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Theoretical/Critical Essay Article

The Mystery of *Akudaaya* in Yoruba Films: Interrogating Death and Destiny in *Aye Loja*, Directed by Seun Olaiva

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Abstract

The study of afterlife has remained within the mythic mode because of its non-empirical but impelling nature. Many scholars insist that death cannot be annihilative and the debate is intensified as Wole Soyinka proposes robust African perspectives on existential issues of life and death. *Akudaaya* ('transmigrated soul') describes people returning to life after death, a phenomenon, which is regularly explored in Yoruba films. This paper expounds the mysteries surrounding this *Akudaaya* and the dramatic/filmic techniques deployed to present the phenomenon. It also addresses how Yoruba films have presented the phenomenon to define the relationship between death and destiny. With the film directed by Seun Olaiya and titled *Aye Loja* as the primary text, more information is accessed through interaction with notable traditionalists, and relevant works in literature, religion and philosophy were consulted. While *Akudaaya* remains a mystery, the phenomenon is discovered to be driven by unfulfilled destiny. *Akudaaya* is therefore seen as a metaphor for the continuity of life in death and a measure through which the conflict between death and destiny is mediated.

Keywords: *Akudaaya*, death, destiny, afterlife, mystery, phenomenon

Introduction

The central concern of this paper is death, afterlife and the mystery of *Akudaaya* ('transmigrated soul') in Yoruba films. The mythic nature of this study endears it to disciplines like religion and philosophy. It thrives infinitely on belief systems common to many cultures in the world with all their inherent contradictions and similitudes. The practitioners of the Christian, Islamic and traditional African religions, for instance, believe in afterlife, but with slight variations and contradictions.

Wole Soyinka's seminal essay "Fourth Stage" provides a tentative springboard for the discussion on *Akudaaya* post-entombment existence even though he cannot be pinned down to have made a direct mention of the phenomenon on ritual. His foray into

the origin of Yoruba tragedy culminates in his articulation of the three tiers of existence which foregrounds a consciousness of incompleteness in terrestrial and extraterrestrial beings. These three realms, being so exemplified in the universal concept of time as past, present and future are “Pertinently conceived and woven into the Yoruba world view ... If we may put the same thing in fleshed out cognitions, life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are within the intimations and effectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualization” (Soyinka 143-144).

The transitional link which welds the three realms of the living, the dead and the unborn in a cyclical motion is driven by a force that underscores the continuity of life in perpetuity. This continuity, according to Soyinka, functions “through the cyclical concept of time and the animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness” (145).

The movement so described by Soyinka is simultaneously a forward and cyclical movement from the living to the dead, to the unborn and onward to the living. No account is given of a reverse movement or a volt face such as to suggest the dead returning directly to life without passing through the primordial gulf of transition to the world of the unborn in preparation for another life as infant. The Yoruba worldview indicates that the dead can reincarnate, but that they must pass through the realm of the unborn and wait to be born again as *Babatunde*, *Babawande* (Father has returned), *Iyabode*, *Yewande*, *Yeside*, *Yebo* (Mother has returned). The Yoruba worldview of a cyclical movement of life is not without an exception, which is to be found in the phenomenon of *Akudaaya*.

Akudaaya refers to the phenomenon of the dead coming back to life, usually after burial and frequently in places where the deceased was not known in his or her former life. The name *Akudaaya* is also used to describe such transmigrated souls. The general belief across cultures is that the soul of the departed inhabits a corporeal body that is identical with the former body. It is often claimed that *Akudaaya* always “disappear” or relocate to another vicinity anytime they encounter someone that recognizes them.

A parallel plain with the cyclical movement of transition as typified in African cosmology is *Akudaaya* phenomenon - the transmigration of soul to another body. This phenomenon is interrogated with the aid of Yoruba films. The aim of this paper is to explore the mysteries surrounding *Akudaaya* in the world of the living. The span of time between death and reappearance is explored along with the rationale for reappearance. The research also investigates the dramatic and filmic techniques deployed to present the cryptic phenomenon of *Akudaaya*. The questions are raised as to how Yoruba movie makers have presented the phenomenon to explain the relationship between death and destiny. To access relevant information, some notable traditionalists were interviewed, and relevant works in religion, philosophy and literature were consulted. *Aye Loja*, a film directed by Seun Olaiya and a few other films on *Akudaaya* were also studied closely with death as the central concern.

Literature Review

Intermeshed within the phenomenon of *Akudaaya* is the concept of death, which will be the major discussion for this paper. The medical definition of death as the cessation of all vital organs (the heart, brain and others) of the body may not help much as this discourse is within the mythic mode. So what is death? Death is defined by Plato and Socrates as the ultimate separation of the soul from the body which is regarded as a form of prison for the soul (343). Essentially, the two philosophers consider death as freedom for the soul following the inability of the body to maintain its hold on it any

longer. The body subsequently decomposes while the soul remains eternal. However, there abound ambivalent perceptions of life, death and life after death. These have created more complex riddles than have been unraveled.

The professed belief of Christians, for instance, is in one life, one death and eternity, that is, afterlife. In other words, man can only live once, die once and afterwards get ushered into afterlife for judgment. The Bible establishes this in Hebrews 9:27 that, “And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment ...” Again, there are many areas that intersect as far as belief systems across cultures are concerned. Contradictions can be found in the Bible that it is possible to live twice, die twice, or not die at all. The raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11:1-44 suggests the possibility of living twice and dying twice. The book of Genesis also reports that Enoch never died. He was simply taken by God. “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (5:24). This is with the general understanding that Enoch was able to access heaven without experiencing death at all. Elijah had a similar experience when he rode on a whirlwind to ascend to heaven. He too never tasted of death and so his body never saw corruption (2 Kings 2:11). Finally, the basis of the Christian faith today is hinged on the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ as reported in Matthew 27-28. Jesus was crucified. He died and was buried, and on the third day, he rose up from the dead. So, the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ provides yet another example of the dead revisiting life as he was seen around for about 40 days before he finally ascended unto heaven.

In my interaction with an Islamic scholar, Dr. Abdul-Gafar O. Fahm of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ilorin, he availed me a few positions of Muslims about the crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, known as Anabi Yisa in Islam. According to him, some scholars believe he never died, but was taken by God to heaven. Some believe that he actually survived the cross. The Quran however only mentions his crucifixion which came after his soul had been drawn unto God. So it was just his physical body that was subjected to torture. The Quran does not say anything about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus as dwelled on by Christians.

The Islamic perception of death is in positive light. Fahm establishes this in his appraisal of Rumi’s thought in the latter’s magnum opus (*Mathnawi*) situated within the general Sufi intellectual tradition. In Fahm’s essay, “‘Ruin the Body’: A Discourse on Death and Annihilation in Rumi’s *Mathnawi*,” Fahm contends that the idea of dying (or death) is contiguous with the concept of annihilation, that is, Fana which, in Arabic, means “passing away”. Death, in Sufi’s *Mathnawi* is explained as “extinction of individual consciousness, recedence of the ego and obliteration of the self” (Fahm 262). The attainment of Fana is therefore akin to the loss of consciousness of self, other persons and things. The implication of this perception of death is that Islam places premium on the spiritual essence of life. Existence on earth is considered to be a journey and death the gateway to eternal destination. Al-Ghazali, an Islamic scholar, submits that “For every voyage, there must be provisions; therefore, adopt the fear of God as provisions for your voyage from this world into the afterlife” (qtd. in Fahm 8).

The above explication discusses death, but apparently does so from the perspective of Islamic spirituality and asceticism. Death is discussed to explain the need for man to be dead to his corporeal self and environment. The use of the word “annihilation” to describe the ultimate essence of death that serves as gateway to afterlife, as indicated above, is therefore contradictory. In view of this, the Quran, Sura 62, Verse 8, quoted thus, “Verily, the death from which you flee will surely, meet you, then you will be sent back to (Allah), the All-Knower of the unseen and the seen, and He

will tell you what you used to do.” is a hint about a destination or an expectation to look forward to after death, that is, afterlife. To talk about afterlife therefore, is to admit that death is not annihilative, so it can be surmised that death is referred to in the wrong context as annihilation of life. Having said that much about death and afterlife, it appears clear that the Quran does not say anything about the dead coming back to life to justify the existence of ghosts or *Akudaaya*.

Some other contradictions can be found in Yoruba traditional religion in spite of its polytheistic nature. If we consider certain philosophical or pithy statements in the Yoruba culture, death could, at a first glance, be perceived to be a terminal phenomenon, and that is why, during the funeral rites, the dead are usually accorded with the following salutations and references:

<i>O di ghere</i>	-	Farewell to a person you cannot meet again.
<i>O darinnako, o doju ala</i>	-	Never to meet again except in dreams.
<i>O gba ekuru je lowo ebora</i>	-	He has eaten the food reserved for the dead.
<i>Orun are-mabo</i>	-	Heaven, a journey of no return.

The essence of all these sayings is that the dead, having been severed from the living, cannot enjoy any physical fellowship with the living again. The above are common phrases that are heard during the funeral rites or even casual conversation. However, the above does not take away from the belief in reincarnation as mentioned earlier and cited in Soyinka’s “Fourth Stage.” From another perspective, the Yoruba have this saying: *Bi won ba pe oku ni popo, alaye lo ndahun* – If the dead is summoned, it is the living that responds. The saying above could generate the following contradictory interpretations:

- 1) The dead can actually be summoned back to life to serve an urgent purpose.
- 2) The dead lacks the wherewithal to respond to such summon.

The saying “*Oku kan kii ba alaye rojo*,” that is, a corpse does not dialogue with a living being, further corroborates the irrevocability of death. In other words, the mystical position that a deceased person occupies puts him on a different dais of existence that does not allow them to dialogue with the living. The *Akudaaya* phenomenon is, however, antithetical to the above statements and other supporting axioms or beliefs.

Like Christianity, African traditional religion, Islam and other religions abound that profess a firm belief in afterlife. However, the belief in the existence of *Akudaaya*, is a slightly strange variation to this belief. It is akin to an experience of seeing ghosts or apparitions as Shakespeare reflects it in the belief of the Elizabethan audience. In other words, the idea of the dead coming back to life is not peculiar to Yoruba or Africans.

In spite of all that, *Akudaaya* in Yoruba, Nupe and some other parts of Africa assumes a different peculiarity. *Akudaaya* phenomenon, also known as *Asehinw’aye* (Daramola & Jeje, np), is rooted in the belief systems of Yoruba. Who is an *Akudaaya*? *Akudaaya*, according to Peter Fatomilola, a renowned Ifa priest in Ife, refers to people who have been confirmed dead and in most cases, buried, with identifiable grave sites, but are seen elsewhere living another adult life. Sometimes, they go back to their former town or home briefly for a purpose and disappear shortly. The nomenclature has also been adopted to describe a freak or product believed to be of a questionable origin or poor quality in a manner of speaking, thereby conferring a derogatory connotation on it. This is because people perceive them as zombies or sub-humans lacking in human qualities.

Contrary to some claims, the apprehension of death in the Yoruba worldview is such that it is not annihilative. Ibitokun avers that “... for the Yoruba, death is not the annihilation of beings. It is simply a rite of passage, a transition from human to divine essence” (21). Awolalu and Dopamu observe the belief of the people that death is only a transition, a means of transiting from the world of the living to the world of spirits”

(253). At death, according to Awolalu and Dopamu, the soul is evacuated from its physical encasement. The encasement, stripped of the vital force that the soul represents, naturally begins to decompose the moment the soul departs for its divine source. The divine essence referred to here would be the ancestral concerns, most certainly not *Akudaaya*, as an *Akudaaya* does not meet the conditions of ascending into the ancestral realm. In line with John Mbiti in his *African Religion and Philosophy*, to attain the rank of ancestors, the deceased must meet the following conditions:

The deceased must have ...

1. died at a good old age
2. lived a good moral life
3. offspring(s)
4. died a good death
5. been given a befitting burial (np)

To attain the rank of ancestors, a minimum of the 2nd, 4th and 5th conditions above must be met, otherwise, transition to ancestral realm becomes “mission impossible”. Aside the fact that the Yoruba belief system provides a safety valve for *Akudaaya*, a cursory view of other cultures across the globe provides similar instances of the dead coming back to life either for a transient moment or a number of years. A quick literary reference can be made to Banquo’s ghost in *Macbeth* and Old Hamlet’s ghost in *Hamlet* both written by Shakespeare. A ghost or an apparition as cited above may not be exactly be the same as an *Akudaaya*, yet the central concept of the dead coming back to life can be found in the examples. However, since Soyinka’s archetypal essay only covers reincarnation through the cyclical movement of transition from the dead to the unborn and back to the living again, so where exactly does *Akudaaya* belong in the cycle? Yet, Soyinka, in *A Dance of the Forest*, is able to resurrect Dead Man and Dead Woman to testify against the living in the gathering of the tribes: “Their councilors met and said, our forefathers must be present at this feast. They asked for ancestors, for illustrious ancestors, and I said to Forest Head, let me answer their request. And I sent two spirits of the restless dead” (5).

It can be deduced from Aroni’s monologue above that an ancestor is different from the spirits of restless dead summoned as guests at the gathering of the tribes. While Soyinka does not categorically state that the duo characters are *Akudaaya*, the statement is clear that the dead do actually come back to life and can, as a matter of fact, be summoned back to existence (which in Yoruba culture is called *Oku Pipe* (“summoning the dead”). However, if *Akudaaya* is not an ancestor that has reincarnated, since the dead comes back as the adult that he or she was before death, what therefore is the transitional process of his transformation from being to non-being and back to liminal being? What space does an *Akudaaya* occupy? Is it the same space as the living, the dead or the unborn? What are his nature and activities upon reappearance? It is obvious that the mystery of *Akudaaya* generates more questions than answers. These are the answers this essay is trying to access in the Yoruba film titled *Aye Loja*.

Yoruba film industry is replete with productions that have to do with death and appearance of *Akudaaya*. These films are easily identified by their titles. The films that I have been able to compile all come with titles that suggest what the content is all about. Below are a few examples:

- Ounje Akudaya* Directed by Kayode Adebayo
- Ilu Awon Akudaya* (The Community of Akudaya ...)
- Oyun Oko Akudaya* (The Pregnancy of Akudaya ...)
- Agbara Oku* (The Power of the Dead ...)
- Iya Akudaya* Directed by Tunde Popoola JayJay
- Akudaya* (Ayo Olaiya ...)

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Akudaya Directed by Segun Ogungbe

Akudaya (Ghost) Directed by Victor B. Adewunmi

Akudaya Directed by Bosun Otayemi

Aye Loja Directed by Seun Olaiya

The above is not an exhaustive list of Yoruba films that exclusively treat the theme of *Akudaaya*. There are many other Yoruba films that treat the issue of *Akudaaya* peripherally without paying too much attention to it. The ones listed above feature *Akudaaya* or a community of *Akudaaya* as the main character(s). The most identifying trait (with few exceptions) is that the films almost always bear *Akudaya* as or within the title, hence the name *Akudaya* is overused. What most of the *Akudaaya* films emphasize is the emotional stress undergone by *Akudaaya* and the longing to reunite and fellowship with their former family members and associates and, at the same time, their desire to keep their reappearance shrouded in secrecy.

Being caught between these two opposing desires helps to generate both intra and inter personal conflicts among the characters in the films. The power, strength, limitations and frustrations of *Akudaaya* characters provide the fertile ground for film makers to creatively explore. From a more epistemological angle, the understanding of many of *Akudaaya* film makers is limited. This deficiency expectedly affects the content and quality of the film adversely. The understanding, for instance, of the concept and application of the word “reincarnation” appears confusing in *Iya Akudaya* directed by Azeez Ijaduade. This confusion of meanings and concepts of reincarnation and *Akudaaya* is exposed in the treatment of the story and the attempt to subtitle the film. Many Yoruba films encounter the stiffest challenge at the stage of subtitling their films which helps to reveal some other fundamental problems in the films.

In *Akudaya* (Ghost) directed by Victor B. Adewunmi, the director failed to establish the difference between the corporeal body of Olaide and her transmigrated soul. Olaide the main *Akudaaya* character merely stands up from the scene of the accident that claims her life without leaving her physical body behind. This betrays a shallow understanding or a careless representation of the phenomenon of *Akudaaya*. It is also obvious that there is paucity of critical works on films on *Akudaaya* and relatively on the phenomenon of *Akudaaya* itself. All these, and more, constitute the gap to be filled in this paper.

Methodology

The research adopts qualitative approach to shed light on the mystery surrounding the phenomena of *Akudaaya*, death and destiny as presented through the medium of film. To this end, some notable traditionalists and actors in *Akudaaya* films are engaged in unstructured interviews, and close attention is paid to the handling of plots, characterization and metaphysical conflict in selected films. Data sourced from the films and interviews are subsequently subjected to descriptive and historical analysis and interpretation with the aid of scholarly texts and journals.

Results and Discussion

The film, *Aye Loja*, which features Ibrahim Chatta as Jimoh/Basit, Peju Ogunmola as his Mother, Dele Odule as Anjola - Basit's Father and Tunde Owokoniran as Khalid (Basit's brother) was directed by Seun Olaiya and produced by Sharafadeen Olabode. In the film, three characters who reside in Ibadan, namely Khalid, Anjola, his father and Afaa (a muslim cleric) simultaneously have a dream about the death and burial of Khalid. To avert the death, a special prayer is embarked upon. Sadly, not too

long after the rite, Khalid's older brother, Basit dies in a ghastly auto accident and is buried.

However, the soul of Basit is unable to access "heaven" having died ahead of his appointed time. After roaming the abyss for an indeterminate time, he is consequently "redeployed" by a spirit to live in Ajah, where he encounters many of his type waiting for their predestined time of death while they still live among the living in flesh. After a while, Basit, now rechristened Jimoh, schemes a visit to his former family in Ibadan. The family, having been forewarned about his imminent 'return', receives him warmly although as a different character who is now a slightly deformed illiterate but with a striking resemblance of Basit. After spending some time with his family, he returns to Ajah and meets Omolade who had come looking for him the day he died in his former life. The lady gets pregnant for him and he decides to take her to his "adopted" parents in Ibadan. This time, he reveals his identity as Basit to his not-too-surprised but rather awed parents and announces his imminent "exit" that same day at 12.00 midnight being his originally predestined time of death. At the appointed time, he dies again in the presence of his parents, Khalid, his younger brother, Fati, his kid sister and his pregnant "wife".

Destiny, Death and Liminality

The rather tacit tripartite conflictual engagement in *Aye Loja* is metaphysical, between Basit, his destiny and death. The inability of Basit to cross the primordial gulf of transition to the world of the dead is an indication that he has not yet fulfilled his destiny. Although he has been predestined to die young, it is not yet his time to die as at the time he gets crushed by a truck. Basit's destiny, however, refuses to be cheated by death, hence it forces Basit to reappear as an *Akudaaya* in Ajah. The concept of destiny in the Yoruba worldview is such that it cannot be altered, yet experiences abound to show that destiny can be disrupted. The uncompleted rites, in their parents' attempt to ward off perceived death from Khalid, may have precipitated Basit's untimely death. The Yoruba aphoristic equivalence of destiny is *Akunleyan* which Olukayode explains in "*Akunleyan ni adayeba* - That which was chosen while kneeling is the reality we met on earth; *A kunle, a yan ipin, A daye tan oju n ro ni* – We knelt down and chose a portion, and on getting to the earth, we become displeased (with the choice we made)" (81).

However, in spite of the encounter between destiny and death in the life of Basit; liminality or the mystery of being in nonbeing, that is, between his death and reappearance requires interrogation. How has the film represented this stage in Basit's life and how has it helped to describe the phenomenon of *Akudaaya*? There are three of such sequences in the film that portray the liminality experienced by Basit.

In the first liminality, immediately after the mutilated lifeless body of Basit has been shown, his soul is seen walking an unpaved wide path. Soon, he encounters a young lady maltreating a small boy. He tries to call the lady to order, but the lady does not respond. As he persists, a man appears from opposite direction and announces to him that he is dead and so cannot be heard by the living – *Oku kan kii ba alaye rojo*. (i.e. the dead does not dialogue with the living). The reality immediately dawns on Basit as his situation is revealed to him. What is observed here is that the camera registers sparse vehicular movements at the distant background of the deserted road. This does not convey the mystery and awe that should attend such liminality, but the message is clear that there has been a separation between Basit's body and soul. However, the money which he is holding when crushed by the truck falls off his hand, and he continues to soak in his reality in a rather pensive mood.

The second is a dream sequence of Khalid, in a deserted quarry site where a lone tricycle rider hollers for passengers to board his tricycle. Basit, in his green sport shirt, is

the rider's first passenger. A second passenger wearing a white apparel appears with a bundle but he is challenged with a philosophical truth by the rider to drop his bundle, that he came into this world with nothing and so must leave with nothing. The bundle disappears and he boards. Another passenger in white, female, boards next. Then Khalid shows up but dashes back to cobble his sandals. Upon returning, his place has been taken by another passenger. Basit fights to regain the seat for Khalid, but Khalid declines. As the struggle continues, Khalid wakes up from his nightmare, leaving Basit shouting and bemoaning his severance from his beloved brother. Here, in the second sequence of liminality is a close semblance of the anguish of severance from the world of loved ones.

At this point, there is nothing left of Basit but the consciousness of his soul and the will to remain close to his family. Although it may be construed as a rebellious act against death, Basit's inability to cross that ancient gulf to the realm of the dead may be seen as a tragic art of some sort. His *Ori*, that is, guardian spirit of his destiny however wins the battle for him as his *Eleda* (Creator) allows him to complete the remainder of his life in a faraway Ajah in the same old but slightly deformed body and slurred in speech. The film captures this in the third sequence of liminality where Basit's soul encounters a floating being in white who explains his situation to him. The floating being sends him to Ajah where he meets other *Akudaaya* in flesh and other human beings.

Dialogue as an Expository Tool

The film *Aye Loja* employs expository dialogues to furnish viewers with information about *Akudaaya*. In what looks like a prologue, the film adopts a "metacinematic" technique by bringing the director of the film (Seun Olaiya) and the producer (Sharafadeen Olabode) on set to dialogue with an actor in the role of a village elder on the phenomenon of *Akudaaya*. In their discussion, three types of *Akudaaya* are mentioned: 1) *Onifarahan* 2) *Oloro* 3) *Onidubule*.

The first, *Onifarahan*, is not considered as mainstream *Akudaaya*. This type is the appearance of a person that has just died, who wishes to say goodbye to a few loved ones, or has an unfinished assignment/errand to run before death comes knocking. Some have information or some hidden wealth which they hope to disclose to their loved ones yet unaware of their demise. The opportunity to do this only comes before burial after which they will not be privileged to appear again. To buttress this, a flashback scene of the old man's experience with *Akudaaya Onifarahan* is shown before the main story commences.

The second type, *Oloro*, describes a deceased fellow who is reported to be seen in a town, usually faraway from where he had lived in his previous life. Some of them live an entirely new life as the adult that they were before death. Some get married and raise children. However, as soon as there is someone that recognizes them, they change their location.

The third type is referred to as *Onidubule*. This type of *Akudaaya* describes a particular family of *Akudaaya* in Ajah who have been dead and buried. These ones are also a form of transmigrated souls but with slight alteration to their former appearance. If they so wish they can go back to where they had lived their previous life. The film is about *Akudaaya Onidubule*.

The information on *Akudaaya* is released further to the viewers based on the inquisitiveness of Alani whose is resident in Ajah. This manifests in the dialogue of two men in Ajah where 20% of the population are *Akudaaya*. Alani, a middle-aged man after overhearing the conversation of three *Akudaaya*, Jimoh, Sunday 1 and Sunday 2, goes to accost an elderly man about the secret behind those who are called *Onidubule*. The old man reveals the secret to Alani that these are people who have died and have been buried

somewhere else. They are not spirits as they also live in flesh and do every other thing that other men do. To identify them, they never eat in the presence of anybody, not even in the presence of their fellow *Akudaaya*. Jimoh, while living with his former parents, does not eat on the dining table with the rest. He would rather eat inside his room.

Through the utterances of the *Akudaaya* among themselves, certain information is revealed while others are further confirmed. In the dialogue between Jimoh and Sunday 1 and Sunday 2, it is discovered that Sunday 1 and Sunday 2 were twins who had died on the same day.

Jimoh: *Omo iya meji i r'ewe, bii t'eyin meji yi ko. Ojo kan leyin mejeji kuo loja kan bo si ikeji. Ei somo gidi o! Omo tii pa'ya lekun.* (Two children born of the same mother do not encounter a dewild, but yours is an exception. On one single day, you both migrated from one market to another. You are very heartless. You are a source of sorrow to your mother.)

Sunday 1: *A ni ka rin ka po, yiye lo nyeni.* (The more, the merrier. It is more dignifying to migrate in group.)

Jimoh: *Se ka rin ka po, yiye nii nyeni, se bii t'ona orun wa ni?* (The more the merrier? How does that apply to death? (*Aye Loja*))

On another occasion, a team of casual labourers, all *Akudaaya*, reflect pensively on their social being as *Akudaaya* and the sorry way they are perceived by the rest of humans. On another occasion, Jimoh admits the mysterious power of God while narrating his strange experience as an *Akudaaya* to his family.

These confessions attest to the fact that they are conscious of the peculiarity of their being. Being conscious that their souls have disengaged from their former bodies and now inhabit other bodies assures them that they are still as human as the rest of the world. But their minds are constantly preoccupied by the reality of their severance from their former families and friends with whom they cannot share fellowship like before.

Post-Production Effects: Dream Sequence and Special Effects

The tripartite dream sequence of Khalid, Anjola and Afaa helps to foreshadow death as a dominant theme in the movie. It further sets the metaphysical conflict of the story rolling as the battle to beat death with the aid of special prayers begins with the family of Anjola. This conflict is closely followed by Khalid's nightmares as he keeps seeing Basit dragging him to come and join him on the other side.

Omolade's dream sequence constitutes a minute part of the sub-plot even though the dream is merely reported. Her dream reveals Basit as the panacea to her problem. The mere introduction of the dream functions as a crucial link between Basit and his destiny - that he will not die without having a child.

The use of postproduction special effects to suggest or convey supernatural power is very minimal even though the metaphysical nature of the story provides avenues to display supernatural powers. The few scenes of such display include the vanishing of the bundle brought by one of the passengers of the tricycle while Basit still roams the gulf of transition. The second is the Floating Being in white who gives Basit a material body and sends him to Ajah.

The almost non-display of supernatural effects in *Aye Loja*, which the film media could easily realize, appears to call the viewer's attention to the corporeality of *Akudaaya* against public perception of them as liminal beings. Other films have represented *Akudaaya* as beings that can appear and disappear at will. In Wumi Ajiboye's *Akudaya*, for instance, Gbolahan, an *Akudaaya*, walks through closed doors, gates and walls at will. He also digs his own shallow grave in the bush and buries his own body with a wave of hand. He appears and disappears on several occasions in the

film. Jimoh, in *Aye Loja*, however, never for once disappears in the film. Even when he is trying to get back to Ajah to fulfill his destiny with Omolade, against the wish of his former family, he never disappears. He merely outwits them physically in order to escape their pressures. With this, the film is able to register the humanness of *Akudaaya* as beings that occupy the same space, time and consciousness with other human beings.

Validating the Existence of Akudaaya

The phenomenon of *Akudaaya* is based on a belief system that enjoys a wide acceptability across cultures. The belief does not draw its strength from any known empirical process, hence it has a series of unproven hypothesis. Although there are eye-witnesses' accounts of them, their existence can hardly be corroborated by empirical facts. In my discussion with Peter Fatomilola, a renowned Ifa priest and film actor, he claimed he saw an *Akudaaya* when he was a little boy in Erunmu, Oyo State, in 1956. According to him, the woman who was a Muslim had died about a year before she reappeared in her former house with her grave at the frontage. The woman that first recognized her fainted, which attracted some crowd. She was reportedly unruffled as she declared bluntly that she has returned home. She went straight towards where she used to keep her *age* (ablution kettle), fetched some water from the well and proceeded to perform her ablution. Eventually, newsmen took her away to their station for an interview and she was later taken to a court where she was made to testify before a judge. Peter Fatomilola, as a young boy had asked those who cared to listen if it was possible to dig her grave to ascertain if her remains were still intact. Nobody paid attention to what they considered to be a foolish question.

In another interaction with Ibrahim Chatta, the actor in the role of Basit/Jimoh in *Aye Loja*, the actor revealed that in Nupe where he comes from, the phenomenon is very common. He avers that *Akudaaya* are not really dead, they have merely been diabolically displaced (*panipoda*). In such a case where a person is displaced, it is his image that will be seen to have died, but his real self would have been hypnotized into a state that he is no longer in control of his being. His spirit could be sent into far away thick forest or a place where no one would recognize him. In addition, even if they are recognised, they would perceive him to be an *Akudaaya*. According to Chatta, an *Akudaaya* would roam around for the rest of his life under this spell until he dies naturally or is rescued. Dr. Adeola Faleye, a Yoruba scholar and an Ifa practitioner, also shared her mother's experience (as a little girl) with an *Akudaaya* that was kind to her anytime she crossed a river to the next village. According to the mother, the *Akudaaya* stopped appearing to her after telling her people of the woman's kindness to her.

Consequently, a lot of myths, superstitions and taboos have been built around this phenomenon. It is generally believed that *Akudaaya* are allergic to incense, petrol fumes or cigarette smoke. That may have accounted for why the humans in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* "resurrect" the abandoned "Chimney of Ereko" (a derelict lorry) to scare Dead Man and Dead Woman away from the gathering of the tribes.

Councillor: Oh. The Chimney of Ereko?

Old Man: That's the one. Tell the owner it is back on the road – in the forest, that is. Get him to drive it right through here and he can let it smoke as much as he likes ... Yes, yes, the chimney ought to do it. When that monster travels at anything over two miles per hour you can't see the world for smoke or smell a latrine for petrol fumes. If any ghost can survive it, then there is no power that can help me. (29-30)

In the same vein, Gbolahan and his wife, both *Akudaaya*, in *Akudaya*, are allergic to incense burning, prayers and cigarette fumes, which explains why they send their prayerful and incense-burning housemaid packing.

In *Aye Loja*, an *Akudaaya* does not eat in the presence of any other person which the film establishes in a number of scenes, most especially with Jimoh declining every attempt by others to make him eat or drink in their presence. What is rather unsettling about this claim however is how far the argument can be pushed considering the fact that some *Akudaaya* get married and raise children. For how long can they avoid eating in the presence of their immediate family members?

Another claim that *Akudaaya* are averse to being recognized by people who knew them in their former lives may not sail if we consider the fact that some actually come back to their former homes. *Aye Loja* is able to scale the hurdle by slightly altering the physical appearances of the *Akudaaya* without sacrificing their striking resemblance with their former selves.

The name pattern of *Akudaaya* whereby they are named after any day of the week to signify the particular day that they had died in their previous life, is established in *Aye Loja*. Basit becomes Jimoh because he had died on Friday while the twins adopt the name Sunday 1 and Sunday 2 because they had both died the same day on a Sunday. This naming system of *Akudaaya* is peculiar to *Aye Loja* and so may not pass as a universal practice. In Ajiboye's *Akudaya*, Gbolahan and his wife retain their old names even after death.

The Metaphor of Market and Motor Vehicle

The irrevocability of the predestined life of man permeates the entire film and it begins with the title of the film, *Aye Loja*, meaning "The world is a market". The film is a condensed version of a Yoruba maxim, "Aye l'oja, orun n'ile" – The world is a market, Heaven is home. The most defining deterministic nature of man's existence on earth is that after a certain number of years on earth, death awaits every living being. Nobody remains in the market without going back home. In other words, no man lives forever. For everyman, certain date has been appointed for him to die. Hence, death is an intricate part of man's destiny, so there is death in destiny as much as there is destiny in death.

One peculiar thing about the metaphorical market is that man enters the market empty-handed and leaves empty-handed. The metaphor is a pointer to the nature of man's life on earth – a life into which he is born naked and must leave without taking anything along with him on the day of his death when his soul vacates his corporeal body. The corporeal body that used to eat, drink and was adorned with apparels and ornaments now laid gently inside a coffin is a mere encasement for his soul. The physical body is what needs material nourishment while the soul needs spiritual enrichment. The errand money Basit has on him on the day of his death becomes meaningless to Basit, his mother and any other person. The movie registers the money flying all around the lifeless body of Basit without anybody paying attention to the money. The metaphorical market conveys meanings beyond man's financial or material concerns. The market places premium on social and cultural values, virtues and other non-materialistic aspects of life.

Jimoh's reference to market however opens a new dimension as to the number of markets available within the terrestrial space. Basit in referring to the twins in leaving one market for another is indirectly suggesting the possibility of the *Akudaaya* occupying another location different from the one they were occupying but within the same material world: "Jimoh: ... On one single day, you both decided migrate from one market to another" (*Olaiya Ajah* scene)

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This would therefore agree with the notion that *Akudaaya* are living beings who occupy the same material space with Oloro, that is, other regular living beings (An Oloro is the one who has not been laid to rest in any grave, that is, who have never tasted death or been displaced like *Akudaaya*). The argument of the film is essentially that *Akudaaya* are as human as Oloro. For as long as they can see and be seen and are known to have raised families of their own, most especially with Oloro, it can be argued that they occupy the same space and time with the rest of human beings.

Beyond occupying the same space with Oloro, another evidence of their humanness is their enormous capacity for emotions which Jimoh exhibits in various ways and dimensions. If they could experience anger, love, mirth, happiness and sadness, then their humanity should not be in doubt. Jimoh, for instance, expresses an infectious happiness in the company of his *Akudaaya* friends in Ajah and passionate love in the company of Omolade in Ajah. He also experiences job satisfaction as a mason in Ibadan while staying with his “adopted” parents. As a matter of fact, his nostalgic feelings drive him from Ajah to Ibadan where he positions himself to be easily spotted by his ready-to-be-adopted “father”. Considering Jimoh’s lines in the only scene that features Jimoh, Sunday 1 and Sunday 2 in *Aye Loja*, “*Ife afeju ma ni. Ife afeju ma lo se mi... Ife ti mo fe awon familik mi lo je ki npe lohun*” (“It is excessive love for my family that is worrying me which made me overstay with them.”) [Olaiya Ajah scene]

Another pointer to their humanity is the consciousness of their status as *Onidubule* alongside the clear memory of their former lives. With their memory capacity, their intellect is not in any way affected as they can reflect on their previous and present lives with some measure of nostalgia. Jimoh would have stayed longer with his adopted family in Ibadan but for the need to go back to Ajah to go and fulfill his destiny with Omolade.

However, the mystery of their transition from death to *Onidubule* is scantily explored in *Aye Loja* and therefore remains unraveled. Perhaps, the experience of the liminality of Basit is what the film is not too concerned about. Maduakor explains that Soyinka is at pains to define the exact nature and topography of the fourth area of experience, which he calls, “... the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming” (296). This aptly describes the state of Basit as a restless spirit that is incapable of crossing the gulf of transition. This gulf, according to Maduakor, is a symbol of continuity which permits free passage through the three areas of existence. But then, the diagrammatic representation of the ontological universe suggests a forward uni-directional movement which appears to exclude the volt face movement of an *Akudaaya* back to life.

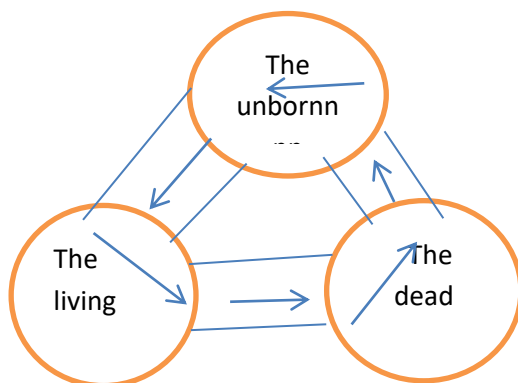


Fig. 1. Soyinka’s cosmology (Maduakor 297)

Again, the motif of vehicular movements or presence as the agency of transportation in the film suggests a not-too-pronounced metaphorical role of transport. According to Ademeso, metaphor is expressed in the similarity of objects that are physically and/or naturally dissimilar. Ademeso describes metaphor as a way of “breaking the conventional ways in which we think about the world” (qtd. in Peck et al 153). For example, “world” that is, Aye, in the films is perceived as a market as much as life itself is perceived as a journey. Death too becomes the incapacitated means of transition in the image of a tricycle at the liminal stage of Basit’s displacement.

At four different points in the film, vehicular presence/movement is used to establish the transition or near-transition of one character or the other from one realm of existence to another. In the tableau of the film, a driver, while trying to call passengers, encounters a lady that has just died in an auto accident. Although the accident is merely reported, the film begins to register auto accidents as an agency of extraterrestrial crossing, most especially in *Aye Loja*.

Secondly, the auto accident involving Afaa’s daughter, although does not result in death, is life-threatening and enough to precipitate the third, that is, Basit’s death in another ghastly accident. This time, it involves a heavy-duty truck that delivers Basit smoothly into the cold hands of death. Even at death, vehicular means of transportation as an agency of death continues to register in the film. In the fourth, which is a spiritual journey, a tricycle is introduced in the liminal existence of Basit as the means of conveying people from liminal realm to the ancestral realm. This would therefore lead us to perceive death in whatever form as a metaphysical means of transporting man from the living realm of existence to the next. In this instance, therefore, death is to be seen as a metaphor for the metaphysical journey of man away from the corporeal world.

Conclusion

The burden of emotion that these beings carry around them is an indication of the consciousness and memory of their former life, which appears to account for their being able to locate their former dwelling place. Although there are some *Akudaaya* that navigate their way back to their former homes, a smooth reunion is not guaranteed. The reappearance may help to mitigate the anguish of severance that has taken place, yet, in their consciousness, they are aware that they cannot occupy their former space and be accepted as regular living beings. These and many more complex reasons account for why their entire existence is characteristically shrouded in mystery, whose kernel the film *Aye Loja* has not been able to crack.

Drawing from the aforesaid, the mission of any *Akudaaya* is driven by the need to realize an unfulfilled destiny. Contrary to what the film wants to make us believe in the tripartite dream of Khalid’s death, it can be concluded that it was actually Basit’s predestined death that the dream was relating to, not Khalid’s. Should that not be the case, then Khalid would have succeeded in beating both his destiny and death. His remaining alive would then have deconstructed the entire concept of destiny and rendered it as something that can be altered at will after all. As for Basit, although the destiny is disrupted, it remains unaltered. The phenomenon of *Akudaaya* can therefore be seen as a measure through which the conflict between death and destiny is mediated.

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