

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY



Egbé Onímò-Èdè Yorùbá

EGBÉ ONÍMÒ-ÈDÈ YORÙBÁ



YORÙBÁ

Journal of Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

EGBÉ ONÍMÒ-ÈDÈ YORÙBÁ

June 2012

Vol. 7 No. 1
ISSN: 1595-1324

YORÙBÁ Journal of Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria

Vol. 7 No. 1

REINCARNATION IN PLATO AND YORUBÁ TRADITIONAL BELIEF

ADEBOWALE, Boşèdè Adéfiólá
Department of Classics,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

Science claims that humans do not know what happens after death. Most people, if not all, are curious to know what, if anything, happens after death. In the history of ideas, many theories have been set forth about the issue of immortality and afterlife. Immortality of the soul is a prevalent idea in many religions. Both Western and African religious and philosophical ideas are not devoid of this doctrine. The Greek philosopher – Plato presents, perhaps, the purest example of the concepts of immortality of the soul and reincarnation. The word "reincarnation" is derived from Latin and it literally means entering the flesh again. *Metempsychosis* (μετεμψύχωσις) is the Greek equivalent word that corresponds roughly in meaning with reincarnation which also connotes life after death, as either human or animal, thereby, emphasizing the continuity of the soul, not the flesh. The doctrine of immortality of the soul is one of the most important subjects in metaphysics. Plato, like the Yoruba, believes that there is a state of existence that goes beyond the limit of this present mortal life span and this can be attained by human through some forms of immortality such as reincarnation. That there can be some kind of continuation in existence after death is attested to by the actions, beliefs, and practices of the living people such as veneration of the dead, concept of the living dead and belief in divine reward and punishment. Plato in the *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Timaeus* asserts that the soul is a pre-existent and immaterial entity which is released from the body at the time of death and can rejoin the body or another body after reincarnation. The Yoruba traditional belief, as espoused by

Makinde, Abimbola and Dopamu, also share the belief that at death, the soul, being a spiritual entity, departs from the body at death and returns to Olódùmarè for reincarnation. The process of reincarnation in Plato and Yoruba traditional thought involves a change from the old form to a new one, and at times from human to non-human. As presented in Plato and Yoruba traditional belief, matching the old and the new form of the soul is problematic because there is no means of identifying them. Although there is no empirical proof of ultimate survival after the death of the body, this paper explores the generally held belief among the Yoruba of Nigeria and Platonic philosophy that the soul can reincarnate in another form after the death of one body or the other. It also examines the problem of self - identity generated by the concept of reincarnation.

Introduction

Reincarnation is a philosophical and religious idea. Reincarnation is the notion that the soul survives the death of the body and begins a new life in a new body which may be human or animal depending on the moral deeds of the soul in the previous life. Although, this term 'reincarnation' is found in many religions today, the origin is obscure. It is generally believed that the idea came from the Greeks and was later introduced into other cultures and religions, especially Christianity and Islam. However, some scholars are of the opinion that this idea originated from the Egyptians from whom the Greeks obtained it. The famous Greek historian of the fifth century B.C., Herodotus states: 'The Egyptians were also the first that asserted that the soul of man is immortal... This opinion some among the Greeks have at different period of times adopted as their own' (Herodotus Bk 2: 123).

Despite this assertion, authorities have not agreed on how the notion arose in Greece, but from what can be gathered from Aristotle, the early Greek discussion of the concept dates to the sixth century B.C. while Pherecydes of Syros, an older contemporary of Pythagoras, is the early Greek thinker known to have mentioned the idea of reincarnation or rebirth (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1091:68). Pythagoras on his part instituted a society into which he diffused the concept. But the development and the progress of serious philosophical exploration of the doctrine of immortality of the soul and reincarnation in Greek philosophy began with Plato who was the most illustrious of the friends and disciples of Socrates. Plato presents the doctrine of immortality of the soul in his works and introduces the account of reincarnation in the Myth of Er, in his work entitled *The Republic*.

On the other hand, according to Yoruba theology, reincarnation means $\square\square\square\square$. This is one of the most important concepts of Yoruba traditional belief system. The belief in $\square\square\square\square$ reflects greatly in the name given to children born immediately after the death of a grandfather or grandmother, such as Babátúndé and Babájídé (father returns), Ìyáḃò, and Yétúndé (mother returns). The question that may arise at this juncture is: where did the Yoruba learn their own idea of immortality of the soul and reincarnation? Makinde opines that the idea of immortality of the soul "could be regarded as being original

with the Yoruba or, at worst, borrowed from some neighbouring African country south of the Sahara, but not from Egypt, and certainly not from Pythagoras or Plato" (Makinde, 1983:142). If the Yoruba did not borrow the concept of reincarnation from any other people, as suggested by Makinde, then, the origin of the Yoruba should suffice in supplying the needed evidence as to how the Yoruba came about the ideas of both immortality of the soul and reincarnation.

Yoruba oral tradition has presented multiple concept of the origin of the Yoruba. Some have linked the origin of the Yoruba people to Arabia, Egypt and Nubia, even though there are no valid evidences to back this claim. However, according to Atanda, with strong linguistic evidence, it has been suggested that the Yoruba people or their immediate ancestors have moved to the place they occupy as their homeland from "Niger-Benue confluence area" (1996:7). Whatever the case, it is evident that the Yoruba migrated from one place before they finally settled down where they call their homeland. With this, it would not be out of place to conclude that the Yoruba must have picked part of their religious and philosophical beliefs, which may include the doctrine of immortality of the soul and reincarnation, from where they migrated from, or from the people they interacted with as they move from place to place.

Platonic and Yorùbá concepts of death

the issue of man's final destination can be discussed naturally under two headings of Death and Afterlife. Death, as defined by Plato is

simply the release of the soul from the body at the time of death (*Phaedo* 64b). Plato regarded the soul as something divine in man which was accidentally united to the body and dwells in it as a prisoner but escapes at the time of death and regains its divinity. Different dialogues of Plato's offer proofs of the soul's immortality and reincarnation or metempsychosis. Metempsychosis is the passage of someone's soul after death into the body of another person or animal.

In Yoruba traditional belief, death is not only considered a necessary end of a phase of life but also as a final turning point into another stage in the life of human beings here on earth. Although death is an undesired event, it is inevitable and unpreventable. Awolalu and Dọpamu observe concerning death:

... People believe that life here on earth is not interminable. They hold the view that sooner or later, the inevitable phenomenon called death will come upon man, who only is a sojourner on God's earth. No matter how long a person lives, death must come as a necessary end (2005:299).

The term 'death', from Platonic and Yoruba conceptions, is viewed not as the end of human life, to the Yoruba, death closes the door of physical, visible, and bodily existence of a person and opens another door, the door to a new life. Hence, the Yoruba regard death

as transitional stage from the physical world to the spiritual realm as reflected in one of the dirges sang during burial. The dirge goes thus:

Ilé ló lọ tààrà,
Bàbá wa relé rẹ
Ilé ló lọ tààrà
Tí ó bá dọrun
Ko wẹhìn wò
Bàbá relé ò
Tí o bà dọrun
Ko wẹhìn wò.

He goes home direct
Our Father has gone to his home
He goes home direct
When you arrive in heaven
Look back to take care of your children
Our Father has gone home
When you arrive in heaven,
Look back to take care of your children
(Makinde, 2007:142).

Apart from believing that death opens the door to another life in a spiritual realm, the Yoruba also believe that it is possible for the soul to reincarnate in another form. The soul, according to the concept of reincarnation, is the pre-existent, immaterial and invisible entity in man and indestructible. Since the soul is indestructible, it is possible for it to reincarnate later in one form or another depending on its moral deeds in the previous life. According to the Yoruba belief, when the soul leaves the body at death, it travels to the Seventh Heaven (Makinde, 2007:150) where the judgment seat of Olódùmarè

is situated passing through the stages of the heavens to receive either reward or punishment and to be reincarnated.

Plato has similar belief as Pythagoras that after the death of the body the soul can reincarnate in another form, either as human or as animal depending on the choice made by the soul. In the dialogue where Plato related the myth of Er, Socrates introduces the story by explaining to his questioner, Glaucon that the soul must be immortal, and cannot be destroyed. In order to substantiate this supposition, the myth of Er in *The Republic* was narrated by Socrates. This myth does not only prop up the idea of reincarnation but also the concept of transmigration of the soul. According to some religious beliefs, transmigration of the soul is the passage of the dead person's soul into another body at or after death.

In the narration, Er was said to have been killed in a battle and after ten days the bodies of the war victims were found decayed except that of Er; he was found whole and the body was taken away for burial. On the twelfth day, while he lay on the pyre, about to be buried, he miraculously came back to life; and there, he related what he had seen in the other world. His soul, according to the myth, sojourned to the super sensible realm where he was made to see how the cycle of life of man is determined by the activities of the three daughters of Necessity, namely, Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos. What Er witnessed can be better explained in the words of Plato as follows:

He (Er) saw the soul which had been Orpheus choosing a swan's life, through hatred of womanhood, because women killed him, and therefore he would not be conceived and born of a woman. He saw the soul of Thamyras choosing to be a nightingale. And he saw a swan changing to man's life for its choice, and other musical creatures doing the same. The soul that drew the twentieth lot he said chose a lion's life; that was Aias, Telamon's son, who shrank from becoming a man because he remembered the award of the arms. Next after him was the soul of Agamemnon, this one also hated the human race for its sufferings, and to be an eagle. The soul of Atalanta had one of the middle lots; she caught sight of the great honours of a man who was an athlete and could not pass them by, she took them. After this soul, he saw the soul of Epeios, Panopeus's son, entering into the nature of craftswoman. Far away among the last lots he saw the soul of the buffoon Thersites clothing putting on the ape. As chance had it, the soul of Odysseus had the last lot of all, and went up to make its choice; remembering his former toils and troubles, it had thrown off all ambition, and went hunting around for a long time for a quiet, retired life, until it found one at last lying somewhere which no one else wanted. The soul chose it gladly, and said "that's my choice - I'm glad! I should have done the same if I had had the first lot". So with other creatures, the beast; some passed into men and some into one another, the unjust beasts changing into savage ones the just into gentle ones and there were all sorts of mixtures (*Republic*, Book X, 620a - d).

It is added in the passage that after all the souls had chosen their lives, they were all guided and brought before Lachesis who then

sent each soul with the destiny he has chosen to be his guardian through life and to fulfil all his choice to Clotho, "passing under her hand and the turn of the circling spindle" to ratify the destiny of his lot and choice. The souls, after their contact with Clotho, are led to the spinning of Atropos so as to make the web of their destinies irreversible. From there without another gaze backward, the souls passed beneath the throne of Necessity. Then the souls began their journey "to the plain of Oblivion, through a terrible stifling heat". They were led to the 'River of Forgetfulness', which is called *Omi Ìgbàgbé* in Yoruba, from which they were all required to drink a measure of the water in order to prevent them from knowing and remembering what has been determined for them by the lot chosen by each of them. And as the story continues, in the middle of the night, after they had fallen asleep, "there was thunder and earthquake and then suddenly they were carried upward this way and that to birth, like shooting stars" (*Republic*, Book X, 620e).

Reincarnation procedure in the Yoruba traditional thought is similar to that of Plato. In the Yoruba myth of Seven Heavens, *Àjàlórùn* or *Olódùmarè* is the giver of new life. At the time of reincarnation reports on each person's activities in his former life is given to *Àjàlórùn* (Makinde, 1983:150-152). From this report, both just and unjust souls are judged according to their deeds on earth. In this theory, each of the heavens serves as a stop and a transmitting

station to the next stop, until the message finally gets to ^{Àjá}Àjáforun. And each of these heavens has an ambassador who reports on the activities of individuals through the Seven Heavens. Olúorogbo, in the myth of Seven Heavens, can be likened to Lachesis in Plato's myth of Er; he is the nearest to human beings on earth and is the first ambassador who reports all he sees and knows about the life of every individual person as well as about the world. Makinde (1983:152) is of the mind that during reincarnation, the soul of a wicked person may be made to enter into the body of animals like snake, cat or goat and at times trees. On the other hand, the soul of an oppressed person or a slave may be caused to enter into the body of a king or queen.

In contrary to the opinion expressed by Makinde on doctrine of metempsychosis being an integral part of the Yoruba traditional belief, Bolaji Idowu is of the mind that the doctrines of metempsychosis and transmigration of the soul are "alien to the Yoruba" (1996:216). However, there is a Yoruba dirge that shows that the Yoruba may not have originally believed that it is the soul of the wicked that is made to enter into the body of an animal. This is found in one of the Yoruba dirges:

Ó kú tán,

Ó d' ewúré olú-jewé;

Ó kú tán

Ó d'àgùtàn olù-jimò;

Ó kú tán,

Ó d'aláàmù tíf jẹun l'èbàá ògìrì

He is dead,
He becomes a goat that feeds on leaves;
He is dead,
He becomes a sheep that feeds on palm-leaves,
He is dead,
He becomes a lizard that feeds along the walls
(Bọlaji Idowu, 1996:216)

This dirge is not in any way referring to wicked people; it is simply a dirge that reflects what can become of an individual that is dead. But it is generally believed that during reincarnation, the souls of just persons are rewarded with good life while the souls of the unjust individuals are ably punished by being reincarnated in the forms of some despicable beings or the other.

Reincarnation of the soul does not occur until about a thousand year after its initial separation from the body. This is to allow time for reward and punishment as emphasised in the myth of Er, Plato explains:

....The souls which came from earth curiously enquiring about the things above, and the souls which came from heaven about the things beneath. And they told one another of what had happened by the way, those from below weeping and sorrowing at the remembrance of the which they had endured and seen in their journey beneath the earth (now they lasted a thousand years), while those from above were describing heavenly delights and visions of inconceivable beauty... for every wrong

which they had done to any one they suffered tenfold; or once in a hundred years- such being reckoned to be the length of man's life, and the penalty being thus paid ten times in a thousand years... and the rewards of the beneficence and justice and holiness were in the same proportion. (*Republic*, Bk. X: 614d – 615c)

The Yoruba theory of the Seven Heavens, according to Makinde (2007:149-150), has the same analysis as the concept above with a slight difference. In this theory, it is possible for a person to come back to life sixteen times, from the time of his first restful death, as human being or as animal. If the person were a good person, he comes back as a good person but if he were a bad person, his soul may transmigrate into that of an animal. It further explains that the cycle of reincarnation proper begins after the 16th time. The average life span of a man is taken to be 70 years and the cycle of reincarnation is said to be the journey of one thousand, one hundred and twenty years. This is calculated by multiplying the lifespan (70 years) by the number of times (16) that a person is expected to come back to life before the next cycle of reincarnation. This period is simply described as the millennial intervals between incarnations by Plato.

While the Yoruba explain what happens to the souls of those who died young, Plato says nothing about their condition, he does not deem it necessary or important to repeat what Er said concerning young children who died almost as soon as they were born. From this it can be assumed that the souls in Plato irrespective of age can

reincarnate. Generally, the Yoruba believe that if a young person dies, he could not have fulfilled his expected mission on earth, and as a result of this, he is believed to be wandering from one place to another in order to complete his mission. It is believed that the souls of those who died in mid-life may go and live in distant towns and assume a quasi-physical existence there. The Yoruba call this type of dead *àkúdááyà*. He might even marry, and his wife would not have the knowledge that her husband was a dead person or a mere ghost. It is very easy to identify an *àkúdááyà* because there is no alteration in his physical appearance; he maintains his former body unlike those who reincarnate in another body. Maybe that is why it is easy to recognise them and those familiar with them in their previous lives call them 'ghosts' during any kind of encounter.

Also, the Yoruba traditionally believe that it is possible for children who had died to come back to life and even be reborn in the same family. Such children are referred to as "*àbíké*" (This is the concept of repeater children). According to Bolaji Idowu, *àbíké* may also be referred to as "*Elére* or *Emèrè*- wandering spirit of children given to the prank of entering into pregnant women and being born only to die for sheer relish of the mischief" (1996: 126). It is believed that an *àbíké*, before coming to the world on an errand of mischief, must make a covenant with its companions to return to 'his normal life' on a particular date. In other words, he must die from this world

and return to his companions. Whenever a child believed to be of this category is born, the parents take every measure to prevent the child from returning. In the Yoruba society, there are many powerful medicine men, who use their power to stop *àbíkú* from dying. Some of the measures taken are seen in the poem of Wole Soyinka titled *Àbíkú*. The poem in part says:

In vain your bangles cast
Charmed circles at my feet
I am Abiku, calling for the first
And repeated time.

Must I weep for goats and cowries
For palm oil and sprinkled ask?
Yams do not sprout amulets
To earth Abiku's limbs.

So when the snail is burnt in his shell,
Whet the heated fragment, brand me
Deeply on the breast - you must know him
When Abiku calls again.

I am the squirrel teeth, cracked
The riddle of the palm; remember
This, and dig me deeper still into
The god's swollen foot.

As reflected in Soyinka's poem, at times indelible marks are inflicted on the body of the *àbíkú* which makes it easy to identify such child in the next birth and other necessary precautions are taken to make the child stay, at times, the child is given a special name. Prominent among the names given to such children are *Kòsòkó*,

Ìgbèkòyí, Málomó, Dúrósinmí, Rótímí, Bántálé, Ayélaágbé, just to mention a few. These names are not without meaning, for example, *Málomó* means “don’t go again”, while *Kòsókó* means “there is no hoe to dig a grave”, *Dúrósinmí* means “wait and bury me”. According to Daramola and Jeje (2005: 74) each time the *àbíká*s are called by these names, it is believed that they are being pleaded with to reconsider their decision about returning to the spirit world.

It is important to understand that the Yoruba real idea of reincarnation is expressed in the notion that dead persons or departed ancestors are sometimes reborn into the same home. The concept is that the deceased may reincarnate in their grandchildren, hence, names like *Babátúndé*, *Babájidé* (father returns), and *Ìyábò*, *Yétúndé* (mother returns) are given to children born immediately after the death of the deceased. The meanings of these names serve as an indication that the departed had been reborn in their family. Zulu Sofola claims that there are two forms of reincarnation (1979:126-136). The deceased as an ancestor may reincarnate in the first child to be born after his/her death. In this case, it is believed that the child born immediately after the death of a member of the family, especially the grandfather or grandmother to the new-born baby is a reincarnation of the deceased. Such children are accorded names mentioned above depending on the sex of the deceased.

The second form of reincarnation is that of the essence of an individual; in this case, the child might have been conceived before the death occurs. In other words, the soul of the person returning must leave its present body that shelters it before the child through whom he is returning is born. The claim of this form of reincarnation, in most cases, is based on the fact that the new-born baby shares some features with the deceased, either in physical appearance or intellect. In this regard, one may wonder how the identification is done since a small child, in fact, a baby cannot exhibit the characteristics that could be used to identify which ancestor has come back and, through which child. Bólajì Idowu explains that when the child is three months old, the oracle is consulted. This rite is known as *mímọ orí ọmọ* (Idowu, 1996:209), knowing the child's personality soul. Through this, the oracle declares which ancestor has reincarnated. Here, it is clear that the Yoruba believe that the ancestor's *orí* does transmigrate into the body of a new creation. In some cases, the child is given the exact name of the person reincarnating so that the person is seen as returning in his totality.

The theory of reincarnation is irrefutable since it is a metaphysical theory. However, the theory does not show any relation between the body and soul, and there is nothing to indicate that a person is either the soul or body or both. Since there is no distinctive clarification between the soul and the body, a fundamental philosophical question is generated, and this is the issue of personal identity. That is how to reconcile the reincarnated soul to who he was in the previous life.

There is no doubt that one of the criteria by which a person is identified is through his memory accounts and spatiotemporal continuity of certain physical and sensible characteristics. For instance, it is possible to know who we are because we can remember and recount sequence of activities from our childhood. It will also be possible to trace the growth of our body through its spatiotemporal history and to record the whole history of our lives activities, with the aid of a fast moving camera accompanying us from the moment of birth till date. But in the concepts of death and reincarnation, the separation of the soul from the body at death and the later reincarnation in another body or form, these criteria of identification will no longer exist.

Clearly the most important means for self identification is the continuation of the same life. For example, if man is individuated solely in terms of the possession of a soul then sameness of man from infancy to old age can be explained, but if the doctrine of reincarnation is accepted, the definition of man requires that the same soul in different bodies be the same man as much as infant and old man. If the doctrine of reincarnation allows the soul of a man to be reborn in the body of an animal, such as a dog, if we knew that the soul of a man was in one of our dogs, then it would require that the dog be called a man. If man is a living body, an animal of a certain shape, then what is a man? A man is an intelligent thinking being that

can know himself as himself; the same thinking thing in different times and places. It is in this context that Makinde writes:

Not only must we be able to identify the sameness of these elements in our individual selves here and afterlife, we must also be able to identify them as belonging to the same persons other than ourselves both here and after life (2007:156).

John Locke has earlier declared that the identity of a man:

consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued life by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body ... for if the identity of soul alone makes the same man, and there be nothing in nature of matter why the same individual spirit may not be united to different bodies, it will be possible that those men living in distance ages, and of different tempers, may have been the same man; which way of speaking must be from a very strange use of the word men, applied to an idea out of which body and shape are excluded. And that way of speaking would agree worse with the notions of those philosophers who allow of transmigration, and are of the opinion that the souls of many may, for their miscarriages, be detrued into the bodies of beasts, as fit habitations. But yet I think nobody could be sure that the soul of Heliogabulus were in one of his dogs, would yet say that dog were a man or Heliogabulus (Locke, 1969:186-187).

There are, however, exceptional cases of possible identification.

For example, the Yoruba believe that a great ancestor, like a warrior, who had lived a great, good, just and famous life, may come back to earth by reincarnating through one of his generations of sons and

daughters. This is noticed when a child grows with certain traits similar to those of one of his ancestors. Such child may grow up behaving the same way and achieving similar or greater successes in the same field of his ancestor whom Yoruba believe to have come back to life. About this belief and the issue of personal identity, Makinde comes to this conclusion:

One might then say that, in a case like this, we may be able to establish, in a very remote way, some sort of personal identity of souls. But if this is the case, we may not know whether the soul of people like Adolf Hitler could come back to earth again at one time or the other in the future through one of his generation of sons or daughters, if he had any left. If that happened we may perhaps be in a position to establish also, in a remote way, the re-incarnation of wicked souls (2007:158-159).

From the above case, it would not be out of place to conclude that it is possible for the wicked souls to reincarnate as human not necessarily as beasts. If this is the case then, there might be, in the future, a reincarnation of Adolf Hitler or Idi Amin, if they have not already reincarnated. On the other hand, if reincarnation into just and good human being is exclusively for just souls, it then follows that only few would qualify to pass through the process of reincarnation. Also, if the souls of the wicked are punished by being reincarnated into different beasts and horrible things in the afterlife, the souls of

the wicked people would have reduced in the face of the earth, since all of them would have been turned to goats, trees and many other things, while only just souls would have continued their existence as just and good human beings. However, from what can be observed, the evidence of wickedness is so overwhelming that it can be suggested that wicked souls appear to be greater than those of just souls. If this observation is right, there seems to be no reason to believe that wicked souls reincarnate as beast.

The theory of reincarnation as described by Plato has been part of Western philosophy; but according to Yoruba scholars, the theory of reincarnation in Yoruba thought is somehow alien and this has generated a lot of controversy. For instance, Idowu argues:

It is almost certain that there is no belief in reincarnation in the classical sense among the Yoruba; that is, in the sense that 'Re-incarnation is the passage of the soul from one body to another'. The Yoruba speaks of *À-tún-wá*- 'Another coming'; but, in reality, there appears to be nothing like it in a specific sense... The specific belief of the Yoruba about those who depart from this world is that once they have entered After-life, there they remain, and there the survivors and their children after them can keep unbroken intercourse with them, especially if they have been good persons while on earth and were ripe for death when they died (1996:209).

This observation does not in any way contradict the Yoruba concept of *Atúnwá* or afterlife or better still hereafter, it only stands in

opposition to the idea of the soul reincarnating in another form rather than that of human.

Conclusion

From the Yoruba and Plato's theories of reincarnation, it is obvious that it would be extremely difficult to identify the life of a previous soul since such soul might have taken up the life of a beast, as in the case of Ajax, the son of Telamon, in Plato's myth of Er, who chose the life of a lion, or the soul of a man entering into that of a woman in a new life, as in the case of Epeus. Although, there is an indication that since a just soul lived a good life, he would be rewarded after his death and most probably be reincarnated as a just person. But it does not follow that an unjust soul would be reincarnated as an unjust person since Plato makes it clear that wicked and unjust souls may be punished and transmigrate into the bodies of beasts just as a just soul might choose to reincarnate as a beast. As it is, it becomes difficult to know whether an existing beast is a reincarnation of the soul of just or an unjust person. Also, the choice of *orí* in Yoruba theory of reincarnation makes it more difficult to identify a just person that has been rewarded with a good life but whose choice of *orí* has influenced his next life into a miserable one. Thus, personal identification of a person in terms of his previous life would be extremely hard, if not totally impossible.

The question that may arise in connection with the concept of reincarnation is whether it would be reasonable to call a beast a person; since Platonic and Yoruba theories claim that the same soul that leaves the body of an animal can transmigrate into the body of a person, if it desires. For instance, a dog may be called a person, especially, if the thought is that the soul, which now resides in a dog used to be the soul of a person who was once a tyrant in his previous life. This goes along with Locke's argument of the possibility of calling a dog a person or a person a dog, assuming that the soul has reincarnated vice-versa. According to Plato, a swan can choose the life of a man, then, there is a kind of transference of souls from the bodies of person to those of animals and vice-versa. If this is the case, then, may be it can be regarded as a kind of crossbreeding. This transference of souls makes it virtually impossible to know who is who and what is what. If this is so, probably we are not who and what we think we are.

References

- Abimbola, W. (1971). On the Yoruba Concept of Human Personality *La Notion de personnel de personnel en Afrique Noire*. Paris Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Abimbola, W. (1976). *Ifa, An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*, London: Oxford University Press en Afrique Noire. Paris Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

- Atanda, J.A. (1996). *The Yoruba: History, Culture & Language*. (Ed O. O. Olatunji), *J.F. Odunjo Memorial Lectures Series 5*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Awolalu, J. O. (1979). *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. London, Longman.
- Awolalu, J.O. and Dopamu, P.A. (2005). *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.
- Bluck, R.S. (1982). "*Plato's Phaedo*". Translated with notes. Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts.
- Bolaji, I. (1973). *African Traditional Religions*. London: SCM Press.
- Bolaji, I. (1996). *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*. Lagos: Longman, Nigeria.
- Claus, D. (1981). *Toward the Soul*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Daramola, O. and Jeje, A. (2005). *Àwọ̀n Àṣà àti Òrìṣà Ilẹ̀ Yoruba*. Onibon-Oje Press & Book Industries (NIG) LTD.
- Dopamu, A.P. (2006). *Change and Continuity: The Yoruba Belief in Life after Death*. Philadelphia, PA, USA. Retrieved February 8, 2007 from <http://www.metanexus.net>.
- Hackforth, R. (1955). *Plato's Phaedo*. Translation with an introduction & commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makinde, M.A. (2007). *An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example*. Reprinted from *Ultimate Reality and*

Meaning (Toronto, Canada), (September, 1984), Vol.7, No 3, pp.189-200.

Makinde, M.A. (2007). 'Immortality of the Soul and the Yoruba Theory of Seven Heavens (Ọrun Měje). Reprinted from *Journal of Cultures and Ideas (Alada Circle)*, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), December 1993, Vol.1 pp. 140-167.

Oladipo, S. (1992). The Yoruba Concept of a Person: An Analytico-Philosophical Study. *International Studies in Philosophy* XXIV/3.

Oladipo, S. (1996). *Philosophy and the African Experience*. Ibadan: Hope Publication.

Plato. (1924). *Republic*. (trans. P. Sholey) 2 Vols. Loeb London.

Plato. (1964). *Republic*. Vols. I & II. With an English translation by Paul Shorey Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Plato. (1997). 'Phaedo' in *Complete Works/Plato* (Ed. John M. Cooper. Trans. by Grube G.M.A.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Plato. (1997). 'The Republic' in *Complete Works/Plato*. (Ed. John M. Cooper). Trans. by Grube G.M.A. and Rev. Reeve C.D.C. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Soyinka, W. "Abiku." Ctdams.com. 2009. Retrieved 20 August, 2012.

Zulu, S. (1979). *The Theatre in the Search for African Authenticity in African Theology en route*. Ed. by Koffi-Apphiah-Kubi and Torress S. New York: Orbis Books.