

**DR. OLU-OSAYOMI OLUSEGUN, DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERARY  
STUDIES, BABCOCK UNIVERSITY, ILISHAN-REMO, OGUN STATE**  
Email: [segunoosa@gmail.com](mailto:segunoosa@gmail.com) 08034550610

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SOYINKA AND THE DIVINITIES AS MODELS FOR FUTURE STUDIES AT A TERTIARY  
LEVEL: **THE ROAD** AS PARADIGM

### **ABSTRACT**

The nature and role of colonialism in the transformation, nay destruction of the African culture, is a matter that is far from settled. Pioneer African writers like Wole Soyinka see the destruction of traditional culture in the coming of the whites. Irked by colonial education's casual dismissal of his culture, Soyinka sets out to reconstruct the African perspective. This is why his works are very much indebted to indigenous African culture and aesthetics. The aim of this paper therefore is to attempt a re-investigation of Achebe and Soyinka's exploration of the elements of indigenous African lore in his works with a view to illuminating them as models for future studies at a tertiary level. Using **The Road** as illustration, the paper contends that traditional divinities are well manifested in the structuring principles of Soyinka's work. The study relies on hermeneutics as the theoretical focus. It is this ability to recreate African traditions and

cultures into a work of fiction that is central to this article. It unfolds the traditional Yoruba religious belief and communal philosophies as Soyinka presents them in his *magnus opus*, **The Road**. This includes a detailed interrogation of the rationality and logic of these beliefs. It shows how Wole Soyinka harnesses his skills to produce a work that offers students of literature an in-depth view and understanding of African culture. This paper unfolds that with a different religious inheritance, Wole Soyinka has been able to do more in the process of retrieving the moral instruments with which to propose new African possibilities through the medium of African deities. This cultural particularity, deeply rooted in what Soyinka's (1976) himself characterizes as the "African worldview", largely informs his distillation of thematic foci, deployment of troupes and metaphors as well as the manipulation of characterization, setting and perspective. The findings offer insight into the fact that despite the limitations of his vision, Soyinka has emerged as a well-rounded artist whose cultural root has been properly harnessed as raw material for his poetics. The paper recommends an examination of the future of cultural studies in Africa, and policy implications.

## INTRODUCTION

### AFRICAN CULTURE AND RELIGION

Religion is the meaning man makes out of his intriguing universe (Okon, 2001:382). This may be in terms of a goal (security in life and death), according to Sieber (1977:145) and the process of reaching that goal (ritual, ceremony, worship, prayer). Evidently, religion, whether viewed negatively or positively, is the strongest influence upon the thinking of men (Mbiti, 1969:2). Consequently, man seeks solace in religion which reinforces him with confidence with which to cope with problems facing him. Similarly, Idowu (1973:1) has rightly observed that religion is very much and always with us at every moment of life, that is, in our innermost beings with regard to the great and minor events of life. Hence, religion has

continually dominated the life of Africans before the introduction of Christianity and Islam to Africa. Also, contrary to the beliefs and expressions of foreign missionaries, explorers, traders that:

There are people somewhere in the world to whom “the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity” would not stoop so low as to reveal Himself, people who could not attain to the knowledge of the living God and the assurance of His being, just because they happen to have been in some particular geographical location and brought up in their own native cultural atmosphere (Evan – Pritchard, 1965:118).

African culture and religion “emphasize the harmony between man, community and the cosmos as the background to health and well-being” (Ilogu 2001). The way in which the African ontological world projected through this traditional vision of nature consists distinctively of a hierarchy of spiritual beings and forces. Thus, Akporobaro (2007:6) declares that the background, against which the traditional man believes, acts and works, is a complex supersensible world of many orders of beings and forces. According to him:

At its apex, is the supreme deity, below whom is a multiplicity of gods, powers and spiritual beings, such as the dead-living and ancestors, ghosts and the spirits of things. In addition to these there are believed to be other occult forces commonly referred to as “witchcraft”, “juju” and “African magic”.

The above statement sums up the ontology of the African existential plan.

African metaphysics as it applies to this study exemplifies the view that all beings form a hierarchy. God is the highest, followed by the lesser gods, ancestors, the elders and the young ones in that order. In this study, divinity refers to those hundreds of gods and goddesses in traditional African religion who figure so prominently in the imaginative universe of the selected writers.

### **Literature and Religion: A Point of Convergence**

According to Owonibi (2007:110-111) Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1956:10) argues that “Literature has been always... a marketable product, its producers being the creative writers and its consumers the cultivated readers with the critic at their head” (1956:10). In the words of Oloruntoba – Oju, (1999:206) the term “literature” may be used to refer to “any material in written form or any other material whose features lend themselves to literary appreciation or appraisal”. Literature is language at work. It is a product of imagination and creativity. Owonibi (2007:111-112) asserts:

Imagination is a derivative of the word ‘imagine’, meaning ‘to picture to oneself’... Therefore, Literature is the royal road that enables us to enter the realm of the imaginative ... The major pivot around which the art of literary creativity revolves is life. A work of art can neither exist in vacuum nor can it be divorced from the different factors or social realities that facilitate its creation. These factors can either be political, historical, biographical or sociological.

In a nutshell, Owonibi has stated elsewhere, Literature derives its main essence from life, as the creative writer is provoked to espouse the losses and gains, the ills and virtues of a society with the view of perpetuating or sensitizing the people to the importance of finding solutions as the case may be. A work of art also entertains and educates. In fact, one basic function of literature is entertainment. The form of entertainment offered by literature affords the mind the opportunity of overcoming tensions and conflicts, especially psychological, spiritual, physical tensions and conflicts. It is also the avenue by which human pass their time in excitement. In the words of Omobowale (2001:3):

Two things at least are indispensable to the creation of a veritable work of art. The first is that it is a representation of life whose creation is propelled by a host of other factors. Second, it is created to serve a pragmatic purpose, which is usually didactic in nature.

In Literature, “human beings are afforded the opportunity to learn from the past to improve the present so as to better the future. One may then be justified to say that serving as a vehicle with which the past is related to the future is essentially the hallmark of literature” (Owonibi, 2001:112). The utilities of literature could be educational, cultural, moral, recreational and socio-political.

Literature, which communicates the emotional, spiritual and intellectual concerns of mankind is dependent on society for its material. Religion is a crucial aspect of the society. The culture and belief system of a people, which are reflected in literature, according to Adebowale (2000:23-24) are actually embedded in religion, thus society is reinforced by religion. Both religion and literature increases the awareness of man. The mutual relationship between both provides the instinct for literary writers to make the subject of religion manifest in their works. An example is Wole Soyinka’s **The Road** in which the creative skill of the literary artist is employed to bring out succinctly prominent African divinities as models for future studies at a tertiary level.

The first suggestion I would like to make is that the selected work ought to be taught at tertiary level and it raises theoretical issues that can only be fully appreciated and thoroughly discussed at that level.

### **Theoretical Focus**

The theoretical basis of our analysis is Hermeneutics. This theory was originally applied to the interpretation of sacred texts. In modern times, shifts in hermeneutics, according to Adebowale (2000:24) emphasis reflect broader academic pursuits. The essence of hermeneutics is to establish the meaning of a writer’s work through an in-depth research into the culture of the society on which the work is based. Martin Heidegger, the originator of the theory argued that as

our consciousness project things, we can never adopt an attitude of detached contemplation of the world (Selden,1985:111). Selden explains further that Hans-George Gadamer applied Heidegger's situational approach to literary theory in his **Truth and Method (1975)**. Gadamer believes that our attempts to understand a work will depend on the question which our cultural environment allows us to raise. He explains further that we also seek to discover the questions which the work itself is trying to answer.

### **The Relevance of Hermeneutics:**

Hermeneutics will help us to understand that the author's perception of divinities could only be within his knowledge about the society. The play, **The Road** is based upon the belief and culture of the Yoruba society; hence our knowledge about this cultural background would help our understanding of the work being interpreted. The totality of meaning which makes up the unity of the text would also emerge through our use of hermeneutics theory.

### **The Analysis: Aspects of Divinities in Soyinka's *The Road***

Obviously, every writer, according to Kwofie (2010:4) makes a selection of the diverse elements of his/her environment, the history, customs and traditions and beliefs of his/her people and presents them in such a way as to ensure his/her originality, assert his/her individuality, or affirm his/her solidarity with the people. I will examine the selected work **The Road** as a standard with respect to the identification of important aspect of the position of gods and goddesses among the Yoruba, and how they can be used as models for future studies at a tertiary level.

The first major issue that any teaching of **The Road** in higher education should get to grips with is the issue of culture. “Culture is a way of life, the way a people organize their lives around certain norms, values, belief system and religious practices” (Chukwuma, 2011:63). A people’s culture is basically what works for them. Students have to be led towards an appreciation of this. Of course, effective teaching of Soyinka’s play should involve, may be even begin with, a brief discussion of Yoruba traditional religion. According to Ibitokun (1995:22):

Yoruba religion does not admit of the culture of “remoteness” whereby the gods sit supine in their celestial abodes and find it degrading to move nearer to the living. Should they do so, they will starve and lose their divine essence. The existence of deities, at least in human terms, depends on their being worshipped by mortals. They do not worship themselves; the living worship them. Though a Yoruba holds them in awe, he nevertheless jeers at their dependence on him. Proverbially he vaunts his human superiority over the divine, “Bi o seniyan imale osi” (if humanity were not, the gods would not be). Mortals, in the same vein, have to fraternize with the deities through the ritual of prayers, libations and offering of sacrifices. By so doing, they assure their own self- adjustment to the superior powers, and to cosmic harmony.

Also, the play must be discussed within the context of Yoruba world-view and then as an exercise in appropriating **Ogun**, the Yoruba god of creativity and metallurgy as a Soyinka’s creative daemon. Ibitokun (1995:22): further, emphasizes this world-view:

The Yoruba world-view is multi-dimensional. It is not restrained to the physical, tangible plane of existence. Besides the earth which is the measure of the present, and the locus of mortals ... there are the realm of ancestors (the past), gods (the eternal) and the unborn (the future). The fourth plane of existence is “the natural home of the unseen deities”. In a terrestrial-based culture like the Yoruba, gods and mortals freely interact. The former have to sustain their divinity by humanizing with the latter.

There is a passage or a border, between any two areas of existence which Soyinka calls “the transitional gulf”. For the first time ever in history, the gulf between the divine and the terrestrial was, bridged by **Ogun** (the deity of iron and creativity). “From the earthwomb”, according to Ibitokun, (1995:23) ‘Ogun sighted and dug an iron ore which he later forged into a cutlass and, at the head of other deities, used this artifact to cut a path and throw up a bridge of transition and fraternization between men and deities. No human has ever been able to accomplish similar feats except in symbolic aesthetics’. Maduakor (1991:205) explains:

The Yoruba god, Ogun, was the first road- maker, celebrated in the Yoruba folklore as the “path-finder” The Yoruba road is the “gulf of transition,” the pathway of Ogun, the first darer and conquerer of transition. The road is also the “fourth stage” linking the living, the dead, and the unborn. It is a symbol of continuity, of eternal recurrence and of inter-terrestrial communication between divine and human essences.

**Ogun** was a hunter according to the Yoruba mythology who usually came down from heaven by a spider’s thread upon the primordial mashy waste for his hunting expedition. **Ogun** and other divinities, -**Orisa-Nla, Orunmila, Esu** and **Ifa**- decided to come down from heaven in order to take over the affairs of the world when the earth had been founded and its furniture arranged. Apparently, the work of the creation of the universe was yet to be contemplated at the time. There was a critical lacuna, according to Yakubu (2009:43) in the finishing of the universe as a unified, cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings and between those beings and the forces of nature.

However, at a place of “no-road”, the divinities came to a halt. The divinities could not achieve their goal. **Ogun** had observed the gap as well as the failed efforts of his colleagues to

remedy the situation. Idowu (1962:85-86) acquiesces with oral traditions view of the power of **Ogun** which is quoted here extensively:

**Orisa-nla** tried to cut a way through, but his machete bent because it was lead (sic). Of all the divinities, it was only **Ogun** who possessed the implement which was adequate for the task. **Ogun** therefore undertook to make a way, but not before he had made the other divinities promise him a worthy reward when the task had been accomplished. This the divinities did. In no time, **Ogun** had cut a way by which the divinities arrived on earth. When they arrived at Ile-Ife, which was the “headquarters” they rewarded **Ogun** with the only crown they brought with them. So, **Ogun** received the title of **Osin-Imale**-Chief among the divinities.

Drawing upon some of Sango’s resources in addition to his, he sets out to “clear a path” a task which he soon achieved. With this feat, he becomes quite popular amongst his colleagues who offer him “the crown of the deities”.

Wole Soyinka has been able to do more in the process of retrieving the moral instruments with which to propose new African possibilities through the medium of African deities:

The gods and avatars of the Yoruba pantheon who figure so prominently in the Soyinka imaginative universe are anything but noumenal, in the Kantian sense... since the principles and phenomena forces in what Soyinka calls the “*African world*.” Is Soyinka then a believer, a religionist? This question, which is ultimately redundant, is perhaps not unfair, given the deep sympathy lavished by the mythopoeist on the gods and avatars, especially his chosen tutelary deity, **Ogun**. The relationship between the writer and the tutelary god, in fact, provides us with a key to unlocking the interest and enigma of the function of the gods in Soyinka’s writings (Maduakor, 1991:xiii).

The relationship between Soyinka and the tutelary god, in fact, provides us with a key to unlocking the interest and enigma of the function of the gods in Soyinka’s writings. In fact, he was at the head of a movement at the University of Ife in the late 1970s and early 1980s to build a place of communion with the Yoruba deities, a place to be known as **Orile Orisa** (Omotoso,

2009:62). He rendered in the process some of the messages of the **Ifa** Divination into English.

Here, is an example:

Obatala fulfils. Purity, love, transparency of heart. Stoical strength.  
Luminous truth. Man is imperfect; man strives towards perfection.  
Yet even the imperfect may find interior harmony with Nature.  
Spirit overcomes blemish – be it of mind or body. Oh, peace that  
giveth understanding, possess our human heart (Soyinka, 1991:33).

Obatala is the god of creation, spiritual purity, patience, forbearance, suffering and ascetic self-control. Indisputably, **Ogun** is another one who ranks in status among the divinities of Yorubaland. He is universally acknowledged in the indigenous belief of the Yoruba as a most indispensable divinity, in as much as all iron and steel belong to him (Idowu, 1996:83-84). **Ogun** is a recognition of a valid aspect, a continuing, a real aspect of the creative and social instinct of Yoruba society. According to Roscoe (1979:219) “Soyinka’s work” ... is essentially African in material and inspiration” because he is “a Yoruba who acknowledges his roots and clings to them”. In a dramatic way, Tsaiior (2006:310) remarked thus:

Significantly, therefore, Soyinka’s corpus which spans the generic gamut constitutes a rich cultural mosaic on which is boldly etched an isomorph of veritable cultural codes and meanings peculiarly African and whose provenance can be largely located in his indigenous Yoruba cosmology. This perhaps crystallizes Soyinka’s appropriation of **Ògún**, the Yoruba god of creativity and metallurgy, as his creative daemon and inspirational essence. This cultural specificity foregrounds the very sociality of Soyinka’s poetics and underscores its fundamental relevance and dynamic functionality.

The teaching of **The Road** should also involve discussion of the methods Soyinka uses to impart credibility in spite of the preponderance of numerous deities such as **Agemo**, **egwugwu** etc. The most important of these is, of course, the use of **Ogun** himself, the Yoruba deity of iron as the natural protagonist, as a background force, and controller of the principal characters. The image of **Ogun** which emerges from Soyinka’s **The Road** encapsulates Soyinka’s world-view which is

drawn from his Yoruba culture. The Yoruba culture itself has already created an almost complete image of this god of contraries. Ogunba (2005:7) buttresses this by pointing out that “the culture has also already created **Ogun** as the most dynamic of the gods and endowed him with a personality which could accommodate any new experience”. The effect of this deep scholarly interest in Yoruba culture endows Soyinka with a base of ideas from which his work flow.

The relationship between **Ogun** as a background force and the principal characters in the play should be explored. Although **Ogun** is not present as character in Soyinka’s **The Road**, he is definitely present as a background force, and the controller of the principal characters, particularly Professor, Say – Tokyo – Kid, Murano, Particular Joe, Chief-in-Town and the other touts’ actions in the play. In a similar vein, the actions of Professor: running the accident store, accident sites, cemetery – cum drinking bar where the drivers and touts converge, his relationships with death (Murano, the wraith) and his dare – devilry of profanating **Ogun**’s worship (during an **Egungun** festival) can be attributed to the manipulation of Ogun, the god of hunting, iron and warfare. Therefore, it can be argued that it is **Ogun**, who controls from the background that kills Professor through Say-Tokyo-Kid, who was clearly suspicious of Professor’s manipulation of Murano in his quest to find out about death. According to Adeboye Babalola (1989:150): Since the creator made the world, it is obvious that many of the characters in **The Road** are various phases and manifestations of **Ogun** who operates in the background, and they have pointedly reflected the complexity, resourcefulness and enigma generally associated with **Ogun**.

Soyinka’s society is caught in three basic concerns (and themes) – religion, politics, and the metaphysical. The metaphysical is the unknown quantity and it encapsulates Soyinka’s

world-view which is drawn from his Yoruba culture. This culture is dominated by religion and in an essay, “The Fourth Stage” (**Myth, Literature and the African World**, 1976:140-160), Soyinka examines the idea underlying the Yoruba concepts of being. The basic idea is that “human life itself is regarded as part of a continuum of life stretching from the spirits of unborn children through bodily existence to the spirits of departed ancestors” (Jones, 1983:5). And in this belief are numerous deities and spirits which interact with human beings. Within the moral ambit of **Ogun’s** universal good-evil order, Soyinka’s **The Road**, to which I shall now turn presents **Ogun** as the Lord of the road and in a sense dances to the rhythm of another deity of the way, **Agemo**.

Not to limit the horizons of our students, they have to be led towards an appreciation of the role of **Agemo** in Soyinka’s **The Road**. In the play, **Agemo** is also, like **Ogun** concerned with the road. During his ceremonial processions he has right of way and may on no account be hindered as he moves from shrine to shrine. Ideas connected with the deity and the conventions which shape his festivals provide a background to **The Road** and a key to its structure. Murano is the physical representation of **Agemo** in his state of transition from human to the divine essence. So what Soyinka does in **The Road** is to create a situation where the human communities are toying with this mysterious spirit. The ultimately fated result is predictable – death. Professor has penetrated sensitivity into another world and his anxiety to unravel the world finally leads to his physical confrontation with Murano and his death.

The teaching of this play should also make reference to Murano’s role. When Murano was knocked down in his **Agemo** phase by Kotonu’s lorry when he masqueraded as the god **Ogun**, Professor suddenly is provided with an unexpected key to the mystery. Having been knocked down by a lorry, Professor traps Murano, the **Agemo** mask-symbol in a sub-conscious

state. Murano was in a state of transition from the human to the divine essence, with one foot in each world-living and the dead – to symbolize the duality of existence.

Professor realizes the danger of trying to make use of Murano in this stage for it will mean trying to make use of a god, **Ogun** the god of the road. Murano is thus a human embodiment of the road as a metaphysical link between the living and the dead. He has travelled to the land of the dead, but he was struck dumb for spying on the gods. This is how Professor describes Murano:

Murano could not reveal much, returning instinctively, to his old trade, tapping wine from trees: beyond that he had retained no further link to what he was or where he had been. And waiting, waiting till his tongue be released. (Desperately) in patience and in confidence, for he is not like you others whose faces are equally blank but share no purpose with the Word. So surely, Murano crawling out of darkness, from the last suck of the throat of death, and Murano with the spirit of god in him, for it came to the same thing, that I held a god capture that his hand held cut the day's communion! And should I not hope, with him, to cheat, to anticipate the final confrontation, teaming its nature baring its skulking face, why may I not understand... (**The Road**, 223).

It is in his archetypal god **Ogun** that Soyinka presents the duality of essence in man. **Ogun** is the god of creativity and destruction as man creates the very objects that destroy him. The motor car which aids man and still destroys him is an example of this duality. The road complements **Ogun's** double nature. The polarity of **Ogun's** nature matches the ambiguity in the potentialities of the Road. The Road brings as much opportunity for good as evil: the Road points not only towards the future but towards the past and movement can be in either direction (Moore, 1971: 60). Such is the latent contradiction in man's nature, a contradiction he shares with **Ogun**, Soyinka's major poetic expression of the essence of creativity and destruction. This duality is the pervading theme in Soyinka's work and concern for humanity.

The god, **Ogun** embodies the underlying ambiguity of man's potentials. (This is an aspect of Soyinka's work that obviously is more relevant to the whole modern world). He is the god of iron, and personifies the human motive to create and unconsciously destroy life. This is the dilemma modern man is caught in, in his attempt to conquer nature. **Ogun** himself conquered the abyss of transition with his emblem the axe, the emblem of creativity and destruction. Man clamours for the factors of industrialization and technology but it is this very sense of advancement that leads to man's pollution of his environment. The irony builds up as "human life presents constant challenges and constant choices and man has to thread his way through all the contradictory alternatives (Jones, 1983:4).

There is the constant need and desire to move forward but the desire is fraught with the potential for retrogression. The landscape bears the marks of man's inventiveness, as much as the evidence of the carnage, wrought by this burst of creativity dots the environment. Man creates the marvelous artifacts which in turn destroys him. Motor roads are strewn with the wrecks of human bodies and of motor vehicles (offerings to the demanding god, **Ogun**?) the nuclear bomb has become a landmark in man's destructive creative genius as it is an improvement in man's "killing time". The irony Soyinka pursues here injects the ambiguity in the nature of Ogun: 'It is he who inspires the workers in metals; it is he who demands the sacrifice of the road. Men are Ogun's protégés as well as his victims" (Jones, 1983;163). This is **Ogun's** philosophy and it manifests in Soyinka's **The Road**.

The deaths by road enumerated above should be supplemented with Kotonu's roll call of the latest victims of the road at the beginning of the play:

Kotonu: Where is Zorro who never returned from the north without a basket of guinea fowl eggs? Where is Akanni the Lizard! I have not seen another tout who would stand on the lorry's roof and play the samba at sixty miles an hour.

Where is Sigidi Ope? Where is Sapele Joe who took on six policemen at the crossing and knocked them all into the river?

Samson: Over shot the pontoon, went down with his lorry.

Kotonu: And Saidu-Say? Indian Charlie who taught us driving? Well, tried to teach you anyway and wore out his soul in the attempt. Where is Humphrey Bogart? Cimarron Kid? Have you known any other driver take an oil tanker from Port Harcourt to Kaduna non-stop since Muftau died?. Where is Sergeant Burmah who treated his tanker like a child's toy? (**The Road**, 167).

By the time the play begins, according to Maduakor (1987:200), several events have already taken place off-stage. Kotonu, of the famous passenger lorry, "No Danger, No Delay", has narrowly escaped an accident near a narrow bridge built with rotten timber. Another crowded passenger lorry that overtook Kotonu close to that bridge crashed into the river. Kotonu's father who was a truck-pusher, had died many years earlier in a road accident, crushed against his own load of stockfish. The memory of his father's death and the shock of his own narrow escape from a road accident combine to strengthen Kotonu's resolve to quit the road. The road is a traitor, or one who lies in ambush. "May we never walk", say the drivers, "when the road waits, famished" (**The Road**, 199) and later on the layabouts lament the treachery of the road: "The road played us fowl" (**The Road**, 213). At the end of the play, like the irascible god **Ogun**, the road becomes a viper as Professor urges his men to:

Breath like the road. Be the road. Coil yourself in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit and at the moment of a trusting step, rear your head and strike the traveler in his confidence, swallow him whole or break him on the earth (**The Road**, 228).

All sacrificial rites of placation of the other, according to Ibitokun (1995:38) are of no avail when death is ready to strike an individual. Although the car owner in "Death in the Dawn" kills a white cockerel and has its feathers and blood sprinkled over his car as a kind of propitiatory rite to **Ogun** to ward off evil and death, he dies in the course of the same journey. His car crashes

and he is smashed into a grotesque “contortion”. As the prophet of doom, Professor further calls the road a slaughter – house:

When the road raises a victory cry to break my sleep I hurry to a disgruntled swarm of souls full of spite for their rejected bodies. It is a market of stale meat, noisy with flies and quarrelsome with old women (**The Road**, 159).

The physical road is the road to death. The vehicles that travel the road inherit the road’s association with tragic fatality. **Ogun** in his negative destructive aspect symbolizes disorder. He gives life as dramatically as it takes it away. Accordingly, Ibitokun (1995:37) submits:

I think that the moral or philosophical lessons Soyinka wants to teach his audience is that, from an existential outlook, death is a boundary situation. Death is not analyzable by human intellect, there is no point in directing our attention to it. We must take death as an existential **donnée**. Keeping Aksident Store, communing with uprooted road – signs, sleeping at night at the burial-ground, decoding cabalistic signs, manipulating a wraith (Murano) in a master-dog relationship to extort from him the mysteries surrounding death, will not help the intellect at all to pontificate on death essence and its mechanism. These are all desperate epistemologies ... It is in one’s individual experience of death that one knows death. This is a universal phenomenon which is not restricted to Yoruba metaphysics.

This section has been able to establish **Ogun** as one of the principal deities in the Yoruba pantheon of gods, and it is his attributes and nature that fascinate Soyinka. In **The Road**, **Ogun** the Yoruba deity of iron, therefore, serves as the foundation of order, and justice operating in the background and manipulating the characters in the play. Professor’s action in the play is an affront on the god (**Ogun**). His tragedy is caused by his failure to acknowledge the supremacy of **Ogun** in such a world. His tragic death is a punishment from the divine world. It will also be useful to ask students to read Soyinka’s play, **The Road**. From these, it will be seen that the road is regarded as “a voracious predatory supernatural force waiting to pounce on its unsuspecting victims” (Palmer, 2001:7).

It is the argument of this paper that Soyinka, in fact, is being not only aesthetic, but also social, political and psychological, and that the entire work, from start to finish, is concerned with social comment, with the state of the road of contemporary Nigeria, and that it is to this end that he uses his archetypal god, **Ogun** to present the duality of essence in man. Our youth in higher education can learn from the past in order to correct some anomalies of the present through the study of Soyinka's works. Hence the revisiting of some cultural/traditional practices and taboos could be helpful in contemporary society. The Yoruba, for instance, made no distinction between religious, civil and moral laws. To them, morality is not just the fruit, but also the root of religion. Whatever religion sanctions, the society sanctions, and whatever religion forbids, society forbids. Therefore as with other Africans, religion permeates life (Akintunde, 2006:386).

Our ancestors must be angry that we have neglected to teach our youth in higher education the powerful heroic lessons from our divinities. Some cultural practices must be re-awakened in higher schools such as belief in the reality and presence of divinities as agents of God in executing his judgement upon offenders helps individuals and groups to refrain from evil acts (Kayode, 1984: 51-58). For example, **Ogun**, the god of iron, is believed to be the god of wrath who attacks anyone who sins with untimely death either through gunshots, motor accidents or any other form of violent death as we see in Soyinka's **The Road**. Therefore, according to Akintunde (2006:837), it is 'eewo' for a devotee of a particular god to marry or 'snatch' another devotee's wife, thus the saying, 'awo kii gba iyawo awo', literally, 'the initiated must not snatch the wife of another initiate'. In **Ifa** cult, a man must not seduce the wife of a fellow cult man. The herbalist's wife must also not be 'snatched' neither should a man seduce the wife of a fellow priest. These observances and pious acts, Akintunde (2006:837) further states prevented the

spread of STD'S and other sexually related diseases in the olden days. The taboo imposed on the worshippers of **Orisanla** to be monogamists is another means of combating HIV/AIDS and other STD'S. It is therefore behoves the community to initiate and implement traditionally oriented educational activities that could promote abstinence and enhance adolescents' self-esteem.

Through this work, **The Road**, Soyinka emphasizes the uniqueness of Yoruba god, **Ogun** among the corpus of world divinities. The young and potential scholars urgently need to continue the momentum by rendering other Yoruba divinities more visible and accessible.

### **Conclusion:**

The discourse thus far has showed that the **Ogun** phenomenon amongst the Yoruba, captured vividly in Soyinka's **The Road**, is essentially a reality of the Yoruba metaphysics that is essential for study in higher education. Soyinka's story stretches the bounds of cultural belief. The fact is, we need Soyinka and all that Soyinka conjures up, in **The Road** for the study and survival of the Arts and Culture in Nigeria and in our educational institutions. Our traditional divinities are **Aso – Òkè** thread stitching Nigeria together and onto Africa and the world in a tapestry fit to gird the loins of the world.

This paper also acknowledges **Ogun** as a cardinal influence in the construction of Soyinka's dramaturgy. The deity motif that recurs frequently provides a framework through which a generic investigation of his plays can be conducted, as it is done in the paper. The argument is illustrated with **The Road**. The analysis has been mindful of the autonomy of this work as a creative entity, in spite of its relationship in many respects with other works in Soyinka's oeuvre. The paper, has, therefore, tried to broaden our perception of Soyinka's dramaturgy by further calling attention to a significant aspect of its aesthetic constituents.

For the moment, it would seem, in the light of such work as **The Road**, that the time has come for readers of African literature to develop expectations other than those derived from colonialism, and to develop a new vocabulary for assessing these works. As has been mentioned above, revisionist interpretations of African history such as those created by authors like Achebe and Soyinka provide samples of probable new directions for the future. In other words, if anything indeed is certain, it is that the traditional divinities will remain a potent backdrop against which African explorations of the post colonial world will be analyzed.

The study proposes, among other things, that there is the need to facilitate faculty and student visits to Yorubaland. This could take the form of summer programmes where both teachers and students experience at first hand the culture, religion and people they read about. It can be highly exciting and revealing. Secondly, for the purpose of expanding the frontiers of dramatic criticism, Nigerian writers should explore the positive attributes of the Yoruba divinities more in their works. For instance, the transformation of **Ogun** myth can be re-created in literature in higher education. Rather than dwell on **Ogun**, the god of war and destruction, greater emphasis should be placed on **Ogun's** virtues in order to propose a metaphysical and revolutionary change in society.

Finally, the study of Soyinka's **The Road** in higher education has great prospects. And the teachers of African literature are central to this revolution. They have a responsibility, not only to develop passion for the novel themselves, but also to ensure that their students are caught up in the cultural revival. As enunciated in this play, the young and potential scholars should be able to see their true essence in their cultural traditions.

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