



Bringing our Cultures Home:
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BADE AJAYI AT 70**

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THE HUMAN SKELETON DERIVED FROM *Ifa* CORPUS: THE UNACKNOWLEDGED DYNAMICS

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Abstract

Bade Ajayi and Sanni's 'Human Skeleton Derived from Ifa Corpus' provides a scintillating periscope in the era of intertextual engagement in scholarship. This work demonstrates the interplay of Ifa corpus and human skeleton as a plot to entrench cybernetics and technological automation in the age of dialogue between religion and science. This consciousness of multi-disciplinary approaches to scholarship gives room for exploration on the nexus between Yoruba religious and scientific concepts. This paper adopted comparative, descriptive and cosmic-textual or coded approach, leading to the fact that the unacknowledged dynamics in the form of cultural dispensationalism and culture system theory become the much needed antidote in bringing out the contour and beauty of Bade Ajayi and Sanni's thought-provoking research effort. To this end, the paper postulates that cultural dispensationalism and culture system theory serve as a palimpsest in the scheme of Yoruba oral genre.

Key words: skeleton, Ifa corpus, unacknowledges dynamics, cybernetics

Introduction

Bade Ajayi and Sanni's research work appeared in a book titled *Science and Religion in the service of humanity* edited by Ade Dopamu and others, published by Local Societies' Initiative in 2006 with 443 pages. This topic provides a panoramic overview and illuminating insight into Yoruba oral literature, Yoruba metaphysical and cosmological genre as intertwined with scientific dialectics. Professor Bade Ajayi, in whose honour this book is written, is an accomplished and dexterous scholar of Yoruba studies with bias in *Ifa* heuristic, expository, authoritative and declarative speech act as couched in bounded, coded and individualized speaking subject.

Bade Ajayi and Sanni's topic provides a thought – provoking periscope. They stand to demonstrate the inter-textuality of the *Ifa* corpus and human skeleton as a plot to promote “cybernetics” and technological “automation”. This topic constitutes a compendium of Bade Ajayi's creative and scholarly efforts. As a matter of fact, the interplay of the *Ifa* corpus as derived from human skeleton written by the duo captured the periodization of multi – disciplinary approaches to scholarship. This multi – disciplinary approach is relatively a recent engagement in the study of science and religion. Thus, this engagement has poised scholars to dredge up deeper layers of our consciousness on the putative connection between them and their explanations. It is not a beginning of dialogue between science and religion rather the dialogue is a continuum of which much specialized investigation is needed as a result of complementarity of the

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future of science and religion. The most gratifying result of this article for which I could explore the unacknowledged dynamics would be that this study becomes the theme of a continuous dialogue which leads to deeper mutual understanding. This eclectic and semiotic thrust emphasizes the inter-textuality of knowledge, especially in the era of multi-disciplinary approach to scholarship.

Bade Ajayi as an embodiment of Yoruba scholar, believes in *Ifa* as a way of life, as both the engine of and antidote for uncertainty. This Yoruba oracular practice is often devoted precisely to disaggregating good forces from bad ones, benevolent spirits from malevolent ones as inveterately rooted in a meta-narrative of modernity without overly constituting contemporary Yoruba anxieties and phenomena. Granted the fact that *Ifa* corpus is all-involving and all-inclusive in the Yoruba milieu, it also serves as a guide to social history of the people. It is psychologically satisfying to underscore the fact that it is a ritual practice that must be carried out on daily basis. As a way of life, this must have informed Bade Ajayi, Dopamu, Epega and other members of Wande Abimbola's school of thought to have persistently applied *Ifa* directory to their day-to-day affairs. In fact, these great scholars have internalized and domesticated practically what majority would call theorization concept. In addition, they have the onerous task of defending their autochthonous beliefs and practices that have been mindlessly bastardized by the Europeans and other religious adherents. To this end, it is the intention of this paper to review Bade and Sanni's work and to address the unacknowledged dynamics.

The Human Skeleton Derived From *Ifa* Corpus: A Review

We shall commence on the premise that human skeleton as derived from *Ifa* corpus is constructed by the very arrangement of the 16 principal Odu and 240 minor Odu in consonance with the Hindus and Arabic style of writing. This adventure was powered by the period of co-operation and intellectual cross-pollination of Ideas that gave birth to cybernetics and technological automation. This interface, so far, makes scientific development to reflect on the topic of divine action. In reflecting on the huge potential for future conflict in polarized scientific culture with religious differences, the concept of common basis would commend themselves as having the potential to lead to constructive rather than destructive tensions (Oyewole, et. al, 2010: X).

Medically speaking, there are 206 bones in human skeletal system from the exegesis of Sanni, while *Ifa* corpus are 16 major and 240 minor Odu making altogether 256 Odu of *Ifa* as enunciated by Bade Ajayi. Subtracting 256 *Ifa* from 206 human skeletons, the round figure is 50. In the province of DNA samples, Holt (2004: 36) asserts that 50 females and 50 males are needed for the gene pool for experimentation (Ajayi and Sanni, 2006:61). It has been stated that human skeleton is bifurcated into the axial and appendicular skeleton. Thus, the axial is made up of the skull, the cranium that accommodates and protects the brain vertebrae and cavity, while the appendicular skeleton comprises the arm and leg bone, the pectoral and pelvic girdle. All these are supported by the joint (p.62). In addition, the autonomic nervous system helps the motor fibers from the brain and spinal cord that serve the internal organs of the sensory nerves and ganglia which are connected by nerves, by both sympathetic and para-sympathetic division.

Bade Ajayi, a student of Wande Abimbola on Ifa, has also produced numerous works on *Ifa* and has since devoted himself to scientific and intertextual study of the *Ifa* genre and its meta- narratives. Like Bade Ajayi, Wande Abimbola (1973) opines that there is hardly any problem about which the Yoruba will not consult *Ifa*. This is well-encapsulated in the meaning of *Ifa* poem quoted below:

*Ifá ló lònì
Ifá ló lola
Ifá ló lètínla pèlú è
Òrúnmìlá lonijò mètèrèrin olósà dááyè*

Meaning : Ifa is the master of today
Ifa is the master of tomorrow
Ifa is the master of the day after tomorrow
To Ifa belong all the four day created by oosa on earth (p.44)

Apart from the foregoing, Abiodun and Ojo (2011:311) observe that *Ifa* consultation does not stop at the afore- mentioned aspects rather, at the appointment and installation of Oba in Yoruba land, *Ifa* consultation plays a vital role in the choice and installation of any king.

Ifa Corpus: The Unacknowledged Dynamics

We could recall that *Ifa* divination in Yoruba land is all-involving and all-inclusive as regards the day-to-day affairs. However, modern civilizations in the context of Christianity and other aspects have negative mindset on this Yoruba Oral literature. These oracular beliefs and practices have been mindlessly bastardized by the Europeans as stating that they are barbaric, occultic and socially destructive religion. Blunt (2013:331) observes that the different divinatory or oracular authorities can come into conflict with one another in sometimes, irreconcilable ways, a result of unresolved accretion with revealed implosive and traumatic anxiety. Again, in the Yoruba milieu, there are too many of such oracular authorities and too much disagreement among them. There is no one belief system, there are multiple oracular and therapeutic institutions at work on the ground and the evidence for their effective aggregation is in the fact that people move from one to the other. They all provide help with witchcraft (p.336).

Siegel (2006:103) reminds us that oracles are ambiguous social institutions. By their very nature, they are both the engine of and an antidote for uncertainty. In societies in which accident, sickness and death are blamed on witches, he argues that the oracle in divining the identity of the witch, essentially converts' suspicion into certainty. Paradoxically, however, it does little to arrest the proliferation of witchcraft-related anxieties because the social certainty generated by the oracle is ultimately spurious. In spite of the above submission, the unacknowledged dynamics of the *Ifa* corpus as presented by dexterous Bade Ajayi have not been explored. In facts *Ifa* corpus as analyzed by this Yoruba scholar of great repute has not been subjected to both cultural dispensationalism and culture-system theory which are the unacknowledged dynamics.

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These theories have the propensity of bringing out at a glance the contour and beauty of Bade Ajayi's *Ifa* narratives.

Cultural Dispensationalism

This theory provides a culture-oriented way to read the society. It seeks a desire for cultural contraction and consolidation among contemporary religious conservatives. Those who seek such cultural contraction, in numerical terms, have grown a good deal. So, in one way, they are part of the culture of expansion. But their preference for contraction expressed a habit of mind and a response to complexity in today's world. Within the response of the dispensational message is the idea that the world is growing worse and that human beings cannot by themselves undo the damage and right the situation (Albanese 2007:20). Divine or cultural rescue is necessary for dispensationalists.

Thus, Bade Ajayi's view requires expansion and contraction and together they create a system that provides some cultural balance. In fact, he links the liberals and conservative together. His view points to a combinativeness in which, in subtle ways, religious people copy one another and value underneath apparent differences. This seems to be the emphasis laid on the dialogue between religious thought and science. In fact, this great contraction is needed to balance greater expansiveness. More of one requires more of the others, and conflict would disappear (Albanese 2007:251). This spirit of contraction and combinativeness has ensured that the church of Orunmilaism has been instituted in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife, in order to expand the frontiers of this belief-system for the liberals and the conservatives.

In addition, Bade Ajayi is of the view that in the world of uncertainty, theory and practice of Yoruba social history must be glued together. Comparatively, *Ifa* corpus which Bade Ajayi dwelt on in this piece seriously aggregates the imperative of human skeletal system as an empirical scientific fact as *Ifa* is ethnographic fact. Thus, a tacit concept or theory does not reflect practical experience, whereas in the case of Bade Ajayi, tacit pragmatic does reflect the experience of the 'spoken-through person'. Bade's variety of practices fall under the rubrics of traditional religion which are efficacious in divining the will or opinion of invisible authorities. Bade is cocksure that in the realm of the invisible, one is conscious of the esoteric knowledge or revelation and its corresponding blessings conferred on the diviners. In the same vein, he is aware of the effects of a profound abandonment or the terror that can come from the sheer excess of the sacred. This aspect falls in line with Bade's knowledge of the sacred and profane on *Ifa* genre.

However, Bade Ajayi is not mindful of the fact that ritual actors and diviners can fail in their attempts to pragmatically manage misfortune or that science offers a better explanation; rather, in more functionalist accounts of divination and ritual 'scholars have intended to ignore the significance of affliction's stubborn resistance because they have ignored the actor's perspective. Be that as it may, Bade Ajayi as a Yoruba scholar of oral literature has contextualized *Ifa* phenomenon with the aid of understanding the environment on the one hand, and he appears to be describing *Ifa* life world as the attainment of uncertainty on the other hand. This phenomenon is not divorced from the actual ritual life and divinatory practices of individual social actors.

Ajayi uses his intellectual acumen to navigate *Ifa* corpus into biocybernetics i.e. the study of control patterns. In the *Ifa* corpus, the *Ikhin*-the sixteen sacred palm nuts manipulation coincides with autonomic electrons in an atomic shell. Likewise, sixteen sacred palm nuts manipulation can receive geomantic interpretation when well displayed. Their positioning accounts for the story connected to each verse of the *odu* as well as the solution derived from each verse of the *odu*. Consequently, the whole human essence of life is in numbers. Also, culture – system theory argues along this line.

Culture–System Theory

Culture–system theory has been applied to diverse attempts to conceptualize and understand the dynamics of culture. Historically, these have involved arguments about the relationship between culture and nature, culture and society, the split between high and low culture, and the interplay between cultural tradition and cultural difference and diversity. Culture – system has also been marked by an engagement with concepts which involve often being taken to cover some of the same ground signified by the notion of culture itself (Marshall 1988:72).

Bade Ajayi has x-rayed in his piece that culture exhibits the way that humans interpret their biology and their environment. According to him, culture becomes such an integral part of human existence that it is the human environment and most cultural change that can be attributed to human adaptation and historical events. He is of the opinion that culture is seen as the primary adaptive mechanism of human, which takes place much faster than human biological evolution. The concern of Bade Ajayi is to recognize the efficacy of cultural theory by the appropriation of conceptualizing the role of culture and cultural practices in class formations and class alliances in society and authority.

In Africa perhaps Yoruba world, *Ifa* corpus also forms ethnographic narrative. Since society is the integrative unit, oracular authorities try to harmonize the culture of the society. The functionality of one aspect of the culture energizes the other. As is well known, classical *Ifa* studies emphasize their integrative or functional effects in the society. Bade's view rests on the fact that in Yoruba culture, persistent stereotypes of *Ifa* narrative as a phenomenon is bereft of social complexity or history. Bade's critics may see that investigators would want to find more intellectually sound, historically specific, and disaggregated understandings of *Ifa* corpus. But Bade's thirty-five years of scholarship on *Ifa* genre would lend support to the kind of aggregating thinking that would pose difficulty to the investigators, yet, *Ifa* genre must be taken seriously in Yoruba practices.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed Bade Ajayi and T. Sanni's human skeleton as derived from *Ifa* Corpus on "science and religion in the service of humanity". In that, we explored the interface of human skeleton and its equivalent in *Ifa* genre. The logic and style in which Bade Ajayi presented this nitty-gritty made many to say that he is a dexterous and erudite scholar of Yoruba Oral literature. Again, his style has left many people to doubt the fact that Yoruba worldview within the province of *Ifa* narratives poses intellectual difficulties. Yet, this belief needs to be taken seriously in Yoruba

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practices. The paper concludes by showcasing the unacknowledged dynamics which many critics of Bade Ajayi did not take time to look into which make their article a thought-provoking periscope without patronizing a deception. Therefore, the unacknowledged cultural dispensationalism and culture system theory, which greatly contribute to this paper, serve as a palimpsest between the honey and the poison.

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