

I am hated, therefore I am: **The Enemy in Yorùbá Imaginary**

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Abstract

This essay will study how the Yorùbá conceptualize “òtá” or the enemy, a trope that recurs in various cultural phenomena such as music, prayers, and other social rituals. The Yorùbá worldview of the enemy has profound implications on the way they frame issues that affect their mental, physical, social, and general well-being. Health studies, religious studies, and social ethics studies and analyses have mostly tried to investigate the enemy as a concept borne out of Yorùbá cosmology which serves as a conduit for superstition, fear, and other seemingly irrational behavior. In this essay, I frame the concept of “òtá” through the theatrical dialectic of antagonist/protagonist theory. The enemy, I argue, is the way the Yorùbá metaphorize all kinds of antagonism—material and immaterial ones—into an imaginative texture that gives it the tangibility they need to triumph against those situations. This essay will interrogate how this personification of antagonism is achieved by studying Ifá texts, Yorùbá popular music of a period, and contemporary Pentecostal prayers.

Keywords: Òtá, Pentecostalism, Yorùbá popular music, Prayers, Identity

Introduction

Once, on a trip to Ibadan from Lagos, I waited with some others in a commercial vehicle for the motor park touts to draw enough passengers, so we could begin our journey. As is typical of Nigerian motor parks, that interval is filled with various economic activities that purport to exchange the boredom and rising impatience of waiting with mercantilist activities that range from the sales of food to books, and to even prayers. The latter is usually offered by both beggars soliciting alms, and religious merchants who solicit donations. On this occasion, I counted about three vendors offering to sell me different materials—books, CDs, and other paraphernalia of prayer—that provided solutions that would give me victory over my enemies. The books document various kinds of enemies one might have, and how to conquer them through prayers that, I noted, were not always clearly demarcated as either Islamic or Christian. I ran through the pages of the books and wondered, *beyond self-protection and spiritual defense against supernatural power, what other factors are responsible for the prevalent and persistent fear of the enemy among Yorùbá people?* In daily conversations, and during rituals of prayer both inside and outside designated religious worship spaces in Yorùbáland, the palpable fear of the enemy provokes creative agency such that people continuously invent thoughts, imaginations, and rites to ward off the activities of those ubiquitous enemies.

The phenomenon is not limited to religious literature. Pull up an album of a Yorùbá musician of the older generation on YouTube and it is very likely the singer will eventually “throw shade” at their *òtá*—enemies—that stand in the way of his/her self-realization; those people “out there” who cannot stand to see him/her prosper. The musician will sing about how those enemies tried to scuttle his/her destiny; how those enemies visited Babaláwo or co-opted other malevolent forces to drag them down spiritually; how those Babaláwo that their enemies consulted requested them to procure expensive materials for the spiritual rites that will set off transcendent powers that will topple the singer’s rising destiny. These narrations within the songs are sometimes told in such detail as if the musician were a witness to the transaction, and they sometimes take the form of linear narratives that conclude with the singer’s victory. These artists, by the way, hardly ever portray themselves as helpless or passive victims of their enemies; they sing about vanquishing those enemies and emerging triumphant.

The fear of the enemy is pervasive among Yorùbá people, and this is because, in Yorùbá cosmology, the material and the immaterial worlds are mutually porous. People believe that there are ever-present contending forces that relentlessly contest one’s good destiny that was prenatally bequeathed

by benevolent heavenly forces. The average Yorùbá, thus socialized into the culture of fear of unseen yet bitter antagonistic powers that live in the metaphysical realms and the catacombs of the imagination, is ever wary of the enemy whose mission it is to deprive them of their destiny (Agwuele, 2016). Yorùbá people imagine their enemies as human antagonists, disembodied beings who take human forms to be able to enter the material world, and also, hostile non-human forces, all of whom are antithetical to one's well-being (Alanamu, 2013). This specter of marauding supernatural forces coming with their armies to shortchange one's salubrious existence is intrinsic to Yorùbá belief (Adamo, 2009; Jegede, 2009).

These enemies, it is believed, exist either within or outside of one's household. They are also thought to stalk one's ancestral lineage, although what marks their power to prevail over one is not their spatial location *per se* but their ability to remotely surveil one's life from their vantage spots in the supernatural realm (Adelakun, 2018). When those enemies witness a favorable turn of fortune in the lives of their victim, they launch a spiritual attack to cripple his/her destiny. People are thus urged to be ever vigilant, to be sensitive to the enemy lurking out there in the dark crevices of the human hearts and who do not want others to prosper. The constant drive towards the awareness of the enemy and its capability towards mischief drives Yorùbá people to an obsession with their enemy. This fixation manifests in virtually every cultural expression which includes popular culture, spiritual rites, and preparation of various fetish items that can be used as forms of self-defense (Borokini and Lawal, 2014; Dopamu, 2014; Lawal, 1977; Osinulu, 2008). Over time, Yorùbá people have also built up a repertoire of thoughts, imaginations, imageries, and mode of expressions that convey the urgency of exorcizing the enemy that wants to harm one's providence.

Taking off from Rene Descartes' philosophical proposition, *I think, therefore I am*, this essay will argue that the very imagination—and perhaps, the reality—of having an enemy is an integral part of self-making, self-definition, and self-perception for the Yorùbá people. The ways they image their enemy, and use language as means of framing the actions and the schemes of those enemies, gives the supposed enemy—an intangible entity—a material texture that also makes them conquerable. The omnipresent enemy, in Yorùbá cosmology, is not always either readily identifiable or embodied, and thus people use language and imagination to turn that enemy into a being. While formulating the image of the enemy or enemies that are united in hatred against them, they also end up generating an enhanced image of themselves, which is principally because they conceive the enemy in relation to themselves.

This essay investigates the underlying dramatics of the Yorùbá fascination with the enemy by examining some aspects of Yorùbá popular cultural

performances such as music and prayer. I have chosen these specific artistic expressions because they vocalize and amplify Yorùbá philosophy through performances of everyday life. The legibility of these cultural performances to other Yorùbá people underscores underlying indigenous thought and philosophy. Yorùbá people have an inventory of *òtá* whose sole mission is to trap them in various ways, and they also, not wanting to become victims, have the counter mission of unmasking, defeating, and ultimately destroying those enemies (Oyetade, 2004). Much more than the task of self-preservation, however, is the self-aggrandizement that underwrites their thematization of the enemy. These instances from popular religion and culture vividly illustrate the Yorùbá conception of the enemy and its percolation into every segment of cultural expression.

As the examples I will analyze also demonstrate, when Yorùbá people incessantly visualize what the enemy is doing against them, they are diagnosing its intent and applying different forms of therapy to vanquish that enemy, either as a preemptive attack or as a form of self-defense. However, without that imagined enemy hating and antagonizing them, there would also not be a *them* against which their persona is shaped. Therefore, the idea of who the enemy is, what the enemy does, and how they counteract such an enemy is a series of dramatic acts scripted in their mind and which, when vocalized, rises to the level of a theatrical spectacle. An old Yorùbá proverb says, “whoever is alive but has no enemy is already dead” (*Eni tí ó wà láyè tí kò lóṣtáà tí kú*). This suggests that the *I am* of Yorùbá being relies also on the existence of the enemy, the antagonizing other, whose hatred is necessary for the cultivation of their impression of themselves. For instance, a Yorùbá proverb says that as a woman with children is an enemy of a barren woman, so is a hard-working person the enemy of a lazy one (*abiyamọ, òtá àgàn; ṣiṣé ṣiṣé, òtá òlẹ*). In this context, the identity of a woman who has children is tied to that of the woman who does not. The identity of the woman with children is shaped by her opposite—the proverbial barren woman—who is usually stereotypically depicted as bitter and hostile to the woman whom fortune has blessed with children. In other words, the mother, the *abiyamọ* identity, is sealed through the *other*, the barren woman. As I will be showing with examples in the following sections, this identity creation process also reveals how their self-perception is tied to how they formulate the image of the enemy they want to destroy.

Defining the Enemy

Scholarship that examines the Yorùbá conception of the enemy has gauged the ingrained belief about the omnipresence of the enemy from various dimensions and concluded the different ways the Yorùbá conceive of the enemy.

They show how Yorùbá people believe the enemy is an etiological source of diverse illnesses, a perception that often hinders people with such beliefs from seeking western medical care (Jegade, 2002). According to Deji Ayegboyin (2009), Yorùbá people consider the evil and enmity of *òtá* to spring from visible and invisible sources, driven by twin forces—internal and external—and their sheer motivating factor is to wreck destinies and destroy people. Other scholars have also classified the categories of enemies that linger in the Yorùbá mind, delineating them according to the level of closeness to the person they antagonize (Agwuele, 2016; Adamo, 2015; Balogun, 2016). David Adamo, a scholar of religion and theology, also examined modern-day Christianity’s treatment of the enemy in rituals of prayers and the application of biblical utterances to agonistic situations. Adamo (2012; 2008), like Ayegboyin and others, also argues that imprecatory prayers in contemporary Nigerian churches are one of the means by which Christians wrest themselves from the hands of those negative forces they believe are out to destroy them to secure their destinies (Adedeji, 2012). Augustine Agwuele (2012) takes a linguistic approach to dissecting the Yorùbá psychology of enemies. He uses the term *won*, that is, “they,” to capture the sociological term that indexes the spiritual forces people believe contend with their personhood, their strivings towards a better life, and the good fortunes bestowed on them before their emergence in this world. Thus, *won* in the Yorùbá language catalogues the ever-present enemy, the opposing force that stymies the individual’s ability to enjoy the good things in life as guaranteed by his/her destiny. Through the constant invocation of *won* in Yorùbá, people remain vigilant and develop means of outwitting these forces. This “‘them,’ our enemies, can only be seen as a threat to our identity” (Frackowiak, 2016).

The Yorùbá define their impressions of the enemy in colorful terms to reflect the way they imagine such an enemy to operate, where they are located, and how they execute their overall mission in the life of their victim. Oyetade collects the descriptions of *òtá* according to the mischief that is ascribed to them:

- òtá ilé*—the enemy within one’s household
- òtá òde*—the enemy from the outside
- òtá idílé*—the enemy in the family or ancestral lineage
- òtá ibi isé*—the enemy at the place of work
- òtá òrun ò gbẹbo*—the enemy believed to be from heaven; one that can neither be appeased nor placated with sacrificial offerings.
- òtá ikòkò tàbí òtá ibábá*—the secret or hidden enemy
- òtá aloré*—the persistent enemy

a bínú kú ẹ̀ni—one who is angry with another, and wishes death upon him/her

elénìní—the bitter enemy

a-mọ̀ni-şeni—one who exploits familiarity to do evil against another

a-fàimọ̀ni-şeni—one who is not too familiar with someone yet does evil against them

a-şeni-bání-dárò—the one who does evil against one, and still commiserates with one over that evil.

a-fojú-fẹ̀ni-ma-fokàn-fẹ̀ni—one who loves one superficially

ojú-la-rí-òrẹ̀-ò-dénú—one whose love is not sincere

a-şe-kú-pani—one who schemes to inflict death (Oyetade 2004, 83).

While his list is not exhaustive, the classification helps to track how the Yorùbá use language to frame the operations of the enemy, so that they can galvanize the necessary hostility towards the enemy.

For all the varied enemies named above, Yorùbá people have developed supernatural means of counterattack. One of the ways they neutralize the effect of the power of the unrelenting enemy is through the power of language, particularly the spoken word. The use of language for this task is significant because, as James Baldwin (1955:175) once pointed out, “the root function of language is to control the universe by describing it.” Language is the semiotic form through which their fears, hopes, visions of conquest, and voyeuristic insights into the activities of the enemy are all documented. The language is evocative enough to give an almost perceptible texture to the enemy’s character and posit the embattled victim as the protagonist, and the enemy as their foil, the antagonist. The only possible denouement to their dramatic encounter is the fall of the enemy and they signify this in their words, either in daily communication, song lyrics, or prayers.

Apart from language, the image is also another resource that surrenders distance between what is known and what is not known. Image, Toni Morrison says, “increasingly rules the realm of shaping, sometimes becoming, often contaminating knowledge. Provoking language or eclipsing it, an image can determine not only what we know and feel but also what we believe is worth knowing about what we feel” (Morrison: 2017, 36). Language and the images it generates thus help Yorùbá people to extract knowledge from the invisible realm to “explain, predict, and control” phenomena in the natural realm they dwell in, one in which they are threatened by enemy machinations (Wariboko, 2014:39). However, beyond categorizing the enemy to manage their activities, the Yorùbá also use their definitions of the enemy to shape their understanding of their own selves in relation to the enemy other, and ultimately enhance their own individual worlds through giving materiality to the enemy through

language. In the next section, through copious examples from popular culture and prayers from Christian religious materials, I will explain the dynamics of Yorùbá thought regarding the enemy.

The Enemy Whose Hatred Makes Me

Long before the term “fake news” gained political traction and became supercharged language for describing malicious media reports, Nigeria had had its share of rumor reporting: the promotion of false and unsubstantiated accounts in the media and through word of mouth. One of the rather frequent victims of the fake news industry was popular Fuji musician Kolawole Ayinla, whose stage name was Kollington.¹ Kollington would release an album after the propagation of the rumor of his death to debunk the news of his death, and to send a message to his enemies who wanted him dead at all costs. Popular music contains narration, and the mode of narration offers an important element in the interpretation of the work (Nicholls, 2007). When Kollington seizes the chance to provide a counter narration against his traducers, he does much more than just informing the public. In one of the albums I selected, *Ojú Ọpón*, he responded to his enemies and rumor mongers thus:

“Wọn” sọ pé mo kú, ariwo gba’yé
 Òkìkì kàn dé gbogbo Nàìjíríà
 Kọ́láwọ́lé ò kú, irọ́ yin, Kọ́láwọ́lé ò kú
 Bẹẹ bá dé Àgbàdò, ẹ́ ó rí i tó n’j’ayé ọba
 Ohun tó bá wù yí n ẹ sọ, ohun bá wù yí n ẹ sọ
 Kò sẹsẹ bẹrẹ̀ i yẹn ò sẹsẹ̀ bẹrẹ̀
 Ẹ ti sọ iru ẹ ní gbà kan, ohun bá wù yí n ẹ sọ
 Àyìnlá ò ní yànkú, màá dàgbà, màá ní n t’ágbà á ní l’ọwọ́
 Gbogbo wa pátá ò ní yànkú, a ó dàgbà, ká ní n t’ágbà ní l’ọwọ́
 Aṣeni se ra ẹ, lèkélèké gbàràdà
 Inú n’b’èyélé lásán
 Íbà jẹ eni yàn, kò dàsé Olúwa dúró
 Wọn relé oni fá, relé oni sègùn
 Wọn ní kí wọn lọ gbàródan wá ní torí Kọ́lá
 Iṣẹ Olúwa, ayé ẹ má tuwò

Mi ò rọ l’ọwọ́ rọ l’èsè, Àyìnlá irọ́ l’ọ́ jasi
 B’omódé wá mi d’Àgbàdò, Àyìnlá, á bá mi ní lé
 Wọn rò pé mo kú, inú ọ́tá n’ dùn, wọn bá ra ewúré wálé
 Orí ewúré tí ẹ ní rí m’ọ́lẹ́ á dá a yí n l’ẹ́jọ́

1 For a discussion on Fuji music, see Barber and Waterman (1995).

*Ayé ẹ má torí ẹ̀mi Àyìnlá lọ jáwé sí ná;
 Ẹ dákun ẹ má torí ẹ̀mi Àyìnlá lọ jáwé sí ná
 Bí a bá rí ẹ̀ni tí ó torí ẹ̀mi Àyìnlá lọ jáwé sí ná,
 Kò ní kú kò ní run, á dẹ̀ kàn máa gbáyé lásán.
 Yó wulẹ̀ gbáyé lásán, yó wulẹ̀ gbáyé lásán.
 Ẹ má má gbé mi hánu o, ẹ gbé mii' lẹ̀ o
 Ẫgbà tá o lọ sí Amẹ̀ríkà, àwọn kan n' bú wa o
 Ẫgbà tá a tún lọ sí Amẹ̀ríkà, àwọn kan bí nú
 Kí ní a ẹ̀ máa táyẹ̀ lórùn, ẹ̀ ẹ̀láyẹ̀ fún wa o
 Ẹ má má pá o, Ẹ má má pa Háji Kollington, kò ẹ̀ yí n o...*

“They” said I was dead, the noise well all over the world
 The news reverberated throughout Nigeria
 Kolawole did not die, you lie, Kolawole did not die
 When you get to Alagbado, you will find him living like a king
 Whatever you like you can say, say what you will
 It did not just start, it’s not new
 You have said this before, say what you will
 Ayinla will not die, I will grow older and have all that makes one’s elderly
 status revered
 All of us will not die, we will all grow old and grow into an elderly status
 The person who tries to undo one, only undoes their own self
 When the cattle egret displays its immaculate plumage
 The pigeon envies for nothing
 Bringing people to disrepute cannot stop the work of God

“They” consulted the oracle and the medicine man
 “They” ran fruitless errands because of Kola
 The work of God, you should not unravel it
 I did not become paralyzed, Ayinla, it was all lies.
 If a child comes to search for me in Agbado, they will find me at home.
 “They” thought I was dead, my enemy rejoiced, they bought a goat and
 brought it home
 The head of the goat that you bury (for rituals) will judge you
 People, do not because of me, Ayinla carry out evil machinations
 Please do not do it because you hate me
 If anyone should carry out evil designs against me,
 He will neither die nor rot away, s/he will merely exist in the world
 They will merely exist without living, they will merely exist without living
 Stop hanging me between your lips, drop me

When we have not gone to the United States, some people insulted us
Now that we have gone to the United States, some are jealous
How do we satisfy the world, please explain to us?
Do not kill him, do not kill Alhaji Kollington, he has not offended you.

Kollington does not merely stop at providing news of his condition, he also uses the opportunity to magnify himself in several ways. First, he is a Yorùbá singer whose fandom and immense popularity are, for the most part, limited to the Southwestern part of Nigeria, where the Yorùbá people predominantly live. However, he uses his song to build a perception that extends the sphere of his cultural influence to the world, while treating his fame in Nigeria as a subset of a global one. Then he goes on to tell his followers that in his home in Alagbado, Lagos, he lives like a king. He shrugs off his enemies and undercuts their importance by stating that they could keep reporting whatever they choose about him, but he will only continue to succeed. He will live long and be conferred with an elderly status—which of course includes long life, prosperity, sound health, and integrity—and even though he did not state it explicitly, this wish would be executed by providence, to the chagrin of his enemies. He prays for his listeners too, wishing success for all of them. By doing so, he invites them into the position of the “self” that joins him to counter his “other.” Thus, when they echo the song or sing along with him, they momentarily occupy the space he has cleared as the besieged protagonist of the narration. When they sing the song, the lyrics and the beleaguered mood they generate helps them appropriate (and weaponize) the persona of the protagonist that the singer constructed.

Then, for the second part, Kollington begins to narrate the actions of his enemies. Like Agwuele stated, *won* in the Yorùbá language supposes an enemy—or groups of them—who are definitively summed up under a collective pronoun. In this instance, Kollington refers to those who are working endlessly to conspire against him as *won*, “them.” This “them” could be any number (and the more they are, the more important their victim is), and by stylizing them under the umbrella *won*, he lessens their facelessness. The *won* takes the enemy from being an amorphous group that exists in the mind of a paranoid Yorùbá person and turns them into an army of people motivated by nothing else than sheer hate. Kollington, like the average Yorùbá person who sums up his/her enemy under *won* conjures the image of a group of people who hate him for no other reason than that he has exceptionally succeeded in his career and they will go to any extent to ruin him. These people, he informs the audience, are so invested in crashing his shining star that they went on several errands, all of which have been fruitless because God was on his side. He goes on to accuse his enemies of not only going from one Babaláwo

to the next, but they also carry out fetish rituals involving animal sacrifices which, in Yorùbá culture, have profound significances (Awolalu, 1973; Prince 1975; Zeitlin, 1966).

Beyond the summation of his enemies under *won*, there is also a graphic description of his enemies' action against him. They do not just want him dead and scheme towards achieving this goal; they were so convinced that their mission had become accomplished. They presumed, Kollington accused, that he had become paralyzed and was dead. The said enemies did not wait for the news to break officially, they went to town with the news, and it so spread everywhere that his house was besieged by fans and well-wishers. For his Yorùbá audience who share a similar frame of cultural reference with him, these accusations and Kollington's imagined reconstructions of the enemy action—going to Babaláwo and burying live animals as a ritual sacrifice—will resonate deeply. They are not likely to question whether he was a witness to the ritual activities carried out to ruin him; as Yorùbá people who collectively believe in the ubiquity of enemies, it just makes sense that some people would want to annihilate a well-known singer like Kollington and will invest useful resources to do so. The song not only resonates with them, it also gives them an armament against their own enemies and antagonizers. The song thus becomes imbued with a supernatural performative force, *àṣẹ*, (Jones, 2015) that is useful for speaking back to the ever-present transcendent power that might be working against them.

Through his narration of their actions, and his eventual triumph over them, Kollington achieved some things: drum up the scale of his cultural significance, establish that he was important enough as a cultural icon to warrant spiritual attacks, send subtle warning messages to anyone else who might not like him and wish him evil, pronounce judgment on his enemies, flaunt his immunity to their schemes to establish his spiritual dominance (and also that his own spiritual fortifiers were more powerful), and remind every listener that he had been to the United States (a status symbol at the time and which he sang about effusively in another album). Overall, Kollington marshals social, economic, spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic resources to build a narrative against his enemies to ultimately promote himself as a star and a musical icon. This is, of course, not to reduce Kollington's songs about his enemies to a mere manipulation of the audience; the fear of the enemy that he evokes in the song is consonant with cultural beliefs. In recent media interviews, Kollington, though much older and semi-retired from singing, still expresses the same fear of enemies and spiritual attacks, thus confirming that his songs are a product of deeply embedded beliefs (Lawal 2017). As stated earlier, the fear of enemies' scheme is an integral part of the Yorùbá imagination; people are always both on the defense against them and are also

preemptive of their hatred. They channel their thoughts, words, and actions towards revoking whatever manipulation and mischief the enemy has going. Allan Moore suggests that in dissecting the audience's listening to the singer's narration, it is more helpful to not think of the singer as singing directly to the listener but to think of the singer as projecting a persona, an artifice that may or may not be congruent with reality (Moore, 2013). In the case of Kollington, he projects to his audience the persona of a renowned artist facing persecution just like other great people in history have done at some point.

However, countering the enemy is not always a reactionary effort or—as the example of Kollington showed—directed at the enemy and to the hearing of the audience. In some other instances, it is triangulated: directed at God against the enemy and to the hearing or witness of the audience. One example is King Sunny Adé's *jùjú* music song, *Ayé Ñ Retí Eléyà*, on his album, *Odù*.

Ayé n' retí eléyà mi ò, wòn n' retí eléyà mi o, l'ójojúmó
Wòn ti kóra wòn jò o láti pègàn mi
Wòn ní mi ò mò ju ilé adúra l'ójojúmó
Bí wòn rí mi l'òná ilé adúra, wòn á máa pègàn mi
Wòn á ní, ó tún ti n' ló
Wòn á ní, olójú rogodo bí iná òkò, olórí gbeske
È wá wò ó, oní ranu, a jeyin awó. Ó tún ti n' ló!
Wòn á tún máa bú mi pé, Bàbá adúra, rora máa gbèsè o
È mi ná n' bá wí yèn ò, Olórùn mi.
Şe o wá má a wò mí ní ran?
Má jẹ kí ogun ayé bómí mọlẹ
Jẹ k'ènu mi gbọrò l'ójú ọtá mi
Jẹ n lè sọ fún wòn wí pé ì wò nì kan loba n'lá
Lójú elégàn, Baba pòn mi le
Lójú wòn, dákun, dá mi lólá lópòlopò
Èyí ni mo fẹ o, Olórùn mi
Dákun wá gbè mí ní jà
Ní torí wí pé, ì wo ni kì í dójú ti ni.

The world awaits my shame, daily they await my shame
 “They” have bunched together to backbite about me
 “They” say I do not know more than visit the house of prayer daily
 When “they” see me on the way to the house of prayer, they begin to badmouth me
 “They” say, “there he goes again!”
 “They” say, his eyes are round like the car headlights, see his head!
 Come and see the time waster, there, he goes again!

They also sneer at me thus: Man of prayer, walk majestically.
 I am the one they are talking about, my God!
 Will you now just sit back and watch me humiliated?
 Let my mouth also hold words in the company of my enemies
 Let me be able to show them that you are the great king
 Before their eyes, honor me
 In their very presence, let me be greatly honored
 This is what I want, dear Lord please be my advocate
 Because you are the one who never lets one be shamed

Like Kollington, Sunny Adé sets a narrative around his enemies, those who mock him, not only as a successful public figure and musical icon, but also for his devotion to God. He shares a detailed account of their mockery of him or his persona. Rather than targeting his enemies, Sunny Adé reports their persecution of him directly to God so He can vanquish them on his behalf. In formulating his enemies, Sunny Adé posits himself as the protagonist, one whose antagonists unabashedly humiliate, a meek person, yet a vessel so significant that his battles are taken over by God Himself. His lowliness is, however, not a consistent persona, it is a put on he needs to make a case against his enemies and appeal to God for vindication. The audience too, by singing along, gets a projected imagery of their selves as protagonists of their narrative.

In another of his songs, *Get Up*, Sunny Adé not only scripts the schemes of his enemy, he uses evocative language that will resonate with his Yorùbá-speaking audience:

Orí mi tó tayọ, ló yà òtá lénu o
È dá mi tó tayọ ló n jọ wón lójú
Iṣé mi tó gbayì ló yọ òtá lénu
Orí mi tó sunwòn ló n jọ wón lójú
Emi náà kọ o, Oba Olúwa mà ni
...ògá ògo ló bá mi ṣe...
Iná tí ẹ dá, kì í ṣe fún wa rárá
È k'ẹyẹ m'ògbó, ẹ f'íná s'óko yíká
Àkèré wọ'dò ẹ lée fẹ fi iná le jáde
Ohun tí ò le bọsí i, òun lẹ n ra'wó lé
È lé wa tíí, Olúwa ò fún-un yin ṣe

My joyful destiny surprises my enemy
 My joyful providence amazes them
 My honored career bothers my enemy

My good luck amazes them
None of this is me, it is the doing of the Lord the King
...the king of glory has done this for me...
The fire you lit, is not for us
You ambushed the bird; you trapped it by setting the farm on fire.
The toad runs into the river, you want to use fire to draw it out
All your machinations will be fruitless
You have hounded us; but God has frustrated your schemes

Sunny Adé's narration of the "they" that haunts him might have religious undertones, but it is not necessarily religious. The more religious—and I dare say extreme—examples of Yorùbá people constructing their subjectivity and identity based on the hatred their enemy has for them would come from contemporary churches. In religious houses of *all* faiths, the Yorùbá beliefs about enemies form the armature of religious rituals such as prayers. From mosque to shrines, where traditional religious forms are practiced, to contemporary churches, especially those of Aládurà and Pentecostal traditions, people battle their enemies who they believe are in contention for their destinies. One of the churches best known for this is Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church (MFM), a church in southwest Nigeria founded by Dr. Daniel Olukoya, and devoted to unceasing prayer activities all year round (Asaju, 2010; Ugwu-eye and Uzuegbunam, 2013). For this essay, I reviewed at least a dozen of the books/pamphlets published by the church to analyze how they understand the enemy and how they position the enemy's hatred in relation to themselves. The books are *Prayer Passport to Crush Oppression* (2006), *Smite the Enemy* (2013), *Taking the Battle to the Enemy's Gate* (2011), *Stop Them Before They Stop You* (2009), *When You are Knocked Down* (2000), and *Too Hot to Handle* (2001).²

Each of the texts burrows into the deeply held fear among Yorùbá people that they are being surveilled by supernatural powers, that their destiny can be stolen, and that they have to wrestle their enemy continuously, so they do not fall prey to the enemy's machinations. They are urged to pray unceasingly imprecatory prayers to destroy the enemy who is *definitely* in pursuit of them. Their ways of dealing with the enemy can be characterized—more or less—as an obsession because their prayers, worship, and other ritual activities are built around the enemy they want to destroy through imprecations. Scholarship has long investigated the problem of reconciling Christian ethics with the violence of imprecatory prayers, particularly ones that come with the book of Psalms (Adamo 2008; Buttici, 2013). Despite the ethical argument

2 The books are all published by the church, MFM, Lagos.

about loving one's neighbor, churches suspend the religious injunction that urges them to love their enemies as themselves. Instead, they pray imprecatory prayers against them because they believe those enemies simply *cannot* be loved (Wariboko 2014).

In Nigeria, imprecatory prayers have become a fixture in many Aládurá churches but MFM took it up several notches higher by building their spiritual energy and industry around the enemy and their desire for victory over them. In one of the many anecdotes Olukoya shared about the enemy attacking the Christian, he gives a somewhat detailed picture of how the enemy operates against the Christian.

A brother once had a serious problem. Everything turned upside down in his life and he did not know what to do about the situation. He became confused and tired of living. However, God gave him a revelation after a session of aggressive prayer warfare. The Lord took him to a graveyard in his dream. An angel of God led him to a particular grave and smote it three times and asked the occupier of the grave to come out and hand over what he took from the brother when she was alive. The woman obeyed. That was how the brother collected from the wicked woman his virtue which was as good as forgotten. This brother's example shows that you can recover your blessings from the grave even if the person that stole it died years ago (Olukoya).

At the end of the chapter, Olukoya offers the following prayer points to the reader:

...I release my blessings from the hands of any dead relatives, in the name of Jesus
 I withdraw my blessings from the hands of all dead enemies, in the name of Jesus
 Every unfriendly friend, be exposed, in the name of Jesus...
 I reject the plans and agenda of the enemies against my life, in the name of Jesus.
 Let every weapon and evil design against me fail totally, in the name of Jesus...
 I cancel the plans and the mark of the enemy upon my life, in the name of Jesus...

This pattern—stories about enemy action and therapy through prayers—is repeated through the book and in fact, through his entire book collections. As earlier indicated, anecdotes about enemy schemes against one's destiny

and subsequent imprecatory prayers are a common phenomenon in Yorùbá churches. However, in the case of the MFM, there is a lot more commentary on their mode of engaging the enemy—balancing beliefs, thoughts, and philosophy that are latent in Yorùbá cosmology with Judeo-Christian practices to offer contemporary Yorùbá people a familiar means of dealing with the problem of the enemy. What is often left out of the analyses, scholarly or otherwise, is how the MFM feeds its congregation with the ideas of who they are, what they mean in this world, and how to sustain that impression of themselves through the creation of an enemy—a foil—which they need to create to maintain the imaging of their own selves. The belief that the enemy is perennially in pursuit of them stimulates the feeling of being permanently embattled *all their lives* and that they—as children of God—have the duty to triumph, is an orientation and socialization process that forms their lifelong subjectivity. To be a member of a church that sees demonic activity and antagonism by the enemy in virtually every mundane human activity is to see oneself as constantly under siege from these forces. To consider oneself as always under siege ultimately enhances one's perception of self-worth because it translates to one having a life, destiny, providence or good fortune that makes one attractive to contending forces. The irony is apparent: their enemy's hatred and fear of the action the enemy will take against them convinces them of their worth.

Conclusion

This essay inquired as to why the fear of the enemy is so prevalent among Yorùbá people as it is expressed in their popular and religious cultures. This worldview has profound implications on the way Yorùbá people understand and articulate issues that affect their mental, physical, social, and general well-being. I, however, note that the demonstrable fear of the enemy among Yorùbá people also stimulates their creativity when they fashion ways of protecting themselves from those enemies. That way, Yorùbá people use an amalgam of language and imageries to imagine the faceless and formless enemy into a being that can be conquered. By looking at two aspects of Yorùbá culture—popular music and religion, I demonstrated that Yorùbá people also employ the image of the enemy they generate to build their own image as the protagonist of their life narration. This essay encourages that the Yorùbá conception of the enemy be viewed beyond tropes of superstition, fear, and other seemingly irrational behaviors for an understanding of self-making and identity formation.

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