

Paper Title: Change and Continuity: The Yoruba Belief in Life after Death
Author: Dopamu, Ade P.
Institutional Affiliation: Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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Paper abstract:

Scientifically speaking, human beings may not know what happens after death, but many are adamant that there is life after death. Many religions want to push for a utopia, a state of blessedness, for those who live a good life here on earth, and sorrow for the bad life. By the 1890s, some scientists had started to explore such psychical phenomena as the continuation of the soul after death, telepathic communication and communication between the living and the dead.

It is axiomatic that death is a necessary end. It must take place to give way for a new life to come. At death, however, the change which occurs in the body is not the end of life. This change is more properly called ‘change of life’. The major religions, therefore, have given expression to visions of immortality which make this change of life a continuation of the existence of the soul in an afterlife.

Although there is no empirical proof of ultimate survival after the death of the body, we would explore the generally held belief among the Yoruba of Nigeria that the soul continues to exist in an afterlife. Their belief gives a three-tier dimension of the soul. First, the soul is an invisible entity representing an unborn invisible baby in heaven. It is this entity that appears before Olodumare, the Supreme Being, to receive the destiny that an individual will come into the world to fulfill.

Secondly, the soul (personality-soul), still invisible, animates the body of a visible human being on earth and pervades it with life. Thirdly, at death the soul, again invisible, departs from the body and represents the dead person before Olodumare, for judgement.

There is absolutely no evidence that the soul is a full-fledged human being in heaven before coming into the world and after dying in the world. But the concepts which the Yoruba have of the soul are not possible without some body form—kneeling before Olodumare, talking to the Gatekeeper of heaven, walking, receiving, accounting, recounting, being judged. Again, when one has a dream of a dead person, one sees him/her in the same physical characteristics, which he/she has always assumed when he/she was living.

The Yoruba believe that there is a state of existence, attainable by human beings, beyond the limits of our present mortal lifespans. That there can be some kind of continuation in existence after death is attested to by the actions and practices of living people such as veneration of the ancestors, ancestral festivals, concept of the ‘living-dead’, belief in spiritual superintendents of family affairs and punishment of moral offenders. With the

foregoing in view, the paper will argue that the Yoruba believe in life after death and that the change that takes place at death opens the way for the continuity of life in the hereafter.

Author Bio:

Ade P. Dopamu is a Professor of African and Comparative Religion at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. He was the Secretary-General of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR), 1979 – 1984; Editor of NASR, 1984 – 1988; President of NASR, 1994 – 1998; Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, 1992 – 1996. He is currently the Director of African Center for Religions and the Sciences (ACRS), University of Ilorin and the President of the Nigerian Association for the Study and Teaching of Religion and the Natural Sciences (NASTRENS). He is a founder and Chair of the Local Societies Initiative granted *Exploring Contemporary Issues in Science, Religion and the Environment in an African Context*, hosted by NASTRENS at the University of Ilorin, Professor Dopamu was a winner of the prestigious award of John Templeton Oxford Seminars in Science and Christianity, Oxford, U. K. (2003-2005), and he was the only African among the 35 participants. He has edited and published many books and articles including: *Religion, Science and Culture* (2003); *African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought* (2003); *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture* (2004); *God: The Contemporary Discussion* (2005); “The History of the Changing Relationship Between Religion and Science” (2005) and *West African Traditional Religion* (2005).

PAPER TEXT:

Introduction

Human beings and animals share so many things in common, the most obvious being life and death. It is axiomatic that all living things will die. From experience, however, not all living things view death with anxiety. Animals, to the best of our knowledge, do not have the same attitude that human beings have toward death. Death anxiety is common among many societies, and in Africa as elsewhere, people try to fight death by the use of magic, medicine, ritual, prayer and bodily protection. Elders are not excluded from such care because everyone prays to live to a ripe old age. When a young person dies, therefore, people feel empty and disoriented, and enter into a state of sorrow, melancholy and emotional upheaval. Although no one wishes to lose a loved one, the death of the aged is accepted with little sorrow because of the people’s belief that such deceased are only changing environment. In other words, people’s approach to the death of the aged is affected by their knowledge of the afterlife.

Scientifically speaking, however, human beings may not know what happens after death, but many are adamant that there is life after death. Many religions want to push for a utopia, a state of blessedness, for those who live a good life here on earth, and sorrow for the bad life. By the 1890s, some scientists had started to explore such psychical phenomena as the continuation of the soul after death, telepathic communication and communication between the living and the dead¹. Although it is yet to be empirically established that there is ultimate survival after the death of the body, we would explore in

this paper the generally held belief among the Yoruba of Nigeria that the soul continues to exist in an afterlife.

The Yoruba

The history of the Yoruba of Nigeria is beyond this paper. Suffice it here to say that the Yoruba are among the most numerous and coherent of the peoples of Africa². They are found in South-Western Nigeria, and in some parts of Benin Republic and Togoland in West Africa. But predominantly, the Yoruba belong to the *Ogun*, *Osun*, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Kwara and Kogi States of Nigeria. Awolalu has opined that:

...no African group has had greater influence on the culture of the New World than the Yoruba. Today, their descendants still preserve Yoruba culture and traditions in parts of the Caribbean and South America, particularly in Cuba and in Brazil as well as in North America. In many parts of the Caribbean and South America, for example, Yoruba Religion has been accommodated to Christianity; Yoruba divinities have been identified with Catholic saints³.

The corollary from the above is that the importance of Yoruba culture is international as well as local,⁴ and that Yoruba Religion is very rich in terms of concepts, doctrines, philosophy, and sublime practices some of which are funerary rites, ancestor veneration, doctrine of the soul and life hereafter. Our task is to try to examine the nature of their belief in life after death.

The Dogma of Human Personality

Many cultures provide what M. J. Field has aptly called a ‘dogma of human personality’⁵. Human personality concerns the physical and psychical constitution of human beings, or the visible and the invisible aspects of human beings. The dogma of human personality, therefore, is a sort of dualism in the nature of human beings, delineating matter and spirit.

According to Yoruba dogma, a human being is compounded of five entities. The distinguished and erudite authority on Yoruba Religion and Philosophy, E. B. Idowu, is typical in his view that these constituents are closely related but not identical⁶. Awolalu and Dopamu agree with Idowu on these elements with varying emphasis⁷. A summary of these works will satisfy our needs here.

The first constituent part of a whole person is the *ara* (body) which human beings share with other creatures. It is the *ara* that serves as the “house” or “temple” for other constituent parts. “The body is the concrete, tangible thing of flesh and bones which we know through the senses, which can be described in a general way, or analytically by anatomy”.⁸ With *ara*, a person acts and reacts on his/her physical environment. The condition of *ara* can be improved through nourishment and proper care, and when a person dies, it is the *ara* that is buried and allowed to perish⁹.

The second constituent part is *okan* (heart), the material heart that a human being has in common with the lower animals. But this material *okan* is a real representation of another *okan* which is essentially immaterial and invisible¹⁰. This, according to the Yoruba, is the seat of intelligence, thought, action, emotion and psychic energy¹¹. *Okan* is also used to denote that part of man called *eye* (mind, mentality or rationality). The Yoruba use *okan* in the following ways: *Okan re ti lo* (He is buried in thought); *Okan mi so pe yoo wa* (My mind tells me that he will come; I think he will come); *O se okan giri* (He behaved bravely); *O lokan* (He is brave; He has courage; He has a heart)¹². In each of the expressions it is not the physical *okan* (heart) but the immaterial *okan* that is being represented.

The third is *emi* which is variously translated as life, spirit or being. It is the vital principle, the seat of life¹³. According to oral traditions, it is the Supreme Being, Olodumare, who gives *emi* to human beings. Hence, He is called *Elemii* (Owner of life; Owner of spirit). The Yoruba use *emi* in the following ways to show that it can be translated “life” or “spirit”. *Mo fee gba emi re* (I want to take his life); *O pa adanu emi re* (He lost his life); *Ko ni emi ninu_* (He is lifeless); *Emi gun un_* (He is possessed by a spirit); *Emi buruku ba lee* (Evil spirit descended upon him)¹⁴

The fourth element is *eemi* (breath). This is closely associated with *emi* (life). At death, when man ceases to breathe, it means that his *emi_* has gone¹⁵. E. B. Idowu is straight to the point when he says:

Emi is closely associated with the breath and the whole mechanism of breathing which are its most expressive manifestation. But although the fact that a man breathes shows that *emi* is in him, the breath (*eemi*) is not *emi* (life). *Emi* is causative of breath and so it is the “breather”, that which breathes in man¹⁶.

Finally, the Yoruba speak of the real essence of being, the personality-soul, which is a complex concept as we shall see below. In view of its centrality to our thesis, it deserves special attention.

The Doctrine of the Soul

It is generally agreed that the soul is not an easy topic to discuss intelligently. Greek philosophers, notably Plato (427 – 347B.C.) and Aristotle (384 – 322B.C.) had developed a concept of the soul which was inherited by Christianity¹⁷. Plato believed that the human soul is immortal, and Aristotle “elaborated a full theory of the soul as a principle of life, present in all living beings”.¹⁸ Indeed, thinkers have expressed a diversity of views on the subject, some maintaining that the soul is pure and that death liberates it from its imprisonment in the body (matter) which is evil, and others accepting the ontological dualism of soul and body with good and evil associated with the soul¹⁹.

There are scholars who deny the existence of the soul. To such scholars soul is an illusion that does not have real existence because it cannot be scientifically proved. But most scholars maintain that soul is a detachable spiritual essence in human beings. In

line with the thinking of Plato, soul is a pre-existent, invisible entity that enters a human body and survives after the death of the body²⁰.

Many writers consider spirit, soul and self as synonymous, while others differentiate between them. There is no doubt that the three entities are closely correlated, and this correlation will become clearer as we examine the beliefs of the Yoruba. From all debates on the doctrine of the soul, however, it is patent that “the only possible soul is the rational one, which could exist in humans only”.²¹ Most religions agree on one fundamental idea that the soul is immortal and it continues living after death. I join those who say that the soul does not perish with the body since the doctrine is consistent with Yoruba belief. It is an indestructible essence that animates human body and succeeds it after death.²² Ted Peters has an excellent summary of this debate:

Sometimes instead of *spirit* we use the word *soul* to indicate the animating power of human life that distinguishes life from inert matter... we have come to associate the soul with the human mind, the seat of consciousness and willing, and that which makes an individual a subject, a personality. We can say we have a mind or we are a person ... our soul or mind is attuned to the rational structure of the cosmos. Therefore, the whole of reality is in a way present in the individual... Thus, the spirit cannot be identical to or limited to the human individual. Rather it comes from without. It invades us or, perhaps better, draws us beyond ourselves into a transcendent order of reality... Spirit is the condition for human life, but in itself it does not belong to what is human. In its origin and its destiny, it is divine²³.

Thus far, and following Plato’s teaching, we have seen that the soul inhabits matter but it is not identical with it. Most religions believe in a soul that “simply sheds its physical body and goes on, maintaining continuity between this world and the next on the basis of some built-in principle”.²⁴ With this general understanding of the soul, we can now turn to examine the concept among the Yoruba.

The Yoruba Concept of the Soul

The Yoruba concept of the soul is pervasive. Of all the constituents of a person the soul is of supreme importance. The Yoruba believe that the soul, or the personality-soul, guides and helps a person before he is born, at birth, through the passages of life, at death, and finally goes back to its Creator, the Supreme Being, Olodumare.²⁵ The personality-soul is called *ori* by the Yoruba.

Literally, *ori* is the physical head. But the Yoruba distinguish between the physical, visible, external *ori* (head) and the invisible, intangible inner head called *ori inu* (inner head) which controls the full personality of a person²⁶. According to Idowu, the visible *ori* is a symbol of *ori inu* (the internal head; the inner person)²⁷. Awolalu gives a good description of *ori* in the following words:

We are, however, convinced that when the Yoruba speak of *ori* they mean something more than the physical head. They are referring to the personality-soul which is believed to be capable of ruling, controlling and guiding the life and activities of man. The people believe that success or failure in life depends on *ori* and its quality²⁸.

The Yoruba believe that *ori* (soul) is given to a person by Olodumare, Supreme Being, before a person is born and at death, the person's *ori* goes back to Olodumare. The Yoruba, however, give a three-tier dimension of the soul. First, the soul is an invisible entity representing an unborn, invisible baby in heaven. It is this entity that stands before Olodumare to receive the destiny that an individual will come into the world to fulfil. In this case, *ori* that is used to describe the soul is also used to describe man's double, guardian or protector²⁹. Here, *ori* is conceived as a semi-split entity that performs functions such as those of a full grown person.

Secondly, the soul (personality-soul), still invisible, animates the body of a visible human being on earth and pervades it with life. The belief that the soul is present from the time of conception is attested to by the functions which *ori* performs before a person is born into the world. It is believed that prior to birth, when a person already has a body, the soul is infused.

Thirdly, at death, the soul again invisible, departs from the body and represents the dead person before Olodumare, for Judgement. Even before the death of an individual, the soul is considered as having unrestricted mobility. It is *ori* (soul) that is able to leave the body in dreams and in mind-wandering. Where belief in witchcraft has survived, it is the soul that goes out of the body to meet with other souls in their nocturnal activities.

According to Yoruba belief, destiny (*ayanmo, ipin ori, kadara*) is the function of *ori*. It is believed that before a person is born into the world, his/her ori will appear before Olodumare to choose a destiny. In the works of Idowu, Awolalu, Awolalu and Dopamu, it is argued that a person obtains his destiny in one of three ways – *Akunleyan* (That – which-is-choosen-kneeling), *Akunlegba* (That-which-is received-kneeling), or *Ayanmo* (That-which-is-affixed to one).

Looking critically at these expressions, it is reasonable to interpret them as three different stages of getting destiny from heaven. If we interpret them as three different ways we will be introducing confusion into the whole process. For, individuals may choose from one single way to the detriment of another. There is clear logic in three stages of getting destiny.

In the first stage, *ori* kneels before Olodumare and chooses his destiny. This is called *Akunleyan* (That which one kneels down and chooses), or The second stage is *Akunlegba* (That which one kneels down and receives), or The third stage is *Ayanmo* (That which is affixed to one).³⁰ E. B. Idowu, who had done a lot of research among the Yoruba, had written inter alia:

Thus we have a trimorphous conception of destiny the sustaining motif of which is that the person who is coming into the world must kneel before the High Authority who is Olodumare for its conferment. Whatever is thus conferred is unalterable and becomes one's portion throughout life. That is what the person goes into the world to fulfil³¹.

The usage of *ori* in what follows confirms that the Yoruba think of *ori* as the soul, human's double, a semi-split entity or a person's guardian angel. A fortunate person is called *Olori-ire* (One who possesses good *ori*) while one who is unfortunate is described as *Olori-buruku* (One who possesses a bad *ori*)³². The Yoruba pray for a person going on a journey or undertaking an enterprise: *Ki ori ki o sin e lo o* (May *ori* go with you; or May *ori* prosper you). A newly married woman is instructed to take *ori* along, and not just beauty because beauty is ephemeral, but it is *ori* that abides with one in the husband's house³³. Parents also pray for their children in the belief that their *ori* will affect them positively. An example is: *Ori mi a sin o lo* (May my *ori* go with you). In other words, "May my *ori* guide you and bless you"³⁴. If a person miraculously escapes from harm, he will say: *Ori mi yo mi* (My *ori* has saved me). When something has been accomplished the Yoruba say: *Ori mi ba mi se_* (My head has enabled me to do it). Here, the person is referring to the fact that it is the person's double that has helped him.³⁵ The illustration is not exhaustive, but what must be particularly stressed is that human beings have souls which make them rational, conscious, responsive and responsible. The soul differentiates human beings from animals and makes humans to be capable of knowing their Maker, the Supreme Being.

The Yoruba believe that when coming into the world, *ori*, in the form of human's double, passes the gate between heaven and earth. There, the *Onibode orun* (The heaven's Gatekeeper) asks him/her to declare his/her destiny.³⁶ According to Awolalu and Dopamu:

There the destiny is doubly and finally sealed, and man is born into the world. But he forgets everything about his destiny. It is only his *ori*, guardian angel or counterpart, that knows all about his destiny, and therefore guides him throughout life. But the Yoruba believe that there is always the oracle divinity, *Orunmila*, who is present when man's destiny is sealed before Deity. He also knows all about man's destiny, and he can always put man in line with regard to his duties and obligations, what to do and what to avoid, so that all may be well with him³⁷.

Let us recall that a person, according to Yoruba Religion, has *ara* (body), *emi* (life or spirit), *eemi* (breath), *okan* (the invisible heart) and *ori* (the personality-soul or the essence of being). All the elements work together. If *emi* (life) leaves the body, life departs, *eemi* (breath) ceases, *okan* (the physical heart) ceases to beat, and *ori* leaves the body. When *ori* (soul) goes out in dreams, the *emi* has to stay to maintain breathing. Thus *emi* (life) and *eemi* (breath) function together, and the absence of one signifies the absence of the other. The two can be restored into a person that faints, or a person that is temporarily confronted by death. If, however, *ori*, *emi* and *eemi* leave together, the person dies.

This concept is similar to what the Ga of Ghana believe about Kra. Kra is usually translated 'soul', but "physical life depends on its presence and health on its intactness".³⁸ The same point is emphasised by Owuejeogwu Angulu shen he says:

...a human being is made up of a soul, breath, and body, with skin. The soul and breath leave the body at death, although both differ in that the soul can leave the body, as in witchcraft, while the body continues to breathe. Also, it is the soul that continues to exist after death.³⁹

In sum, the Yoruba believe that the human soul begins its journey from heaven, inhabits the human body on earth and finally returns to Olodumare its Maker.

The Phenomenon of Death

As we pointed out above, death is a necessary end. It is a final turning point in the life of human beings here on earth. Awolalu and Dopamu have observed concerning death:

...peoples 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 end⁴⁰.

In Yoruba belief there are categories of death – bad or good death, death of the young and of the aged. The good death concerns those who live to a ripe old age, and a full funerary rites are accorded such people. Bad deaths include those caused by anti-wickedness divinities (thunder, smallpox, and iron), those who die young and those who die childless.⁴¹ A full examination of bad deaths should not detain us here since we are concerned primarily with good deaths and the death of the aged.

The aged believe that there should not be any anxiety over death because it is a means of going back home which is the origin of every human being. When the aged finally dies there are funerary rituals to prepare him/her for the new journey home. One of the dirges sung is:

Ile lo lo taara,
Baba wa rele re;
Ile lo la taara.
Ti o ba dorun,
Ko wehin wo;
Baba rele o,
Ti o ba dorun,
Ko wehin wo.

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.

To the Yoruba, death closes the door of physical, visible, bodily existence of a person and opens another door, the door to a new life. The aged, therefore, does not face death as a coward. His bravery is stalwart. In the opinion of Arthur Peacocke, death must take place to give way for others to come.⁴² Here, we shall quote Peacocke with approval:

Evolution can operate only through the death of individuals, New forms of matter arise only through the dissolution of the old; new life only through death of the old. We as individuals would not be here at all, as members of the species. *Homo Sapiens* if our forerunners in the evolutionary process had not died. Biological death was present on the earth long before human beings arrived on the scene, and is the prerequisite of our coming into existence through the processes of biological evolution whereby God, theist must assume, creates new species including *Homo Sapiens*.⁴³

What St. Paul has taught Christians about the resurrection of the dead, using the imagery of the seed that will have to “die” before germinating, is true of the Yoruba. Ted Peters is aware of this when he writes:

To speak of the new...inevitably implies that what is old will have to die. The future holds an element of death as well as the promise of new life... Death to the old aeon is necessary if the new creation is going to have the quality of newness required to make it a fulfilment.⁴⁴

We are also intrigued by Angela Tilby’s contribution on this matter because it reflects the belief of the Yoruba. He opines:

In the end we must die and give up our individual consciousness into the boundless merciful memory of God. Death is not a punishment, it is a gift of nature, and we spend all our life learning to appreciate it. In the same way, our human life in this universe may not last for ever. If life is destined to fill the whole universe, it will not be life as we know it.⁴⁵

But where did the dead go after dying in the world? Do they have any existence after death? What is the evidence that there is life after death? These questions deserve attention in what follows:

Change and Continuity

The Yoruba believe that at death, the change which occurs in the body is not the end of life. The change is more properly called 'change of life'. The Yoruba are quite ready to surmise that the soul of the departed must exist somewhere in heaven. They regard death as both the necessary and sufficient condition for attaining immortality of the soul. *Ori* (soul), as we have stated, comes from Olodumare and it returns to Him after death where he continues existence. We can illustrate the change and continuity of the soul in the following way:

CHANGE

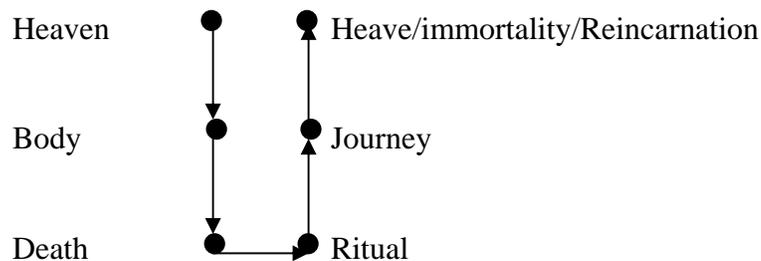
1. From the heavenly soul to a human being in a bodily form.
2. Death of the body.
3. After appropriate funerary rites, the soul returns to heaven.

All these changes concern the soul and they bring about a change of life, from one state to another. If the change does not take place, the soul as we know it, has no chance of immortality.

CONTINUITY

As in the case of change, continuity of life concerns the soul. Continuity can be illustrated as follows:

1. Through death, the soul changes its abode and continues existence in heaven.
2. In heaven the soul may have a chance of immortality.
3. Through reincarnation the soul may also return to any of his children.



The Yoruba believe that there is a state of existence, attainable by human beings, beyond the limits of our present mortal lifespans.⁴⁶ That there can be some kind of continuation in existence after death is attested to by the beliefs, actions and practices of living people such as veneration of the ancestors, ancestral festivals, concept of the living-dead, belief in spiritual superintendents of family affairs, funerary rituals, the last words of the aged, transition of the dead, divine judgement, reincarnation, the doctrine of the soul and punishment of moral offenders. Space will not allow us to examine all of them.

Funerary rituals are of primary significance as a mechanism for expressing, reasserting and reinforcing life after death.⁴⁷ The deceased who leaves behind children and who dies at a ripe old age is accorded full burial, in the belief that he is going home. Before

his death, the aged faces the impending death in a mood which, at best, is positively gay, and in any case is lacking in anxiety.⁴⁸ Magesa's comment on this subject is apposite here;

Old age and death have important roles in African understandings of the vital force... Accompanied by the appropriate rites, they are moments when the power of life is intensified for the individual and for the individual's society... death in old age is a dignified event. It is expected that old people must demonstrate courage and heroism when faced with death. Such behaviour increases their honour and influence of their vital force in the eyes of those they leave behind. As a result, the words a person utters at the moment of death have utmost significance...The prestige of the aged in death has been frequently enhanced by the significance attributed to their 'last words.'⁴⁹

After death and necessary ritual, an individual is reinstated as an ancestor because he has living descendants of the right category. "His reinstatement in this status establishes his continued relevance for his society"⁵⁰. Although dead, people believe that they are living in heaven. That explains why Mbiti has described them as "the living dead"⁵¹

That human beings should survive bodily death is a notion that gives meaning to the why of human existence at all. Personal survival, therefore, is a valid conclusion, because it validates the picture of Ultimate Reality (Olodumare) who initially gives life to individual person.

Within the African context, the Yoruba inclusive, the living dead are the ancestors. Not every dead person becomes an ancestor. "Strictly speaking, therefore, a person who leaves no descendants cannot become an ancestor spirit".⁵² Also, children who die cannot become an ancestor since they do not achieve parenthood.

A pertinent question arises. Can children or childless people who are not ancestors qualify to continue existence after death? The Yoruba are just as vague about the after-life of this category of the deceased. Although the elders are quite ready to surmise that the departed must exist somewhere, apparently in heaven, and no doubt do so in ways that mirror life in that world, they do not clearly admit that children and childless people continue life after death. Some speculate that dead children only change environment in this world and continue to live in the new environment until they die at old age. It is said that they can again change environment if they encounter someone who knew them before. The Yoruba talk of those who die young and live somewhere again as *Aku-da-aya* (The ghost of a dead person appearing in a place other than his hometown).

Two other issues compound the problem. First is the *abiku* (born-to-die children) phenomenon. This is based upon the belief that there is a cycle of wicked spirits who of their own volition enter the wombs of pregnant women and are born only to die shortly after. It is believed that any mark made on the dead body of *abiku* will reappear when the mother gives birth again to another child. This is an indication that the previous dead child has come back. There is logic in saying that, if it is true that the same child who had

died has come back, the *abiku* child must have continued existence somewhere before returning to the same mother.

Secondly, the doctrines of the soul and after-life existence are intertwined. If all human beings have souls, and if the souls survive after death and return to their Maker (God), it is reasonable to suggest that all souls, without exception, will fulfil this requirement. Consequently, the souls of children and childless people will survive after death, even though they are not qualified to be ancestors. It could be argued, therefore that soul, death, spirits, ancestors and the after-life are issues that relate to one another in the people's belief and practices.

But the facts of customary beliefs show that ritual dealings with ancestors are not the same as those associated with deceased children and childless people. This, at once, may suggest that since this category of the dead do not have elaborate rituals associated with them, and since they have no descendants to bring them rites and reverence, they may not have any existence after death. This is not to be so in view of the doctrines of the soul and death. It is also clear if we bear in mind that the doctrine of divine judgement after death does not leave out any category of dead people, old or young, male or female, childless or fruitful. In these cases, the soul of those who die has a fundamental role to play.

There is absolutely no empirical evidence that the soul is a full-fledged human being in heaven before coming into the world and after dying in the world. However, the concepts which the Yoruba have of the soul are not possible without some body form - kneeling before Olodumare, talking to the Gatekeeper of heaven, walking, receiving, accounting, recounting, being judged. Again, when one has a dream of a dead person, one sees him/her in the same physical characteristics which he/she has always assumed when he/she was living. In view of the foregoing, we submit that the Yoruba believe in life after death, and that the change that takes place at death opens the way for the continuity of life hereafter.

All along, the word "heaven" has occurred in relation to God, divinities, ancestors hereafter and the human soul. The question can then be asked: Where is the location of the hereafter? The Yoruba will answer this question by pointing to the sky. The knowledge of space and other planets is not much of a concern to them. Heaven is just above covered by the clouds. The Yoruba, therefore, speak of heaven as a place that exists in literal terms. They think of a hierarchy of heavens or planets, one of which, at least, houses the Supreme Being and other spiritual beings, including divinities and ancestors. The Yoruba think that heaven is a very pleasant place to go, and it is a place that the aged yearns for. The aged is also warned to live in heaven according to the established pattern of the place:

*Ma jookun,
Ma jekolo,
Ma ba won kole imo bo ba dorun,
Ohun ti won ba n je ni ki o ba won je.*

Do not feed on centipedes,
Do not feed on earthworms,
Do not build a thatched roof house when you get to heaven,
Eat whatever they eat in heaven.

Conclusion.

The question of the hereafter has perplexed mankind for ages. People of every age and society have pondered the subject, and there is no shortage of proposed answers. The Yoruba believe in the life after death. They claim that after the death of the body, the soul continues to exist in another world, that is, in an afterlife. Practices, religious experiences and beliefs show the belief of the people in an afterlife.

Pouring libation to the ancestors, invoking their names to settle disputes, mentioning their names in discussions and seeing them in dreams presuppose that the ancestors are still in existence in some form or another. They are always watching to see that the living are on the right path, and that they preserve what their forefathers established.

The thought of their continued existence keeps the social structure together and enhances the relationship between the living and the dead. On the whole, it appears that many Yoruba people think of the hereafter having similar features as those of the present life. For the Yoruba, the real picture of the life after death, therefore, is a life of an unending fellowship in the community of one's kith and kin who had gone before into the world beyond.

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