

Mythic Convergences between *Ogun* and *Abiku* in Soyinka's Poetry

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt at rethinking the socio-political engagement of Wole Soyinka. It explores segments of his poetic presentation of the myth of *Ogun* in his micro-epic "Idanre" and *Abiku* in "Abiku". This is to gain a better and more profound knowledge of the personalities of *Ogun* and *Abiku*, as conceived in Yoruba mythology and religious beliefs. It specifically analyses the remarkable metaphysical affinities, convergences and complementarities of both mythic personalities as portrayed in the selected poems. This is discussed from philosophical and literary deconstructive perspectives. The paper discovers that the embassy of both supernatural beings is evil and that the poet's imagination is enmeshed in the abyss of despair, at the root of tragedy in its personal and social expression. Ultimately, it reveals that Soyinka poetically situates meaning in the realm of the material and the metaphysical and that the sources and strategies of his narratives are both immediate and esoteric. The paper concludes that the poetry of Soyinka proposes re-directions in the character of African literature by envisioning the origin of evil in human society in its relatedness to divinity, to the spirit forces within and outside the soul of man.

Keywords: *Soyinka, Yoruba, Myth, Idanre, Ogun, Abiku.*

INTRODUCTION

In his paper entitled "Wole Soyinka: *Idanre, Ogun* and the Mythography of Evil in Contemporary African World", F.B.O. Akporobaro (513-514) convincingly articulates and elucidates Wole Soyinka's major socio-political concerns. To him:

Throughout the variety of his works, Wole Soyinka's main point of view is often insistently a humanistic one. He shows a strong attachment to the defense of socio-political values. He is appalled by what he describes as 'the collapse of humanity', 'man's self-alienation from his spiritual positive-capabilities, as man grows and progresses negatively towards cannibalism, greed and destructive injustice'. His concern with the need for the regeneration of positive humane values is what provides the basis, the logic and rationale of his poetic symbolism and the satiric energy of his fiction and drama. In identifying his work and vision with these socio-humanistic concerns, Soyinka aligns himself with the position of the traditional African artist whose role is profoundly functional, social, and life-affirming.

Using the foregoing theoretical assumptions, an attempt is made in this article to enunciate Wole Soyinka's poetic demonstration of the myth of *Ogun* and *Abiku*, its parallel in Yoruba metaphysics and their significance to African socio-political experience.¹

Both *Ogun* and *Abiku* are used as probative metaphors for the reality of evil, irrationality, tyranny and social injustice in Africa. This experience is critical to the paper's analysis of the same diabolical sensibility of *Ogun* and *Abiku*. From the same discursive perspective, Wole Soyinka's strident political tenor is intense in "Idanre" as in "Abiku" in terms of the related issues of evil and savagery. The task of this article is to argue that Soyinka draws upon the contradictory and often anti-social traits in the personality of *Ogun* and the cognitive disorientation of the *Abiku* child, as "sources of metaphorisation, philosophical notions and motifs for the representation of the African political leaders' lack of moral performance and contemporary socio-historical experience" (Akporobaro 514). Therefore, the aim of this article here is to argue that "Idanre" and "Abiku" poems have more thematic, aesthetic and ideological convergences than divergences and that both of them share similar universal global themes of evil, savagery, tyranny, death, triumph of adversity and social injustice. The article shall not only look at the thematic point of convergences between the two literary works but also at their stylistic use of images and establish the influence of the Yoruba metaphysics on the selected works. The article will demonstrate how much the images associated with *Ogun* such as "red, hot, horrific, negative and frightfully destructive have enriched and depicted his evil, sinister and temperamental nature" (Akporobaro 514).

All the same, from a vintage point, the article discusses the general concept of *Abiku*, its paradox and its relevance to Africa socio-political experience. Overall, the article enunciates that the very concept of *Abiku* underlies the idea of a child who is merely interested in wreaking pain on his mother and the entire family unto which he is born. There is an attempt to explore the idiom of the concept only as it relates to the family unit but also the very nature of the human self in relation to the society. While the article is concerned with the remarkable conceptual affinities and similarities generally, attention is particularly focused on the imaginative importance of the mythical protagonists and on the images associated with them. There will be a brief discussion of *Ogun* and *Abiku*, the underlying keywords of the paper. This will be followed by the list of each poem on which the article is based (The Corpus) and the presentation of each poem (The Analysis). The present presentation is not a technical or an out-and-out theoretical analysis of the selected poems, but an attempt to point out those aspects of significant relationships between *Ogun* and *Abiku* that the article belief will appear to the general reader as interesting.

The corpus

Soyinka's "Idanre" (1967) and "Abiku" (1967) poems form the corpus for the interpretation of some of the convergences between the mystical entities (*Ogun* and *Abiku*) presented in the paper. The two poems are purposively chosen for this article. Some readers will probably question the basis of the article's choice of poems. There are many reasons, but the two most important are: firstly, the poems are two of the most appealing poems in African literature; the two selected poems are easily, for this article, the best poems of the poet and remain from many point of view, two of the best poems ever written. Coincidentally, "Idanre" and "Abiku" were published in 1967, just seven years after Nigeria independence. The two poems also have similar discursive patterns and thematic preoccupations like evil, tyranny, savagery, death etc. They also deal with one theoretical Yoruba traditional society where gods and spirits are never far from the activities of men and in fact, determine the social activities and the annual circle of the community. Secondly, each of the poem is a "classic" and is, invariably mentioned in scholarly-editions or in one or another of the many courses on contemporary African poetry of African universities or features in academic research. The

fictionalization of identity of *Ogun* and *Abiku* in each of the poem is to ensure what is called an ‘orderly pattern’ and a narrative on and about the complexities which characterize both the psychological and demonic forces in Africa.

Mythological concept of Ogun

Ogun, popularly known as the god of hunting, iron, warfare and Custodian of the sacred oath is the great ambiguous god of the Yoruba people. As such, he is rooted in belief systems of great intricacy. *Ogun* is one of the major gods and goddesses not only in Yorubaland but also in West African pantheons. He is also one of the earliest and outstanding Yoruba deities that are said to derive their powers straightaway from *Olodumare* or *Olorun* (the Supreme Being, or God, the sustainer and upholder of the universe). Other prominent or higher divinities in Yorubaland are *Orisa-nla*, *Orunmila*, *Olokun*, *Sango*, *Osun*, *Oya*, *Esu (Elegbara)*. *Ogun*'s dimension, today, has however swelled to embrace diverse new components from present-day technology to highway safety-whatever metal, danger, or transportation. “In the minds of the followers”, according to S.T. Barnes (2), “*Ogun*'s conventionality present two images: the one is a terrifying specter: a violent warrior fully armed, laden with fighting charms and medicines to kill his foes. The other is society's ideal male: a leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, and justice. This African figure can easily fit the destroyer/creator archetype”.

At present, the Yoruba culture has also contrived *Ogun* as the most powerful of the gods in the pantheon who averagely number from 201 to 401 and still greater and provided him with a disposition which could contain any new knowledge. As a result, no militaristic or powerful new knowledge, past, present, or future can be said to be off *Oguns*'s creativeness or universe. To Akporobaro (631-632), “*Ogun* is the god of creativity, an artist who taught man the art of metallurgy and smiting. He is also the god of war, an irascible destroyer”. As his votaries or followers described him, *Ogun* has different faces. The different connotations of *Ogun* are disclosed in broad range of rituals, myths, symbols, and artistic representations; for instance, only “*Ogun*'s devotees wear iron emblems, display fiery red eyes when possessed, and dance with swords and display fiery outburst of anger to the extent that they may heedlessly injure bystander; just as easily, as they may dwell on *Ogun*'s humanitarianism and self-reliance with poignant recitations of heroic deeds that require outstanding levels of courage and leadership” (Barnes 3). Literally, in the use of metal tools his votaries are cautious to follow the ordinances and canons defined by *Ogun*. This clarifies the motive why farmers, drivers and blacksmiths give constant offerings to *Ogun* so as to secure his support in whatsoever they do. It is in accordance with this view that Olusegun Olu-Osayomi (3) explains:

So great and famous for his prowess all over Yorubaland then that it was commonly acknowledged that he never lost any battle to an opponent.

Indeed, *Ogun* could have been described as the prodigy of war. The secrets of his successes laid not only in his gallantry at war but also in the skills with which he was able to manipulate his implements of war which were believed to have been charged with fire. These implements were derived from steel and they included guns, cutlasses and machetes. So, the basis of his military successes rested on the effectiveness of steel.

The Yoruba culture as it is has beforehand produced an almost total icon of this god of opposites. Undoubtedly, within the connotations of *Ogun* consists a dialectic or epistemology

of the human situation that can be declared as a hypothetical submission. The theory on *Ogun*, “embodies a profound and compelling observation of human nature. This theory enables us to examine a realm of ideas that explain, in deeply moving terms, certain strengths and weaknesses that are universal to the human condition” (Barnes 3). The article’s excursion into the instructive historical evidence of *Ogun* in Yoruba culture is followed by a brief exploration of the concept of *Abiku*, which focuses on the ontology of the body.

The mythological concept of Abiku

Abiku

In vain your bangles cast
Charmed circles at my feet;
I am *Abiku*, calling for the first
And the repeated time.

Must I weep for goats and cowries
For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
Yams do not sprout in amulets
To earth *Abiku*’s limbs.

So when the snail is burnt in his shell,
Whet the heated fragment, brand me
Deeply on the breast. You must know him
When *Abiku* calls again.

I am the squirrel teeth, cracked
The riddle of the palm. Remember

This, and dig me deeper still into
The god’s swollen foot.

Once and the repeated time, ageless
Though I puke; and when you pour
Libations, each finger points me near

The way I came, where

The ground is wet with mourning
White dew suckles flesh-birds
Evening befriends the spider, trapping
Flies in wine-froth;

Night, and *Abiku* sucks the oil
From lamps. Mothers!’ I’ll be the
Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep
Yours the killing cry.

The ripest fruit was saddest;
Where I crept, the warmth was cloying.
In the silence of webs, *Abiku* moans, shaping
Mounds from the yolk.

-Soyinka (62-63).

Amongst the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, the assumption that some individuals have the power to originate their own death at will, only for them to be reborn to the same woman is ingrained in the concept of *Abiku* that is, born to die. Wole Soyinka's "Abiku", reproduced above gives a brilliant idea of the world and power of *Abiku* children. In the poem, *Abiku* is the spotlight of Soyinka. He is the epitome of evil. There are different accounts to explain the origin of *Abiku*. A.E Asakitipi (659) identifies one particular myth which seems to cut across most cultural beliefs in Southern Nigeria in the following:

It is generally held among the Yoruba, Igbo and Urhobo that in the distant past, some children were born into this world but realized, with their psychic power, that the world would be too difficult for them to make any significant mark upon due to the stiff competition that characterizes it. Acknowledging their laziness, and their inability to compete with others, they decided to die and go back to heaven. On getting to heaven, the gatekeeper interrogated them and found that their lack of zeal to work had brought them back. Not to encourage indolence, this group of children was not allowed to enter heaven and was told to go back to the world. In order not to be regarded as non-achievers in life, they decided to form a society in the spirit world with a selected forest as their abode. Their rendezvous is usually on big trees such as the baobab and other similar trees. But because they are spirit beings, they cannot be seen with the naked eyes. In the forest, they indulge in playful activities and once in a while may decide to be born into the physical world just to have a taste of it and after a while they will die and return to their spirit kins. An oath is usually sworn to keep the bond of comradeship perpetual. It is also believed that a pact is made in the spirit world detailing what they would do when they are born into a family and the very day they would return to the spirit world. The date they decided on is usually significant in the life of the family the child is born into.

Thus, the child may resolve to die when the father is observing an important ceremony or event or on the child's own birthday, normally before his/her fifth birthday. Nevertheless, this is not to say that *Abiku* children do not live past their fifth birthday. Several have been discovered to live to an adult age only to die at the day of wedding. The end goal of picking such a date is for the child to be the focal point or cynosure of attraction so that what he/she could not attain by dint of diligence is accomplished by his/her abrupt death. Following his/her demise, the circle is duplicated often to be reborn into the same family and by upholding the same sex.

In various cultural groups, such stories are widespread. Nonetheless, they may be dissected as myth; they are however infused in the belief system of the people, which embody their ontology and eventually their social attitude. Three key lessons can be unearthed from this tale. Firstly, it is the conviction or assumption that some children have the power to launch their own death and for them to reincarnate (Wole Soyinka, lines 20-32 hereinafter called WS). Secondly, their aim is to exact pain on the family into which they are born (WS, lines 20-29). Eventually, the family members observe this anomaly (WS, lines 9-12) and search for ways to stop it, as maintained in the poem. Also in the poem (WS, lines 1-12), *Abiku* children bask in the distress of their parents and no amount of charms or plea can compel (WS, lines 1-8) or urge them to stop their malicious torment (WS, lines 18-19) while parents seldom contract medicine men to intercede in stopping the drift as depicted in the poem, others beseech such children by giving them names that insinuate cajolery or brainwashing. This belief provides resources in such cultural names as *Kokumo* (he will not die again), *Malomo*

(don't die again) among the Yoruba; Onwubiko (death, I implore you) among the Igbo; and Akpoyoma (the world is good) among the Urhobo. However, what is significant and remarkable about these names is that they suggest that the phenomenon has been culturally defined and accepted as given. And by giving such names, it is the cultural belief among these groups that they appeal to the child's emotion and therefore may persuade him to stay.

However, where these pleas are ineffective, the parents of the child seek the help of a medicine man who mutilates the body of the dead child with the belief that his kindred will reject him due to ugliness resulting from the mutilation. By this rejection, the child is then forced to stay when next he is reborn (Asakitikpi 660). Parents who presume that their child is an *Abiku* might embrace a third path by contracting the assistance of a medicine man before the demise of the child. When the child (usually a child above seven years old) is presumed to be an *Abiku* due to incessant illness and spasmodic of the child, a medicine man is engaged.

Through chains of brainwashing and flattery, the child may readily lead the medicine man to where his spiritual appurtenances are buried. These gadgets, which come in various modes, may embrace cowries, beads, threads, and shells, along with others. After digging this material, which are usually hidden behind the house or under a big tree, the medicine man creates a charm out of them which the child's parents keep. Seldomly, the child may put on the amulet round the neck or wrist and in some instances the accoutrements are ritually dismantled to cut any link between the child and the physical world.

Ogun and Abiku: The enduring nexus

Apparently, every writer makes a selection of the various components of his/her ambience, the history, customs and traditions and beliefs of his/her people and delivers them in such a way as to guarantee his/her creativity, affirms his/her oneness with the people. The article will investigate the two selected works chronologically, that is in the sequence in which they are published using "Idanre" as a yardstick with respect to the recognition of themes and sub themes, images and identities.

The other work "Abiku", will consequently be contrasted with "Idanre" from the perspective of the regular variation or recognition of themes, images; the attempt here will be one of deciding the convergences of subjects treated in the poems. Akporobaro (515) typifies that "Idanre" is one of Wole Soyinka's major poems written distinctively to give a mythic perception into the forces of bestiality, bloodshed and socio-political injustice in human experience.²

Exclusively, Soyinka displays an obsession for *Ogun's* cruel, ruthless and imperious temperament. The poem "Idanre" is divided into seven sections or movements, its external form according to Oyin Ogunba (12), immediately mirrors the popular saying:

Ogun meje l' Ogunmi
(My *Ogun* is a god of seven manifestations)

Which Soyinka refers to as the "septuple god" (84). From one angle, in the poem, are *Ogun's* positive qualities as a creative virtuoso, an advocate of growth or elaboration and the spirit of harvest; and conversely, his extremely fierce behaviors which manifest him as the matchless embodiment of the spirit of death or havoc. Though an adept of some positive behaviors as recounted cogently in section II of the poem, it is this negative behaviors and capacities of *Ogun* that is the concern of the article. Within this section II again is the savage,

bestial personality and horrifying adroitness of *Ogun*; very much in corroboration is a reification of the demonic whimsicality in *Ogunas* witness in the following:

And we

Have honeycombed beneath his hills, worked red earth of energies, quarrying rare
and urgent ores and paid.

With wrecks of last year's supper, paved his roads.

With shells, milestones of breathless bones- *Ogun* is a demanding god.

We walked through broken braids of steel and fallen

acrobats. The endless safety nets of forests proved a
green deception. Fated lives ride on the wheels of death

when, the road waits famished

(64)

Ogun is a god who gleans in the death of his people-an annihilator. He clearly reveals himself on the road that waits starved. "*Ogun* is a demanding god". He is avaricious. He works strenuously and those that follow him must do correspondingly. The wine girl is a picture of amenability or vulnerability. Hence, the wine girl and the poet persona "honey combed beneath his hills", "worked red earth/of energies", extracted ores from quarries, made payment from their own scarce resources, and paved *Ogun's* way with "shells, milestones of breathless bones". The path of their journey is scattered with "broken braids of steel/and fallen acrobats", and their preservation is not cocksure since the forest is a "green deception where those whom *Ogun* has reserved for his meal "ride on the wheels of death when, /the road waits famished".

Hence, to strengthen *Ogun's* devilish character, he is not above laying trap on those confined to his iron wheels to squash them for his delight. This is aside from the fact that he behaves like a thoughtless task-master to his farmhands leaving them seriously distorted in different ways. Even in the making of iron ore which has boosted his work as a primeval craftsman and for which is rightly acclaimed. *Ogun* has displayed very minimal regard for human life, and even much less for work norms and cardinal human privileges. The adoption of the words "braids of steel" and "fallen acrobats" depicts the countless statistics of road disasters and plane crashes as an outcome of the insidious look of the forest which is seen poetically as *Ogun's* trap. This reinforces the myth of *Ogun* as the god of iron. The motif of a man as a pre-ordained being is also portrayed in the "fated lives" riding on the wheels of death. *Ogun* reveal himself on the roads that wait famished. Joined with this motif is the recurrent image of the dominance of the mystical over the natural. This can be observed in the satiric of the green forest as a "safety net". In actuality, they do not grant protection for man, only an illusion formed by *Ogun* to annihilate man via accident. From this idea, the powerlessness of man is depicted and one feels sorry for him.

Section V of "Idanre" or the fifth movement, entitled "The Battle", is the place where Soyinka conveys a most grotesque, aberrant act, and the atrocious acts of *Ogun's* personality and rendition. "The Battle" is a menacing elegiac conjuration of bloodshed, butchery, laceration, excess of trepidation, blindness, prideful irrationality and absolutism. As Soyinka presents it in the notes on "Idanre", "The Battle" is "*Ogun's* day of error". This is the period when, acting on deceptive information, *Ogun* slaughters his own people (who had foolishly persuaded him to be their king and so lead them to battle against their own foes) in their

millenary, misapprehending them for attackers and enemies. Soyinka well-reported the nature of the massacre:

This blade he forged. Its progress
Never falters rivulets on it so swift
The blood forgets to clot

There are falling ears of corn
And ripe melons tumble from the heads
Of noisy women, crying

Lust- blind god, gore-drunk Hunter (75).

Against all expectations, *Ogun* “the prestidigitator god”, adept in legerdemain, hocus-pocus, murderous deeds, ignites a holocaust on the men of *Ire*. At once, he slaughtered them to a man. He is not a common warrior; he is a deracinator. He assaults the enemies and all their assets.

Ogun destroys their estates and homes and dries up their wells. Consequently, even those that elude his hatchet at the combat area have nothing to return back to at “home”. He is a berserked fighter and diabolist. He takes the appearance of a beast at any time and seems to impede all “strategic outlets’ of escape.

He instantly disposes of the adversaries and turn to kill his own men. War is “a human feast” and it is less important whose blood is shed. All wails of “your men *Ogun!* Your men!” make no sense to a “lust-blind god”, “a gore drunk Hunter”, a “Monster deity”.

On an equal footing, his blade seems enchanted. It is designed to rain mayhem on every human fighter in view. Neither *Ogun* nor his saber (cutlass) discerns the word “retreat” in war. In Soyinka’s Mythography, the men of *Ire* were silly, even their aged in requesting *Ogun*’s assistance originally and persuaded a “cannibal” to be their king and took no safety measures to safeguard themselves:

We do not burn woods to trap
A squirrel; we do not ask the
Mountain’s aid to crack a walnut
To bring a god to super is devout, yet
A wise host keeps his distance till
The spirit one has dined his fill. What mortal
Brands a platter with an awesome name,
Or feeds him morsels choice without
Gauntlets of iron. A human feast
Is indifferent morsel to a god (76).

As it is, *Ogun* ‘the god’ intoxicated with wine and enraged by blood turns in bloodbaths on his men likewise the enemy and butchered them almost to a man and they reply by slandering him:

Lust- blind god, gore-drunk hunter
Monster deity, you destroy your men! ... (75).

Murderer, stay your iron hand
Your men lie slain- cannibal! (76).

Akporobaro (544) puts it more succinctly:

This is the surface story, but the men of *Ire* also represent the human race whose fate it is to destroy themselves. *Ogun*'s ignominious act can find parallel in a military or political officer even in contemporary times who leads his men to battle and turns against them. At another level, it could even find parallel in a leader who once he has secured a hold on the reins of power, gets power drunk, fortifies himself, and terrorises and brutalises even his right-hand men. It is significant that the battle is obliquely introduced through an image of locusts destroying crops. This image of devastation represents the waste of resources that war brings.

Soyinka's message or advocacy, which is well-defined, is that something is wrong with human race, most especially African leaders, a la *Ogun*:

Overtaking fugitives
A rust- red swarm of locusts
Dine off grains
Quick proboscis
Find the coolers
Soon the wells are dry (73)

The correlations with corrupt politicians drinking and draining up the wells are evident and simple to draw in most third world conditions. *Ogun* is labelled as “a lethal arc” which must go it's “full circle”, he is not a god of concessions or bargains. For him, the smell of human blood and gore is the same disregarding natural social and ethnological fabrications. The god makes no disparities of human entreaties and the propitiatory knife: “All prayers were one/To the iron one” (78). Soyinka apprehends this ghoulish essence of *Ogun* when he writes:

Where do we seek him, they asked?
Where conflict rages, where sweat
Is torrents of rain, where clear springs
Of blood fill one with longing
As the rush wine
So inert they sought
And inside they find him (75-76)

At Ire-Ekiti, the traditional *Ogun* minstrels have also expressed *Ogun*'s ghoulish essence in their mantras:

Ojile le gbejeoniyan

(One thousand four hundred and forty people)

Keesuseninuoko Ogun

(Working in Ogun's farm)

Ororoebibuni

(They are all in bits and pieces).

Eyiko o balorilibe

(Those of them who have heads)

Selieilorun

(Have no necks)

Eyiko o balorun

(Those who have necks)

Selieilori

(Have no heads)

(Ogunba 1-18)

Soyinka's mythic characters *Ogun* and *Abiku* have striking fantastic affinities or attractions of significant literary interest. *Ogun* as depicted in "Idanre" is dreadfully calamitous, gloomy and in belligerent antagonism to light and life. His dealings with the wine-hawker-girl (a dead girl, killed in a motor accident) and the people of *Ire-Ekiti*, and his carcinogenic activities on the road are images of his cataclysmic sensibility. Death on the road is a fundamental concept in Soyinka's *The Road*, a play written at the early phase of Soyinka's career. The descriptive imagery is doggedly barbarous, capricious, impulsive, tyrannical and fatuous, as in the following stanza quoted from section II (... *and after*) and section V (*the battle*) of "Idanre":

II ... **and after**

In the blasting of the seed, in the night-birds'

Instant discernment, in the elemental fusion, seed

To current, shone the godhead essence; (64)

Whorls of intemperate steel, triangles of cabal

In rabid spheres, iron bellows at volcanic tunnels

Easters in convulsions, urged by energies

Of light millenniums, crusades, empires and revolution

Damnation and savage salvations (67)

V **The battle**

Storms strain his mighty chest, his nipples
 Glow with blackness, from hair-roots
 Spit black jets of flames. Tall herises to the hills
 His head a rain- cloud has eclipsed the sun
 His nostrils blow visible
 Exhalations as twin-flues through clouds (74)

The above are strong images of super-human (phenomenal) fiend and hard taskmaster. Far from conveying his being as creator and artist, *Ogun* is just a monster, a destroyer, a sadist who bears death alike to his friends and has to be circumvented as well as *Abiku* looking at his negativity disclosed of himself in “Abiku”:

In vain your bangles cast
 Charmed circles at my feet
 I am *Abiku*, calling for the first
 And the repeated time

 Must I weep for goats and cowries
 for palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
 Yams do not sprout in amulets
 To earth *Abiku*’s limbs

 Though I puke; and when you pour
 Libations each finger point me near (WS, lines 15-16)

As quoted above in this same bent of imaginative similarities and antecedents, *Abiku* children relish pleasure in the agony of their parents and no quantity of charms or invocation can force or influence them to put an end to their pernicious torment. Soyinka’s mythic *Abiku* is an adumbration and expression of the same fiendish sensibility of *Ogun*.

Abiku is a depiction and particularized articulation of *Ogunas* warrior. The embassy of both metaphysical characters is evil and iniquity. In other words, it is death and adversity to the human world.

It is not only *Abiku*’s evil behaviors that parallels the mythic god *Ogun*, but also what the *Abiku* declares in the poem which has equal boisterous, heartless, powerful, compulsive and ferocious vitality of *Ogun* in “Idanre”.

One may not completely comprehend why the *Abiku* would resolve to die early and unexpectedly, but regardless of whatever motive they were resolute in their decision not to abide in the world but to return to the spiritual domain.

The *Abiku* says:

In vain your bangle cast...
Ageless though I puke...
I am the squirrel teeth, cracked...
Remember this, and dig me deeper still into
The god's swollen foot.
Abiku moans, shaping
Moulds from the yolk.

One thing is understandable; *Abiku* child in his coming and going, displays a remarkable level of freedom that nonetheless, encroaches on the happiness and bliss of others. Freedom in its total extension seems to be symbolized in the very notion of *Abiku*. As it runs in traditional societies, the notion may have a much profound meaning, which strives to entrap the dissensions that define the world of man. Thus, the notion or concept can be said to signify the self, which longs for freedom. The self signifies the principle of the individual that does not want to be confined by time and space. Presumably, the self-desires to attain immortality: consequently in Soyinka's "Abiku", he announces himself as "I am", the axiomatic name of God. With such a prelude, *Abiku* strives to liken himself with the disposition of God who alone transcends space and time and occupies eternity. *Abiku* repeatedly chooses to be free and uncontrolled. Comprehensively, in his eagerness to exert his freedom, *Abiku* constantly brings torture, sadness to his actual family. It is this aspect of *Abiku* meteing pain on his mother and the whole family into which he is born that equates *Ogun's* lion-like negativity and butchery, a nihilist who brings death even to allies and has to be circumvented. Akporobaro (550) bears credence to the above submission on *Abiku*:

In 'Abiku', each successive verse is an incremental intensification of the theme of death to man, and mercilessness. This is also the point of view in the portrait of *Ogun* in 'Idanre'. A good number of the images vocalized by the *Abiku* either are, or are recurrent in the picture of *Ogun* in 'Idanre'. 'The ripest fruit and the ripened corn field' of 'Idanre', 'the moulds shaped from yolk' and the 'ground wet with mourning' are minute but significant examples of leitmotifs which are echoes anticipating the larger more explicit themes of the diabolic sensibility of *Ogun* in 'Idanre'. The victim is no longer an individual, the unfortunate woman in 'Idanre' but man and society terrorised, by power of all sorts.

The general effective notions of "Idanre" and "Abiku" are horror, cruelty and apathy towards human agony as indications of wickedness and the outcomes of brutal force and crude energy, its previous and synecdochical portrayal of the theme of aggressive vile or wickedness in human matters. Soyinka's poetic creativity in "Idanre" seems to be stimulated and enhanced in the examination of this perception of cruelty and violent evil power in a related way as his creativity was in a sense motivated by a vision of death, evil and cruelty endued in "Abiku" (WS, lines 1-8, 18-19). This is realized in the poem in terms of the poet's creative spirit, the gamut and the complexity of poetic symbolism and motif which give the poem its mythic and philosophic sonority. *Ogun* is acknowledged in an almost casual deportment with one Promethean benevolence of linking the aperture between men and the deities in a civilizing

quest. But, sardonically, not much is made of this motif in the poem. Rather, the images show extravagant terror, indiscriminate bloodshed, gashing, blindness and foolishness.

The section “The Battle” is a frightening elegiac conjuration of this act of gasconading irrationality and tyranny. Except for Soyinka’s equally petrifying *Season of Anomy*, we do not have in modern African literature more indomitable symbolism of seraphic irrationality, eccentricity and brashness. In “Abiku” just as in “Idanre”, the readers are prone to a vision of malevolence, combativeness and human frailty and absolutism of the immortals. *Ogun* should be labeled as heartless and impervious, just as *Abiku* who regularly chooses his death and causes agony and sadness to his immediate family (WS, lines 20-29). Soyinka’s haughty *Abiku* are apathetic towards the petitions and coaxing or flattery of their parents. It is in a bid to halt or stop residuum of endless freedom that mothers, and the whole household, make an attempt to cajole or compel *Abiku* to stay (WS, lines 9-12). Consequently, the coming of *Abiku* builds anxiety, uneasiness in the household as both sides strive or fixate on their own benefit. In this lies the dialectical affinity between *Abiku* and his family and, add-on between individual and their community. Even so, the concept of *Abiku* can be invoked to explicate the social pressure that dwells in human societies. Akporobaro (552) reiterates thus:

“Idanre” functions as an objective correlative of the African human condition; a continent richly endowed with human power and resources but bent upon self-destruction; a nation capable of infinite spirituality but given to self-annihilation and spread of disease, moral decay and chaos. As expressed in the imagery of the wine-girl, and plight of the people of *Ire*, African leader such as Idi Amin, Mobutu SesseSeko, Charles Taylor, FararAidid and Robert Mugabe breathe violence, and speak violence. *Ogun* is an image of these African leaders. Innocence means death, and brutal force is might, privilege and power. This is the tragic essence of the myth as it is effectively presented in the poem.

CONCLUSION

It is convenient to conclude that this paper carries out a comparative exploration of *Ogun* and *Abiku* in Wole Soyinka’s poetry by dwelling on their significant relationships, convergences and complementarities, and the nature of their relations in the specific contexts of evil, tyranny, savagery, death and social injustice. *Ogun* in “Idanre” represents the dark satanic aspects of *Ogun* deity and evidently demonstrated by the poet. *Abiku* in “Abiku” is a differentiated and detailed articulation of *Ogun* warrior and has the same tempestuous, heartless, resilient, irrepressible and ferocious energy as *Ogun* in “Idanre”. Also, the discussion has revealed that Soyinka’s strident socio-political tenor is intense in “Idanre” as in “Abiku”. They both exhibit a striking unity of vision, giving eloquent expression to the depth of the poet’s immersion in Yoruba mythology.

The paper has clearly shown that *Ogun* and his twin *Abiku* exercise irresistible dark deeds and diabolos. They are thus a theodicy of evil. Aggressive evil expressed through the agents of brutality, warfare, corruption and death provides a rich source of imagery, mythic motifs and associated leitmotifs. The images used in both poems are very lucid and frightening, though these images are as baffling as the tumultuous condition they are meant to depict; they buttress persistently the terrible and humanistic point of view of Soyinka’s reconstructive mythography. Another significant discovery of this paper is that the tragedy which Soyinka’s myth of *Ogun* and *Abiku* expresses is man’s continuous reification of the negative polarity of his being through his self-surrender to the destructive impulses inherent in his nature. Thus, the article reiterates that Soyinka’s writings envision the origins of evil in

human society in its relatedness to divinity, to the spirit forces within and outside the soul of man is valid.

Notes

- 1) Without equivocation, Wole Soyinka is a foremost exponent of African literature and culture. In 1986, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. As an established playwright, poet and novelist, Soyinka is the first African to be so honoured. In 1976, he published his seminal collection of essays, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, and wrote *Death and the King's Horseman* (1976), for which he won the Nobel Prize. He has written more than twenty-five major plays. Soyinka's "Idanre" and "Abiku" were published in 1967.
- 2) Wole Soyinka, "Idanre" In *Idanre and other poems*, (London: Methuen and Co.).

This poem was published for Commonwealth Festival of 1967 in London. Soyinka's stanzas are not numbered. For the sake of reference, this article has chosen to use the pagenumbers beginning with the first page, which the poet takes as page 61. *Ogun* in "Idanre" represents the dark satanic aspect of *Ogun*. According to Akporobaro (2010:631), Soyinka's early fascination with this indigenous myth of *Ogun* and his many contradictory qualities is first made manifest in several contexts: in his essay "The Fourth Stage" and "Ideology and Social Vision", now published in *Myth, Literature and African World* (London: Cambridge, UP, 1976; p.105) and in his interview with John Agetua in *Interviews with Six Nigerian Writers*, (Bendel Newspapers Corporation, Benin City; p.29). In these contexts, Wole Soyinka discusses the complex mode of being of this divinity and the relationship of his nature to the cosmic order and the conditions of tragic experience. Two aspects of his personality provide the source of the fascination, which this divinity has for the poet. First in his Promethean role as benefactor of man – the artist, and creator, - which express the positive and creative will in nature. Second, is the violent, the poet's keen awareness of the existence of these contradictory moral qualities in man as an individual, and in the society of which he is a member. See Wole Soyinka's "The Writer in a Modern African State", A speech delivered at the 1967 Writer's Conference in Stockholm published in *When the Man Died Views, Reviews, Interviews on Wole Soyinka*. ed. John Agetua (Bendel Newspaper Corporation, Benin City); p. 29.

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