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YORUBA CONCEPT OF COOL AND THE OXYMORONIC PHILOSOPHY OF *DREADNESS*



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Trinbagonians have an ability to laugh in the midst of tragedy. This penchant extends into our art and communication style. This trait draws from our African cultural heritage. It exists in many guises in the diaspora in musical forms like the blues. In particular, our paradoxical ability to see the seriousness of a situation while we laugh can be linked to the Yoruba concept of Cool. As Robert Farris Thompson documents, the Yoruba aesthetic of coolness relates to striking a balance in all aspects of life. Nothing in life is completely dire or lighthearted. This balance manifests in the African Diasporic figure of the anti-hero. In Trinidad and Tobago carnival, for example, several characters are both dreadful (evoking fear or supernatural dis-ease) and affirmative like the Jab Molassie¹, Bookman², or Midnight Robber³. In calypso, Winston Bailey, Shadow, exemplifies this oxymoronic philosophy of *dreadness*. As Claire Tancons notes as Shadow, Winston Bailey “portrays an ambivalent if familiar persona as black man

¹ As Dylan Kerrigan notes, the Jab Molassie is “one of the oldest Carnival characters, possibly dating back to the days of slavery. He represents the ghost of a slave who met his death by falling into a vat of boiling molasses in a sugar factory” (np). Daubing his or her self in molasses, oil, or paint, the Jab Molassie engages in, according to Gerard Aching, “lower frequency politics” (21)—rendering the invisible and ignored exploited black body undeniably visible. Thus the Jab Molassie evokes the restless spirit—the dreaded unknown—and makes it known.

² Kerrigan also describes Bookman as “the principal character in a traditional devil band” and “a representation of Satan himself” (np). An example of a fancy masquerade, Bookman in his satin costume conjures up the antithesis of goodness in the Judaeo-Christian binary. At the same time, Bookman serves as social censure—warning people of the consequences of sin (damnation). He embodies both the good and evil aspects of faith and divine retribution.

³ The most overt embodiment of dread and terror, the Midnight Robber “has been terrifying children and intimidating adults for well over a century” (Kerrigan np). Several authors such as Rhoma Spencer, Tony Hall and Philip A Scher, note the Midnight Robber’s use of fear inducing speech to extort money from onlookers. Spencer goes on to link the Midnight Robber with the Egungun. Invoking images of Hell and suffering, the Robber’s speech embraces the anti-hero figure and uses dread or fear as a source of power and creativity. When Shadow made his first appearance on the Dimanche Gras stage in 1974, his character visually alluded to the Midnight Robber with his black hat, skeleton jumpsuit, and black satin cape.

and entertainer” (330) which pulls from a Black Atlantic conundrum that Tancons terms “the Invisible Man symptom, famously analysed by Ralph Ellison’s eponymous novel. In it, blackness is seen as the ultimate experience of invisibility and light is used as a critical tool to give form to the concept of the (in)visibility of race. Being a shadow requires a certain degree of light, while being invisible requires no light at all” (330). More than that, Bailey’s music, through his persona, Shadow⁴, often blends macabre lyrics with affirming music, for example, the hellish possession described in “Bass Man” underscored by a jubilant apotheosis-inducing music. At present, this deliberate oxymoronic *dreadness* is underexplored in academia, despite the possibility of such analysis revealing a more concrete Trinbagonian world view.

Shadow’s corpus of work provides much material for such an exploration because it consistently exhibits a specific world view. Shadow is one of the few calypsonians who approached topics from a specific stance regardless of the zeitgeist. As Lawrence Waldron states in his blog, *Shadowlingo*, “Most of Shadow’s music is not of the sort that you hum along to in the waiting room of the doctor’s office, ignore as unobtrusive accompaniment to conversations in your gallery at high tea, or mumble the lyrics to in the refrigerated aisles of Hi-Lo” (np). Waldron alludes to both the vibrancy of Shadow’s music and his thought-provoking lyrics. Such power to hold the listener’s attention is due to Shadow’s ability to philosophize. According to Bukka Renni “Shadow contemplates natural phenomena and man’s relations to the universe” like any true philosopher who “draw[s] concrete lessons from abstract treatment of subject matter” (np). While Rennie compares Shadow to William Blake, David Rudder offers another explanation. In an article by Debbie Jacob, Rudder is noted as seeing Shadow “as the most African of calypsonians,” and Rudder goes on to state that Shadow’s music was “the pure, tribal vibe” (np). Rudder’s notes mirror what Charles Fergus describes as the reclamation of African Practices in Trinidad including the music. Fergus asserts that during the height of the Black Power movement in 1970s Trinidad, devotees renamed themselves Orisha, switching from the “Shango or Shango-Baptist”

⁴ For the purposes of this essay, Shadow here serves as shorthand for the persona/narrator of the calypso. It is not my intention to assume or suggest Winston Bailey’s intentions or thoughts. While calypsos and popular music tends to be autobiographical in terms of revealing the world view and cultural influences of the artist, it is important to differentiate between Bailey as composer and Shadow as persona/narrator of the calypso.

appellation (10). This, Fergus argues, “was an affirmation of Yorubanness and Africanity” and not simply a “renaming ritual” (11). Instead, it was “a demand for equal respect” alongside “any equivalent European expression” (11). While one hesitates to suggest that for Bailey the shift was deliberate, Rudder’s observations and Fergus’ argument, taken together, imply that Shadow’s philosophical outlook may be best understood by adding an African framework or by also using an African lens for interpretation. For example, it is possible to examine Shadow’s *dreadness* as an extension of the Yoruba concept of Cool, and focus on Shadow’s dread philosophy of life/living. If we apply the Yoruba concept of Cool to Shadow’s dread lyrics we can better appreciate his ability to balance the macabre with the inspirational. Such a correlation will also help us understand the process of cultural evolution in Trinidad and how African world view(s) are embedded in our own philosophies.

The African Framework

In the introduction to his *African Survivals in Trinidad and Tobago*, J.D. Elder cites “extensive field work among the folk of the Eastern Caribbean” conducted over two decades (1950-1970) which “produced evidence that Blacks in the West Indies have not only retained their African culture in many areas but also that they have never ceased from terming themselves *Africans*” (10). Such a finding, as Elder notes, inspired him to attempt tracing “the phenomenon of cultural continuity” in Trinidad and Tobago (10). He goes on to identify that the “last heavy migration of pure Blacks from Nigeria to Trinidad and Tobago goes back to mid-19th century some time after the Abolition Act in 1807” (11). According to Maureen Warner-Lewis, after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the British impounded slavers “in African ports or on the high seas” and many “of these freed slaves arrived in the British Caribbean after intransit stays” as a “readymade reservoir of labour” (6). Warner-Lewis further notes that between 1841 and 1867 “some 9000 Africans arrived in Trinidad” as indentured labourers, joining other freed Africans who had migrated to the island between 1807 and 1841 (7). These resettled indentured labourers included many Yoruba who proved to be one of the more overt influences on Trinidad African and Afro-Creole culture, bringing with them a reinfusion of West African culture including orikis, ritual practices and specific philosophical structures. As Elder explains, Trinidadian culture inherited

“metaphysical activities, moral and ethical systems, divinatory rituals, and beliefs about the dead and the gods” from “West Africans like the Mandingoes, the Radas, the Yorubas, the Igbos, the Hausas” where “Fate, the After Life, and Judgement” are “central” to morality (96).

These practices were kept alive through religious and secular practices and syncretisms, especially music, masquerade, and attitude. For example orikis (praise songs to the Orisas), and like many African musical forms (as Elder in *From Congo Drums to Steelband* discusses), feature call and response patterns. As Hollis Liverpool explains, these “Yoruba religious songs not only permeated Shango music and rhythms, but Yoruba occupational and war songs influenced the Kalenda and the Calypso music” and “the melodies of these chants were later borrowed by calypsonians” (145). Warner-Lewis also asserts that the “melodies of some chants were” co-opted by “early minor-key calypsonians” (7). In terms of masquerade, traditional mas characters like the Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade, and Dame Lorraine bear striking resemblances to the Eyo, Egungun, and Gelede Masquerades, especially as these characters balance celebration and lamentation which may appear as ambivalence. Likewise in approaching life (attitude), the Trinidadian penchant for wordplay and improvisation also resonate with Yoruba philosophical practices. While these philosophical underpinnings are often underexplored, far less documented, they provide lenses of analysis that reveal a more complex world view in praxis in Trinbagonian artistic and cultural expression. This paper employs three such Yoruba concepts to explicate Shadow’s music and codify his philosophy of *dreadness*: *iwa rere*, *itutu*, and *àjò l’áyé*.

Itutu and Iwa Rere

One such framework is *itutu*, a moral imperative based on Yoruba cosmology, ontology, and aesthetics. The Yoruba concept of mystic coolness – *itutu* – can be loosely translated as the ability to remain calm. As Robert Farris Thompson notes, coolness “is a part of [good] character” (*iwa rere*) and is measured by our ability to “live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure” (16), and the more we can live this way the more we will “assume virtual royal power” (16). *Iwa rere*, in Yoruba

cosmology, “is a force infusing physical beauty with everlastingness” (Thompson 9) and “originates in God” (11). Underpinning both *itutu* and *iwa rere* is the Yoruba aesthetic of balance. Beauty (and by extension morality) can be found in the balance of pretty and ugly—“in something not too tall or too short, not too beautiful . . . or too ugly” (Thompson 5). This aesthetic is reflected in visual and oral art. As Farris Thompson (1984) reports, many folktales use plastic beauty (devoid of any visual flaw) to represent evil. For example, in Amos Tutola’s *In The Bush of Ghosts*, the protagonist encounters a young woman who, having been tricked by a young man’s flawless physique and following him away from home, found herself imprisoned and enslaved—the flawless young man was an ogre in disguise. This balance is combined with “everlastingness” or the aspect of divinity bestowed on humans—*aṣe*. The ideal person exhibits *itutu* by developing *iwa rere*, and internalizing *aṣe*—“the power to make things happen” (5)—so that he or she can approach life’s vagaries with confidence. By using this framework, one can see that Shadow’s dread philosophy of life/living as an extension of the Yoruba concept of Cool teaches us that, despite the ugly/prettiness of life, we must remain balanced and generous.

Àjò L’áyé

In her investigation of Yoruba ritual practices, Margaret Drewal documents the philosophy of life as a perpetual journey. As Drewal states, “[R]itual journeys have a synecdochic relationship to the greater ontological journey of the human spirit in that they are nested in ‘life’s journey’ (*ajo l’aye*)” which is “always a progression, a transformation” incorporating reincarnation, lived experience, and time in the ancestral realm (46). Drewal explains this as follows: “Every time spirits return to the world, they choose different heads or personalities (*ori inu*), different bodies (*ara*), and different destinies (*ayanmo*)” (46). Drewal draws from her informant, Ositola’s explanation that the:

whole lifespan of a man or woman is a journey *ajo l’aye* [literally, “journey of life”]. When you are going to start your life, you go through a journey. Even when you are coming to life, you go through a journey. And if you want to develop on the life, it is a journey. So it is just journey, journey, journey all the while. (47)

The point of this ceaseless journeying is the refinement of self and knowledge. For example, one must step into the world which takes place a few months after physical birth and connects the returned spirit with their *ori inú* (inner head). Then one must establish himself (traditionally meant for boys) and determine his destiny/calling through *itefá* ritual. This ritual may be repeated. Even funerals represent journeying from corporeal to spiritual/ancestral realm. At each stage, the individual discovers themselves. Further, As Ositola explains to Drewal, one must “walk the path through the land, the hills, the water, the thorns, the troubles” because one must “pass all troubles so that [one] can fulfill [one’s] destiny” (34). Such a search will lead us to “a holy place” (34), a “cooler place where we have a good head, where it is holy, where it is smooth” (35). This journey motif, through syncretism and creolization, has a wider impact in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, it is also present in the Spiritual and Shouter Baptist’s practices of mourning and traveling.

Iwa Rere, Life, and Living in Shadow’s Music

Iwa rere shows up in Shadow’s works in two ways: contemplations on the nature of life and the nature of living. First, the nature of life is explored in songs like “My Belief” (1975). Recorded early in his career, “My Belief” suggests Shadow’s understanding of the importance of character and balance. It is set apart from other calypsos of the era because it lacks the braggadocio typical of the male calypsonian asserting self (for example Sparrow’s “Drunk and Disorderly”). However, the song is an affirmation of self—*iwa rere*. The verses assert Shadow’s refusal to abandon convictions in the face of abuse and injustice. These convictions are declared in the chorus. The first three lines are outright affirmations: “I believe in the stars in the night sky” speaks of the vast “immovable” beauty of the universe beyond man’s influence—a beauty that balances darkness (night) with light (stars); “I believe in the sun in the daytime” affirms that there is strength and power beyond man’s strivings, and “I believe in the little children” affirms the innocence, potential, and continuity of human life. The fourth line of the chorus seems to be an oxymoron: “I believe in Life and its problems.” Yet, following the first three affirmations, this line should also read as an affirmation. It is the balance of dark and light mixed with energy sourced externally from a celestial source (the sun) and the understanding of potential (children) that makes life bearable.

Further, through the lens of *itutu*, this line is not contradictory at all. Rather life is supposed to have problems, conflicts and struggle to be beautiful.

The complexity of life's beauty and meaning is reiterated in "The Story of Life" (1977). The first verse opens with a framing narrative. The Shadow persona/I, in the midst of tumult and struggle, contemplates the meaning of life and living. This framing indicates the "uglier" aspects of life—"torture and strife"—leaving them open for interpretation. The main narrative gets more maudlin, moving from sudden death ("Yuh grow up yuh fall down and bounce yuh head /Yuh don't even know if you wind up dead") to burial and consumption by worms. The chorus further suggests that everything is temporary, asking the listener to "Dig the trees, they grow big and strong just to be cut down / Tell me the true sense, this tree was ever in existence." The futility suggested by each vignette in each verse can lead one to believe that life is pointless. The beauty and accomplishment amounts to nothing in the long run. In short, life is both ugly and pretty. While this may seem upsetting, this is the natural state of things because no matter what you do, you will die. However, reading it through the lens of *itutu* and balance, as the song progresses, life is revealed to be a cycle in which your death has equal value by supporting the continuation of life and nature. This seeming futility has an organic beauty in the grand scheme of the universe.

We can also look at Shadow's exploration of the nature of living as expressing *iwa rere* and *itutu*, for example "In Ladder of Success" (1976). Perhaps the crux of the song's message is that success comes out of adversity—the "ladder of success is situated in distress". The use of the preposition *of* is striking here. The ladder is not the means to success, but success itself. *Of*, as OED defines it, expresses "the relationship between the part and the whole." In other words, this ladder that you must climb is part of the success you expect to receive. The intrinsic value of your prosperity is directly linked to your ability to climb, to "go forward" (8), to "fight" (11), to not "give up at all" (10). After all, to prosper, "your one and only chance is perseverance" (4). This underscores the necessity of distress and struggle, that life is made richer, more fulfilling, and more beautiful because of these "ugly" elements. Just as death has value, struggle has value. Adversity is necessary for success.

So, if the end result is death, and life is hard, the suggestion is that character is more important than material trappings to be able to endure. To be truly successful, therefore, focus on inner self—one's *iwa rere*. In "Ladder of Success," Shadow insists that success is "up to you" and you alone learning who you are. This is driven home by the fact that the lyrics are not concerned with what is at the top of the ladder. This song appears on Shadow's album *The Flip Side of Shadow* after another song which urges the listener to look inward, "Happiness" (1976). In "Happiness," Shadow insists that "Happiness is in your soul" and that "You don't need to search the whole world through/Happiness is inside of you." This word, *happiness*, crops up in many of Shadow's selections, and seems to be synonymous with *iwa rere*, *itutu*, and success. It is internal(ized), linked to the soul/spirit, and the reward of good character.

***Itutu* and the morality of generosity**

Once we focus on *iwa rere*, we must express *itutu* and live a generous, balanced life. As Farris Thompson reports, for the Yoruba, generosity is a moral imperative. To be generous is to be good. One must be generous towards others and towards oneself (balance). Reading Shadow's "Do Good" (1977), through the lens of *itutu*, the lyrics indicate that generosity is the key to a satisfactory life. In the first verse Shadow warns "If you do good, good will follow you, / but if you do bad, your journey will be hard." To support this claim, he goes on to describe a materially prosperous person who is "always in war with your conscience" even while "living in a den of luxury/yet you always unhappy" because you are haunted by the memories of the wrong things "you do like a bomb in your head." There is an implicit link between the "den of luxury" and the "wrong things you do," implying that the accumulation of wealth is tied to unscrupulous and ungenerous behaviour. The end result is that your *iwa rere* is undeveloped—you are left unhappy. The second verse extends the discussion of generosity to include being generous with oneself. In particular, one must be content with one's achievements, the success already achieved. Shadow admonishes people who

want every object they behold
they greediness is out of control

they could be living in the midst of happiness
but they minds are in sadness

Here the contrast between happiness and sadness highlights the inability to learn about the self through struggle. Both verses suggest that those who seek happiness in possessions and external markers find no rest, and echoes the sentiments in “Happiness.” Likewise in “Do What You Gotta Do” (2008), the listener is urged to remember that everyone has their place in the grand scheme of life. The implication here is that there is no role too insignificant:

Who’s going to mind the pigs
who’s going to plant the figs
[. . .]
Do What you gotta do

Being generous with ourselves should help us to be generous of spirit, to recognize the divinity (everlastingness/ase) in yourself and others. This is expressed in “Everybody is Somebody” (1976). This song overturns colonial capitalist hegemony, which insists that people’s worth is determined by the contents of their pockets. Instead, it instructs us to be generous of spirit and remember our interconnectedness: “If you are the one who is feeling glad / Remember that someone who is sad, is somebody.” In “Poverty is Hell” (1994), generosity of spirit is contrasted with the lingering class assumptions derived from colonial capitalist hegemony and materialism. The poor man, begging in the rich neighbourhood is arrested and sentenced based on a stereotype—“bandit face.” This is juxtaposed with the mother slicing her dumplings “thin, thin, thin” so that even the neighbour’s child might have something to eat. The capitalist ideological framework that aligns morality with wealth is overturned. The rich are ungenerous/bad. The poor are generous/good. The correlation of goodness and generosity is also suggested in “One Love” (1982). Here Shadow’s wish to see a world of “happiness, peacefulness, and togetherness” can be achieved through love which is aligned with unity. Such togetherness and unity would be born of generosity, of mystic coolness – *itutu*.

Àjò L'áyé: Journeying to self and out of self

Thus far, the concepts of *itutu* and *iwa rere* illuminate the deeper philosophical machinations of Shadow's *dreadness* – revealing that his lyrics may seem macabre or nihilistic, but are ultimately affirming. If we add the concept of *àjò l'áyé* as an analytical lens, we also gain insight into the importance of perpetual journeying and searching to the revelation of self. In other words, cosmic travel is necessary for the development of *iwa rere* and the establishment of *itutu*. This is further suggested because the cosmic journey motif also appears in some of the songs already mentioned such as “Happiness,” “Story of Life,” and “Ladder of Success.”

For example, in “The Ladder of Success,” not only is the ladder part of being successful, but one must be willing to preserve, search and move. Inherent in the statement that “the ladder of success/ is situated in distress” is the idea that one must find the ladder. One must search for it. In explaining an Ifa divination verse, Ositola tells Drewal that the meaning of the verse is that life's journey should be spent “searching for truth, wisdom, and knowledge,” and despite hardship, one must “continue with the search” (34). Applying such an interpretation further changes the meaning of success from a capitalist connotation of material gain to a more intangible achievement. Such a metaphysical goal is further suggested by the juxtaposition of the verses and chorus of “Happiness.” As stated above, Shadow advises that happiness can only be found in your own soul. However, it is the futility of “searching the world all over for a treasure chest” and “fighting to reach the top” without searching the inner self that highlights the philosophical impact of the song.

The concept of *àjò l'áyé* takes on an autobiographical significance in songs like “One Life to Live” and “Bassman.” In the former, Shadow's message is still universal, despite focusing on the “I” (the other songs mentioned thus far, except for “My Belief,” address the audience directly using the imperative mood, or use the third person omniscient narration). Throughout the song, Shadow asks for understanding, asserting that “I do my best the way I could” so that people should respect his “destiny.” He repeats in the chorus that “I've got one life to live one life time to give/ And the most that I will do is the best that I can do.” This speaks to transience and lifelong struggle

to achieve *iwa rere, itutu*, and the generosity towards self and one's flaws that allow the individual to continue journeying through life. The last line of the chorus, "And the rest is up to you I am only passing through," moves the song from introspective to universal by suggesting that Shadow is but one piece in the larger puzzle of life and universe. The last line suggests that all human beings should be doing the best that they can do because life is transient. The line also suggests travel as Shadow is "only passing through." In the last verse of "One Life to Live" this travel motif becomes overt as Shadow proclaims that "I move along the road of life," and encourages others to "please carry on" even if he stops. The goal is to move and to keep searching. This resonates with Ositola's assertion that "The whole life span of a human is a journey" and that we must keep "progressing" and "moving" (47).

In "Bassman," *àjò l'áyé* is even more focused on Shadow's own experiences. The song represents an internal struggle to recognize his *ori inu* and his destiny. As Tammico Moore notes in her thesis, "When 'Difference' Becomes 'The Norm': The Influence Of Winston Bailey 'The Shadow' On Calypso Music In Trinidad And Tobago," Bailey's "journey from having dreams of stardom to actual stardom was a rough one" (14). As Moore explains, Bailey's first few years in the calypso arena were discouraging. Moore states that Bailey "had been knocking on the kaiso doors for at least a couple of years prior to his first Calypso Tent appearance in 1969 at the Original Young Brigade Tent" where he appeared as part of the backing group The Firesticks (14). However, the group disapproved of his voice, so he left (15). Despite appealing to audiences in various tent engagements during the 1970-1973 seasons, Bailey would not achieve major success until 1974 with "Bassman." Unlike his previous songs which targeted Sparrow and Kitchener as rivals (Moore 16-7), in "Bassman" Shadow is pitted against his inner/spiritual self-represented by Farrell. Read through *àjò l'áyé*, the song represents Shadow coming to terms with his *ori inu* (spiritual inner head) while stressing the need, once one's destiny is revealed, to move forward, not backwards. This is overt from the opening lines "I was planning to forget calypso/and go and plant peas in Tobago" – a plan to revert to an older self. However, the persistent "bassman in meh head" represents a different calling or destiny. Very overtly, "Farrell, the bassman from Hell" represents the spiritual realm (Hell) making contact with Shadow's headspace. This contact forms Shadow's *ori inu*. In this context, "Bassman"

serves as Shadow's stepping into the ritual world. As such, Shadow's fear "that he cannot make the grade" if he abandons calypso is justified. Even his plea to "have a brain operation/ a man in meh head, I want him to dead," cannot be fulfilled because he needs to accept his *ori inu*. The song's irony is exacerbated by the almost supernatural popularity of the song and Shadow setting the record for tying with himself for road march in 1974 (Thompson n.p.).

After identifying one's *ori inu*, the next stage of *àjò l'áyé* (life's journey) is the *itefa* ritual—determining one's calling or vocation. Continuing a reading of Shadow's body of work using this concept, one can identify several songs which indicate Shadow's acceptance of his *ori inu* and his destiny as part of a forward progression. For example, in "The Revenge" released in 1975, progression is marked such sequences as:

When I come first time, they tell me ah cyah rhyme
I said in my mind I go learn in time
I come back again, they chase me away
Well I use my brain now I come to stay

Despite being chased away, Shadow not only persists but grows, coming back again and using his brain (talents) to stay. The chorus affirms that Shadow accepts his calling, linking it to his origins as "a lunatic from a music asylum." This acceptance of self and destiny gives Shadow the confidence to "beat them with topic" and assure his friends:

don't worry relax take it easy
I am well equipped I could man the ship
I know they will fight and with all their might
But just for the sport I will hold the fort

This claim is repeated in "Dat Soca Boat" (1979) where Shadow also asserts that he is from the "house of music" and is so powerful that he can "sink dat soca boat." This acceptance of destiny coupled with the journey motif extends into Shadow's more metaphysical contemplations and expressions of cosmic travel and justice—his invocations of *dreadness* through a Midnight Robber/Bookman persona. In "King from

Hell" (1975) Shadow travels to Hell (after death which is another stage of the journey) to exact not only "revenge in the land of death", but also righteous judgement. He will punish those "who do the wrong thing" in life. Similarly, in "Jump Judges Jump" (1976), Shadow exacts righteous revenge against a mad society whose competition judges "swear [he] is a comedian" despite the fact that "the world know [his] music is solid like brick" and well loved. This invocation of hell may undermine Ositola's explanation that *àjò l'áyé* will lead to a "cooler place" that is "holy" and "smooth" (33), however, if we are employing Yoruba cosmology as a lens, then we should also divest imagery from the Judeo-Christian framework. As Drewal reports, Yoruba ritual journey includes "travel from one place to another, sometimes actual, sometimes virtual" which should produce "material for further contemplation and reflection" which will result in "growth or progress" (37). Wole Soyinka explains this process, especially for the artist, as engaging in the fourth stage. During the ritual, the celebrant enters the spirit realm through possession, encountering all manner of being to emerge with new insights, understanding, and messages. In light of this understanding, instead of Hell representing damnation, in Shadow's lyrics, "the land of death" becomes a euphemism for the ancestral/spiritual realm.

Both Drewal and Soyinka's explanations of Yoruba ritual allow us to read the journey motif in "The Return of the Shadow" (1981) and "Moonwalking" (1982). In "The Return of the Shadow," Shadow comes back from "cooling out on the astral plane" to remove his robot stand-in. Here astral plane and Hell represent similar spiritual spaces, and the song suggests cosmic travel from the corporeal to the spiritual realm. Significantly, Shadow returns to fulfil his destiny, "to run some musical madness." This return resonates with the Yoruba concept of reincarnation where spirits/personalities can be reborn to new bodies and destinies. The difference is that Shadow is fully aware of self and purpose, so his absence seems more temporary and ritualistic than a restart of his journey. "Moonwalking," on the other hand, stresses the need for such metaphysical travels for development, growth, and progress. Shadow desires to leave the earth and walk on the moon. The description of such a journey underscores that it is not physical but virtual. There is no mention of space travel, space suits, or other elements of science or science fiction configurations of space.

Take Away

To state the obvious, the above reading makes no claim that Winston Bailey, Shadow, deliberately employed Yoruba ontology in the crafting of his music. The use of *iwa rere*, *itutu*, and *àjò l'áyé* as analytical lenses is meant to suggest two interconnected ideas. First, embedded in Trinidad and Tobago culture is an African/African-derived philosophical strain that has been largely ignored or under-explored far less applied to our descriptions and definitions of our cultural products, and this stems from lingering colonial hegemonic assumptions about what is sophisticated or productive, and what is not. As Wande Abimbola notes, the African world view “is very much misunderstood, especially in Europe and the Americas” (6). Indeed, as recently as April 2022, examples of how little members of our society value African-ness can be spotted on social media and in other spaces. For example, on Facebook, responding to Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) airing a clip of a goat race in Tobago, the poster commented that such clips were embarrassing because his white friend asked him from what part of Africa such a video could have come from. Here linking embarrassment with being associated with African practices is quite revealing of how much decolonization discourses and practices are necessary. Second, and linked to this, is the penchant of academia to apply Western (European and American) derived theories to analyse cultural products that draw from non-Western world views. Thus, this paper is an attempt to decolonize analysis by using Yoruba ontology as a theoretical framework. In this way, it becomes possible to circumvent the binary structure of Western Epistemology.

So, if we apply *itutu*, mystic coolness, as an analytical lens, what overall message can we extract from Shadow's *dreadness*? Like several Black Atlantic cultural products and practices, Shadow's seems to embrace the antihero aesthetic. For example, Bookman, part of the devil mas band, leans into the demonization of blackness. Bookman is a ruler in Hell. At the same time, the Bookman delivers moral judgement by noting the sinners and abusers—the unrighteous especially in the upper classes. The Bookman's *dreadness* is oxymoronic, both “demonic” and serving a moral purpose. Similarly, Shadow's *dreadness* offers a moral lesson. His preoccupation with the darker side of life reminds the listener of the importance of developing self. Cultivate your *iwa rere* by internalizing the aesthetic of balance and *àṣe* so that you can express your *itutu*

through generosity and coolness in the face of adversity. As Abimbola reminds us, the Yoruba world view “implies”:

that you are to a large extent responsible for your own self-improvement. If you want to change your own condition, you must make sacrifice. Peace is not spread out like a carpet in front of anybody, it must be created! Whatever you have that you can put down, or bring in so that the universe can be reordered in your favor, is your own sacrifice. It may not always be in the form of blood or food sacrifice. It may be service to the community. When a widow offers to clean the shrine of Ifá every four days, sing and dance there, she is making a sacrifice. The Yoruba notion of sacrifice is an important contribution of Africa to religious thought but it has often been misunderstood. (6)

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