends to the world to practicalize the choice. You might say that this determinist tenet has a fatalistic ring which could, in human affairs, encourage social stasis. It is like foreclosing individual effort against all odds to achieve success. I don't think that is the way we should look at it. Rather we should conceive the idea from the angle that every action of man or every destiny has a role in the entire purpose of human interaction (1984, pp. 38-39).

With this, Rotimi emphasizes the role of human action in the fulfilment of human's destiny. While the theme of fate is an important subject in Sophocles' tragedy as it is in Rotimi's, their major intention was to help their readership to see the importance of paying obeisance to the gods.

**Conclusion**

In spite of many criticisms, *TGB* has been very successful in Africa and other places. Etherton (1982, p. 123) declares that it "has proved to be one of the most successful modern plays in performance ever... African audiences always receive it most enthusiastically". Dunton (1992, p. 17) also notes that the play is a success. He admits: *TGB* '...can be a gripping experience'. With his work, Rotimi has contributed to the growth of African art by synthesising African traditional modes with the best and most famous classical literature. It is evident that Ola Rotimi's adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* is indeed a huge and rich

success. He did not engage in a mere translation work. Rather, he employs his skill as a dramatist to produce a text that does not only retain its intertextual connection with the source text but also reflects the African heritage of the author

From the above discussion, it is apparent that fate and its characteristic related concepts have been both a mystifying and complicated subject, which has received various interpretations at different times. Ancient Greek philosophers and playwrights, have attempted to discuss the subject from various perspectives. Similarly, Yoruba scholars who are far separated from the early Greek counterparts have been fascinated by the topic. We have seen that, generally, fate is the belief that events or every effort in the life of a person is predetermined. Fatalism as a concept holds that all events take place according to a predetermined and inevitable destiny or fate (Adebowale, 2017, p. 45). Both Greek and Yoruba peoples believe fate to be the will of the gods; however, while the Greek believed that nothing could be done to change or avert fate, the Yoruba believe that a person's fate may be enhanced for good or changed for bad through certain mediums.

The theme of fate as presented in the two texts analysed above emphasises the futility of man's efforts in attempting to avert the foreordination of fate. The texts present Greek and Yoruba peoples as fatalistic. However, given the fact that these texts are intertextual connectives, additional meaning can be added to the concept of fatalism: that everything has an appointed outcome which cannot be altered by effort or foreknowledge. This is really the case of the protagonists, Oedipus and Odewale. All efforts to prevent the outcome of their fate prove unsuccessful. Here, the characterisation of fatalism neither needs causal explanation nor allows any room for proactive behaviour, it is a dead end for anyone who attempts to find a way to change or prevent the events of his life or its outcome. Thus, the concept of fatalism as presented by Sophocles and Rotimi can easily lead to the attitude of resignation, the acceptance that an individual does not have control over the events of his life. Therefore, the question could be asked: Is man really helpless in the face of his fate/destiny? If the answer is affirmative, can man be held responsible for his actions when, indeed, he is just acting out the script (will) written by the gods?



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