The Transition from Yorùbá Metaphysics to Islamic Aesthetics in Ọlánrewájú Adépojù’s Poetry

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Abstract
This paper explores the poetry of Ọlánrewájú Adépojù, a major contemporary Yorùbá poet, based in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria. Much of the scholarship on the poet focuses purely on his sociopolitical interest, but the development of his craft has been largely ignored. This paper examines peculiar features of Adépojù’s poetry based on its fusion of Yorùbá cultural and Islamic religious values with the view to theoretically characterizing his practice. It draws on purposefully selected, recorded audio poetic compositions of Adépojù produced between 1974 and 2012 in order to yield a comprehensive view of his poetics. It employs hybridity, an aspect of postcolonial theory advanced by Homi Bhabha, as a theoretical framework to analyze the texts. The essay reveals that Adépojù’s poetry grows from the simple narration of the Yorùbá traditional worldview, identity, and òrìṣà pantheon to become an instrument of radical Islamic ideology. It concludes that the integration of the indigenous and the Islamic cultural values in the work of Adépojù results in a unique poetic idiom in Yorùbá poetry.

Introduction
Adépojù’s work represents an important phase in the development of modern Yorùbá poetry because of his pioneering role in the dissemination of Yorùbá poetry through audio recordings. He is one of the most prolific and influential practitioners of modern Yorùbá poetry. Adépojù’s poetry is also unique because of the complexity of his immersion in Yorùbá artistic conventions and Islamic values. This confluence has resulted in a variant of
Yorùbá poetry that is uniquely his. His corpus includes a published Yorùbá poetry collection, two dramatic texts, and eighty-nine recorded performances on phonograph records, cassettes, and compact discs. Although Adépojù is best known to the Yorùbá-speaking public as a radio poet and one who circulates modern Yorùbá poetry on discs, the impact of his poetry spreads to the larger Nigerian context on account of its social relevance. He creatively adapts his practice to changing modes in media usage and technological innovations.

Despite being the most articulate promoter of modern Yorùbá poetry, Adépojù has been largely marginalized by scholars. A holistic and comprehensive engagement of Ọlánrewájú Adépojù’s poetry, emphasizing the hybrid nature, has not been done. Paying attention to this unexplored area enhances the understanding of the complex dynamics in Adépojù’s poetry and broadens its recognition within the context of the larger Yorùbá poetic tradition. This paper, therefore, pays attention to what he has produced, how his poetry has evolved, and his idea of a poet.

The first effort that brought attention to Adépojù’s poetry is a study of another Yorùbá poet, Adébayò Fáláítí: A Study of His Poems, by Olatunde Olatunji. He identifies Ọlánrewájú Adépojù as an example of a commercial poet and also portrays him as lacking originality in his compositions. Adéyínká Fólórunṣó adopts a similar outlook, degrading the significance of Adépojù’s poetry and assailing his adherence to sociopolitical engagements and praise-singing. A considerable amount of literature has also investigated Adépojù’s contribution alongside other Yorùbá cultural producers regarding the popular struggle against military rule in Nigeria (Williams 1996, Haynes 2001, Oluḵọtún 2002, Adágunodo 2003, and Ojó 2007). More recent studies demonstrate that there is more to Adépojù’s poetry than many critical studies have recognized (Nnodim 2002, Okunoye 2010). The present essay provides a distinctive approach from previous attempts through its reading of Adépojù’s poetry based on its hybrid constitution. This perspective explains why the notion of hybridity, emanating from a postcolonial theoretical perspective associated with Homi Bhabha, is appropriate for the engagement of Adépojù’s work. The concept of hybridity in the context of the essay is a modification of the original conception in Bhabha’s thought in the sense that its conventional insertion within postcolonial theory did not necessarily anticipate its application beyond the colonial context. The collision of Islam and the Yorùbá tradition in shaping Adépojù’s unique poetic idiom lends itself to this reading and only reveals how the idea of hybridity operates beyond the spheres of conventional postcolonial studies.

The notion of hybridity has been broadened from its manifestation in relation to object, plant, or person of mixed origins to include ‘anything of
heterogeneous origins or incongruous parts. Postcolonial hybridity as proposed by Homi Bhabha explores the collision and fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct cultures, identities, forms, styles, or ideas. The location of the representation of identity in Bhabha’s work is the ‘threshold of the border,’ an ‘in-between,’ ‘beyond,’ and a newly constructed space. Bhabha’s conceptualization of hybridity as “the borderline work of culture” suggests the possibility of utilizing available resources for double perspectives, juxtaposition, and integration. The cultural interactions may not necessarily be smooth, as hybridity is a cold war, involving intricate processes of cultural contact, intrusion, fusion, and disjunction. The question of the identity of the artist/poet/intellectual frequently arises as one negotiates the intersection of an art that speaks from ‘two places at once’ in a rapidly changing society.

Apart from Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, this essay also finds relevant Ali Mazrui’s attribution of the nature of African cultural influence to a ‘triple heritage’—the traditional, the Islamic, and the Western. Mazrui’s perspective exposes the theoretical apprehension of the postcolonial identity and creates a basis for our discussion in the sense of admitting that the influence of foreign culture significantly defines identities in a postcolonial context. Mazrui’s work on the triple heritage is complemented by Edward Said’s argument that, because of imperialism, ‘all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid.’ Hybridity, therefore, constitutes an essential aspect of postcolonial context, as it rejects cultural confinement and reaches out to forms of expression and experiences beyond established boundaries.

Adépojú is a complex and multifaceted personality. He is an author, poet, Islamic preacher, and founder of an Islamic sect. He is the most self-conscious propagator of ewi (modern Yorùbá poetry), a vibrant and dynamic form that he enlists for the articulation of Yorùbá values, cultural nationalism, and identity. In recognition of his contribution to Yorùbá culture, he has been conferred with the traditional title of Ààrẹ Aláṣà (custodian of culture) of Ibadan in southwestern Nigeria in 1984 by the 37th Olubadan of Ibadan, the late Oba Yesufu Asanike.

Studying the many different shades of Adépojú’s artistic influence is vital for understanding the development of his identity. A proper comprehension of his art must recognize the influences of the Yorùbá socio-culture, his interaction with Western literacy and media, and the interaction with Wahhabi-inspired Islam. His birth and early life in the very traditional and cultural environment of the Yorùbá has become a feature that resonates in his works.

1 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.
2 Ibid., 217.
3 Ali Mazrui, The Africans: A Triple Heritage (New York: Little Brown and Co, 1986), 13.
4 Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).
He frequently declares, self-assuredly, ‘I grew up independently of any one as a poet.’5 His parents did not send him to school because they were illiterates and did not value Western education. But he learned to read and write in both Yorùbá and English through self-effort. His participation in communal celebrations and traditional festivals contributed to his mastery of the verses of Yorùbá divinities, including Ìfá Ọ̀rűnmìlà (divination deity), Ògún (deity of Iron), Ṣàngó (deity of thunder), and the ancestral cult at an early stage. This traditional link is evident in his only poetry collection, Ìrònú Akéwi, which is framed in the idiom of an accomplished oral poet.

Although Adépọ̀jù is a ‘local intellectual,’ his contact with Western literacy is highly significant to his identity formation. His successful attempt at overcoming the limitation of illiteracy and the attainment of the position of an accomplished modern Yorùbá poet, testify to a life of resilience and sheer determination. The acquisition of Western literacy enables him to strengthen his self-conscious identity as a ‘modern’ Yorùbá poet. The interaction of the oral and the written makes ewí ‘modern’ because only those poets who can read and write in Yorùbá practice it.6 Adépọ̀jù’s exposure to functional literacy granted him the opportunity to interact with the first generation of modern Yorùbá poets and the first elite cluster of university-educated people in Yorùbálánd. The poetry group Ègbé Èkèwì Yorùbá, which was established in Ibadan in 1958, and which later became Ègbé Ìjìnlẹ Yorùbá (Yorùbá Renaissance Society), fostered creative efflorescence through reading sessions, discussions, and the publication of a literary magazine, Olókun, which defined the character of modern Yorùbá poetry. It was this environment that nourished Adépọ̀jù to early maturity as a poet, after he had worked with Adéagbo Akinjògbìn, one of the co-founders of the Yorùbá poetry society, as a houseboy.

New opportunities for creative development emerged through Adépọ̀jù’s position as a freelance presenter at the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service/Television (WNBS/TV) in 1964. His interaction with Adébáyọ̀ Fáléti, an ‘elder poet,’ provided Adépọ̀jù the best opportunity to exhibit his talent. The poet dexterously appropriated the broadcasting media outlets of radio and television to strengthen his art and to gain public recognition. Adépọ̀jù left broadcasting in 1974 and established a recording studio and a record label, Lanrad Records. The decision enabled him to appropriate the technology of broadcasting media to the practice of reading ewí on cassettes and discs, which represented a quick adeptness in knowledge transfer by the poet. He effectively

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5 Stephen Ogundipe, Interview with Chief Olanrewaju Adepoju, in “Hybridity and the Construction of Olanrewaju Adepoju’s Poetry,” PhD diss., Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 2015), 270–75.
6 Adeagbo Akinjogbin, Ewi Iwoyi. Glasgow: Collins, 1969.
employed a peculiar form of address and creatively adapted a commercial model for his practice of *ewi* as testimonies of his link with modernity. He also created a wider scope of sociopolitical engagement for his poetry, which was impossible at the government-controlled media establishment. In addition, the relatively inexpensive technology of records, cassettes, and CDs made his poetry to be more accessible to many people, and this action inevitably popularized Yorùbá poetry. The dissemination of commercially produced *ewi* on LPs provided an alternative channel to the audience, who could intersperse *ewi* and music in their listening enjoyment.

The most distinct expression of the character of Adépòjú’s poetry came through the change of religion from Christianity to Islam in 1985. Following his acceptance of Islam, there has been a considerable change in his religious perspective. His exposure to Islamic fundamentalism resulted in changes in religious values, attitudes, and expressive modes, and in his understanding of the function of poetry. This outlook is reflected in the transformation of his poetry from mostly Yorùbá myths and spirituality (lyrics of the Ifa oracle) to Islamic sermon (*nàsíà*). His establishment of an Islamic sect, the Universal Muslim Brotherhood (*Jam’iyyatil-Ukwatil-Islamtitil Aalamiyah*), was inspired by the religious fundamentalist precepts and teachings of the Wahhabis, the official religious group of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabis are a movement of Islamic thought that was inaugurated by Ibn Hanbal (780–855) with the aim of establishing a new social movement in which Islam holds a prominent place.7 The Wahhabis also operate under the rubric of the Salafis,8 in view of their call for a ‘return of Islam to the standard of the Prophet.’9

The conventional understanding of Islam among Muslims often invokes the religion as a timeless, unchanging, and universal faith. The common identity as Muslims is fostered through the Arabic language, the Holy Quran, the Hadith, and the five pillars of Islam. In spite of this transnational identity as Muslims, several scholars agree that the assumption of roots in a uniform, singularly orthodox form of Islam is incapable of accounting for the wide range of conflicting cultural practices and viewpoints (see Gellner 1981, Asad 1986, Starrett 1997, Soares and Otaeye 2007, and Loimeier 2013). An alternative proposition is the paradigm of multiple cultures and societies in which elements of Islamic religion and cultures are integrated into a plurality

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7 Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Plainfield: American Trust, 1994).

8 The Salafis were the first three generations that represented the golden age of Islam. They were often referred to as Islamic ‘predecessors,’ ‘pious ancestors,’ ‘pious successors’ of the Holy Prophet.

9 This is the idiom of those who venerate the Salafis. It derives from the idea of weaving a future out of a distant past.
of local contexts, suggesting local adaptation of Islam (Geertz 1968, El-Zein 1977, Harrow 1991, and Loimeier 2013). According to Loimeier, Islam is too diverse to support the idea of a single expression. He, therefore argues for the localization of Islam within specific communities such as ‘Hausa Islam’ or ‘Yoruba Islam,’ suggesting multiple faces of Islam. While the ‘localized’ Islam is assimilative in character, the ‘orthodox’ Islam assumes a pure form canvassed through the ideology of various Islamic reformist movements, including the Wahhabis, the Salafis, and other Islamic fundamentalists. The tension between the two sets of polarities is central to the understanding of Adépojù’s ambiguous relationship between Yorùbá culture and Islam.

Adépojù considers himself as a professional Yorùbá poet and claims the self-conscious title of ‘king of Yorùbá poets.’ His contemporaries and critics refer to him either as a commercial poet or a scavenger poet. Adépojù has been left out of serious consideration of Yorùbá creative practice because of his commercialization of Yorùbá poetry. His being a ‘professional’ poet is contrary to the dispositions of the first generation of modern Yorùbá poets, who are scholar-poets, including Adéagbo Akínjògbìn, Adébóyè Babalọlá, Adébáyọ Fálétí, Láwuyi Ogúnníran, Afolábí Òlábímtàn, and Olatunbosún Òládápọ. The first generation of modern Yorùbá poets was the first elite cluster of university-educated people, who stirred up a wave of creative activity through the Yorùbá poetry group Êgbẹ Ìkéwì Yorùbá. The poetry group fostered and developed a new guild of Yorùbá poets through reading sessions, discussions, and the publishing of a literary magazine, Olókun and Ewì Èwòyí, the Yorùbá anthology of poetry.

The ambivalent relationship of Adépojù’s vocation of a professional Yorùbá poet with his Islamic fundamentalist identity constitutes another source of pressure on the development of his practice. Several forceful Islamic theologians, including Hajar al-Haythami and Al Qaradawi consider poetry as haram (prohibited). These scholars completely reject the acceptability of poetry in Islam, warning of its hidden dangers. Al Qaradawi, for example, expresses a strong disapproval of poetry, describing it as ‘an effeminate occupation, not fitting to virile characters; a game and a diversion unbecoming of religious and serious men.’ Haythami similarly connects practicing poetry to moral and social vices, suggesting that composing panegyrics with poetic figures of speech and living as a professional poet are unacceptable in Islam.

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10 Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa; A Historical Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
11 Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Plainfield: American Trust, 1994), 2.
12 Islamic fundamentalism is generally averse to music, poetry, and artistic works.
Considering the fact that Adépọ́jù earns his living from poetry and composes panegyrics with poetic figures of speech, there is a contradiction between his engagement of Yorùbá poetry and Islamic fundamentalism. Muslims generally believe that faith and work are inseparable; being a Muslim is part of daily life. Adépọ́jù’s self-definition, therefore, constantly navigates between the Yorùbá and Islamic frames of reference. Moreover, his claim of being a ‘Yorùbá’ poet has been largely questioned by his admirers because of his extremist Islamic ideology. This reservation has been reflected in his poor album sales recently. His upbraiding of Yorùbá Muslim clerics for commoditizing religion equally alienates him from the mainstream Muslims. He is, therefore, too deep in Islam to be a Yorùbá poet. His experience vividly illustrates the interstices of a postcolonial identity.

Adépọ́jù, however, justifies his practice as a Yorùbá poet, declaring, ‘as long as ewi is not against God, there is nothing wrong with it’.13 He envisions Yorùbá poetry as an instrument of preaching in such a way to impart understanding of religion. His position is informed by the dynamics of Yorùbá society, which is remarkably tolerant and liberal in religious matters. Yorùbá society encourages the co-existence of traditional beliefs and other religions. And this prospect invariably makes Islam in Yorùbáland to be unique, compared to other places. Perhaps, this is why it is frequently said that bó ti wu ni làá se imàle ēni (people are free to practice Islam the way they want).

Although Adépọ́jù’s engagement of the very medium of poetry is problematic, his decision to communicate his Islamic spirituality in expressive terms through what he calls ‘jihad poetry’ is another vexatious matter. This genre suggests his double identity as a Yorùbá poet and Islamic preacher. 'Jihad poetry,' according to the poet, is ‘making poetry in line with the wishes of Almighty Allah.’14 The poet vividly demonstrates the outlook of a poet-preacher through the rendering of several poems promoting many aspects of the Islamic faith such as Sharia law, equity, humility, submission to authority, and social justice. He also speaks on Muslims beliefs, the oneness of God, names and attributes of God, last days, destiny, predestination, and the revelation of the Quran.

The intercultural tension is reflected further in the poet’s advocacy for the destruction of artworks and sculptures erected in Nigerian cities. There are numerous statues of legendary warriors erected in several Yorùbá cities. The call for the destruction of these artworks contradicts the cultural rights of a people. The video footage demonstrating the continuous destruction of

13 Ogundipe, 279.
14 Ogundipe, 280.
heritage sites in Iraq by Islamists provides a remarkable insight into the possibilities inherent in the anti-arts and crafts disposition of Ọlànrewájú Adépọjù. Although what is regarded as an artwork could be a result of a dominant discourse establishing its values; artefacts, creative works, festivals, and expressive arts constitute important aspects of a people's cultural heritage, of which oral poetry is also a vital part. Adépọjù apparently fails to recognize the link between creativity/culture and religion.

Ọlànrewájú Adépọjù takes very seriously the sociopolitical complexities of contemporary Nigerian society. He claims to be a public intellectual as a poet, 'speaking the truth to those in power,'15 and exhibiting an uncanny passion for the well-being of the poor and the less-privileged. His poetry transcends any private emotion as he consciously addresses his works to trend within his immediate Yorùbá society and at the national level, providing a national character to his artistic imagination. Adépọjù appears to recognize ewi as a vehicle to propagate a creed. According to him, 'constructive and stout defense of social good form [is] the primary mandate of my poetry.'16 But this altruism is hardly the case at all time.

Adépọjù's poetry is also characterized by ambivalences, inconsistencies in sociopolitical and human rights commentaries. He reinforces a narrow, minimal perspective on human rights that derives ultimately from his fundamentalist Islamic ideas. The poet also supports the restriction of women from the public sphere and of the freedom of religion of ọrìsà worshippers. In Ọfin Ọlórun (God's Commandment) Adépọjù declares:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ọfin tí Olúwa mí ṣe lórí àwọn obìnrin} \\
\text{Nínála ni, ó tóbi yéye} \\
\text{Èèwò nálá ni} \\
\text{Kí obìnrin máa bá wa sòró láwújo} \\
\text{Èni tó bá fè} \\
\text{Kó gbọ, kó ṣe oriire}
\end{align*}
\]

God’s law regarding women
It is unusual and very firm
It is a forbidden thing
For a woman to address men in public
If you like
Do listen and be blessed

15 Edward Said, *Representation of the Public Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1994), 85.
16 Ogundipe, 277.
His call for the enforcement of Sharia as a legal alternative similarly negates freedom of religion and human rights that he eloquently promotes. His public display of Islamic piety and fundamentalist ethos considerably affects his vision of the poet as public spokesperson with respect to social justice and good governance. His initial aversion to religious extremism in Má Gba wèrè Mésìn (Do Not Be a Religious Extremist) has been replaced with religious intolerance through his condemnation of other religions. The interaction of indigenous poetic conventions and received religious ideology has resulted in split identities and contradictions in his artistic engagement. The effect of such a decision has continued to affect the criticism of Adépọ̀jù’s poetry. The emergence of the foregoing trends in the artistic development of Adépọ̀jù is vividly illustrated in the subsequent paragraphs as we engage the two phases of his practice.

**Early Poetry: Yorùbá Metaphysics**

The early poetry of Adépọ̀jù encompasses the period 1972–1985. The period saw the publication of the poetry collection Ìrónu Akéwí in 1972 and the first decade of his production of audio recordings of his poetry. It was a time of experimentation with traditional oral forms and musical instruments. The experimentation largely derived from the adaptation of Yorùbá oral poetic forms such as Ifá (divination poetry), rára (chanting), ọfọ (incantation), and ṣàngó pípe (praise chants to Ṣàngó) to his poetry. These oral forms were largely mixed with ideas drawn from the Yorùbá traditional worldview, identity, and òrìṣà pantheon.

The 1972 collection Ìrónu Akéwí reveals how the values that drive Adépọ̀jù’s poetry are closely tied to Yorùbá religion. The poet demonstrates the value of identifying with the Yorùbá pantheon in several ways. The various forms include panegyric performed for Ṣàngó, the Yorùbá divinity of thunder and lightning, in the collection. In Mo Fẹsùn Kàn Ọ̀ (I Accuse You), the poet addresses the manner of rendering his poetry as ‘expelling fire’ like Ọya’s husband. The reference to Ọya’s attributes is probably meant to appropriate the power of the òrìṣà through the expression of its authority (àṣè). The interaction of the poet with Yorùbá religion and philosophy is also evident in the frequent allusions to the Ifá corpus in several poems, including Má Móbùn Sàya (Never Marry a Dirty Woman), Àgbà Ọrọ̀ (Mature Counsel), and Tèmi Yé Mi (I Have My Reasons). In Tèmi Yé Mi, for example, Adépọ̀jù claims ‘mo forin dífá / Ifá ọ̀sè’ (I rendered my song as an Ifa oracle, it came to pass). The idea of connecting his poetry with Ifá metaphysics suggests that he lays claim to esoteric knowledge. There
is also an enthusiastic appeal to children to practice the traditional religion in *Ìgbà Ló Dé* (Times Change). He publicly acknowledges the society of women mediums (witches), *Ìyà mi Òsòròngà*, in the poem *Tèmì Ní Bẹ́ Lára Mí* (I Am Not Infallible). The following verse taken from *Ìgbà Ló Dé* (Times Change) illustrates the Yorùbá religious outlook:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ìgbà ló dé, ìgbà ló dé.} \\
\text{Ọmọ burú títí,} \\
\text{Ọmọ kò níran iṣé tí baba wọn ní ñe.} \\
\text{Ọmọ gọ, gọ, gọ,} \\
\text{Ọmọ kò mòrisà tí baba rẹ̀ nín.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n bọ egúngún elégúngún,} \\
\text{Ọmọ pà tilé wọn run.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n pabì fórisà àjèjì.} \\
\text{Ọmọ kò mòrisà títí baba wọn ní ñe.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n bọ egúngún elégúngún,} \\
\text{Ọmọ pà tilé wọn run.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n pabì fórisà àjèjì.} \\
\text{Ọmọ kò mòrisà títí baba wọn ní ñe.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n bọ egúngún elégúngún,} \\
\text{Ọmọ pà tilé wọn run.} \\
\text{Ọmọ n pabì fórisà àjèjì.} \\
\text{Ọmọ kò mòrisà títí baba wọn ní ñe.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Times change, times change
A child is so perverse,
He does not recall his father’s vocation.
A child is so stupid,
He fails to recognize the deity of his father.
A child is worshipping another person’s masquerade,
The child destroys the lineage’s masquerade.
A child is consulting for a strange deity.
The divinity of a native does not demand for a sacrifice from a stranger.
Worshipping one’s ancestral masquerade only attracts blessing.
You worship only your family divinity.

The appeal to the younger generation to worship the *òrìṣà* and masquerades of their forebears is characteristic of the poet’s disposition in his early poetry. The commentary on the people’s attitude to traditional culture raises the age-old conflict between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity.

The Yorùbá religious outlook additionally finds expression in the invocation of several deities, culture heroes/heroines or ancestors in Yorùbáland in the poem *Ọtítọ Korò* (Truth Is Bitter):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ẹ̀yìn alágbára nílè Yorùbá!} \\
\text{Tię ti débugbé dótó} \\
\text{Ẹ mà sùn lọrùn}
\end{align*}
\]
Eni pé ki n kú
Gbogbo wọn pátá
Kó fọwọ ara wọn sera wọn
Odüà Olófin, Obátálá
Baṣòrun Àjàká Ajèngè-tí-è lè-
Esùùfù kò féri
E wá gbé mi lékè
Gbogbo àwọn abínúèni
Ọkè Ibadan, Àṣàké ọlómú orù
Má sùn
Ọránjú, Olúorogbo,
Sàngó, Lákáayé
E je kásákòkó
Kó màa bá kòkòè gbẹ
Bí a ti rójú pe orí aki ni
Gàáragà la fidà lale.
Eyin Òba aládé méréèrindínlogún
Ìlè Ekiti
E wá gbè mí níjá
Agemọ kí kú ní màjésí n
O dijọ tó bá fòpá rin.

All renowned ancestors in Yorùbáland!
Those who have reached the habitation of truth
Do not be asleep in heaven
Anyone who says I should die
Let everyone
Face the backlash of their actions
Odüà, Olófin, Obátálá
Baṣòrun Àjàká a man of peaceful disposition
The wind does not befriend a drizzle
Come and deliver me
from the plot of the envious.
Ibadan Hill, Àṣàké, the o with large breasts
Do not sleep.
Ọránjú, Olúorogbo,
Sàngó, Lákáayé
Let the one drying cocoa seed

17 Odùduwà, Òrànmiyàn, Àjàká, and Sàngó were the first four Yorùbá rulers who were deified.
Dry in the sun with it
As we invoke the names of heroes
We drag the sword on the floor
You sixteen kings
of Ekiti land
Come and fight for me
*Agemo* does not die young\(^{18}\)
Until he uses a walking stick.

The above poem was a response to the threat that Adepoju received following his unequivocal endorsement of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's candidacy in the poem ‘Obafemi Awolowo’ in 1979. Awolowo was the presidential candidate of Unity Party of Nigeria during the 1979 general elections in Nigeria.

The address to the Yorùbá divinities and culture heroes is a self-identification of the poet with their dynamic nature and absolute reliance on their protective powers. The fact that several divinities are enumerated suggests attempting to harness the range of their traits, mythical origins, and powers as *la force vitale*. The departed ancestors are recognized as great by the Yorùbá for their exemplary deeds, which qualified them for ancestral worship. Among those mentioned in the poem include Odùduwà, the deity of Ile-Ife regarded as the progenitor of the Yorùbá; Sàngó, the deity of thunder and lightning; and Òbatálá, the creator-divinity. Lákáayé refers to Ògún, the ambivalent deity of iron and smiths. Ōkè Ibadàn was the deified ancestor of Ibadan people. Olùorogbo was the only son of Mọrèmí, whose life was offered to save the people of Ile-Ife.\(^{19}\) Òrán yàn was the first king of Òyó, while Ọba Àjáka succeeded Òrán yàn. By mentioning the names of the deities and mythic ancestors, the poet unconsciously provides a platform for their celebration in a culturally meaningful way. In other words, there is a fascination with Yorùbá mythic and legendary figures, whose actions and achievements speak of heroism in Adépojú’s poetry. These heroes and heroines provide a platform to judge the character of the political class, and assess their performance. Due to their past roles in shaping the course of events, the heroic figures seem to be what Toyin Falola refers to as ‘veritable symbols of the national life.’\(^{20}\)

In spite of the seemingly Yorùbá identity in content and form, there is evidence of a pluralistic religious vision in his early poetry. This ambivalent theistic outlook is demonstrated through the poet’s rendering of panegyrics

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\(^{18}\) *Agemo* is an ancestral deity commonly celebrated in Ijebu land.

\(^{19}\) Experts on Ife religious traditions claim that Olùorogbo predates Mọrèmí.

\(^{20}\) Toyin Falola, “Yoruba Writers and the Construction of Heroes,” *History in Africa* 24 (1997), 2.
to Jesus Christ (*Oríkì Jésù*), the Prophet Muhammad (*Oríkì Ànábi*), and Olódùmarè (*Oríkì Olódùmarè*). In *Oríkì Jésù* (In Praise of Jesus), for example, the poet integrates both the Christians' and Muslims' conceptions of Jesus. The Muslims recognize Jesus only as a prophet and not as a Son of God. Contrary to Muslims’ reactions to the Sonship of Jesus, Adépọjù affirms the Christian perception of Jesus as a Son of God in *Oríkì Jésù*. He makes provocative portrayals of Christian and Muslim founders of faith, depicting Jesus as a Prophet (*Àpẹẹrẹ Òjíṣẹ*), suggesting him to be a forerunner of Prophet Muhammad. This depiction of Jesus typically projects Islam’s perception of Jesus, but Christians will definitely find such representation unacceptable. The Being that is eulogized in the poem ‘In Praise of Jesus’ seems to share both Christian and Islamic beliefs:

| Òkan ọso ti Èdùmàrè bì |
|------------------------|
| Tó ju ẹgbẹ̀dógbon ọmọ lọ |
| A -gbẹ́nú -sọlá |
| Ọmọ Òga ìgbà |
| Ọmọ lójú Olúwa |
| Ọmọ aládé àlàáfìà |
| Àpẹẹrẹ Òjíṣẹ |

The only begotten of Edumare  
Greater than five thousand sons  
The one who richly dwells within  
Son of the Most High  
Beloved of the Lord  
Prince of peace  
An example of the Prophet

The construction of a mingled religious persona similarly finds expression in the poet’s composition for Olódùmarè (*The Praise of Olódùmarè*). The poem aggregates creeds and *oríkì* of several divinities in the Yorùbá pantheon, and of Islamic and Christian beliefs. Adépọjù ascribes the attributes of Òrún-milá, the custodian of oracular knowledge, to his idea of the Supreme Being. Specific examples include allusions such as *Èlèrí i Ìpín* (the witness of creation) and *Òpitàn tò mòdì ayé, mòdì ọrun* (the custodian of knowledge that knows the origin/history of heaven and earth). The poem ‘The Praise of Olódùmarè’ similarly contains attributes of Ọjà, the Yorùbá divinity of thunder and lightning. A number of allusions eulogizing the thunder-deity includes *Ò-ké-pàrà solòrò ìjìnìjìnì* (the one that exclaims and the person concerned is terrified), *sángiri, làgiri, òlágiri* (the one that breaks the wall, one that splits
the wall, splitter of walls), and Ọba ̀ á so (the king did not hang). The breaking and ripping of walls is an allusion to thunder strikes and the spirit of fire linked with the Yorùbá thunder divinity.\(^{21}\)

In addition to the cognomens of Yorùbá divinities in ‘The Praise of Olódùmarè,’ the poem contains allusions to the Islamic Shahada (the Oneness of God) such as Ọ ́ kan soso péré ni Ọlọrun (God is one) and Ọba Yáárábi (the King who occupies heaven and earth), which portray an Islamic theistic vision. Adépọjù also alludes to the Christian idea of God, calling the Supreme Being Olúwa (Lord), Ọlọrun (God) and Ọba tíí pe ra rè ní àwa (The King, who calls himself we), which gives an impression of the Christian idea of the Trinity. It then becomes clear that behind Adépọjù’s praises of Olódùmarè is an ambivalent theistic vision in his early poetry.

The fusion is also reflected in the manner of musical accompaniment to Adépọjù’s poetry. Musical accompaniment features prominently in much of Ọlánrewájú Adépọjù’s early poetry. He employed traditional instruments such as the hunter’s flute, dundún drum, and ẹkẹrẹ (rattles). He started with a solo dundún drum accompaniment and subsequently added the hunters’ flute regularly used in the performance of ijálá chanters. He later introduced guitars to his work, providing a sense of visionary response to the popular musical trend and the patronage system of the 1970s. The combination of Western and traditional musical instruments was a demonstration of his embrace of old and new forms.

He stopped using guitars and jùjú beat in 1981 but retained the traditional instruments. He removed the hunter’s flute after his return from Mecca in 1995 and experimented with bẹmibé (similar to the largest of the European drum set) drum used by the Muslim Ajísààrì groups to wake Muslims for the early morning meal during the month of Ramadan. The introduction of the instrument at the critical point in Adépọjù’s career probably signifies an awakening, having just returned from the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. He completely stopped drumming in Ta ní n ̀ Bínú (Who Is Angry?), declaring that his new vision of ewi was irreconcilable with drumming:

\[\text{Iwọ tóo mòwe,}\
\text{Àti àsàyàn ọ̀rọ̀ gbọ́,}\
\text{Jé ki n'kéwi fún ọ.}\
\text{Fifetí sì}\
\text{Fifarabále}\]\
\text{Lewiásıkò yiín fẹ́.}

\(^{21}\) See Akintunde Akinyemi, “Myths, Legends and the Poetics of Heroism in Two Yoruba Historical Plays.” *Ife Journal of Languages and Literature*, 1, 1(2013): 1–15.
O kojá à n’í lùlù sì
Mo fé siná ọgbón bolè
Bí ọwåãwárá ójọ ni
N ọ ti è lùlù séwí mọ
O tó ko yé wa
Etí ò gbéjí
Ilu maa gbéjè
N ọ ní ijó o jó
Ká rétí gbó nàsià.

You that have an understanding of proverbs,
And other carefully chosen words,
Let me render my poems to you.
Careful listening,
Being attentive,
These are the requirements for ewí of the moment.
It does not permit drumming
I want to throttle with words of wisdom
Like the showers of rain
I no longer drum to my poetry
It is fitting for you to know.
There is need for absolute concentration
Let drums be taken away
I am not willing to dance
So as to listen attentively to sermons.

The foregoing marks a turning point in Adépojú’s poetry, representing the transition of his poetry from Ifá orin (lyric of Ifá oracle) to nàsià (sermon). There is a sense of movement from the overtly Yorùbá-myth-informed poetry to that of Islamic aesthetics, a transition from indigenous aesthetics to a foreign one. In doing so, musical accompaniment, which signifies entertainment, was a serious impediment to the new perception and direction of ewí as an Islamic message.

Later Poetry and the Transition to Jihad Poetry

The values that Adépojú propagates after his embrace of Islam are strictly driven by Islamic fundamentalism. He introduces Islamic preaching to Yorùbá poetry, suggesting an art that is concerned with the spiritual well-being of humankind, and individuals’ usefulness in the service of their creator. The manner in which he voices disapproval of religious innovations and what
he calls ‘syncretic’ practices and innovative worship (èsin àdádáàlé) of some Yorùbá Muslims attests to an outlook of religious extremism.

The fundamental Islamic vision becomes apparent through the poet’s conception of a new identity for his poetry known as ‘new jihad poetry’ (jiáàdi orí orí ẹwí tuntun), suggesting ‘a vision of implementing God’s new society on earth’ (Zeidan, 15). The outlook of a ‘jihadist poet’ effectively transforms him into an ‘Islamist warlord.’ His new self-conscious identity of Ajagun Nílá Musulûmí (Commander of Muslims) could be interpreted as an alignment of his ẹwí with propagators of militant Islam. This identity is a striking departure from the earlier religious ecumenism and endorsement of traditional religion. The coming of the ‘war commander’ suggests a vision of a rampaging religious conqueror, whose task is to enforce perfection in the perceived imperfect Islamic practices in his society.

The foregoing outlook probably informs his calls for a reversal of the Sufi-inspired Islamic practices in Yorùbáland as declared in Òfin Ọlọrun (God’s Commandments):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Aránniléti dé!} \\
\text{Olùkilò tó hàn gbangba ni mo jé fáràyé} \\
\text{Lánrewájú dé!} \\
\text{Ajagun ñlá de!} \\
\text{Iró pín.} \\
\text{Àgò yà lónà fún gbgó gbogó alábòosí èsin}
\end{align*}
\]

The prompter is here!  
I am a sure Messenger to the world.  
Lanrewaju is here!  
The war commander is here!  
Deceit has ended.  
Let religious charlatans give way.  
The poet clarifies the nature of the warfare in Tàkúté Ọlọrun (God’s Trap):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ogun kùmò} \\
\text{Ogun àdá kó ni móní wí} \\
\text{Ogun wáàsígbàlà làn’ wí} \\
\text{Irò la jé gbógun tì} \\
\text{Iránnse èsù la jé bá jagun} \\
\text{Èmi Àkànmú tì gbé wáàsí} \\
\text{Ajagun ñlá kálé lórílè-èdè Nàijíríà.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is not a war of the cudgel
Nor a war of cutlass that I am talking about
It is a spiritual war for salvation
We want to confront deception
We want to confront servants of Satan
I, Akanmu, have come with a mission
To propagate a militant message in Nigeria.

Unlike the militant Islamists such as Al Shabab or Boko Haram that frequently take to armed struggle in order to enforce their religious convictions, the poet interprets his Islamic mandate from a spiritual perspective. A similar call is made in the same poem, Tàkúté Olòrun (God’s Trap):

Éyìnlọmọ ogùn igbàlà
Isé mí ti bẹ̀rẹ̀
Isé tóó se Jànmmáà
Ibo ċẹ̀ ti riṣé ààfáà
Àsé jìbiti lóní bẹ̀
Kò síhùn tí n jẹ̀ṣẹààfáà.
Inún bí mi sí gbogbo èke,
Sí gbogbo alábòsí pátá poo.

All you soldiers of salvation
My work has started
It is time to work Jànmmáà.22
Where did you get the work of a cleric?
It is all deception
There is nothing like the work of a cleric.
I am angry with all liars.
I am angry with all deceivers.

The diatribe is towards professional Islamic clerics, whom he refers to as ‘deceivers’ and ‘liars.’ The poet rejects the idea of having professional clerics like Christian clergy, describing it as an Islamic aberration. He also challenges some practices of the Islamic clerics, like making talismans for people and preparing Quranic writings as medicine and divination, in Tàkúté Olòrun (God’s Trap):

Mo jé róra se ibèèrè kan sii:
Ibo ní kùráánì gbé wí pé

22 Muslim faithful.
Kẹ e màa hàntú ta.
Èsì ọrọ la fẹgbọ lenu yín o
Àáfáà kí ló dé?
Tẹ e fí n tajà ọkùnkùn.
Tẹ e fí n wí pé
Kí won kó mówóàdúà wa
Sé Oluwa n’gba ribá?
Lóríbèérèàwa wa ọmọ aráyé ni
Ká han hàntú
Ká dì tirà fún ni
Ojàòkùnkùn ló já sí
Àáfáà onífá ló màa n ti yerùpẹ̀
Ódodo Músùlùmí kòníi se bẹ̀
Èbọ ni
Ìlànà Èsù ló jé
Fún èni tí kò bá mọ́

I want to ask you another question:
Where do you have it in the Quran
That you should be selling hantu?23
We want to have a response from you
Alfa, what is it?
Why do you engage in shady deals?
Why did you demand for money?
Why charge a fee for prayers?
Does the Lord demand for a bribe from human beings
For their prayer requests?
Drinking Koranic writings
Preparing talisman for people
These are unwholesome practices.
It is a cleric-diviner who practices sand divination
A true Muslim does not do so
It is a ritual practice
It is a pathway of Satan
For those who do not know.

Prayers for the departed (fidau), the drinking of Quranic writings (hantu), sand divination, the use of talismans and granting public voice to women,

23 Qur’an verses written in ink, washed and stored in a bottle like a syrup, taken as medicine.
among other practices, are very common among many Yorùbá Muslims. The
demonstrated practices are considered acceptable in Yorùbá society, where
Islam is indigenized. However, this verse categorically decries such prac-
tices as unacceptable to Islam, and a journey through the pathway of Shaytan
(Satan). The debate regarding the lawful (halal) and the unlawful (haram) is
a continual one in Islamic societies and cultures.

Along with this interest in condemning unwholesome Islamic practices,
there are concurrent lawful practices he endorses and promotes through the
life history of Prophet Muhammad in Êṣeyóri Ònábí (Achievement of the
Prophet), Ëmí Òkùn (“Evil Spirit”), Ìdájò Òdodo (Righteous Judgement),
Ìtàn Ònábí (Life History of the Prophet), and Ìsípayá (Revelation). The re-
presentation of Islamic practices in Adépoju’s later poems reflects the tension
between syncretism (Islamic innovations) and accepted (orthodox/tradition)
practices. It is also a pointer to the dynamics of Islam within the Yorùbá so-
ciety. The advocacy of Islamic principles as a means of moral and societal re-
construction has serious consequences. It suggests Islamic reform as the only
solution to socioeconomic problems in the society. This possibility of a fun-
damentalist ethos is unattractive to several Yorùbá Muslims. This divergence
probably explains why religious extremism, which the poet’s outlook seems
to represent, is unattractive to many Yorùbá Muslims.

The tendency towards fundamentalism finds vivid expressions in Ìdájò
Òdodo (Righteous Judgement), which evokes issues pertaining to the intro-
duction of Sharia in Nigeria:

*Kò sènì tó fè fì ðàrìà dà ilú rú o*
Etó wa la bèèrè fún
Tí aráyé ní se gbérùmí sò mí sí
Iléèjọsàràìa la fè ní
Só dàá kó dàriwò?
Áwa Mùsùlùmí ni a fè ðàrìà
Kí ló wá kan ti kírísítéò ni bè

Demanding for Sharia is not for social unrest
We are demanding for our rights
Everyone is contesting our demand
The request for a Sharia court
Should it generate any controversy?
We, the Muslims, desire the practice of Sharia
What is the concern of Christians?
A call for the implementation of Sharia should be of interest to non-Muslims because it represents a visible character of an Islamic state and a possible threat to the secular state policy. The introduction of Sharia in a mostly non-Muslim dominated southern part of Nigeria has the tendency to aggravate the tense religious atmosphere. This position explains why the idea of a separate legal system for Muslims may be perceived as promoting religious identity in a secular society:

\textit{Ohun tó rewà tó ye}
\textit{Tó kan ti Kirísítẹní ní ti wọn?}
\textit{Étọ ti wọn pàtò ló yẹ}
\textit{Ki Kirísítẹní kó bèèrè fún}
\textit{Bí wón bá fẹ́ ká pín ilé ejó sí méjì}
\textit{Ká kúkú pín in.}

What is pleasurable and proper
That should concern Christians
Is for Christians to demand
for their rights
If they desire a separate legal system
Let it be so.

A people have the right to demand that they be governed in accordance with the moral-cum-legal precepts of their religion. However, the modern nation-state must be recognized as a secular construct to prevent a situation in which several judicial systems struggle for dominance in the country. Although the justice system inherited from the colonial authorities was based on the Western-Christian legal system, associating the prevailing system with conspiracy against the Muslims is an expression of the fundamentalist’s potential for over-generalization. Such resentments have dangerous consequences, as they often lead to unprovoked attacks on innocent people. The call for the implementation of Sharia probably arises out of such resentment. Such prospect has its danger, as there is the probability of subverting diversity and individual rights, which may lead to sociopolitical tyranny.

**Conclusion**

Much as the driving idiom of Adépọ̀jú’s early years largely remained Yorùbá traditional religion, his interaction with the Islamic religion provided additional stimulation for his artistic imagination. The interaction with Islam resulted in the displacement of the Yorùbá traditional outlook. The collision of
the Islamic and Yorùbá knowledge systems resulted in a fusion, which is characterized by what Bhabha calls the ‘beyond.’ The ‘beyond,’ therefore, functions as a bridge of nexus between Islam and Yorùbá traditions in his poetry.

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