

IS OLODUMARE, GOD IN YORUBA BELIEF, GOD?: A RESPONSE TO BENSON O. IGBOIN**Sunday Layi Oladipupo**

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ABSTRACT

Olodumare the Yoruba word for Supreme Being has attracted comments, interpretations and misinterpretations from different scholars of both Yoruba and non-Yoruba extractions. E. Bolaji Idowu, John Ayotunde Bewaji, Kazeem Ademola Fayemi, Kola Abimbola analyses manifest some seemingly contradictions upon which was hinged by Benson O. Igboin, in his paper "Is *Olodumare*, God in Yoruba Belief, God?" From their explanation, Igboin demand for the true nature of *Olodumare* having conceded that *Olodumare* and the Christian God are not and cannot be the same. Specifically, Igboin asked *Olodumare*, who are you? This paper, therefore, aims at providing an insight to the real nature of *Olodumare* in Yoruba worldview. It argues that God is nothing other than the English meaning or interpretation of the Supreme Being. The paper posits that Igboin's pairs of Esu and *Olodumare* of which one is true and faithful to Yoruba traditional Religion and the other true and faithful to Christianity in Yoruba land does not hold water. Using analytical method of philosophical inquiry, the paper concludes that *Olodumare* in Yoruba traditional Religion cannot be equated with the concept of God as conceived in Christianity neither could it be bifurcated. He is sufficiently a Supreme Being in Yoruba theology.

Keywords: *Supreme Being, Olodumare, Yoruba, Esu, Benson O. Igboin.*

ABSTRAK

Olodumare, sebuah kata dalam bahasa Yoruba untuk menyebut Wujud Mutlak, telah memancing beragam komentar, penafsiran, dan, bahkan kekeliruan pemahaman dari banyak sarjana baik dari kalangan keturunan Yoruba maupun non-Yoruba. Analisis dari E. Bolaji Idowu, John Ayotunde Bewaji, Kazeem Ademola Fayemi, Kola Abimbola menunjukkan beberapa kontradiksi yang oleh Benson O. Igboin dijadikan rujukan dalam artikelnya, "Is *Olodumare*, God in Yoruba Belief, God?" Dari penjelasan mereka, Igboin berupaya menemukan hakikat *Olodumare* yang diyakini berbeda dan tidak bisa disamakan dengan Tuhan umat Nasrani. Pada intinya, Igboin mempertanyakan, siapa *Olodumare*? Berangkat dari hal itu, artikel ini bermaksud menyuguhkan sebuah pemahaman mengenai hakikat sesungguhnya *Olodumare* dalam pandangan dunia Yoruba. Artikel ini mengajukan pandangan bahwa Tuhan tidak lain dari apa yang dalam makna atau penafsiran istilah bahasa Inggris disebut sebagai Supreme Being (Wujud Mutlak). Tulisan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa apa yang dilakukan

Igboin dengan mengidentikkan Esu dengan *Olodumare*, yaitu salah satunya benar dan diimani oleh agama tradisional Yoruba dan yang lainnya benar dan diimani oleh agama Kristen/Nasrani di tanah Yoruba adalah hal yang tidak jelas dan tidak berdasar. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian analisis filosofis, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa *Olodumare* dalam agama tradisional Yoruba tidak dapat disamakan dengan konsep Tuhan sebagaimana yang dipahami dalam agama Nasrani, namun tidak pula dapat dipisahkan. Jadi, *Olodumare* bukanlah Tuhan seperti yang dipahami dalam pemikiran agama Nasrani, melainkan Wujud Mutlak dalam teologi Yoruba.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Wujud Mutlak, Olodumare, Yoruba, Esu, Benson O. Igboin.*

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Introduction

"Man without religion is a myth!"

This paper attempts to demonstrate the fact that universal concepts really exist, although they are oftentimes reducible to cultural domain of universal. One of such concepts to which it examines under critical analysis is that of Benson O. Igboin's investigation on God as the meaning to understand Olodumare in Yoruba Belief. The investigation was written in his paper, on the title: "Is *Olodumare*, God in Yoruba Belief, God?" and published in *Kanz Philosophia* Volume 4, Number 2, December 2014. By reading through the paper and the arguments, I therefore became agitated to respond to the paper.

The answer that I proposed for the question raised in the aforementioned paper is built on the philosophical idea of MacIntyre. He states that:

... any contemporary attempt to envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, whose character provides the virtues with an adequate *telos* encounters two different kinds of obstacles, one social and two philosophical. The social obstacles derive from the way in which modernity partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behavior.... The philosophical obstacles derive from two distinct tendencies, one chiefly, though not only, domesticated in analytic philosophy and one at home in both sociological theory and in existentialism (MacIntyre 1981).

In this paper, the philosophical obstacle forms the centre of attraction, especially analytical philosophy. By this, the stage is set to validate the fact that *Olodumare* in Yoruba belief is not necessarily God as interpreted in the Christianity or any other religious sense apart from Yoruba religion.

A Conspectus of Igboin's Argument

This aspect is structured to present a synopsis of Igboin's argument. It becomes necessary in order to prepare the ground for what follows. The central argument of Igboin as contained in the paper embodies the diverse interpretations and analyses of the *Olodumare* by many Yoruba scholars. The incongruence of their submission seems to be confusing as there is no unifying template to ascertain the true nature of the Deity in Yoruba theology. Based on the preponderance of different interpretations of these scholars, Igboin concludes by raising a question to solidify his position. He asks "*Olodumare*, who are you?" His response to this self-raised question is suggestive in nature. He suggests that: "for now, there are two pairs of Esu and *Olodumare*; one pair is true and faithful to Yoruba traditional religion and the other pair true and faithful to Christianity in Yoruba land" (Igboin 2014, 207). This suggestion opens the gate for further interrogation and probable solution to the question asked. This diagnosis is within the understanding of Igboin's argument. It serves as the basis upon which his position is being interrogated herein. The understanding of Igboin's paper gives the following implications discussed in the subsequent paragraph:

First, it interrogates the claims of three recent decolonizing philosophers and reveals that their casting of *Olodumare* is incongruous and inconsistent one with another. *Second*, it suggests that each of the world's religions does not begin its text with the question: *Who is God?* Therefore, to him the existence of God is also a given, because He must necessarily exist in order to establish such a relationship (Igboin 2014, 190). *Third*, the decolonisers cannot successfully refute Idowu's conclusion without providing an alternative linguistic exploration of *Olodumare* (2014, 190).

Given this, his argument implies that "the account impels one to think of *Olodumare* as a universal deity; a deity that is bold and courageous to confront the world" (2014, 205). And that for better understanding of philosophical discourse as it relates to concept, attention must be shifted to "linguistic engagement as it avoidance as done by decolonizing philosophers tell much on the competence of engagement and responsible decolonization" (2014, 206). Also, "that unlike Idowu, the decolonizing philosophers could not sustain the philosophical tempo they started with, without delving into

moral, social, political, economic functions and differences in the nature and personality of the society and deity under examination” (2014, 207). And that all the decolonizing philosophers examined by him agreed that *Esu* is not Satan or the Devil but was erroneously translated so in Yoruba language and theology (2014, 207). His paper therefore calls for critical harmonization of idea and understanding of *Olodumare* by scholars in order to have a thorough decolonization of whom and what *Olodumare* is in Yoruba theology (2014, 207).

Without necessarily revisiting the methodological question of study in African philosophy, the onus of this paper is to add value and meaning to the substance of *Olodumare* in Yoruba traditional religion in a way to provide an avid explanation of *Olodumare*.

Why Olodumare in Yoruba Belief is not Necessarily God in Christian Sense?

Having reviewed the fundamental assumptions and central argument of Igboin on the nature of Yoruba *Olodumare* vis-a-vis his reference to some Yoruba scholars, it is apposite at this point to respond to the main question posed in his paper. Bearing in mind that some, if not all philosophical issue(s) is/are perennial in nature and the fact that interrogation of existing claims is one of the major hallmark of scholarship warrants this exercise. However, in a positive sense, Igboin’s paper deserves commendation, for bringing to limelight an issue that ordinary mind could not have thought of.

It is important to mention that this discourse is not out to defend the theology of *Olodumare*, rather it is committed to a philosophical clarification of the concept of *Olodumare* in Yoruba culture. This is because, to me, Igboin seems not to have adequate resources to explain this concept for the Yoruba *Olodumare*. The Yoruba *Olodumare* is distinctively the Supreme Being either religiously or philosophically and this cannot be disputed. This reality might have formed the basis of Segun Ogungbemi’s submission that *Olodumare* is a Supreme Being if not even superior to the Judeo-Christian concept of God (Ogungbemi 2014). Ogungbemi’s thought here seems to have complimented the age-long position of Geoffrey Parrinder, who says: “the Yoruba Supreme Deity has no temples or priests. He is not called an *Orisha*, a god; He is above and beyond all gods” (Parrinder 1973, 19).

The concept of the Supreme Being is a cultural phenomenon. It exists in all cultures, though with different names, peculiar to their linguistic expressions. For instance, to the Jews, it is called *Yahweh*, to the Yoruba he is known as *Olodumare*; to the Hausa He is called *Ubangiji*; to the Edo, He

is known as *Osanobua*; to the Igbo, He is called Chukwu etc. Furthermore, the concept of the Supreme Being has various connotations in different religious spaces, for instance in Christian belief, He is called Almighty God, to the Muslims, He is called Allah, in Hinduism, He is called Supreme *Brahma/Bhagavan*, while close to the concept in Buddhism is Nirvana, etc. This possibility presupposes that God is merely the English interpretation of the Supreme Being adopted and commonly used by the Christians to explain their understanding of what the name connotes in their religious space. Thus, the attempt to universalize the Christian idea of God has made it one of the perennial problems.

The challenges that shroud the universal nature of God are onerous tasks that still seek for clarification in the face of multi-cultural interpretations and worldview of different cultures that constitute the universe. This simple belief presupposes the possibility of it being conceived differently in different tradition and by individuals based on their philosophical dexterity. The implication of this suggests that its universal nature could be meaningfully understood within the purview of cultural universalism. The problem associated with the incongruences with different explanation of *Olodumare* as given by Yoruba scholars cannot be dissociated from the translation of the Christian Bible by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowder who confused the notion of God in the Bible with the traditional Yoruba concept of *Olorun/Olodumare* and the biblical concept of Satan and the devil as *Esu* in Yoruba culture.

This reference is imperative as it could not be dissociated from the perceived differential analysis of the Yoruba understanding of *Olodumare* as related to Christian God. One is therefore poised to give a brief background to the nature of Yoruba people in respect of their religion and idea of Supreme Being. The best way to start this in my view is with glean to the fact that the Yoruba traditionally are pagans and that the influx of new religion be it Mohammedanism or Christianity is a product of eighteenth century. However, before this period, the Yoruba have their idea and understanding of a Supreme Deity which is *Olorun*. Samuel Johnson states:

The Yoruba originally were entirely pagans. Mohammedanism which many now profess was introduced only since the close of the eighteenth century. They, however, believe in the existence of an ALMIGHTY GOD, Him they term *OLORUN*, i.e, LORD OF HEAVEN. They acknowledge Him, maker of heaven and earth, but too exalted to concern Himself directly with men and their affairs, hence they admit the existence of many gods as intermediaries and these they term *Orisas* (Johnson 1921, 26).

From the above submission, one can graphically refute the argument of the insufficiency of *Olodumare* as the almighty creator. This refutation is not unconnected with the preponderance fact that hierarchically and religiously, the Yoruba place *Olodumare* far above other deities (gods) and this is well captured by J. Olumide Lucas who argues that:

Over and above all other deities classified above and excelling them in power, honour and majesty is the Supreme Deity known as *Olorun*, a Being of unique character, possessing attributes far too noble, far too abstract and refined to have originated from the thought of a primitive people. He is credited with Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence (Lucas 1948, 34).

One, however, needs to examine Johnson's qualification of the Yoruba as pagan, this qualification in our view seems derogatory and perhaps one needs to query the authenticity of his thought as this is a representation of colonial mentality. Similarly the thought of Lucas referring to the Yoruba thought as primitive is equally an unacceptable concept as using such words to qualify Yoruba thoughts lives much to be desired. However, upon critical analysis, it is evident that following from the perspective of the above scholars, the name *Olodumare* is subsumed under the name *Olorun*. Meanwhile, Idowu on whose analysis Igboin hinged his argument was the one who is ascribed to have scholastically brought the name *Olodumare* to limelight. He pointed out that the name *Olodumare* is older than any other name that may be given to the Supreme Deity in Yoruba culture. Parrinder presented Idowu's submission in the following words:

.... Dr. Idowu has argued persuasively that the older name for God is the title of *Olodumare*, still widely used, and rather mysterious in meaning, perhaps 'almighty' or 'omnipotent ruler.' He quotes many hitherto unrecorded songs and proverbs to show the antiquity of *Olodumare* and suggests that the popularity of the name *Olorun* grew with Christian and Muslim influence because of its clear and monotheistic sense (Parrinder 1973, 20).

Given the above, one could logically agree with Idowu as even till date, the word *Olorun* seems to be an adjective for *Olodumare* such that you hear the Yoruba people when making reference to *Olodumare* saying *Olorun Olodumare*. Though, scholars have argued that the origin of the word *Olodumare* cannot be determined and that attempts made in the past to break up the word into syllables for easy analysis have not been successful. Tradition, however, has it that people confirm that the name connotes one who has the fullness or

superlative greatness; the everlasting majesty upon whom man can depend (Awolalu 1979, 11).

It follows, therefore, that *Olodumare* being interpreted to mean different things by different scholars of Yoruba orientation do not imply that it has no existence in Yoruba theology. Rather, it suggested the need to reflect on the circumstances that warrant their claims. For instance, Idowu in his explanation of the concept of *Olodumare* is out to correct the misconception of the European on Yoruba theology and seek for Yoruba equivalent of the European concept of God. Within Bolaji's exposition, *Olodumare* is pungently portrayed as God in Yoruba belief (Idowu 1962). Bewaji's exposition as outlined by Igboin, is a reaction to correct the negative impulse of scholars like Pearce who argued that African philosophy does not have independent, indigenous modes of thought; and because African philosophy lacks spontaneity, it represents "a combination of lines of contemporary philosophical thought" (Igboin 2014, 194). While Fayemi's argument, seems to have been informed by the need to decolonize African belief from the shackles of western analysis. On the other hand, Abimbola's argument hinges on the relationship between *Olodumare* and other divinities that participated in the creation story obtainable in the Yoruba mythological account of creation. This is coupled with the belief of the Yoruba, that *Olodumare* is only at the apex in the hierarchy of divinities and that each of the divinities has his area of specialization. This reality is well captured by Fayemi, who posits that, "*Olodumare* is seen as the ultimate cause of all visible processes in the world and as a matter of importance, He is central to the Yoruba world-view" (Fayemi 2007, 304).

The argument of Abimbola, therefore needs to be pontificated to explain the fact that the doctrine of delegation of power and division of labor in the creation story as obtained in Yoruba belief is not sufficient to assume that *Olodumare* is at the same level with other divinities. The fact that there is a division of labor between *Olodumare* and other divinities in Yoruba religion does not presuppose that *Olodumare* is not the Supreme Being as argued by Abimbola. The profundity of this thought reflects in Idowu's position that "by the functions of these divinities, and the authority conferred upon them, they are 'almighty' within their limits. But their 'almightiness' is limited and entirely subject to the absolute authority of the creator himself" (Idowu 1962, 45). The creator whom Idowu refers to here is *Olodumare* and not any of the divinities associated with the reserved right in any aspect of the day-to-day activities and administration in Yoruba land. This reality is reflected in the attitude of the Yoruba such that when sacrifices are offered at the shrine of any other deity, the Yoruba direct their prayer to *Olodumare*.

For instance, they use to say “*Olodumare je ki ebo ti a ru gba or Olodumare gb’ebo wa,*” means: “*may Olodumare, the Supreme Being, accept the prayers offered through these sacrifices or may Olodumare accept our sacrifices*”. By implication, other divinities were assigned with one responsibility or the other in the Yoruba creation story and theology is an opportunity given to them by *Olodumare*. This opportunity however does not put them at par with *Olodumare* as argued by Abimbola for the Yoruba. According to Fayemi, “acknowledge the existence of a supreme reality as the cause of all causes, the being of being and the transcendent of transcendence... This being or creator, the Yoruba refer to as *Olodumare* (Supreme Deity) or *Olorun* (the owner of the heaven and earth)” (Fayemi 2007, 304).

This fact is sufficiently advanced in the reality of *Olodumare* as the one that gives responsibility to others in the process. However, it is equally necessary to mention that the leadership nature of *Olodumare* in Yoruba account and hierarchy of divinities, though, places him at the apex and as such regarded as the Supreme Being in Yoruba worldview; this does not sufficiently make him to be at par with the attributes of God in Christian theology. It is suggested that his supremacy is a necessary one. This is explained by Oluwole when she states “*Orunmila* was mandated by *Olodumare* to use his wisdom to organize and manage the affairs of the society” (Oluwole 2014, 15). This to an extent further clarifies the misrepresentation of Abimbola who seems to be too assertive in concluding that when it comes to issue of wisdom *Orunmila* is at apex. Though, this is part of Yoruba theology on the hierarchical nature of the Supreme Being and divinities, it is nonetheless, further shows the supremacy of *Olodumare* above other deities.

Beyond this, Yoruba myth of creation is emphatic on the point that *Olodumare* ordered *Orunmila* to use His (*Orunmila*) wisdom to organize the world. This wisdom, of course, must have been given to him at creation by God rather than revelations or direct dictation after *Orunmila* was already on earth (Oluwole 2014, 59). This is akin to Igboin’s that “when Apostle Paul talked about “Christ the wisdom and power of God,” he is not saying that Christ is above God in the Godhead, neither did he suppose that God lacks wisdom and power nor are they limited in God” (Igboin 2014, 196). Hence, *Olodumare* within this myth could not be seen as Christian God who reveals Himself to His adherent by handing over divine messages to them directly. In spite of all the scholars analyzed by Igboin, it is only Idowu that equates *Olodumare* as God. Others have their reservation on the Godliness nature of *Olodumare* as postulated and conceived in Christian religion. Be that as it may, one could not shy away from the fact that:

Meanings of concept and ideas in one particular language, may, and very often do differ from that into which they are translated, explained, and understood. The situation is that most scholars fail to pay serious attention to the consequences of some important differences of conceptual and intellectual schemes of thought. The omission often leads to the lack of deep understanding and full appreciation of the fact that arguments and criticisms in a foreign language may be addressing ideas and concepts outside the parameters in which they were conceived, used and explained in the original language of the author (Oluwole 2014, xvii).

It is, however, necessary to argue that, taking the universal nature of God as the Supreme Being, conceived differently by different culture, represented in different names is a pointer to the possibility of similarities and disparities in explaining the nature of the Supreme Being. It is in this sense that one may argue that Yoruba theology on the *Beingness of Olodumare* could be meaningfully understood when it is properly analyzed and diagnosed within the purview of Yoruba theology which is a reflection of Yoruba worldview. It should not be based on the seemingly corrupt interpretation of Yoruba/African scholars who have already been westernized and colonized “for were we to impose upon these realities a foreign framework, we would be placing on them an iron collar, we would torture them in a Procrustean bed, we would not be able to readily connect reality with the particular savor it has, [when viewed through African eyes], we would be posing all sorts of false problems and giving pseudo solution” (Oluwole 2014, 112).

Similarly, that different Yoruba scholars who re-interpreted the nature of *Olodumare* differently is not the first in history. Therefore, being the premise on which Igboin has built his argument only reflects one of the many problems that arise from trying to translate one language to another. It perhaps leaves much to be desired such that question as: How can we retain the meaning of a statement, expression or concept undistorted when translated from one language into another (foreign) language and vice-versa? (Aigbodioh and Igbafe 2004, 87). Philosophers of different orientations have tried to rescue philosophy from this challenge by providing some possibilities. For instance, Wittgenstein argues that “philosophical problem arises because different spheres of language are brought into parallel relationship with each other and because it is supposed that what is valid for one sphere must also be valid for the other” (Specht 1969, 2). Oladipo’s submission seems to complement Wittgenstein’s view. He posits that:

By taking translation for granted and assuming that sameness of meaning between two linguistic expressions can be established in terms of sameness of referent, scholars who promote this orientation in the study of African traditional thought systems fall into linguistic trap. This trap make them superimpose alien conceptual categories on these thought systems thereby distorting them (Oladipo 1995, 396).

It is evident from Oladipo's submission that giving different interpretations of the concept of *Olodumare* by different Yoruba scholars could not have reduced it from being the Supreme Being as contained in Yoruba mythological account of creation neither could it be equated with God as conceived in Christian religion or any other religion outside Yoruba religion. As such, the disparities in and among Yoruba scholars in the translation of the concept of *Olodumare* is reducible to language or translation problem. It is therefore sensible to portray Aigbodioh and Igbafe lines of argument that:

The meaning of concepts and their translation varies such that it would be absolutely wrong for any philosopher to insist that a certain concept in African philosophy has a fixed meaning or translation or that it bears an exact equivalence of another Western linguistic culture, or still to draw conclusion that there is a set of behavior, knowledge, belief and philosophical stand for the largely heterogeneous African peoples. Where this is the case, such a sweeping claim usually portrays the opinion of the individual philosopher (Aigbodioh and Igbafe 2004, 95).

It is within this claim that it is suggested that attempting to equate two seemingly comparable concepts in two different languages by different scholars will continue to breed the problem of infinite regress. This suggests the possibility of each scholar writing from his/her own point of view.

Beside this, Igboin's suggestion of pairs of *Esu* and *Olodumare* of which one pair is true and faithful to traditional Yoruba Religion and the other pair true and faithful to Christianity in Yoruba land reflects unnecessary multiplication of concept. This suggestion cannot pass the test of the principle of *Ockham's Razor of Parsimony*. The principle that urges that unnecessary multiplication of concepts should be dissuaded, therefore, Igboin's suggestion seems to be an escapist strategy within the purview of what *Esu* and *Olodumare* stands for in Yoruba religion.

This reality cannot be glossed over without an eloquent reference to the fact that *Esu* as understood in Yoruba religion could not be resisted because it is one of the primordial divinities. Therefore, the Yoruba "*Esu* is the gateway to all the divinities and the Supreme Deity" (Ogungbemi 2013,

80). While evil which is an offshoot of *Esu* in Igboin's pair that reveals it understanding as true and faithful to Christians in Yoruba land is outside the Yoruba conception and idea of *Esu*. This is more evident in the fact that while Yoruba in their religion worship *Esu* they do all that is possible to resist and avoid evil. Dopamu argues this out. He states:

Humans do not fold their arms and allow evil to befall them. They fight evil, especially the visible and some invisible moral evil. Today, most of the energy of Christian Crusaders is directed against the forces of evil with Prayers and imprecatory psalms such as Psalm 121, 35, 109, and 89 are used by people to fight the enemy. The Muslim may read Sura 2:255 or Sura 9:129 for protection (Dopamu 2009, 45).

By implication, *Esu* in Yoruba cannot be considered to have any semblance with *Esu* as interpreted by Christian faithful in Yoruba land for they share different status and attributes. What only apply in Yoruba land is wandering and waging war against evil and not *Esu*. It is not uncommon to hear the possibility of making medicine against evil in Yoruba land. Such medicine includes; *Arebi*, *Abidaanu*, *Madarikan*, *Agbefo*, *O ntako* among others. All these are used to counter evil in Yoruba society. For potency of these medicine, however, *Esu* always has its role to play, it is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to attempt cursing *Esu* as possible in Christian religion, because, in Yoruba society "everybody seeks, ..., to be on good term with him" (Idowu 1962, 81). This suggests that *Esu* in Yoruba worldview cannot be paired with Christian in Yoruba land. This is pungently clarified by Falola that "*Esu* can never mean the biblical Satan – their homeland and power are far different" (Falolu 2005, 27). Similarly, Abimbola argues that:

There are many differences between the Christian and Yoruba conceptions of evil. Evil in Anglo-Christian Theology ultimately derives from one source, Satan. All evil acts, deeds, etc; ultimately result from the fact that Satan has a supernatural ability to overcome, persuade or entice humans and other entities into improper conduct. But in Yoruba religion, evil does not emanate from one source. Evil emanates from the evil supernatural forces called *Ajogun*. There is two hundred plus one of these forces in the cosmos. These forces are all separate and distinct entities, and as such they are individually responsible for a specific type of evil. The *Ajogun* have eight warlords: *Iku* (Death); *Arun* (Disease); *Ofo* (Loss); *Egba* (Paralysis); *Oran* (Big Trouble); *Epe* (Course); *Ewon* (Imprisonment); *Ese* (Afflictions). Hence, one can engage in some linguistic license and claim that, while Christian theology has a mono-demonic conception of evil, Yoruba religion has a poly-demonic conception of evil (Abimbola 2005, 75).

From the above quotation, *Esu* in Yoruba religion is crystal different from any conception that could reduce or equate him as a pair of *Esu* that reflects its understanding in Yoruba Christian. This is built on the fact that “*Esu* could be portrayed as a deity that crept into the reality of changing nature of being and essence of all that exist” (Oladipupo 2013, 50). Therefore, “the interpretation of *Esu* having single purpose is only a western epistemic supposition which does not replicate the Yoruba understanding of *Esu* (Oladipupo 2013, 50). However, it is suggested within the purview of this discourse that *Esu* in Yoruba religion shares almost if not the same functions with the modern Chief Whip in a parliamentary democracy whose duty is to maintain discipline and curb individual excesses.

Given this analysis, it is hoped that the problem of evil as used in an alleged proof that Christian God does not exist giving His attribute while the existence of *Esu* does not in any way negates the existence of *Olodumare* in Yoruba religion. Thus, Fayemi opines that:

The problem emphasizes the contradiction in the character or attributes of God in relation to the factors of the world and of human experiences that are considered evil. By evil, we mean any experience that is injurious, painful, hurtful, regretful, or calamitous. It is anything that is morally and physically bad or unacceptable. Evil can be conceived as anything that impedes or obstructs the achievement of goals, ideas, happiness, or general well-being (Fayemi 2013, 118).

From the foregoing, the problem of interpretation is evident in the sense that evil as presented in the above is not a reflection and understanding of *Esu* in the Yoruba religion. *Esu* in Yoruba religion is not necessarily evil personified. It is in their tradition to see it as intermediary between human beings and *Olodumare*. It behooves us to mention that interpreting evil to be handiwork of *Esu* within the content of Yoruba religion is misleading. This argument hinges on the fact that the activities of *Esu* as profoundly established by Yoruba scholars is not wholly evil inclined, for it is considered to be responsible for good in some instance. Dopamu’s submission that “we often hear expression: *Esu! A se buruku se rere* (*Esu! One who does evil and still allows some good*)” (Dopamu 2009, 44), seems to be apposite here. By this, the idea of *Esu* being responsible for evil is deconstructed, because evil in Yoruba society is simply interpreted to mean *Ibi* or *Aburu* which reflects the traditional meaning of evil as the privation of good. This is why evil in Yoruba transcends its two major types namely natural and moral in Christian religion or western conception. This is viable in the sense that, “besides these two sources of evil, five different

types of evil can be identified in Yoruba cultural world: natural or physical evil, spiritual evil, moral evil, social and psychological evil, and intellectual evil” (Fayemi 2013, 121).

The upshot of this piece is that, therefore, God is to Christian as Allah is to the Muslim faithful and as *Olodumare* is to the adherents of Yoruba religion. It is evident that the interpretation of the concept of the Supreme Being differs from culture to culture without one necessarily superior to the other. Fayemi might have been making recourse to this possibility when he argues that the disparities in the nature of the Supreme Being as articulated and conceived in different cultures cum religions “never meant to connote inferiority nor superiority of one over the other” (Fayemi 2007, 308). It then behooves us to conclude that this singular premonition is responsible for Fayemi’s insistent of not interchanging the word *Olodumare* for God and vice-versa as done by Idowu and other Yoruba scholars as observed by Igboin (2014, 201).

Conclusion

This paper in its scope points out the independent nature of the concept of *Olodumare*. This is a de-colonial agenda to refute the seemingly assumption that *Olodumare* in Yoruba theology could be equated with the concept of God as conceived in other religions. The paper does not attempt to compare Yoruba *Olodumare* with any other conception of God. It is however of the view that, even, if such comparison becomes necessary, the minimal condition under which other religions idea of God and Yoruba *Olodumare* could be objectively compared for keeping faith with the textual information on each of them and let each be understood within the tradition it belongs to. This position hinges on the fact that comparisons are meant to draw out similarities, this does not mean that the pair of items or concepts compared is identical or the same. Given the foregoing analyses, it is hoped that attempting to reduce *Olodumare* in Yoruba religion (theology) to God as conceived in any other religions will amount to an attempt at reconciling *Hume’s Empiricism and Descartes’ Rationalism* which is still facing philosophical challenge till date. It is equally arguable that any attempt at equating Yoruba *Olodumare* with God in any other religious space or trying to place one over the other in scholarship will engender the fallacy of begging the question. This hinges on the fact that, the two concepts are yet to be logically and epistemologically accepted and not yet explained in clear, rational terms. For instance, as we have divergent opinions as to who *Olodumare* is, among Yoruba scholars, the existence of the Christian God vis-a-vis his attributes is a subject of philosophical discourse

as reflected in the doctrine of the theist, atheist, agnostics, and deists. Yoruba *Olodumare*, therefore, is not necessarily God as conceived in Christian thought, but he is sufficiently a Supreme Being in Yoruba theology. This is the fulcrum of the response to Igboin's question "Is *Olodumare*, God in Yoruba Belief, God? Because the concept and/or idea of *Olodumare* or God, is a naked, fictional and mythical character that has been given different interpretations. Given this, it is suggestive that it is impossible to claim that *Olodumare* is God in Christian sense. However, that does not negate his Supreme nature among the Yoruba divinities; rather it merely acknowledges the fact that we cannot provide irrefutable evidence of a cultural belief of people. This is not because of any deficiency in different interpretation of such nature or being; it is due to the fact that human knowledge and understanding are dynamic, time-bound, finite and mortal. By definition, human beings are incapable of fully comprehending and demonstrating the nature of *Olodumare* vis-a-vis Christian God, a Deity/Supreme Being whose nature is so foreign to Yoruba Religion and culture.

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