

# An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation

Oládotun B. Osanyinbí, Kehinde Falana

General Studies Department, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria

Email: dosanyinbi@futa.edu.ng

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## Abstract

Reincarnation is the belief that after someone dies; his immortal soul separates from the body and lives again in another physical body. The traditional Yorùbá culture holds the belief in reincarnation (atunwaye). Atunwaye is believed to be possible in three different forms which are: *ipadawaye* (ancestor's rebirth), *akudaaya* (die and reappear) and *abiku* (born to die). Yorùbá people of Akure also hold on to the traditional belief in atunwaye. The article used the philosophical tools of analysis and evaluation to examine reincarnation beliefs among the Yorùbá people in general and Akure people in particular. Oral interviews were also conducted among indigenes of Akure, to understand their beliefs on reincarnation. Findings show that Yorùbá people of Akure also hold on to traditional belief in reincarnation (atunwaye) in its various forms. The research concludes that reincarnation is an established belief among the Yorùbá people in general and the Akure people in particular. It is also noted that this belief has survived despite the influence of Christianity and Islam on the culture of Akure people.

## Keywords

Reincarnation, Yoruba Beliefs, *Ipadawaye*, *Abiku*, *Akudaaya*

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## 1. Introduction

We shall proceed by first defining reincarnation. Two important concepts that need to be understood in relation to the concept of reincarnation are death and immortality. The human phenomenon that gives rise to the concept of immortality is death. Whereas, an understanding of immortality is fundamental to an understanding of reincarnation. Death is the irreversible cessation of life (Helper, 2006). As an inevitable characteristic of all living things, the fear of death is a universal and natural sentiment. Death customs and rites are observed by people of all cultures. These are in forms of burial and mourning's customs' which are means of helping individuals cope

with this fear. The cultural belief about burial and mourning varies from one culture to another. Generally, it includes a means to dispose the physical body of the dead, an aid or permission for the spirit/soul of the dead person to make its passage from the land of the living to the next stage or final resting place and an avenue to re-order and re-pattern the cluster of social relationships which have been disrupted by death between the deceased and the living (Middleton, 2006).

Although all biological species are characterised by death, man however is dissatisfied with the idea that he could not have further consciousness after death. This is because death has more implications for human beings than to any other living thing. It raises such questions as: Why should man die? What happens at death? What happens after death? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is the destiny of man? The absurdity that death seems to render human existence gives birth to the desire for continued existence of man. The fundamental and complex implications that death generates provoked the thought that there must be a part of man that survives death. “The notion that one passes into another realm of existence upon physical death is among the most venerable of human beliefs” (Moody, 1975).

Hence, some cultures nurture the belief that “some aspects of the human being survive even after the physical body ceases to function, and is ultimately destroyed... This persistent aspect has been called by many names, among them are psyche, soul, mind, spirit, self, being and consciousness” (Moody, 1975). This necessitated the distinction between the material; physical, and the immaterial; non physical components of man as the bedrock of the belief in the immortality. This belief is as old as human cultures as anthropologists suggest, it must have been generated by the memories of dead persons, dreams about them, reflection of one’s self on bright surfaces or religious rites that grow up spontaneously in the face of death (Hick, 1994). However, among philosophers, it was Plato who first made a systematic distinction between the body and the soul and argued for the immortality of the soul, upon which other Western conceptions of this distinction were built (Omogbe, 2007). He distinguished between the body which belongs to the sensible world, shares its changing and impermanent nature, composite, corporeal, material, able to disintegrate and be destroyed; and the soul which is related to unchanging realities, universal, eternal, simple and imperishable. His argument is hinged on the belief that the soul existed before uniting with the body and therefore distinct from the body and capable of existing without it. The soul is immortal. Therefore, it survives death while the body decays. It is the immortality of the soul, an aspect of man that confers immortality on man.

What then happens to the soul after death? There have been divergent views in response to this question and reincarnation is one of them. What then is reincarnation? Reincarnation is the doctrine of the passing of the soul at death into another body or bodies either animal or human (Bouquet, 2006). This definition seems not to give reincarnation a distinct definition from transmigration, as we shall see later that transmigration is not same with reincarnation. Not all cultures accept the beliefs that the human soul can reincarnate on non human bodies, but they still believe that the soul can reincarnate. Reincarnation is the belief that after someone dies; his immortal soul separates from the body and lives again in another physical body to start another life anew. Reincarnation is both a philosophical and a religious concept, thus making it a crucial theme in philosophy of religion.

Reincarnation is a widely spread idea across cultures. Among the Greeks, Pythagoras and Empedocles are believed to have taught that individuals are to be reborn on a scale according to their merits as humans, animals or even vegetable form. The Druid of Western Europe and Ancient Irish traditions have rebirth of heroes as a recurrent theme. The belief in rebirth flourished in India; the ascending and descending scale of rebirths, one’s status in the next incarnation is determined by one’s *karma*, which is the accumulation of one’s merits and demerits. For Buddhism, life is predominantly suffering and impermanence—in a continuous and tedious chain of rebirth called *samsara*, an evil that should be brought to an end by achieving nirvana (Bouquet, 2006). Many African cultures also hold to the belief in reincarnation, of which the Yorùbá people’s belief is our subject matter.

It is important to distinguish reincarnation from other related concepts. Reincarnation is different from incarnation. Incarnation is the traditional Christian belief that God the Son, Jesus Christ took the form of a man and united his Divine nature with human nature. Reincarnation is also different from apotheosis. Apotheosis is deifying a human being that has died. It is glorifying a person or raising him to a god-like status after his death. It was an ancient Greek and some African cultural practice to elevate the founders of cities and colonies to the status of gods after their death. For instance, the Romans also deified their founder, Romulus. Some individuals like Julius and Augustus Caesar, and other Roman Emperors were deified and worshiped after their death. The practice of establishing this deification was accompanied by a ritual ceremony, which the most important part

was the setting free of an eagle, which was supposed to carry the emperor's soul to heaven. After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, deifying emperors stopped (*Encyclopedia Americana International Edition*, 2006). Examples of apotheosis abound in Yorùbá traditional religion, some of which are: Sango, Ogun, Oya, who are human beings but become deified after their deaths.

It is also important to distinguish reincarnation from transmigration of the soul or metempsychosis. In transmigration, the soul, after leaving the human body inhabits an animal or some inanimate objects such as trees or stones. Reincarnation, the soul takes on another body, which could be that of a newly born baby or it continues its existence in another part of the world different from the one in which he dies.

The concepts of immortality and reincarnation are also entrenched in the African Yorùbá's worldview which has some peculiarities in their belief.

## 2. Yorùbá People and Culture

The Yorùbá are groups of people who are related culturally and share the same language, though with some variations. The Yorùbá tribe is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and one of the largest homogeneous groups in Africa. They live mostly in South-Western part of Nigeria, comprising of Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States. Some parts of Kwara and Kogi States also have Yorùbá people living there. Beyond Nigeria, Yorùbá people are found in Republic of Benin, Dahomey, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Jamaica.

Culture can be described as the total way of life of a people and it consists of the language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals ceremonies, and symbols. Every society has its own culture, although, the cultures might be different from society to society. The Yorùbá culture is their common way of doing things or way of life. It consists of their language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals ceremonies, and symbols. These have been passed down from generation to generation, through their oral traditions, such as myths, folklores, stories, songs, proverbs and wise sayings. It is also reflected in their art and crafts. Their festivals and traditional religion also reflect their cultural beliefs. According to Bolaji Idowu, the Yorùbá people believe in: God, *Olodumare*; in divinities, *Òrìṣà*, in spirits; ancestors and mysterious powers (Idowu, 1962). The works of Awolalu and Dopamu (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005) also exemplify this view. This article will focus on the Yorùbá belief in ancestors who are family members that have died, deified and reincarnated. They are seen as actively involved in the protection and guidance of their family members and are revered by them. This is because it forms the background for the belief in reincarnation.

## 3. Death and Immortality in Yorùbá Belief

Death is not a strange phenomenon among the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá belief that everybody is going to die is revealed in one of the sayings that "*àwáyé ma kúkòṣí, orunnikanlārèmabo*" (Everybody born into the world is bound to die. It is only existence in heaven that is permanent). The Yorùbá cultural belief considers death as a separation of the soul from the body. Awolalu and Dopamu further emphasises this when they wrote:

But the people believe that death is only a transition. It is only a means of passing from the world of men to the world of spirits. Man, as we have seen, is made up of the physical, tangible body and the personality soul, which is the real human essence. People believe that when death occurs, the personality soul, which is the spiritual substance, the essential person, is separated from the physical body. The physical body decays, while the personality-soul returns to the source of Being from Whom it comes (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005).

It is this belief that accounts for the elaborate burial ceremonies among the Yorùbá people. The reaction of the Yorùbá people to death shows clearly that they believe in immortality of the soul. The Yorùbá believes that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and the deceased, and that the latter have the power to influence, help or molest the former (Idowu, 1973). Yorùbá differentiate kinds and manners of death, which can be categorised as "good" or "bad" deaths. A bad death, referred to as premature death "*okuofo*" is understood as mysterious and tragic. Death categorised among this do not usually receive full funeral rites. Example of bad deaths are the death of a child, death believed to be punishment from the gods (including leprosy believed to be afflicted on the sufferer by Sanponna the god of leprosy), deaths resulting from accidents, a woman who died at child birth, suicide or someone gruesomely murdered. Their burials are done by specialists who have to do some rituals to accompany them. More importantly is the belief that such people

cannot join the ancestors, neither can they reincarnate (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). The good death is that which the person lives to a good old age, must have lived good and exemplary lives and must have children surviving him (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). The Yorùbá people believe that for those who die good death and were given full funeral rites, they translate into a blissful life in company of the ancestors. They can reincarnate in a child born into the family.

Reincarnation is the belief that the dead family members come back to life, as a new child into family where they previously belong when they were alive. These are usually identified through resemblance, dreams or divination to confirm reincarnations of particular ancestors, and are given names such as *Babatunde* (“father returns”) or *Yetunde* (“mother returns”). These ancestors are invoked to help their descendants. Although the ancestors’ rebirth as exemplified in the foregoing is the major Yorùbá belief in reincarnation, there are other Yorùbá reincarnation beliefs that we shall enumerate later.

According to Sophie Oluwole, African Traditional thought claims three types of justification for the belief in reincarnation (Oluwole, 1996). The first is family resemblance, in which case, children resemble their dead ancestors, having some physical and mental features identical with theirs. The unnatural and circumstantial marks made on some people, such as gun shot and deliberate and accidental deformities on the dead do also reappear on the child that is born. This cannot adequately be explained as a biological family trait. Another justification is the *Abiku* (among the Yorùbás) or *Ogbanje* (among the Igbos) syndrome. The deformities mete out on the bodies of the babies out of desperation to stop them from coming back, appear on those children when they are reborn. The third justification is memory transfer. This is attested to by the stories of children who could recount real life experiences of their ancestors with astonishing details, yet had no first hand access to the stories of such ancestors. All these justifications for reincarnation are well maintained among the Yorùbá people as well.

There are obvious problems with the belief in reincarnation. One of it is that, how do we identify a person who is said to be incarnate in another person? That is, can there be common criteria of identifying incarnate persons? This is a problem of personal identity. Moreover, how do we establish the truth or otherwise that the soul of a person is the soul of a dead ancestor? (Ayiba, 1989).

#### 4. Reincarnation Belief among Yorùbá People

The Yorùbá people believe in reincarnation (*atunwaye*). They actually believe that the souls of some individuals do return after death to live again in a different body. There are different types of reincarnation beliefs among the Yorùbá. One is the belief that someone who dies in good old age may return, out of affection for his children, grand children or relatives, to be reborn into the family to live with them again. This type of reincarnation is called *ipadawaye* (ancestors’ rebirth). This is the most common and enduring belief in reincarnation among the Yorùbá. There is another belief in *abiku* (born to die). The third form of reincarnation belief among the Yorùbá is *akudaaya* (died and reappeared).

The Yorùbá people believe that reincarnation may not always be completely physical, and for a long time. The person can appear suddenly to intervene or rescue his family member from a particular problem, only to disappear after. It can be a sudden and short reappearance that comes like a flash that leaves the person with an undeniable impression. These reappearances are identified with cases of *akudaaya*. There is another level of reappearance that occurs regularly in dreams or follows a particular pattern. For instance, the dream appearance experienced at the anniversary of the person’s death or a regular reappearance of a husband to his widow on their wedding anniversary. It is believed that the dead actually came back to give guidance to the living or to prove that they still exist in some forms elsewhere. It is arguable however, whether this is not simply a mental experience and instead of reincarnation since the dead did not take up a new physical body. The usual emphasis is that his soul re-manifests to show its continued existence.

##### 4.1. *Ipadawaye*

Before the belief in ancestors’ rebirth is connected with the belief in judgment and ancestral cult among the Yorùbá people, the Yorùbá believe that the life after death is in heaven (*orun*). *Orun* however has two compartments; *orunrere* (good heaven) and *orunapaadi* (bad heaven). It is believed that those who died good death are rewarded with *orunrere*. There is also the belief that God judges the character of individuals after death and rewards those with good character with *orunrere* and the bad people are kept in *orunapaadi* for the punishment of their sins. The *orunrere* is where the ancestors live after death. There, they continue their lives in eternal bliss

and in the company of other ancestors. They can also interfere in the affairs of their family members still living. They may decide to reincarnate as a child to the benefit of their family members. Thus, it is only the good ancestors who can reincarnate and those who so wish to do that do reincarnate.

The Yorùbá strongly believe that the souls of the departed good ancestors were reincarnated and reborn as grandchildren in the family for them to continue their existence in the family. The ancestors do this as a result of the love they have for their family members or for the world (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). Children born into the family shortly after the death of an aged person are believed to be reincarnated, especially if they share the same gender with the departed. Children believed to be reincarnated by ancestors are given such names as *Yetunde* [mother has returned], *Iyabo* [mother has come], *Babatide* [father has come] and *Babatunde* [father has come again]. Others are *Ayedun* [life is sweet], *Dehinbo* [come back], and *Sehinde* [come again]. When a child is born, the divine oracle *ifa* is consulted to know which ancestor or ancestress has reincarnated in the child. Some are obvious if certain marks that appeared on the dead also appear on the child (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005).

The Yorùbá expresses the desire for reincarnation at life, but more at death. An aged dying man or woman can express the desire to be reincarnated in the family of his or children's family as a grandchild. More reincarnation expressions are made at death.

Whenever somebody died after a life of much suffering either from a protracted illness or some similar varied ills like barrenness, ill luck, and other related life misfortunes, the corpse was usually addressed as follows: In the next life, make sure you change your destiny. Others simply said at the death of a beloved after a life of misfortunes: *Otilo tunyan* (A Yorùbá expression meaning He or she has gone back to change his or her destiny.) (Fatokun & Hofmyer, 2008).

#### 4.2. *Abiku*

Define This is another type of which is a phenomenon of repeated mortality and birth by the same mother. It is believed that it is the same soul reoccurring to be born as child many times over. "This is based upon the belief that there is a circle of wicked spirits who, of their own volition enter the wombs of pregnant women and are born only to die shortly after" (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). Many times marks are made on the dead child before it is buried to disfigure it and discourage it from appearing again. However, the fact that these marks reappear on the child that comes after, is a strong evidence to show that it is the same child that is reborn and a strong support for the belief in this phenomenon.

Such children are usually named *Maku* [Do not die], *Kokumo* [It will not die again], *Kasimaawo* [Let us watch this one], *Arinka* [Unstable walker], *Igbokoyi/Igbekoyi* (the burial ground rejects this), *Malomo* (Do not go again), *Ayedun* (Life or the earth is sweet), *Durojaiye* (Wait and enjoy life), *Durosinmi* (Wait and bury me), *Kokumo* (Not dying again), *Apara* (One who comes and goes), *Ikujore* (Death leaves him), *Biobaku* (If he does not die), *Petirin* (He has been walking for a long time). These names are given to serve as an appeal to the children to stay and not die again. Some are given in hope that the child will not die again. Others express doubt on whether the child will stay for long or they simply reserve judgement on it. Some others however are believed to taunt the child, make him/her realise that he/she have been identified as *abiku* children, which will make them him/her stay or worse still, die and never reincarnate again.

*Abiku* children give their parents a lot of psychological problems, because they fall sick many times, faint some of the times and are resuscitated. The parents usually try their best to prevent the child from dying again until she dies and they helplessly give up. Nevertheless, the Yorùbá also believes that the circle can be stopped by the intervention of a powerful *Babalawo* [spiritualist].

There are some connections between this belief and the Yorùbá belief in *emere*, which is a phenomenon of familiar spirits believed to come to the world for a short time to play, achieve nothing or to punish some persons. The Yorùbá believe that *emere* cause the *abiku* phenomenon, but not all *emere* are *abiku*. The *emere* children are believed to possibly live longer than the *abiku* children. However, they do not live to achieve anything or that they die when expectations about them are high, dashing the hopes of their parents. They are believed to be cruel and have some irrational behaviours, which some attribute to their relationship with their playmates in heaven.

#### 4.3. *Akudaaya*

*Akudaayas* believed to be another manifestation of reincarnation. In this situation, the dead person is believed to

live in another place different from where he used to live and died. It is usually interpreted in relation to premature death. It is believed that if the destiny that the *ori* of that person was to fulfil was terminated abruptly without fulfilment, or if he is not properly buried, he will not be qualified to enter the ancestral cult but will reincarnate in another body or the soul will keep roaming the world. There have been reported cases of such people who appeared in another location different from where they use to live and died and continued their normal life. In some cases, it was reported that they got married, gave birth to children, worked and invested in the other places where they later lived.

The existence of the *akudaaya* is usually terminated by the discovery of someone who can recognise him to be the dead fellow or a situation that will make those who know him as the dead recognise him as living again. However, after they have died again or disappeared, the evidences abound in the relationships they have had, the children they have got and the works they have done at their second existence.

The belief in ancestors' rebirth (*ipadawaye*) is the most enduring belief in reincarnation among Yorùbá. The belief in *abiku* has waned, though it has not totally vanished, especially with the advent of orthodox medicine that has been able to reduce infant mortality rates and sickle cell anaemia. Perhaps, the *abiku* syndrome must have been a result of lack of medical care, jaundice and especially sickle cell anaemia. This is the opinion of Ilechukwu in his medical research of this phenomenon (Ilechukwu, 2007). The phenomenon of *akudaaya* is a complex one to understand. The evidences are not easy to lay hold upon, as the *akudaaya* is usually said to have disappeared or is dead and buried again before he is known to be one. What survives their disappearance and re-death (*atunku*) are some of the properties and relationships that they have established while they are re-living.

## 5. Akurẹ People and Culture

Akurẹ people are Yorùbá people who live in South Western Nigeria. Oral tradition states that Akurẹ was founded by *Omoremi Omoluabi*, son of *Ekun* and grandson of *Oduduwa Omoluabi*, the royal progenitor of the Yorùbá tribe, who left Ile-Ife in search of a place to settle. Thus, descendants of the Akurẹ clan are addressed as *Omo Ekun*. *Omoremi* was said to have stayed for a while at *Igbo Ooye*, hunting with his entourage while on his way from Ile Ife. For his bravery, he was called *Oloyemekun* (caught the leopard in *Ooye* forest). The totem of Akurẹ is the Leopard arising from the prince's father's name, *Ekun* and from his hunting adventure. He arrived in Akurẹ and was proclaimed *Asodeboyede* (the *Person* who hunted and arrived with royalty). At the point where the prince and his party arrived at the exact location of the modern city, the string holding the heavy royal beads on his neck was said to have snapped, thus causing the people to exclaim "*Àkúnrẹ*" (The beads have snapped), this later became the name of the settlement they established on the site. By constant use overtime, the phrase was twisted to become Akurẹ.

The *Deji* is the paramount ruler of the Akurẹ kingdom and is supported by six high chiefs called *Iwarefa* or *Iare*. The *Iare*chiefs were the elder statesmen and used to act as the chief advisers to the *Deji*. The first six of these chiefs; *Olisa*, *Odopetu*, *Elemo*, *Aro*, *Ojumuand Asae*, popularly known as the *Iarafamefa*, were the representatives of their different quarters making up Akurẹ. About one hundred and thirty villages were under the political control of the Akurẹ kingdom in the 19th century. The village heads under the political jurisdiction of the *Deji* carried him along in the administration of their different villages. These villages were not allowed to approach the *Deji* directly because of the superiority the Akurẹ main indigenes have over citizens of the villages whom they usually referred to as *asira-oko* (rural people) (Afe, 2014). Akurẹ people share the traditional beliefs of the Yorùbá culture. They believe in the Supreme Being, divinities, ancestral spirits, life hereafter, reincarnation and supremacy of morals.

## 6. Reincarnation Beliefs among Akurẹ People

The Reincarnation is part of Akurẹ traditional religions and cultural belief. Samuel Ajayi (Ajayi, 2015) affirms that Akurẹ people have always believed in reincarnation from time immemorial and this belief is still very present among them today. Julius Jemilugba (Jemilugba, 2015) opines that the evidences that Akurẹ Yorùbá people believe in reincarnation abound in the names that depict such belief that abound among Yorùbá people. Such names are *Iyabo* (mother has come) *Babatunde* (father has come) *Babasehinde* (father has returned). If the Akurẹ people do not believe in reincarnation, there would have been no reason why they should give such names to their children.

Stephen Fagbemi (Fagbemi, 2015) holds that the sayings of the Akurẹ people betray their belief in reincarnation. Some of the sayings are: “*Ojoomiran to o bapadawaye, o oni se eyi, o oni se tohun*” (next time when you come back to the world, you will not do this or do that.) All forms of next life wishes or another life expectation that is this worldly are evidences of reincarnation beliefs among the Akurẹ people. Some other sayings are references to experiences in the previous lives. For example: “*O dabi eni wipe nigbatimokokowayelajonaalohun, mi o bi omo, nimo se feranawonomo mi to bayi*” (It is like, when I first came into the world, I was barren, that is why I love my children this much in this second coming.) There are cases of people who are also believed to be older than their age among Akurẹ people, because they are believed to be some ancestors that reincarnated. Such people are believed to be so because they bear some unique marks that were present in those ancestors or some special resemblances. Others are believed to have some wisdom, skills, lifestyle or birth circumstances that are similar to that of some dead ancestors. It therefore shows that Akurẹ people believe in reincarnation in all its various forms: *ipadawaye* (ancestors’ rebirth), *akudaaya* (died but reappeared) and *abiku* (born to die children).

Akurẹ people claim to have evidences to show their belief in reincarnation. Ajayi (Ajayi, 2015) said that stories of people who have died in Akurẹ and reappeared in other places abound among Akurẹ people. Dele Ogun-sola (Ogunsola, 2015) has some reincarnation experiences and was willing to offer them as evidences to attest to the truth of reincarnation.

First, in 1953, when he was in standard one, his mother who was in Ghana to trade, came home because a well known aunt went to call her. His mum said she appeared to her around 12.30 pm on Saturday in Ghana and told her that her father was very sick and she has been sent to call her, so she should follow her home. But, because she hasn’t finished her transactions and couldn’t get enough money for the journey, they had to wait till Monday and she slept in her place in Ghana. They both returned to the city very late at night, so they couldn’t proceed further to the village to see the reportedly sick man. So the aunt slept in their house, with all the family members seeing her, himself inclusive. The following day, they set off to continue their journey. As they entered the village, the woman excused herself to ease herself, while his mother carried her luggage and proceeded into the house. He saw her father hail and hearty, so she reported that her aunty came to call her all the way from Ghana that he was sick. The people were surprised because the time she said she appeared to her was about the time she died in the village. His mother was shown the grave where she was buried. The conflicting evidences from both groups of people were irrevocable. This was a case of *akudaaya*.

Again, his first cousin came four times as an *abiku* or *emere* child. At her first coming, she died and the smallest left finger was cut. One and half years later, she was given birth to without the cut finger. She lived for two years and died again, her left toe was cut. She came back the third time with the two parts of the body cut off. She lived for one and half years and died again, so her right ear was cut. At her fourth coming, all the three parts of the body were absent. She was named *Omodara* (child did wonders) but was later mutated as *Omodara* (child is beautiful), when she came to live with him, so as to debunk the impression of her being an *abiku* child and make her happy. She grew up with him and he trained her till she finished her first degree at Adekunle-Ajasin University AkungbaAkoko, where she graduated with a second class upper division at the age of 23. On the eve of the day she was billed to collect her NYSC call up letter, she complained of headache and died overnight, to confirm that she was an *emere* child.

Adebisi Adedeji (Adedeji, 2015) has another dimension to the belief in reincarnation among Akurẹ people in particular and indeed Yorùbá people in general. He agrees that traditionally, Akurẹ people believe in reincarnation like other Yorùbá people do. Reincarnation is a coming back again after death to live, either through rebirth or reappearance. The main point in reincarnation for the Akurẹ Yorùbá people is a second chance to extend the life’s span that has been initially cut off by death. He however believes that it doesn’t mean that the second chance is one and identical with the first one. Thus the saying among Akurẹ people that: “*Asehinwayeeni, bi ebon lo ri*” (the coming back to life of a person is like being deceived). What this means is that the consolation of coming back to life is like deception, because the second chance is not real. It is not the real person that reappeared; it is like a disguise, a photocopy of the original existence. For him, this does not negate their belief in reincarnation, but questions the status of the person believed to be reincarnated. However, this does not present the belief as a true belief that should be trusted or held on to. If it is a form of deception, it cannot be said to be true at the same time. One can validly say that holding on to this belief about reincarnation is contradictory to their belief as earlier discussed. Nevertheless, the fact that the Yorùbá people place more emphasis on this-worldly experience above the experience beyond the world could have contributed to this dimension of the belief. The Yorùbá people believe that “*aye yini a o ko se ki a to se orun*” (we will first live in the world before

we live in the other world). Hence, reincarnation should not be seen as an escapist way of living an inferior life in this world. The chance that one has to live now is more important than the next. Therefore, the saying that: “*Asehinwayeeni, bi ebon lo ri*” (the coming back to life of a person is like being deceived).

Traditional cultural beliefs are not easy to refute, because it has been part of the people for a long time. Father Adedeji (Adedeji, 2015) is of the opinion that the belief of the Yorùbá people of Akurẹ in reincarnation is not based on flimsy evidences. It is a product of many years of experimentation. They have enough empirical evidences to show that the belief is actually true. It is scientific because they have observed it, subjected it to experimentations and drawn a theory from it.

In conclusion, reincarnation is a well established and enduring belief among Yorùbá people in general and Akurẹ Yorùbá people in particular.

## 7. Reincarnation Belief in Contemporary Times

No doubt, there is no African culture devoid totally devoid of free from foreign influences as colonisation. Christianity, Islam and westernisation have rubbed on the African culture. These influences notwithstanding, reincarnation still remains as one of the enduring beliefs of the Akurẹ people, though with some modifications and new dimensions.

Although Christianity and Islam share with Yorùbá traditional religion, the belief in the immortality of the soul, they reject the belief in notwithstanding reincarnation as untrue. Akurẹ Christian have modified *abiku* incidences as true but explained it as some oppression from wicked spirits which can be stopped by the superior power of God or *Allah*, through his servants or *Alfas*. Instead of consulting traditional spiritualists called *babalawo* for the identification and stopping of these evil spirits, they rather go to the religious leaders of their new religions. Therefore, unlike the Christianity that sees these claims as untrue, Yorùbá Christians see it as true, but as a problem of life that can have solutions in Christ.

When confronted with clear evidences of cases of reincarnation, rather than denying it because it is incompatible with Christian beliefs, Yorùbá Christians would rather doubt their beliefs and pitch their tents with the obvious. Although reincarnation cannot be scientifically established, Yorùbá people simply accept it as mystery that defies explanation. Others simply suspend judgement about it.

The subject of reincarnation is more than just a trivial superstitious belief among the Yorùbá. It has survived the test of time and the influence of other contrary beliefs as the culture inter relates with other cultures. It is a fact that only a move obvious fact can uproot. It is supported by arguments that only superior arguments can overshadow. These superior arguments are yet to be found, but the quest continues.

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