

Reincarnation in the Yoruba Ontology

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Abstract: *Reincarnation is a religious notion that refers to the belief in some religious traditions that a component of each human being (or all living beings) continues to live after death. Numerous rebirths are associated with the concept of cleansing and refining one's inner essence, and this component is repeated in an infinite number of rebirths. However, reincarnation is not a widespread concept among the Yoruba; it occurs in just two instances: in some circumstances of untimely death, in order for an individual to fulfil his or her God-given purpose or destiny in life, and in some cases of suicide. Unlike other notions, this is not a broad term; rather, it refers to a singular occurrence that is very unpredictable. Similarly, in the second case, the concept of reincarnation is applied very loosely; it is believed that an ancestor can reincarnate in the body of a child if their gender matches that of the deceased ancestor. This study opines that this occurs only when an ancestor dies prior to the birth of a new kid; it can be a real reincarnation or a desire conveyed through the names given to a child. The departed are thought to continue to exist in the afterlife; people who remain on Earth can make contact with them, and they retain all of their hereditary characteristics. It derives its data from both primary and secondary sources.*

Keywords: Yoruba, myth, reality, reincarnation, history

I. Introduction

Since the dawn of time, the concept of "reincarnation" has been a conundrum that people have attempted to solve. Scientists, religious groups, psychics, and researchers are all attempting to solve the enigmatic conundrum. Indeed, recent global surveys indicate that the majority of the world's population believes in an afterlife, including Mexicans (76 percent), South Africans (73 percent), Canadians (72 percent), Indians (65 percent), Iranians (98 percent), and Japanese (51 percent), as well as 46 percent to 60 percent of those who do not identify with any religion (Darrow, 2013). Reincarnation is the concept that souls reincarnate in new bodies, times, and places on a continual basis. According to the majority of faiths, reincarnation is a natural yet immensely significant process of soul development; it is the process of combating negative components such as desire or karma in order to attain a higher state of being; it is universally applicable to all human beings. Alternatively, it can be defined as the transfer of a person's life energy or consciousness stream to another person's body (Darrow, 2013: 261). Additionally, 27% of people in Western Europe and 20% in Eastern Europe believe in reincarnation (Geach, 2019). Reincarnation is believed in by 20% of individuals on average in Western European nations (varying from 15% in Germany to 31% in Portugal), according to the Pew Research Center, and 38% of those who identify as "spiritual but not religious" also hold this belief. More than 20% of the population in Latin American nations express this idea, ranging from 23% in the Dominican Republic to 51% in Panama (Geach, 2019). In Brazil, 37% believe entirely in reincarnation, 18% have concerns, and 44% have no belief in reincarnation at all (Darrow, 2013: 263). On the other hand, the western world believes that reincarnation may be associated with psychological struggle, guilt, and/or an existential sense of passivity (Darrow, 2013).

II. Review of Literature

Religious Beliefs about Reincarnation

To evaluate reincarnation objectively against this backdrop, it must be viewed through the lens of religion, as the concept of reincarnation is intrinsically linked to religion. As a result, this section of the study will investigate reincarnation through the lenses of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

2.1 Hinduism

As previously said in this research, reincarnation is the religious or philosophical concept that the soul or spirit begins a new life in a new body after biological death, which may be human, animal, or spiritual, depending on the moral quality of the previous life's activities (Name). In Hinduism, the term "Samsara" refers to the entire universal process that results in the cycle of death and rebirth and is led by karma. "Karma" is defined as any activity, whether beneficial or negative. He chooses his second birth based on the karma he generates.

For instance, if a person has performed significant spiritual service and intends to continue doing so after death, his soul chooses a family that is supportive of his wish for reincarnation (Name). Even devas (gods), according to Hinduism, can die and reincarnate. However, the term "reincarnation" is a misnomer in this instance (Geach, 2019). To bolster this perspective, the Rigveda, the earliest extant Indo-Aryan scripture, has numerous references to rebirths.

One verse states:

Agni, burn him but do not consume him completely; neither his body nor his skin should be dispersed. Jatavedas, after you've developed him, send him on his way to the Fathers...Consume him with your terrible flame and your shining splendour. Carry this man to the holy realm with thine auspicious forms, O Jatavedas. Send him to the Fathers once more, O Agni, with our oblations, which are offered in thee. Wearing new life enabled him to reproduce his progeny: Jatavedas, and permitted him to re-enter a body. (Geach, 2019)

According to Hindu philosopher Adi Shankaracharya, our universe is like a dream: impermanent and fictitious. We are trapped in samsara (the cycle of birth and death) because we are unaware of the underlying basis of our existence. Ignorance of one's true nature (avidya) results in ego-consciousness, which is based on desire and a never-ending cycle of rebirth. The notion is intrinsically linked to action (karma); each action has a corresponding reaction, and the resulting force determines the next incarnation. As a result of desire, one is reborn: A person desires birth in order to experience a body that is incapable of producing deep, persistent bliss or tranquility (ananda). After numerous births, every human becomes dissatisfied and begins to seek greater forms of happiness through spiritual experience. When a person discovers through spiritual practise (sadhana) that the true "self" is the everlasting soul and not the body or ego, all desires for worldly pleasures vanish because they appear little in compared to spiritual ananda. When all desire has been extinguished, the individual will cease to exist (Taliaferro et al., 2010). When the cycle of rebirth is brought to an end in this manner, it is claimed that a person has attained liberation (moksha). As a result, Hindu adherents believe they will spend eternity in the perfect peace and contentment that come from understanding that all existence is one Brahman, of which the soul is a component. Dvaita schools of thought perform worship with the goal of eternally reuniting with the Supreme Being in a spiritual world or paradise (loka) (Taliaferro et al., 2010: 640).

2.2 Jainism

In Jainism, the soul and matter are seen as everlasting, uncreated, and eternal. The two are inextricably linked, resulting in puzzling cosmic manifestations in the material, psychological, and emotional realms that surround us. This gave rise to the concepts of transmigration and rebirth; a central premise of Jain philosophy is that spirit and matter undergo alterations but not ultimate annihilation. After death, life as we know it transfers to another sort of existence depending on the virtues and shortcomings acquired during its current existence. The path to a supreme soul is characterised by nonviolence and integrity.

Karma is a major and fundamental idea in Jainism, entwined with other philosophical notions like transmigration, rebirth, liberation, nonviolence (ahimsa), and non-attachment.

Actions are thought to have consequences, some immediate, some delayed, and some extending into future incarnations. As a result, karma is regarded not just in terms of a single lifetime but also of future incarnations and previous lives. Karma is both the cause and effect of birth and death. Souls bound by karma circle endlessly in the cycle of existence. "Whatever misery or joy a soul may encounter during this incarnation is a product of prior choices." Jainism places a priority on pure thought and moral behaviour as a result of this conviction.

In Jainism, God has no control over an individual's future; rather than any system of reward or punishment, one's personal destiny is viewed as a product of one's own personal karma. Violent deeds, such as murdering five-sensed creatures or devouring fish, result in rebirth in hell. Deception, fraud, and deception all result in reincarnation in the animal and vegetable realms. Kindness, compassion, and a humble personality result in human birth, whereas austerities and the taking and keeping of vows result in paradise rebirth. As a result, each soul is responsible for its own circumstances and redemption.

2.3 Buddhism

The Buddhist concept of reincarnation is distinct from others in that it does not believe in an eternal "soul," "spirit," or "self," but rather in a "stream of consciousness" that connects each life. The real process of rebirth is called punarbhava (Sanskrit) or punabbhava (Pali), which literally translate as "becoming again" or "becoming" (Hartshorne, 1984). The earliest Buddhist teachings make reference to methods for recalling previous incarnations that are focused on cultivating a high degree of meditative focus. According to Buddhist mythology, Buddha taught that this experience was susceptible to deception and should be understood cautiously. He preached a unique perspective on reincarnation constrained by anatta, which holds that there is no irreducible atman or "self" connecting successive incarnations, in contrast to Hinduism, which holds that everything is connected and, in a sense, "everything is everything."

According to Buddhist philosophy, expanding awareness (Pali: samvattanika-viana) or stream of consciousness (Pali: viana-sotam) is one of the factors that contributes to the creation of a new aggregation following death (or "the dissolution of the aggregates"). When one personality dies, another arises, much like how the flame of one candle might serve to light the flame of another. Although the new person's awareness is neither the same nor dissimilar to that of the deceased, the two form a causal continuity or stream. Transmigration is the result of karma, or voluntary effort (Pali: kamma). The fundamental reason is the retention of consciousness in ignorance (Pali: Avijja, Sanskrit: Avidya): when ignorance is eradicated, rebirth ceases.

2.4. Islam

All major monotheistic religions on the planet reject reincarnation. This is because it contradicts their fundamental ideas about the human being having a finite life for which he or she is judged and rewarded. Which of the human being's lives is he or she to be judged on if

he or she has several lives? What was the very first life? The final existence? As a result, the Quran rejects reincarnation while preaching the presence of the soul. Islam's primary tenet is that this world has just one birth. After death, a person will be judged as to whether they should go to hell or be eternally reunited with God (Taliaferro et al., 2010: 647). However, a few Muslim groups, most notably the Shia sect (Ghulat), as well as other Muslim sects such as the Druze, believe in reincarnation. In certain ways, the Ghulat Shia Muslim sect views its founders as celestial incarnations (hulul).

2.5 Judaism

Judaism, in its traditional form, does not believe in reincarnation. The Tanakh ("Hebrew Bible"), classical rabbinical works (Mishnah and Talmud), and Maimonides' 13 principles of faith make no mention of it, though the story of the Ten Martyrs is read in Ashkenazi Orthodox Jewish communities during the Yom Kippur liturgy; they were killed by Romans to atone for the souls of Joseph's ten brothers. Medieval Jewish rationalist thinkers disputed the issue and were frequently disdainful of it. However, Jewish mystical literature (the Kabbalah) teaches a belief in Gilgul Neshamot (Hebrew for metempsychosis of souls: literally "soul cycle") from its traditional Medieval canon onwards. Although other non-Hasidic Orthodox Jewish communities do not emphasise reincarnation, they acknowledge it as a genuine teaching. For the first time, 16th-century Isaac Luria (the Ari) centred his new spiritual articulation on the subject, supporting the identification of reincarnations of historical Jewish figures compiled by Haim Vital in his Shaar HaGilgulim.

2.6 Christianity

The major Christian denominations are hostile to reincarnation. When a person dies, Christians believe that their soul joins their body in the grave. This state of soul sleep lasts until the "continued day," also known as the "final judgment." However, the Bible contains evidence of Jesus' teaching about reincarnation. However, there was a schism in early Christian history over how to understand Jesus himself. Was he a man who attained divinity? Was God shown in the form of a man? The battle was between Paul's Church in Rome and the Jerusalem Church's remnants that fled to Egypt following Rome's invasion of Israel in 70 AD. The Romans denied both pre-existence and reincarnation, considering Jesus to be God manifest in human form. The Jerusalem party recognised Jesus as a man who reached human-divine atonement, which is everyone's goal in order to break the cycle of birth and death and obtain eternal life. Rome, however, won the political battle, and the orthodox notion of resurrection was reduced to an end-of-time "Night of the Living Dead."

However, Christian sects such as the Bogomils and Cathars, who believed in reincarnation and other esoteric concepts, were dubbed "Manichean" and are today occasionally referred to as "Neo-Manicheans" by researchers. According to a recent study, some Westerners believe in reincarnation, including numerous contemporary Christians, modern Neopagans, Spiritists, Theosophists, and students of esoteric systems such as Kabbalah. The Baltic countries have the strongest belief in reincarnation, with Lithuania having the highest rate in Europe, at 44 percent. According to a 2009 Pew Forum survey, 24% of American Christians believe in reincarnation. Geddes MacGregor, an Episcopal priest and Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a recipient of the California Literature Award (Gold Medal, non-fiction category), and the inaugural holder of Bryn Mawr's Rufus Jones Chair in Philosophy and Religion.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Yoruba Culture and Reincarnation

Death is not uncommon among the Yoruba. "Awaye makukosi, orunnikan laremabo" (Everyone born into the world is destined to die) is a Yoruba proverb that reflects the Yoruba people's belief that everyone would die. The only thing that is eternal is paradise's existence, orunnikan laremabo" (Everyone born into the world is destined to die) is a Yoruba proverb that reflects the Yoruba people's belief that everyone would die. The only thing that is eternal is paradise's existence. According to Yoruba traditional beliefs, death is the disconnection of the spirit from the body. "However, the people think that death is only a transition"

(Onyewuenyi, 2016: 26). An interview with Chief, Awoyinfa, a chief priest in a Yoruba explains the Yoruba perspective of death; *"It is simply a passageway between the worlds of mortals and spirits. As previously said, man is composed of two distinct components: his physical, tangible body and his soul, which is his actual human nature. When a person dies, some people believe that their soul, spiritual substance, or essential self is separated from their physical body.*

While the physical body decomposes, the personality-soul returns to its source of being.

This concept underpins the Yoruba people's complex burial customs. The Yoruba people's attitude toward death unambiguously displays their faith in the immortality of the soul. The Yoruba believe that communication and communion between the living and the dead are possible and that the latter have the ability to influence, help, or molest the former. Yoruba classifies certain sorts and modes of death as "good" or "evil." A poor person's death, colloquially referred to as "Okufo," is regarded as strange and tragic. Typically, such deaths do not get complete funeral ceremonies. Deaths deemed to be divine punishment (including leprosy believed to have been inflicted on the patient by Sanponna, the leprosy deity), accidents, a woman who died during childbirth, suicide, or someone gruesomely murdered are all examples of horrible deaths. *Their burials are carried out by specialists who must perform a variety of ceremonies in their company. More importantly, such individuals are believed to be incapable of reincarnation or reuniting with their ancestors.* A "nice death" occurs when a person lives to a ripe old age, has led a decent and exemplary life, and leaves behind children. The Yoruba believe that those who die a nice death and are properly buried will enjoy a happy life in the company of their forefathers and mothers. They are capable of reincarnating in the form of a child born into the family.

As previously stated, reincarnation is the belief that deceased family members will reincarnate as a new kid into the family to which they previously belonged while alive. These are frequently identified through likeness, dreams, or divination in order to confirm specific ancestors' reincarnations and are given names such as Babatunde ("father returns") or Yetunde ("mother returns"). These forefathers and mothers are enlisted to assist their descendants.

Although the ancestors' rebirth is the primary Yoruba reincarnation belief, we will examine additional Yoruba reincarnation beliefs later. According to Sophie Oluwole, African traditional philosophy proposes three distinct rationales for believing in reincarnation (Idowu, 1962). The

first is familial resemblance, in which offspring bear some physical and mental features in common with their departed ancestors. Unnatural and contextual markings on some people, such as gunshot wounds and deliberate and inadvertent abnormalities on the deceased, reappear in the newborn. This is not a complete description of a genetic family trait. Another justification is the Abiku or Ogbanje syndrome (among Yorubas and Igbos). The flaws inflicted on the newborns' bodies in an attempt to prevent them from returning manifest in those children when they are reincarnated. The final justification is memory transmission. This is demonstrated by examples of children who could vividly describe their predecessors' real-life experiences despite having no firsthand knowledge of their ancestors' stories. Among the Yoruba, all of these reasons for reincarnation are commonly accepted. There are some evident

faults in the belief in reincarnation. Among them is the question of how to recognise someone who is supposed to be incarnate in another person. Can comparable criteria be used to identify incarnate people? This, on the other hand, is believed to be predicated on personal identification (Egbe, 2012).

3.2 Yoruba Beliefs About Reincarnation

The Yoruba people have established many types of reincarnation in order to establish reincarnation as a possibility in Yoruba cultural belief. For instance, a deceased person may be seen somewhere by individuals who are unaware of his death soon before or after his burial. In another instance, he may be witnessed living a separate life in another location (Osadola & Adeleye, 2020). "He may even marry a lady who, unaware of her husband, may have problems with him." *We were once requested to meet a young man whose father was said to have died but was later reincarnated. According to the information gathered, the father died in Lagos but was later seen in another Yoruba town where he married a lady who bore him the boy; this is referred to as Aku-da-aya (the ghost of a deceased person appearing in a location other than his native town). The Yoruba culture is adamant that such situations are likely to occur and that those who die on earth have simply relocated on the same ground. Only those who do not live to a ripe old age but pass away prematurely are considered to fall into this category.*

Atun-wa is another Yoruba reincarnation technique (another coming, rebirth, or being born again). According to the Yoruba, this is a characteristic that is reserved for individuals who have lived to a ripe age and have been righteous. Additionally, they become ancestors and have the ability to reincarnate as a result of their fulfilling lives on Earth. A newborn child is born shortly after the reincarnated human dies in this type of reincarnation. Indeed, it is Yoruba custom to consult the oracle upon the birth of a child to ascertain which of the ancestors, also known as the living dead, has returned. According to one theory, ancestors reincarnate because they adore this world and, more specifically, their family (Onyewuenyi, 2016).

"There was a man who, following his death, informed the community that he would return shortly and that his younger brother would bear him." When asked how they would know he was the one, he said that they would know he was the one because he would be born with teeth in his mouth. Soon afterwards, the brother gave birth to a toothless baby. (Idowu, 1962)

The reappearance of an ancestor's bodily marks on the body of a newly born child, as well as past life recalls, create a situation in which a growing child not only exhibits characteristics that lead the Yoruba to believe he is older than his age but is also capable of recalling a previous existence and recounting some of his or her experiences during that previous existence. (Idowu, 1962)

Despite this assertion, the Yoruba are befuddled by the concept of rebirth. According to Danoye, this has prompted Idowu (1962), an authority on Yoruba traditional religion, to conclude that there appears to be nothing like it (reincarnation) in its precise meaning. Despite numerous instances supporting the Yoruba belief in reincarnation, Idowu (1962) has a major problem integrating the notion with ancestor invocation. He struggles to comprehend how an ancestor might fully reincarnate, drink, and dine with the living in this physical world while remaining in full health and vitality in the afterlife, as a result of which he is summoned from time to time. Sensing the contradiction inherent in an ancestor being "there" and "here" at the same time and in the same manner, Idowu (1962) develops the theory of partial reincarnation, which is predicated on the argument that the ancestors' continued existence in full life and vigour in the spiritual world necessitates only their partial reincarnation in this physical world. Awolalu and Dopamu (2005) built on Idowu's (1962) idea by arguing that the Yoruba religion places a premium on both partial reincarnation and life continuing in the hereafter in a manner similar to that which exists here.

The Yoruba people's unmistakable belief in reincarnation is mirrored in their way of life, most notably in their naming rite. On the other hand, Onyewuenyi (2016) argues that the term "reincarnation" should not be used. He asserts that "reincarnation" is a European phrase that encapsulates certain coherent concepts. Therefore, it would be erroneous to confine African interpretations of concepts that explain the critical effects of deceased forefathers on living descendants to the stable concept of reincarnation (Egbe, 2002). A close review of Idowu's (1962) and Onyewuenyi's (2016) reasoning indicates that both limit reincarnation in Yoruba belief to ancestor rebirth, excluding the a-ku-da-ya phenomenon previously discussed as a manifestation of reincarnation. Regardless of the aforementioned polemics, the Yoruba believe in reincarnation in the traditional sense based on their experiences, even though the concept in their religion admits to some flaws that they have not been able to overcome adequately.

IV. Conclusion

Considering everything that has been said thus far about whether or not the concept of reincarnation is accurate, it appears that certain linkages must be made between the cycles of reincarnation. Because God is capable of acting in ways that defy human logic and religious instruction, this study demonstrates that there is still much more to learn about human existence than we have thus far discovered. This study says that Yoruba belief in reincarnation seems to be based on a number of things, such as personal experience, faith in destiny, communication with the dead, and the idea that God can do anything He wants. Living experiences can't be thrown out, because they show that reincarnation has happened in the past and that there's nothing stopping it from happening again.

According to studies, reincarnation issues are best addressed within certain groups and religions rather than across cultures and religions. This is because people's experiences vary according to culture and beliefs. It is arrogant to dismiss other people's experiences as erroneous, especially if they lack evidence to substantiate their statements. Even if one completely disagrees with the reported experiences, it is irrational to dismiss other people's accounts as erroneous without taking the context into account.

Given that humans are more than just physical objects that logic can evaluate, philosophy's goal is to help logic recognise its limitations and appreciate the world beyond reason. As with any other tenet of faith, reincarnation is not amenable to logical analysis. Humans possess both a physical body (visible to the senses and reason) and a spiritual spirit (invisible to the senses and reason) outside the realm of logic. As a result, it is critical to respect people's experiences and accurately recount events. The phenomenological technique unambiguously confirmed what the Yoruba believe about reincarnation and shed light on their viewpoint, which was contextualised in relation to the beliefs of people from other cultural backgrounds.

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