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Dog Sacrifice in Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me By My Rightful Name* and the Works of Wole Soyinka: Ogun, Race, Identity and Diaspora

Fiona F. Moolla*

Abstract: This essay considers the ways in which the significance of blood sacrifice in the propitiation of the Yoruba god Ogun is transformed in the context of international literature which asserts an endogenous African modernity, and the specificity of black experience and identity. It focuses mainly on Isidore Okpewho's 2004 novel, *Call Me By My Rightful Name*, compared with the role of Ogun in Wole Soyinka's aesthetics, foregrounding key essays, drama and poetry. Okpewho's novel presents the reality of the ancestral call among the Yoruba of the American and Caribbean diaspora, which synecdochically represents the call of an essentialized Africa. The central character, Otis Hampton, is a middle class basketball playing African-American college student who inexplicably begins to respond in uncontrollable ways to African drumming and involuntarily chants in a language he does not understand. The attempt to explain his condition leads him to a Nigerian village from which his ancestor was betrayed into slavery by a local family. Otis's journey of self-discovery ends only when he acknowledges his double identity, African and American, reflected in his "rightful name", Otis Akimbowale Hampton. A key moment of the discovery of Otis's African identity involves initiation into manhood through sacrifice of a dog to Ogun, Yoruba god of iron, war and the road. Ogun, and dog sacrifice to Ogun, are central symbols also in the work of Nobel prize-winning author, Wole Soyinka. Dog sacrifice seems central to the literary representation of Ogun, which is also pivotal in the constitution of a modern African identity in Soyinka and a diasporic Yoruba identity in Okpewho's *Call Me By My Rightful Name*. The fixation with blood sacrifice to Ogun is more

flexibly approached by Ogun worshippers for whom Yoruba spirituality embodied in ritual is a lived, shared experience.

Keywords: *Ogun, Dog sacrifice, African diaspora, Yoruba culture, oral tradition*

Ogun, the Yoruba god, primarily of iron ore, forges a productive link between the works and thought of Nobel prize-winning author, Wole Soyinka, and the scholarship and fiction of US based Nigerian academic, Isidore Okpewho. Soyinka, who together with Achebe and Ngugi, forms the troika which has come to represent African literature in international literary networks, needs no introduction. His reputation has been built, certainly not only by his larger than life character, but also by his varied talent and success as a novelist, dramatist, poet, essayist and autobiographer. Isidore Okpewho, by contrast, may not be a familiar name except to scholars of African oral traditions. But within the area of Africana orature, Okpewho's stature looms large. Okpewho is the author of a number of magisterial studies, probably the best known of which is *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity*. The figure of the god Ogun explicitly connects Okpewho with Soyinka since Okpewho, drawing on his unrivalled knowledge of the variations in the representation of the god in the West African oratures, is able to contrast the literary use made of the figure of Ogun in Soyinka's oeuvre with his presence in oral verse forms. In the groundbreaking book by Okpewho above, but also in *Myth in Africa* and the essay "Soyinka, Euripides, and the anxiety of Empire", Okpewho explores Soyinka's literary adaptation and use of Ogun as critique of African leadership and symbolic embodiment of a unique postcolonial African character. While Ogun inspires or is alluded to in the greater part of Soyinka's output, whether in the form of critical essays, poetry, fiction or "faction" (as the author has referred to his autobiographies and memoirs) this analysis will zero in on the works in which the significance of Ogun is explicit and central to the exposition of ideas. The texts in question, in order of publication, are the play *The Road* (1965), the poems "Idanre" (1969) and *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), and the essay "The Fourth Stage" (1965), the key Ogun-related ideas of which are reiterated in "The Ritual Archetype" (1976).

Okpewho's scholarship on Soyinka's literary use of Ogun covers Soyinka's most important works and yields interesting insights into questions of representations of African identity and philosophy. Okpewho is the author of four novels, the first, *The Victims*, written in 1970 and the most recent, *Call Me By My Rightful Name*, in 2004. Tracing the significance of Ogun in Okpewho's 2004 novel, presents a far more productive point of departure for a comparative analysis, through the figure of Ogun, of the overlaps and disjunctures in conceptions of the two authors on questions of African identity in a postcolonial and, increasingly globalized, diasporic African world.

The use to which Ogun is put in literary representation will, furthermore, be held in counterpoint with the transformations in Ogun worship and propitiation in contexts where Ogun remains a lived social and religious reality, rather than a literary symbol. As a god whose essence is materially present in iron ore, Ogun comes to be the patron god of all those who rely for their living on the implements of metallurgy, namely, hunters, farmers, ritual scarifiers, and so on, but also, in the contemporary context, mechanics and drivers of motor vehicles, among others. Ogun is worshipped by all at festivals in his honour, but the cult of Ogun is particularly relevant to and part of the rite of passage, specifically, of hunters whose survival depends on metal hunting weapons. Worship and propitiation of Ogun as part of the hunter's rites of passage are linked with sacrifice, especially of the dog, the meat of which Ogun is reputedly particularly fond of. The symbolic significance of dog sacrifice to Ogun will be further explicated below, but, more crucially, blood sacrifice is the pivot around which the analysis of questions of continental and diasporic African identity and personal development will turn.

Soyinka's works and Okpewho's novel draw on all the above-mentioned significance of Ogun, but also develop Ogun as a concept in interesting but contradictory ways in the context of a project concerned with individual development, race and identity in African and African diasporic contexts. Given that a general familiarity with Okpewho's novel is unlikely, the essay will move from a detailed analysis of *Call Me By My Rightful Name* to a brief analysis of and comparison with Soyinka's key texts, mentioned above. Literary representations of Ogun will then

be contrapuntally contrasted with Ogun as lived apprehension, particularly on the question of blood sacrifice to the god.

Call Me By My Rightful Name is an ambitious novel which enters a number of issues and debates in concert. It explores the personal and collective impacts of the North-Atlantic slave trade on African Americans, and indigenous African collusion in this trade. It dramatizes the day-to-day racism experienced by black Americans, even those who are fully acculturated and have entered the middle class, as well as the suspicion and stereotyping of Africans born and brought up in Africa, as well as people of African descent in the Caribbean, by African-Americans and vice versa. It ventures into the politics of African nationalism and the internal divisions within this broad umbrella represented by the split between Malcolm X and Elijah Mohammed. It also represents in fine brush strokes the tensions and overlaps between Christian and animist spirituality.

The novel is set in the early 1960s and centres on the experiences of Otis Hampton, a handsome, athletic all-American black basketball player who wins admission on a basketball scholarship to Radcliffe, an elite Boston college. At around the time of Otis's twenty-first birthday, he begins to display unexplained, strange behaviour. Twenty one, as one of the recognized ages of legal maturity in Western cultures, is not coincidentally chosen as the age for Otis's experiences. The novel thereby underscores its concern with individual development through various forms of rites of passage in different cultures. After a college party held in his honour, Otis and his girlfriend drive home, listening to the radio in the car. Music with background drumming causes Otis's body to convulse while he utters incomprehensible sounds. In the now classic scenario of racism, Otis and his girlfriend are pulled over by the police; and it is only their clearly middle-class background which prevents a racial incident.

Unsettled by the experience, the couple returns to spend the night at the home of Otis's parents where, apparently as a consequence of a dream, Otis has another incident in the early hours of the morning. Split between parental fears of possible drug-use and a foreboding that an upbringing in the slave South, which they have spent a lifetime escaping, is coming back to haunt them, the parents agonize over their son's experiences. In a chapter which flashes back to the family histories of

both parents, it becomes clear that racism is the inescapable experience of both the black person who challenges and violates the racial order, and the black person who attempts completely to assimilate into dominant white society. Otis's maternal grandfather is burnt at the stake by a mob of white men who accuse him of lusting after a white woman. In his final death throes, he also utters an incomprehensible chant. Otis's father's family are held as exemplary in their conformity, but after a racial sleight at a party held by the family for whom his mother works as a domestic servant at which he and his sister sing duets, he resolves to put himself in a position, through education and conduct of the utmost propriety, to make sure he cannot be denigrated again.

After a few more unexplained incidents of involuntary frenetic movement and speaking in tongues, it becomes clear that Otis's seizures are linked to things African – African languages and African styles of drumming. On one occasion, his girlfriend, Norma, accidentally audio-records his “mumbo-jumbo” chanting. This recording is given to Dr Fishbein, a white Boston psychiatrist known to be sympathetic to black people and African culture, whom Otis's parent have persuaded him to see. Fishbein arranges for the recording to be analyzed by an African language academic who determines that the incomprehensible gibberish, in fact, is a dialect of Yoruba. Fishbein, realizing that Otis's problem lies outside of his range of expertise to solve, makes the curious proposition that Otis undertake a trip to Africa where he thinks answers may be found. Fishbein is the index of an epistemological tension in the novel, which at one and the same time gestures towards alternative African modes of knowing that link the realms of ancestors, the living and the unborn, with the procedural rationality of post-European enlightenment modern ways of conceptualizing truth. Since this is a novel cast in the realist, rather than magic realist mode, for example, some attempt is made to explain and validate Otis's strange experiences from within the worldview the novel also tries to challenge. The narrative presents the psychiatrist, Fishbein, wondering whether Otis's paranormal cross-generational family invocation may be similar to the few sources of which he is professionally aware of “unconscious memory and remembered trauma, much of it built on testimony of Jews who had survived the [Jewish] holocaust” (133). In this way thus, the novel bows to a worldview it desires at the same time to unsettle through the

supernatural invocation which cuts vertically across the horizontal, rationally verifiable world of the novel's formal realism.

Otis, his father and Fishbein make the journey to the part of Yorubaland linked with Otis's chant. When they reach the vicinity in question, Otis forces the American cultural attachés who act as his guides in Nigeria to drive their 4X4 off-road. In a valley that clearly has significance in relation to the ancestral call, Otis forces the driver to stop. He dashes out to a tall iroko tree beneath which he prostrates himself and clutches the earth to his chest. At this point, saying, "It's here" (120), he finally is released from the power which seems to be leading him on, forcing him to undertake this journey. This incident is witnessed by a local man who intuitively connects it with local family history. He leads them to the nearby village and takes them to the home of two elderly twins, whom he instinctively knows are genealogically linked to Otis. The twins, Taiwo and Kehinde, welcome him as a reincarnation of their elder brother taken in a slave raid when he tried to protect them. Like his ancestor, Otis bears a scar from an old battle wound on his shoulder and carries a mark on his head where he was bashed by the slave raider's gun. The chant he has involuntarily been reciting is the *oríkì* or lineage history-cum-praise of his family. On a later visit the twins tell him that the brother, Akimbowale, was captured at a celebration where he was chanting the *oríkì* of his family. As reincarnation of his ancestor, Otis has to complete the *oríkì*. In order to complete the *oríkì*, he has to learn the language and be initiated into Yoruba manhood. To this end, he stays on in the village for about 18 months. In this time, he discovers local political intrigues which prejudiced his ancestors, and led to Akimbowale's capture, which continue to prejudice his kin in the village. When Otis successfully completes the *oríkì*, his involuntary seizures stop, he takes on what we assume to be his rightful name, Akimbowale, symbolizing his true identity, and witnesses the downfall of the family that has usurped his family's position in the village. Once justice is restored, the twins, who are over 100 years old, are able to die a peaceful death. Otis is then able to return to the US, where he recognizes his parallel American identity and is able to take up, for the first time, an unconflicted American citizenship since he accepts his double cultural heritage.

In African, as in most other non-modern cultures, the subject is seen to be formed in the *mores* of the culture through oral myths, folk tales and proverbs, which, in some cases, find scriptural or textual reinforcement. Thus allusions to Yoruba oral traditions figure very prominently in this narrative of identity, and ancestral cultural and racial homecoming. This is in stark contrast with the ideas of the autonomy of modern personal formation, as symbolically embodied in the rationally and independently self-actualizing hero of the realist novel. Paradoxically, we see, using the form of the realist novel, Okpewho gestures towards non-modern African, specifically Yoruba notions of subject formation. This is effected through Yoruba oral tradition, which is presented as the spur, setting Otis off on his rite of passage that takes the form of a literal journey of self-discovery, crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction to that of his slave forebears. Oral tradition is also presented as inducting Otis into the ways of his people, and, ironically, oral tradition is used to validate a European enlightenment rational understanding of the world. Each of these uses of orality will be discussed below.

If a divination, *orikì* proverbs and folk tales are presented in italic font in the narrative channelled through Otis's intuitions, dreams and subconscious thoughts. Otis himself through fragments of Ifa divination is presented as a sparrow whose nest is neither on water nor on dry land (10), suggesting the in-betweenness and provisionality of his existence until he answers the call of the ancestors. We are told, furthermore, that the sparrow does not “shirk its duty” in finding the place between the “hill and the river” (22) which we later discover is the place at the iroko tree where the family line was broken by the slave raid. Otis's arrival is foreshadowed in a dream of one of the twins, where he and his father are embodied as an eagle and a frankolin. Yoruba orature, infused as it is with Yoruba spirituality, is presented as the catalyst which obliges Otis to begin his journey of self-discovery.

Yoruba oral tradition, furthermore, is also presented as informing Otis in the laws and lore of his culture. When Otis spends time in the village learning the Yoruba language and culture, he discovers how children are instructed in morality and conduct, and are informed about the world through animal tales which become near universal through the diaspora – the Brer Rabbit stories as one example. It is through an animal

tale of a wild pigeon who refuses to sacrifice one of her twin children in gratitude to the god who ended her bareness that the significance of doubleness as an identity construction is foreshadowed. There is a fragment in italics, "*Hurray for things that come in pairs*" (25) which underscores the cultural wealth of diversity when Otis at the end of the novel acknowledges his double identity as both Yoruba and American. Thus Yoruba person formation in the alembic of the formative influence of the oral tradition is transnationally permuted in the service of individualist subject formation, or, more correctly, double individualist subject formation, when Otis recognizes both his Yoruba and his American identities.

The epigraph of the novel, furthermore, performs the contradictory non-modern, oral validation of the procedural rationality of modernity, to which allusion has already been made. The epigraph is an extract from recorded oral testimony which provides "evidence" for the less scientifically plausible occurrences in the novel. Otis's transcontinental ancestral call is the same as the ancestral invocation of a man in Yorubaland, but, in this case, writ transnationally. The oral evidence relates the experience of an unnamed man on whose farm "an animal called *atu*" would eat all the yams even though his farm was in the middle of other people's farms. This stopped only when, after a spiritual retreat, he ran 25 kilometres and intuitively dropped the stones, collected at the shrine at which he had worshipped, on the land of his ancestral home whose location he had never been told. The oral testimony which forms the epigraph to the novel, thus, in a nutshell, so to speak, foreshadows Otis's ancestral call and provides "evidence" for a scientifically unverifiable force in the context of a novel which otherwise respects the verities of the formal realism of the novel genre. Okpewho's novel, we see, plays an epistemologically double game using oral tradition according to the precepts of European enlightenment rationality to prove scientifically the reality of the mystical ancestral call from across the ocean.

In Okpewho's novel, as in the work of Wole Soyinka, there is, furthermore, a subtle elision of African cultural differences allowing Yoruba culture to stand synecdochically for all African culture. In the case of the African diaspora, this is an even easier conflation to make since Yoruba culture so strongly dominates the spirituality and lifeways

of Africans in the Caribbean, as well as North and South America, as the novel makes clear through carefully orchestrated tangents to the main narrative line.

But the idea of a diasporic African self-realization is expressed most forcefully in the novel through Otis's literal and formal rite of passage involving, centrally, the sacrifice of a dog to the god, Ogun. Ironically in the context of African diasporic identity, the rite of passage in the novel does not finally initiate Otis into the secret lores of his people, known only by adult men, catapulting him into manhood. Instead, Otis ultimately is initiated into recognition of double individualist subject formation, namely, his Yoruba/African and his American identities. Otis is specifically linked right from the start of the novel with the god of hunters, Ogun. In what must be a reference to Tiger Woods, who in 2004 when the book was published was still at the peak of his sporting career, Otis is given the nickname, Tiger – he is Otis Tiger Hampton. Thus, through the allusion to a predatory animal, Otis is linked from the beginning of the narrative with the hunter, an association which becomes stronger in the third part of the novel.

The first explicit reference to Ogun comes when Otis is pulled over by the police after his initial experience of ancestor possession. The moment is one of extreme racial tension where, having been shoved by the white police officer, the words of *oríkì* of Ogun, or identification-cum-praise chant of the god of iron, enters his consciousness. The lines of the *oríkì* are significant in establishing the paradoxical nature of the god of iron ore, who by association is the cult god of all human beings who work with metal - so hunters, scarifiers, barbers, mechanics and so on, as mentioned above:

Ogun kills on the right and destroys on the left. He kills on the left and destroys on the right. He kills swiftly in the house and swiftly in the fields. He kills the child with the iron toy in its hands. He kills the thief and the owner of the goods. He kills the master of the house, then smears his blood on the hearth. But the other gods hated Ogun for his anger. He was asked to make sacrifice, so they would welcome him among them. Ogun made sacrifice ...

The *oríkì* which appears in the novel is a fragment of a much longer *oríkì* which throughout highlights the paradoxes and ambiguities of the

god which parallel the complex nature of human beings and, by extension, the paradoxes of life. Although oríkíare sometimes termed “praise poetry”, Karin Barber reminds us that oríkido more than just praise. They identify lineage, individual history and personal character through a string of compressed formulations. They also identify both the good and the bad. While the oríkì fragment in the novel foregrounds Ogun’s bloodthirstiness and indiscriminate destruction, Ogun enjoys another more positive dimension expressed in different oríkì fragments highlighted in Soyinka’s meditations on the god. Ogun is also known as “protector of orphans” and “roof over the homeless” as Soyinka reminds us in the essay, “The Ritual Archetype”. In this guise, Ogun “stands for a transcendental, humane, but rigidly restorative justice” (26). It is the paradoxical nature of Ogun which makes him symbolic for Soyinka, as we shall discuss shortly, of an African modernity which will allow Africa to transcend the assaults of colonialism, a transcendence in which violent action is not ruled out. Ogun features at this tense moment where Otis potentially could respond to the police officer violently. Ogun is summoned up in the narrative again at the end where Otis, after being arrested and roughed up at a protest march, hints that if necessary he may adopt violent means to achieve just ends.

Ogun, who is also the patron god of travellers and the road, is presented in the novel as the force that guides Otis on his literal journey to Nigeria. And as the god of scarification, essential to the Yoruba male rite of passage, Ogun also is the god of the figurative journey of life or self-realization. It is Ogun thus who directs Otis to the moment in his life where he recognizes his Yoruba identity literally inscribed through his scarification in the village. Ogun thus in the words of the novel, “[i]n fury ... builds roads” and “infury ... rights wrongs” (27). The restorative justice brought by Ogun through Otis’s life journey of cultural recognition is one that is felt by both the descendants of local colluders with the slave trade, who get their comeuppance in the novel, and, potentially, will impact on racial discrimination and injustice in the United States.

The dog sacrifice to Ogun is the climactic scene in the novel where rites of passage and the ambiguity of creation and destruction, and life and death are presented in clearest outline. Otis Tiger Hampton, as a reincarnation of Akimbowale the warrior and hunter, must be initiated

into the cult of hunters and achieve ritual manhood in order to perform the dance and oríkì of his lineage in order to restore their honour. In an aside, the Yoruba man who acts as his mentor admits that most local Yoruba young men who live in the cities no longer perform the initiation, but given Otis's calling, he will have to undergo it. Otis is not informed of what is required and is led through the rites in an altered mental state as a consequence of an unknown drink he is given, and finally loses consciousness. Before passing out, he is led to a post to which a dog is tied and he is told to sever the head with one blow of his machete or risk having to supply another dog for a repeat of the ritual. Otis cuts off the dog's head, which not so much troubles his conscience when he comes round, but rather forces him to consider that Americans would view this act as one of a "crazy savage!" (202). Thus what disturbs Otis is not an evaluation of the act against an ethical framework, whatever that may be, but a concern ultimately with reconciling the sacrifice with the worldview of his other American self.

Dog sacrifice is associated with the god Ogun for a number of reasons, the clearest of which, and one which explains the specific form of the sacrifice, is probably the myth that on an occasion a dog bit off the penis of Ogun. In the myth thus the dog is presented with the power to emasculate the god. In order to prevent the animal from swallowing the organ, the god cut off the dog's head with one fell swoop (Ojoade 220). Ogun is also known to savour dogs, as a line from an oríkì to Ogun attests: "Ogun of Ogboro eats dogs, and we give / him dogs" (Pemberton and Afolayan 158). As hunting animals, dogs also are linked with Ogun, god of hunters. Other more complex reasons include the fact that for Nigerians, in its feral state, the dog is more ferocious even than the lion, but, domesticated, is man's loyal and faithful friend (Ojoade 215). It is this paradox of the existence of the dog that links the animal to the paradoxical god of destruction and creation. As an aside, dogs in Yoruba communities are kept as pets and as nursemaids to infants, licking up their faeces (Ojoade 216), and are eaten as a favourite food, the flesh of which is also known to have magical analogical therapeutic qualities (Ojoade 218-19).

But, surprisingly, even though the dog and dog sacrifice are so strongly linked to the worship of Ogun, believers in Ogun have quite unproblematically replaced dog sacrifice with other forms of sacrifice.

And herein lies the rub. For people among whom Ogun is a lived reality which does not have to be “proven” to themselves or to others, the rituals which shape lives and character enjoy a flexibility which is lacking in literary Ogun reincarnations, which, paradoxically, use the god as a symbol of multiplicity, transformation and change. John Pemberton III and FunsoAfolayan describe the Odun Ogun festival in the town of IlaOrangun as being particularly bloody. On most of the days of the festival, significant numbers of dogs were publicly ritually sacrificed and the heads added to the dog skeletons already at the shrine of Ogun. Paradoxically, the violence of the ritual sacrifice of the dogs is a collective social commitment to abjuring violence. Pemberton and Afolayan describe it thus:

Cultural existence has its costs. It requires acts of violence not only against the person who is one’s enemy, but also against oneself and ones children, and against forest, land, and animal ... Here then is revealed the irony of human existence: death is essential to life. This is the reality. The truth about themselves with which Ogun confronts humans [sic]. (171)

Two days after the end of the sacrifices, another rite to Ogun is performed which sets the limits to violence against oneself and to all others, human and non-human. What is fascinating about the festival is the fact that these anthropologists note incidentally that dog sacrifice was ended in 1973 when Christians and Muslims protested against the gruesome killings. From this year on, kola nuts have been offered as a substitute to Ogun. I am, of course, not making a case for the higher morality of the monotheisms contrasted with animist lifeways since, of course, the monotheisms install their own sacrifices, real or symbolic. Sacrifice is not testimony to the diminished value of the sacrificial creature. It is testimony to how dearly it is held and the awe in which its powers are viewed. The point I do want to make is that substitution of kola nuts for dogs is evidence of the flexibility of Yoruba lived spirituality which is also capable of considerable local variation, a point made quite emphatically by J.D.Y Peel in *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (28, 88-9).

This may be contrasted with literary representations of Ogun, where Ogun and his worship become somewhat rigid and formalised through

using the god as a symbol of Yorubanness in the constructions of modern forms of identity. So while the lived practice of Ogun worship is adapting to transformed contexts, literary representations of Ogun are fixated by the blood-sacrifice linked with Ogun as a symbol of a modern Yoruba identity which needs to distinguish itself, quite sensationally and spectacularly, from modern Western identity formations in ways that make it startlingly different from Western paradigms, while, ironically, sharing the invisible framework of the concept of the modern “identity”, which now gets extended to include a Yoruba/African identity.

These ideas become even clearer in the work and thought of Wole Soyinka. The significance of Ogun to Soyinka’s aesthetics and politics is articulated fairly early on in his career, theoretically, in the essay “The Fourth Stage” and, creatively, in the play *The Road*. Ogun is the central inspiration also in the two poems, “Idanre” and *Ogun Abibiman*, but, as mentioned above, Ogun inspires all of Soyinka’s oeuvre. In Soyinka’s work, a symbolic Ogun emerges whose dynamic captures both the individual formation of Soyinka as artist and the corporate formation of an African identity entering a universal modernity. African entry into modernity in Soyinka’s practice occurs through a uniquely African, mythically embedded, unbifurcated African enlightenment which, nevertheless has universal lessons to teach. Ogun embodies this African enlightenment both in his coming into existence and in his development.

Ato Quayson observes that: “Soyinka interweaves three distinct myths of Ogun in mapping the god’s singular career” (69-70). Quayson notes further that Soyinka not only selects these myths, but also subtly transforms them in the context of his project. Drawing on the ur-myth of the shattering of Orisa-nla into a thousand fragments which become the other gods, Soyinka presents Ogun as the god who gathers the primal unity unto himself after dispersion. In my view, the unity of Ogun here is the necessary counterbalance to the contradiction or paradox which otherwise is emphasized by Soyinka as constituting Ogun. Unlimited contradiction or paradox, of course, is singularly unproductive, especially in the political arena which is a major concern for Soyinka who is both artist and activist. The paradox, ambivalence or contradiction of Ogun as symbol emerges most strongly in the third myth, highlighted by Quayson, namely the narrative of the destruction at Ire where, under the influence of palm wine, Ogun cut down both friend and foe. This

unity also is the necessary counterbalance to the binarism of the European Enlightenment critiqued by Soyinka in “The Fourth Stage”, as in other essays. The second Ogun myth, which is the literal link between the first and the third myths, is probably the most significant in the context of this essay since it presents Soyinka’s concept of artistic subject formation through the metaphor of the road. After the first severance, Ogun reconnects the sky-bound gods with the earth through cutting a pathway with his sword. This journey, which is also a rite of passage, penetrates the transitional abyss, the non-place of ambivalence, which is the fourth stage. Ogun’s passage is communicant in its individuation, in this way eschewing the radical individualism of the self-realization of the subject of European enlightenment. Thus, while the negritudists, critiqued by Soyinka, look to the pre-colonial past for an African identity that engages modernity through a unique, unified African essence, Soyinka retrieves from a mythical pre-history an African identity riven by productive, ultimately unified contradiction, captured in the paradoxes of Ogun.

The Ogun created in Soyinka’s aesthetic project, it goes without saying, is significantly different from the Ogun of his worshippers and the figure of Ogun that emerges in Yoruba oral verse. As one example of this difference, Diedre Bádéjo notes the significance of the *oríkì* of Ogun “because of its role in the preservation of the genealogical record and its role in inspiring proper conduct among the ruling elite” (359). However, what is striking is that while a very different Ogun emerges through Soyinka’s literary transmutation of the god, Soyinka does not relinquish, in fact, underscores across the key works blood sacrifice to Ogun. In the play, *The Road*, in particular, a bloodthirsty Ogun is presented who must be appeased with dog sacrifice at every opportunity to ward off human slaughter in vehicle crashes on the highway. Soyinka puts the following words into the mouth of the comic character, Samson, who begs the ill-fated driver, Kotonu, to propitiate the Ogun:

Kill us a dog Kotonu, kill us a dog. Kill us a dog before
the hungry god lies in wait and makes a substitute of me.
That was a thin shave. A sensible man would see it as a
timely warning, but him? I doubt it. Not for all the
wealth of a traffic policeman. Dog’s intestines look
messy to me he says – who asked him to like it? Ogun

likes it that's all that matters. It's his special meat. Just run over the damned dog and leave it there, I don't ask you to stop and scoop it up for your next dinner. Serve Ogun his tit-bit so the road won't look at us one day and say Hohoho you two boys you look juicy to me. But what's the use? The one who won't give Ogun willingly will yield heavier meat by Ogun's designing. (198-99)

It is in BiodunJeyifo's formulation of the role of Ogun in Soyinka's thought that the full irony hits home. For Jeyifo, the god Ogun acts in Soyinka's work as a "motif" of "self-invention" (27). Channelling postmodern ideas of linguistic constructedness through the concept of the subject, Jeyifo highlights the ways in which Ogun allows an artistic self-fashioning and refashioning. It is striking thus that Soyinka in the major relevant creative writing and essays comes back again and again to the sacrifice of the dog, a practice which Ogun worshippers could quite flexibly substitute with kola nut sacrifice. Underscoring blood sacrifice, I would like to suggest, has less to do with the significance of Ogun in Yoruba lived realities than it does with Soyinka's interpretation and presentation of a Yoruba, and by extension, African politics of modern identity formation. The endeavour to form a modern African identity needs to distinguish itself from European modernity which Soyinka neatly encapsulates in his essay "Drama and the African Worldview as: "a recognisable Western cast of mind, a compartmentalising habit of thought which periodically selects aspects of human emotion, phenomenal observations, metaphysical intuitions and scientific deductions and turns them into separatist myths (or 'truths') sustained by a proliferating superstructure of presentation idioms, analogies and analytical modes" (37). African identity for Soyinka, by contrast, in its radically complex, paradoxical but ultimately more productive humanism brings together rather than splits opposites. Some sense of the nature of the African identity formation, which in other works and author statements we know may be extended universally, is gleaned from the description in "The Fourth Stage" of the transitional abyss where it is forged: "the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming" (22). As other scholars have noted, the resemblance between Soyinka's African modernity and the Romantics, especially William Blake, is striking.

But to return to Okpewho's novel whose focalizing of blood sacrifice in *Call Me By My Rightful Name* highlights the curious fixation with dog sacrifice in both the novel and in Soyinka's work. In the transition from scholar of orature to novelist, Okpewho transforms Ogun from a deity worshipped by his supplicants into a symbol of a modern Yoruba, and again, by extension African identity, which exists in parallel with a contemporary American identity. Identity politics are clearly woven into the narrative, indexed by the title of the novel, *Call Me By My Rightful Name*. The novel is divided into three sections, the last of which is written in epistolary form. In these letters Otis writes about his Nigerian experiences to his girlfriend and parents, signing off as Otis. When he establishes his Yoruba identity after the ritual to Ogun and the completion of the oríkí and the dance, he signs off using what we take to be his rightful name, "Akimbowale". When he recognizes through the disillusionments of local politics and feuds that he no longer has roots in the Yoruba village, he signs his letters Otis Akimbowale. When he returns to America and becomes fully cognizant of his double, not divided identity, he signs his letters to acquaintances in Nigeria as Otis Akimbowale Hampton. The recognition of double identity is foreshadowed in the tale about the wild pigeon, referred to earlier, who, in refusing to sacrifice one of her twin children, underlines the necessary recognition of doubleness. Otis's double identity is symbolized by the amulet given to him by the elderly twins, dropped by his enslaved ancestor when he is captured. The flat square bronze amulet is engraved with two parallel lines which represent the coexistence of his two identities, the one Yoruba, the other American. This is the final self-realization which is the culmination of the journey on which he is taken by Ogun. If the novel had been informed by postmodern conceptions of identity, the bronze amulet would probably have featured two intersecting lines highlighting hybridity, creolization, mixing or métissage of Otis's American and African identities. Cast in a postpostmodern, posthumanist frame, the bronze amulet would probably carry lines which form a network or web, suggesting the interrelational identity which is constituted out of the dynamic connections of the human, the non-human, the environmental and the scientific. The symbol which probably best captures the Ogun-identity that emerges in Soyinka's work is the mobius strip he alludes to most clearly in the

poem, “Idanre”. The mobius strip is the sacred python looped by Ogun devotees around their necks expressed in scientific terminology. The mobius strip is aband twisted and looped on itself so that one might traverse its length on both sides without crossing an edge. African entry into modernity, it follows, requires no crossing of boundaries since the contradictions and paradoxes of modernity are present in the contradictions and paradoxes of precolonial African culture captured in the contradictions and paradoxes of Ogun.

In the use to which Ogun is put by both Soyinka and Okpewho, it is imperative to take that which is most unsettling to contemporary Western sensibilities and construct around that an alternative mode of existence, which ironically remains shaped by its interpellation by the Western world view against which it distinguishes itself. Since the sacrifice of the dog to Ogun is symbolically central to this project, it presents with an immutability which is at odds with the multiplicity and volatile transformation of the versions of African identity shaped in the work of the two authors. Ironically, worship of Ogun, rather than symbolic literary valorization of the god of iron in the service of modern African identity formation, in the case of the replacement of the kola nut for the dog as propitiatory sacrifice, suggests a highly communicant, dynamic multiplicity and flexibility.

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*University of the Western Cape,
South Africa

fmoolla@uwc.ac.za; ffmoolla@iafrica.com