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IS OLODUMARE, GOD IN YORUBA BELIEF, GOD?

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ABSTRAK

Pertanyaan apakah Olodumare, Tuhan dalam kepercayaan Yoruba, sebagaimana diterjemahkan oleh Bolaji Idowu, adalah Tuhan merupakan persoalan penuh liku. Hal ini karena konsep dan kepercayaan atas Olodumare ini mengalami serangkaian analisis berputar sehingga memancing pertanyaan tersebut dijawab dalam tiga tahap episodik mendasar. Pertama dari kalangan antropolog Barat yang, sengaja atau tidak, keliru memahami bahwa Olodumare bukanlah, atau tidaklah sederajat dengan, Tuhan; tahap kedua diperjuangkan oleh pengkaji Africa (*Africanist*) / teolog Yoruba yang mengajukan status Olodumare sebagai Tuhan; sementara mazhab dekolonisasi mutakhir berupaya melepaskan Olodumare dari apa yang disebut sebagai jerat Helenistik (*Helenistic grab*) periode kedua, dan memberikan citra yang 'tepat' tentang Olodumare. Masing-masing 'kebenaran' tentang Olodumare ini memiliki pertanyaan-pertanyaan turunan yang memengaruhi pemahaman atas Olodumare. Kajian ini mempertanyakan klaim-klaim tiga filsuf dekolonisasi saat ini, dan mengemukakan bahwa apa yang mereka lontarkan seputar Olodumare tidak konsisten. Kesimpulannya, untuk memperoleh konsep yang kuat tentang Olodumare, perlu upaya untuk mengadopsi padanan kata-kata terjemahan alternatif yang tepat, baik terhadap ajaran Yoruba maupun ajaran Kristen; jika tidak demikian, pertanyaan-pertanyaan yang muncul mungkin tetap akan tak terjawab, sementara tesis Idowu tetap dirasakan sudah memadai .

Kata-kata Kunci: *Olodumare, Esu, masalah keburukan, Tuhan, Yoruba*

ABSTRACT

The question whether Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief, as Bolaji Idowu translated it, is God is a tortuous one. It is so because the concept of, and the belief in, Olodumare are undergoing circuitous strings of analysis that tempt one to answer the question in three fundamental episodic phases. The first came from the Western anthropologists who advertently or inadvertently 'misconceived' Olodumare, as completely less than a God; the second stage championed by foremost Africanist/ Yoruba theologians 'promoted' Olodumare to the 'status' of a God or rather insisted that Olodumare is God; while the decolonisation school is currently divesting Olodumare of so-called Hellenised garb of the second period, and casting 'true' images of him. Each of these 'truths' about Olodumare has serious ancillary questions that affect the overall understanding of Olodumare. This study interrogates the claims of three recent decolonisation philosophers, and reveals that their casting of Olodumare is inconsistent one with another. It concludes that before any incontrovertible concept of Olodumare could be reached, alternative translational (linguistic) equivalents true to the Yoruba theology and true to Christianity must be adopted; otherwise the questions raised might yet remain unanswered, while Idowu's thesis still suffices

Keywords: *Olodumare, Esu, problem of evil, God, Yoruba*

Introduction

Each of the world's religions does not begin its text with the question: who is God? This question seems to be taken for granted as the thrust of the religions is to establish a relationship between God and his adherents, in any case only where such religions believe or have the idea of a God. The existence of God is also a given because, he must necessarily exist in order to establish such a relationship. Hence the rational inquiry into the existence of God is seen as overstepping the bounds by some religious adherents. After all, it is not only through the gristmill of rationalism that all realities can be determined! Despite this, philosophical inquiry into the existence of God has continued to stimulate robust debate. Faith and reason have their functions in the determination of experiences and realities. Since God is the object of most of the world's religions, rationality and faith are usually pressed into the service of comprehending His nature, character and activities. But the inquiry into the existence of God, His attributes and the ancillary problem of evil in Western religions have not only affected Western societies for good or ill, such problems have also been exported to cultures that the proselytising religions – especially Christianity and Islam – have evangelised. African societies and their religions have been affected by the consequences of proselytisation.

The concept of, and belief in, Olodumare and Esu in indigenous Yoruba Religion have been severely affected by Western conceptualisation of them. While Esu (Falola 2013, 3-36) appears luckier in that several intellectual and phenomenological engagements have largely 'rescued' him from the misconceived Western categories and some Africanist intellectual misrepresentations (though not from practical Western theological usage, and may hardly be), Olodumare seems to remain in both stretches. It is this that this work seeks to bring to the fore for more discourse. Such Western misconceptions have been refuted, and most recently Curtis Keim (2014), having made an incisive critique of them concludes that "it is bad science, bad linguistics, and bad reporting" (52). Keim further argues that in order to dispute any African beliefs and ideas, scholars must first and foremost understand African languages, and also utilise such theories that are consistent with the African. According to him, "anyone who wants to study Africa in depth needs to learn African languages, because language is the major key to understanding how people mentally organize the world around them" (4). The import of Keim's challenge can be gleaned from the fact that he has crisply covered two earlier phases of our discourse, namely: the Western anthropologists' misconceptions of African belief system, and the Africanists' dependence on Western theories about Africa without recourse to understanding African languages. This study therefore argues that the decolonisers cannot successfully refute Idowu's conclusion without providing an alternative linguistic exploration of Olodumare.

Setting the Pace with Bolaji Idowu: Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief

Bolaji Idowu is regarded as the father of Yoruba religious studies laboriously worked rightly or wrongly to disabuse and correct the derogatory notions and terms that were used to describe the deities of African Religion as a whole and Yoruba Religion in particular by some European writers (Olupona 2011, 35). Lere Adeyemi (2013) recently espouses that those European anthropologists utilised evolutionary theory in their investigations of African religious epistemologies and phenomena. Since the thrust of that theoretical framework is 'survival of the fittest' and there must literally and necessarily be a 'fit' and a 'fitter' for a 'fittest' to logically exist in

the realm of comparative religious history and practice, African Gods had to be made the scapegoats by many of the European anthropologists (291-292). In fact, Max Muller applied the evolutionary theory in his study of Asian religions and western religions, and came to the conclusion that there are stark similarities and dissimilarities in various religions of the world. It was his efforts that resulted in Comparative Religion as a discipline, which spirit is: "he who knows one, knows none" (Umejesi 2010, 119-136). One of the principles of Comparative Religion is that no scholar should pass moral judgement on any religion as par superiority or inferiority. In actual sense, however, this principle is observed more in breach. It is this theoretical mindset that produced such derogatory terms as 'ancestor-worship,' 'fetishism,' 'native,' 'primitive,' 'pagan,' 'heathen,' 'idol worship,' 'animism,' 'savage,' and so on to describe African religious realities (see Keim 2014; and Idowu 1973; for analysis and refutation of these terminologies).

Idowu (1973) argues that Olodumare in Yoruba Religion is no less in essence and quality than the God introduced to Africa, which was used as standard of judging African Religion and deities. For him, the sociological structure and religious cosmogony of every society must be taken into cognisance in attempting to discern its religious belief. Consequently, because the European writers came with their sociological mindset and cosmogonic stereotype, they missed the very point of underscoring the fact that there is an Olodumare in Yoruba Religion who is supreme and all-powerful (28). Little did Idowu know also that in trying to deconstruct the Western fixity he would be accused of or challenged for abandoning the tradition he believed he was vigorously defending and promoting, though using the same theoretical and intellectual instruments of the detractors.

In his booklet, *God in Nigerian Belief*, Idowu gives a universalist nature and character of God. He elucidates that God is one even though he is perceived differently by different people using their different cultural lenses. According to him:

> The big truth that the whole world still has to learn is that there is only one God, and not many; that god is not a monopoly of any particular race or nation; that the whole world belongs to Him; and that in this world, there is not a place where He has left Himself without witness. Therefore He reveals Himself everywhere, even though the revelation is variously apprehended according to the capacity of each people. These differences in apprehension, affected still by other factors, may make for an incomplete or even a distorted picture of God; but it is a picture of Him nevertheless. (Idowu 1963, 9)

It is with the above mindset that Idowu discusses the religious nuances of God and also presents a periscope that unpacks the generally believed pluralistic nature of the Nigerian society. In his religious discourse of God among various ethnic groups in Nigeria, Idowu does not however take inventory of God differently from the pre-missionary and pre-colonial Africa, a thought-pattern that characterises the larger frames of his arguments and in the use of the term 'traditional.'

But in his book, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Idowu (1996) specifically and carefully studies the name, nature and attributes of the Yoruba deity, Olodumare, starting with thorough linguistic analysis. According to him, Olodumare is not only the owner of heaven and earth, he is also the creator who equally enjoys such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc. as God in Christian belief. He believes Olodumare could not be conceived less in these terms as his operations in heaven and earth evidently demonstrate. Although Olodumare is omnipotent, he has a retinue of responsible ministers, called the divinities that are saddled with almost

absolute powers with which to carry out their respective assignments. He argues that this is necessary in a hierarchical-theocratic set up. Such divinities as Obatala, Esu and Orunmila are given the responsibilities of moulding the human frame, inspection of worship and divination respectively. "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" (45).

Idowu (1996), further reacting to the European misconceptions, enacting a truth about the Yoruba Religion, and contributing to knowledge, suggests that the Yoruba have a notion of "diffused monotheism" (221). His intentions are two-fold: first, he believes that the notion of diffused monotheism stresses against the detractors that viewed the Yoruba Religion as polytheistic; if it is polytheistic, Olodumare would not enjoy the pre-eminence of being in his own class. Second, being diffusedly monotheistic, the notion of delegation of powers to subordinate divinities could be sustained. The idea of delegation of powers to the divinities presupposes that, first, Olodumare is the source of the powers being exercised and second, the divinities are in actuality representing Olodumare rather than being in their domain of influence 'absolutely absolute.' The use of 'absolutely absolute' is deliberate. The Yoruba, it needs to be re-emphasised, believe that even though the divinities have some level of absolute authority to take some decisions, that authority cannot be completely absolutised in their respective beings; but rather, it is a function of the delegated power.

Absolutisation of authority of the divinities therefore is responsible ultimately on the absolute authority of Olodumare. In ossifying this point, Idowu (1973) in *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, writes: "I do not know of any place in Africa where the ultimacy is not accorded to God. That is why, because this is very true of the Yoruba, I conclude that the religion can only be adequately described as monotheistic. I modify this 'monotheism' by the adjective 'diffused', because here we have a monotheism in which there exist other powers which derive from Deity such being and authority that they can be treated, for practical purposes, almost as ends in themselves" (135).

Osadolor Imasogie (1985) also agrees with the structure of "implicit" or "diffused" monotheism. For him, apparently studying the sociological nature of the Bini kingdom, argues that African Religion could be described as "bureaucratic monotheism" (63). Obviously, the Yoruba and Bini kingdoms are hierarchically structured in such a way that the Oba or king assumes the ultimate authority, while titled men, depending on their statuses exercise some form of authority. In the sense of diffused monotheism, powers are devolved to other divinities in the supernatural realm; this supernatural realm is replicated politically, thus justifying the Yoruba king as the vicegerent of God. In bureaucratic structure, special departments are created with rules and regulations that guide the operations of heads of units. Since the ultimate decision in great matters rests with the chief executive, Idowu and Imasogie conclude that Olodumare or Osanobuwa (in Yourba and Bini kingdoms respectively) occupies that prime office.

What is implicated in the diffused monotheism organogram therefore is that although the subordinate divinities have some delegated authority, they are not opposed to the personality, essence and status of Olodumare. This is the summit of Idowu's argument: Yoruba Religion has the pride of being a monotheistic religion; monotheism being conceived as the highest form of religious 'evolution.' Such a conclusion of the supremacy of Olodumare, Idowu, fair to himself, says derives from "some explanatory

attempts on the matter" even though such attempts are actually rigorous and difficult (Olodumare 1996, 32).

How far do Idowu's attempts represent 'traditional' Yoruba Religion and truth? This is the crucial question that elicits this work. In the meantime, because of the reactions that Idowu's attempts have generated, it is necessary to briefly clarify the concept of the 'traditional.' Tradition is generally and generically viewed as 'old.' It connotes a long-established pattern of behaviour or action in a community. It is also described as a history of unbroken continuum, free from disruption, and cherished by the practitioners. Tradition can be further understood as opinions, beliefs and practices that have survived from many generations, and yet true to its origin (Bruns 1991:1-21; Odimegwu, 2007, 290-300; and Igboin 2014, 79-97). The pressing question that arises is whether or not tradition is fixed or fluid. With particular reference to Africa, tradition is described as the opinions, beliefs and practices of the people before the influx of Christianity, Islam and colonialism. Hobsbawm and Ranger have argued that thereafter, i.e. after the incursion of slave trade, Christianity, Islam and colonialism, we can speak of "invented tradition." According to them, an *invented tradition* constitutes:

> ... [A] set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* historical past. (Keulder 2008, 151)

Hobsbawm and Ranger elucidate further that traditions are likely to be "invented" when and if:

> ... [A] rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which "old" traditions have been designed, producing new ones to which they are not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or supply side. (151)

It has been argued that many leading Africans abandoned their 'traditional' traditions in the face of slave trade, foreign missions and colonialism. In the process, it was either to struggle along with the nationalists, retain their 'political traditional' positions or curry for favour through 'created' traditions that vitiated or corrupted their 'traditional' traditions. For example, Jacob Olupona (2011) recounts the 'untraditional request' of the colonial master, inviting the Ooni (regarded by the Yoruba as a god, divine or sacred king) of Ile-Ife to travel to Lagos to give evidence in a matter involving the Elepe of Epe in Ijebu Remo and Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo as having great political prospect for Ile-Ife, but not without the consequence of reinventing tradition. The Akaribgo considered as untraditional the wearing of beaded crown by the Elepe of Epe. The then reigning Ooni, Adelekan Olubuse I, also observed the transition and invention of tradition when he reminded the Elepe of Epe that "if it were the old days," he would have invited the Elepe to Ile-Ife for desecration of tradition and have "him beheaded" (42). What this immediately portends is that the Ooni recognised that he had lost tradition and the tradition conferred on him to behead anyone that dared to disobey his order. Loss of tradition means therefore, loss of power inherent in it. According to Olupona:

> The unprecedented visit of an Ooni to Lagos was chilling to all the Yoruba Oba, including the Alaafin of Oyo. Before this visit, it had been a taboo for an Ooni to leave the city of Ile-Ife. The other Yoruba oba viewed the announcement of the journey with such great alarm and seriousness that they decided to vacate their palaces and stay outside their city for the

> duration of his visit.... Although the Ooni's visit can be interpreted as a sign of the capitulation of the traditional center and society of Ile-Ife to the new colonial center in Lagos, the visit also signalled a reinvention of tradition. (41)

The sense of capitulation of tradition and the powers thereof can further be gleaned from the definition of Oba of Benin thus: "Traditional ruler means the traditional head of an ethnic community whose stool conferred the highest traditional authority on the incumbent since before the beginning of British rule" (Quoted in Keulder 2008, 152). Here, we see that tradition is defined more in terms of the political reality of the day than the pristine religious or cultural epistemology. Certainly, they have lost the essence of Max Weber's idea of traditional authority which some erroneously believe they still carry, thus: "[tradition] ... the authority of the "eternal yesterday", i.e. of the mores sanctified through the unimaginably ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform. This is "traditional" domination exercised by the patriarch and the primordial prince of yore"(Quoted in Keulder 2008, 152).

Our non-use of 'traditional' is different from John Bewaji's (2012) reason for avoiding the phrase "African traditional religions" (166) which Idowu uses approvingly, though he uses religion in the singular (Idowu 1973). Bewaji maintains that Christianity and Islam are traditional to the Israelis and Arabs respectively in the same way that African religion is traditional to Africans. Since they (Christians and Muslims) would not add traditional to their religions, it is absurd for Africans to continue to affix traditional to their religion. Bewaji (2012) concludes that 'traditional' is one of the derogatory terms that Europeans used to describe the religion of the Africans, "as if Islam and Christianity are not the traditional beliefs of the desert people of Arabia" (176).

Consequently, the question is restated: to what extent is Bolaji Idowu true to Yoruba 'tradition' or Yoruba 'invented tradition' in his study and rendition of Yoruba traditional religious deities, particularly Olodumare? The grain of the exposé below is that Idowu and other foremost Africanist theologians consciously or unconsciously aid the European investigators by their inappropriate or arbitrary linguistic and conceptual adoption of Yoruba religious phenomena in explicating the Western religious concepts. For example, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther deliberately translated "God in the bible as Olodumare (or Olorun), the Yoruba traditional names for their High Deity" (Abimbola 2006, 57-58). In the same vein, Satan or Devil in the Bible became Esu despite their dissimilarities. By this, these Africanists invariably docked themselves in the same Western conceptual categories they thought they were avoiding or reacting to. But to what extent are the decolonisation philosophers faithful and true to the Yoruba tradition of a coherent conceptualisation of Olodumare?

John Ayotunde Bewaji: Esu, not Olodumare's Enemy

One needs to understand the propelling force behind Bewaji's decolonisation effort as regards Yoruba theistic argument. Bewaji, like many other African philosophers, believes that the West has done much in distorting facts and reality in, and about, Africa. Unfortunately, it is the distorted versions that have come to largely define Africans and Africa in global context. For instance, Bewaji (2012) reacts to Pearce's argument 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" (400). Bewaji argues that Pearce's ignorance could have stemmed from not reading the works of African thinkers such as Nyerere, Nkrumah Awolowo, Diop, Mazrui, etc. or his

misreading of others like Gyekye; consequently, he believes that African philosophy could best be described as ethno-philosophy. According to Pearce, "African philosophy does not emerge from a spontaneous recognition of the uniqueness of African traditional religion but from the work of Western missionaries and their followers with well-defined interests in shaping people's beliefs. The very justification of African philosophy lies in Western philosophy or in the theological curiosity or European missionaries. It is not autonomous" (Quoted in Bewaji 2012, 402). Bewaji calls this mode of thought "chicken and egg" procedure, an "obfuscatory tactic, aimed at creating the illusion of argumentative creativity"(402) which misses the fact on the ground. Furthermore, Bewaji reacts:

> First, the pioneer African Christian theologian scholars in Africa are unanimous in celebrating the so-called religiosity of Africans (Idowu 1962). If this is correct, one should not be remiss to understand the whole point of Christianizing the 'heathens,' thereby forcibly supplanting one superstition with another. (402)

Western missionaries and their African trainees, Bewaji insists, collaborated to deny African belief the status of religion or "anything indigenous worthy of rational discourse" (403).

Among other issues considered aberrational to Yoruba traditional religion is the philosophical problem of evil, which is imported into the religion by assuming albeit incorrectly the omnipotence of Olodumare. According to Bewaji, the problem of evil did not, does not and even need not arise in Yoruba philosophical, religious and theological plane if Idowu is true to the traditional Yoruba religion. If Olodumare, as Idowu presents him is the creator of the universe, it follows therefore that Olodumare created both good and evil since they are both part of creation (Bewaji 1998). To think that Olodumare created only the good and not the evil, is to say that He created a part of creation. In Yoruba Religion, both good and evil are viewed purposively as they in turn create the opportunity or office for other creatures, e.g. herbalists and medicine persons. Since kings, divinities, witches, elders, etc. derive their powers from Olodumare, the dispensation of such powers whether for good or evil is ultimately subjected to Olodumare, who created them *ab initio*. This therefore does not refute Olodumare's power, since by being powerful, he is capable of creating, and indeed, created both good and evil.

Bewaji (1998) argues that he advisedly avoids the use of such patristic or scholastic terms as omnipotence and omniscience in describing Olodumare, the terms freely used by Idowu to describe Olodumare. To use such terms would suggest that one is referring to God, it appears. The reason is that shunning them provides a safe valve against the intractable philosophical problem of evil. In Judeo-Christian tradition, the omnipotence and omniscience of God spontaneously creates an incompatibility with evil. In that tradition, the most virulent antagonist to God is Satan. Unfortunately, the translators erroneously 'subscribed' or 'sacrificed' Esu as Satan or Devil. In Yoruba tradition, according to Bewaji, to say that Olodumare consults Orunmila in knotty mysteries of existence, even of, and about, himself as the Supreme Being, does not portend that Olodumare lacks superior wisdom or knowledge contrary to Idowu's engagement with Yoruba tradition. The Yoruba conceive "the Ifa corpus as the embodiment of the wisdom of Olodumare as bequeathed to Orunmila." In the same vein, that Obatala was assigned the responsibility of creation is a privilege from Olodumare, since ultimately creation is ascribed to Olodumare. Bolaji Idowu must have truly missed this theological point if he thought that the status of Orunmila as possessing wisdom diminishes that of Olodumare. It will be needful to apprehend for

instance 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. It is the fact (for practical purposes) that the most visible demonstration of God's wisdom and power is Christ or in/through Christ that both the Jews and Gentiles struggled to comprehend (I Corinthians 1: 23-24).

There is the possibility that if and when one understands another's religious traditions that one can unpack and unlock the mysteries of one's tradition without compromising the latter. We also recognise as a caveat too to that possibility, that if not soundly handled it can yield unwarranted results, namely either undermining one's traditions or superogating them over another's. Idowu may have been situated in either of these complexities. But Bewaji seems not to have been completely free from them either. In his "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil" under review, Bewaji, as noted above, technically avoids the terms 'omnipotence and omniscience.' In his dexterous meticulousness, he sticks to such phrases as "Yoruba Olodumare," "Christian God" and "Old Testament Yahweh" (Bewaji 1998). The use of these 'adjectives' gives a specific and culturally bound meaning of the Gods. But in few occasions, he uses 'God' without such qualifications thus unintentionally though, obviously creating confusion in understanding and defending his methodology of decolonisation.

Bewaji further pursues the decolonisation efforts in his "Esu and Liminality in the Yoruba Thought System: A Leadership Perspective" (2013, 131-153). In this latter work, he makes frantic successful attempts to de-robe Esu of Arabic and Hellenistic garbs, and defends the nature of other divinities with the purpose of challenging "members of society to live higher moral standards as demanded by the ancestors, the divinities, the Supreme Being, and living members of society" (Falola 2013, 23). Thus, although Bewaji is critical about Adeleke's (Adeleke 2005, 11-31) article: "Even the Gods are Fools," he apparently works against the same cultural or traditional principles he thinks he is protecting or defending. For instance, he defends Esu for being upright in deciding to bury the tenth cowry that was causing a problem for the three women he (Esu) had earlier given ten cowries to as their reward for assisting him (Esu) to sell a goat. Bewaji says that Esu could have been accused of larceny or theft if he had taken the extra cowry and added it to his account.

I may not be adept in Yoruba tradition, but the burial of a cowry that ought to have been put into productive enterprise needs critical cultural and traditional investigation. This is more so that even Bewaji (2013) himself has suggested in the preceding paragraphs that there is an acceptable traditional format of sharing among the Yoruba in sharing such an extra cowry. In his own words: "In Yorubaland, there are cultural traditions for sharing things; age, marital status, or other social and religious statuses could have come into play to determine who should get more in such circumstances as being considered here" (138). The immediate question is: why wouldn't Esu resolve the conundrum by resorting to any of these Yoruba cultural traditions of sharing? How plausible is it to maintain that Esu "was creative and intellectually reflective of the Yoruba culture of giving thanks to the ancestors who made the conditions of our existence as cultured persons possible in the first instance?"(138). One questions whether that kind of offering that contravenes cultural dictates would be accepted by the ancestors who the Yoruba believe to be moral paragons. The only act of justice, it seems to me, was for Esu to have adhered to the traditional, acceptable sharing formula of the Yoruba. The verdict: Esu neither solved the problem nor kept the tradition of the Yoruba; therefore, in

this instance, contrary to Bewaji's advocacy, he (Esu) cannot offer reproducible leadership qualities for contemporary Yoruba or African societies.

Bewaji further complicates his decolo-nisation philosophy by espousing irreconcilable accounts of Esu. Whereas Bewaji (1998) earlier said that Esu is not opposed to Olodumare in Yoruba tradition and that is why the philosophical problem of evil is completely non-existent, and that "Esu as a good minister of God" enforces the law: "He [Esu] is, therefore, courted and even *bribed*." In a latter work, Bewaji (2013) states as follows: "It is obvious that Esu could not be *controlled*, *bribed*, harassed, or intimidated by anyone, including by Olodumare, the Supreme Being" (141). What does one make out of these obvious contradictions rather than oppositionality of Esu to Olodumare, and moral caprice? However, these do not form a ground for Olodumare to depose Esu since their co-existence does not constitute "absolute polarities in the Yoruba world" (145).

The same presumed exquisite defence of Orunmila can also be deciphered here. Although Bewaji correctly refutes Adeleke's attribution of trickster in the stories the latter narrated, the former in the endeavour of presenting a salutary quintessence of Orunmila missed a significant aspect of the deity he prescribed for moral rectitude. That is pride or pomposity that knowledge often results in. This needs to be underscored here briefly. According to Adeleke (2005), Orunmila recounted how on a number of occasions he had resolved complex riddles for different animal-personalities such as dog and dove. He crowned it up by saying: "*Even* I solved the one concerning God" (24). If the word 'even' connotes a greater emphasis for comparison to indicate the degree or premium one places on a reality, idea or concept, one cannot but think that contextually, Orunmila implies that if he could resolve a riddle that Olodumare himself couldn't resolve, his audience should acknowledge the extent of his superiority to Olodumare, or that he (Orunmila) should be regarded as the sole embodiment of knowledge. No matter the epistemological justification that decolonising philosophers may give, it is nonetheless true that knowledge puffs up and in Yoruba as in many other African societies, while relishing knowledge, they abhor the arrogant display of it.

Traditional African/Yoruba setting would not praise intellectual sagacity that was devoid of moral virtues and values. The myths, folklores, stories, pithy sayings, proverbs, etc. copiously enact moral lessons and guiding principles. Bewaji also misses the point in attempting to repudiate the moral significance of the myth of Osun and her co-wife and rival, Oba. Oba had gone to Osun to ask for the secret of her success in cooking; the latter responded by lying to Oba that she used her ears to cook for the chiefs. Adeleke milked out the moral import of the myth by noting that instead of Osun lying to Oba that she (Osun) was using her ear to prepare sumptuous meals for the chiefs, which earned her a pride of place in the kingdom, she ought to have honourably declined by saying nothing or telling the truth (16-17). However, Bewaji (2013) berates Oba for being "intellectually uncritical" or undiscerning to have "unreflectively" (137) heeded the lie told her by Osun. Explicitly, Osun is painted as possessing more intellectual prowess than Oba, whereas the latter humbly, honestly and earnestly sought a solution to her problem. One can only muse how such intellectual superiority is skewing the echelon of leadership and governance today, and the effects on the masses, the unreflective victims!

However, our interest in Adeleke's article is that in classifying and exemplifying the foolery of the gods (Osun, Esu and Orunmila), he obviously does not mention Olodumare. The immediate implication of this to us here

is that Olodumare is not equalised with the deities (divinities); he is in his own class. Or, it is suggestive that after viewing Olodumare's actions he was unable to pinpoint any act of foolery or trickery that would have put him in such normative conundrum. This may further suggest a superlative quintessence of Olodumare which soars above the reach of the three principal divinities in the Yoruba pantheon, for as Adeleke (2005) concludes about these divinities, the folly they exhibited "seems to put a question mark on their reliability and dependability as beings that possess supernatural *attributes and powers*" and as such "the divinities are no better than human" (31). I am very sure that no Yoruba person will say this about Olodumare despite the fact that he is not all-good, all-powerful and all-loving.

But, finally, Bewaji (2012) frowns at the use of High God to refer to the Supreme Being. According to him, it is "condescending" to conceive of Olodumare or the Supreme Being as High God as John Amanze and Kola Abimbola have done. Thinking about Olodumare in such neuter gender category will mean that "we may not be able to ascertain whether it is a He or an It or a She" which is an unfair comparison. Such inaccurate comparison results from the western failure, that is:

> to see analogies of symbolism and equivalence of doxography is because of poor historical background which clouds perceptions, leading to misrepresentations and wrong attributions of ideas of Africans; after all, what could be more analogous than the Christian ideas of spirits, angels, the Trinity, the Christ, the patriarchs, and the Supreme Being, with the African ideas of divinities, spirits, ancestors, deities, and the Supreme Being?(137)

What further argument can one put forward from this question than that the Supreme Being, Olodumare is God? He concludes that in a multicultural world we have come to live in, all objects of worship in world religions possess the same notion of "deity, Supreme Being, an Absolute, a Universal Ideal" thus making it ignorant to refer to any religious individual or group as idolaters or pagans (165).

Fayemi Ademola Kazeem: Olodumare, not God

While the thrust of Bewaji's decolonisation was Esu, Fayemi Kazeem intensely focuses on Olodumare. He also disagrees with the conclusion of Idowu who argued that Olodumare is God. In his "The Concept of 'Olodumare' in Yoruba Language: An Exercise in Conceptual Decolonization" Kazeem (2007, 301-314) states his objective as responding to the call to philosophical decolonisation of African concepts, which have been garbed with Western conceptual categories. Such categories, he posits, have vitrified traditional meanings of concepts, and in the process the Yoruba are losing their heritage. He defines "philosophical decolonization as a conceptual, critical, comparative as well as reconstructive intellectual engagement" (301). He then chooses to decolonise "Olodumare in Yoruba language" (301) According to him, Kwasi Wiredu had called on worthy African philosophers to think and tease out concepts first in their respective African languages. According to Wiredu, "you are to try and think out the concepts in your own African language and on the basis of the result, review the intelligibility of the associated problems or the plausibility of the apparent solutions that have tempted you when you pondered them in some metropolitan language" (Quoted in Kazeem 2007, 304).

In response to this, Kazeem grounds his philosophical decolonisation on the declension (breaking into syllables) of Olodumare as done by Bolaji Idowu. This effort, though not "entirely satisfactory," yet "the name [Olodumare] connotes one who has the fullness or superlative greatness;

the everlasting majesty upon whom man depends" (304). He argues that Olodumare is not God for the reason that the former does not possess such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence, which are ascribed to the latter, the same that have become philosophically tendentious and problematic in the West. He cites Godwin Sogolo to buttress his argument. Sogolo wrote that Olodumare "knows more than we do, but unlike Christian God, He does not know everything. He (Olodumare) is more powerful than we are, but He is not all-powerful. God, in Africa, is more benevolent than we are, but He too can do evil and therefore not omnibenevolent" (308). Kazeem maintains that even though Olodumare does not have "the same equivalent content meaning with the concept of 'God' in Western thought system," Olodumare is neither superior nor inferior to God (307-308).

It is instructive to state here that Idowu's declension of Olodumare is the premise upon which Kazeem argues that Olodumare is not God. Even though Kazeem does not find Idowu's declension of Olodumare as satisfactory, the same premise that led Idowu to conclude that Olodumare is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, for which Idowu is being heavily criticised, Kazeem does not provide a parallel declension of Olodumare but proceeds from the same point Idowu made to arrive at a different conclusion from Idowu's. Neither in this instance is Kazeem faithful to Wiredu's theoretical methodology of decolonisation that he approvingly claims to rely on. Expectedly, since Kazeem's stated objective was to decolonise "Olodumare in Yoruba langu-age," the best and safest place to start would have been to provide alternative linguistic analysis of Olodumare. Although Idowu might be wrong, it could not be taken away from him that he was versed in Yoruba language, tradition and theology. His linguistic analysis of Olodumare would need to be surpassed or faulted before actual decolonisation of Olodumare could be realised. Also, Jacob Olupona (Olupona 2011) accuses Idowu and other pioneers of indigenous religious studies of not strictly adhering to the principles of comparative history of religions by adopting "a spurious approach" (21) developed in line with their experiences in Western religious training. But there is no study thus far that has faulted the linguistic analysis done by Idowu despite his seemingly unacceptable framework.

Kazeem (2007) points out that the relevance of Olodumare can only be gleaned when he is completely de-robed of the God-categories and attributes. Although Olodumare did not create the primordial divinities, he brought them into existence in order to assist him in the different departments of the world. However, Olodumare does not have absolute authority over the divinities he brought into existence. Again, because the divinities are quasi-autonomous, evil is only ultimately conceived as resulting from Olodumare. Consequently, the intractable philosophical problem of evil would not be in existence among the Yoruba. Also, in human society, particularly in contemporary African conflictual democracies, as evident in the perennial unhealthy rivalry between the executive and the legislative arms of government, (may be we add the comatose judiciary): "The valuable lessons of harmonious interaction between 'Olodumare' and other causal agents in Yoruba cosmological order are highly significant to the resolution of these problems" (310). In fact, "if the society were to be teleguided by traditional religious beliefs in 'Olodumare' and divinities, people would have the fear of instantaneous justice. Fear of incurring the wrath of the gods would keep people away from immoral and illegal actions and thereby ensuring social justice, peace and order" (311).

One can say without equivocation that democracy thrives in tension. Democracy

is also different from theocracy that is predominant in traditional Yoruba setting. If Kazeem's Olodumare's political solution must fit into democracy, first we must revert to monarchism in which kings as deputies of Olodumare sometimes, against the nature of the latter, absolutised authority and became dictatorial. If Olodumare was not dictatorial in his disposition to the divinities, it remains a critical point of investigation to unravel how and why his deputies should be. More seriously however, Kazeem merely romanticises Yoruba past history at both supernatural and corporeal levels. Abimbola (2006.), for instance, notes that there were serious tensions, civil wars, immoral behaviours, political wrangling, etc. that had devastating effects on the Yoruba nation (45). At the risk of being accused of defending Christianity, Islam or colonialism, it should be stated that our attempt at decolonisation should reflect truthful and correct historical and mythical past. Kazeem claims that it was Western influences that brought injustice and moral decadence to Yoruba societies. This is offensive to decolonisation: if there were no cases of injustice, immorality, war, etc. such terms as guilt (*ebi*), adultery (*agbere*), stealing (*ole*), etc. would not have been in Yoruba vocabulary; such divinities as Sango, Ogun, Esu would have correspondingly been non-existent, because in the functional theory Kazeem is pursuing, these deities may not be known, and venerated without their existential possibilities and relevance.

In his conclusion, Kazeem (2007) seems to have realised that contemporary societies are more complex than the traditional Yoruba societies. Although it will not be possible to return wholesale to the past, "such values and ideals inherent in the traditional Yoruba notion of 'Olodumare' should be reactivated and re-emphasized.... This should however be done not in isolation but rather in pursuit of synthesis with other relevant religious insights from contemporary Western understanding of God" (312). The admission and recommendation are more devastating to the decolonisation process. If the irreducible attributes of God are incompatible with Olodumare, how does decolonisation serve the purpose Kazeem is advocating? To us, either Olodumare will be re-robed of God-categories or he will become more ambivalent. Either of these does not serve the cause of decolonisation but rather introduces the philosophical problem of evil, being laboriously denied in Yoruba religious tradition.

In a later work, apparently reacting to E. O. Oduwole's argument for the universalibility of the philosophical problem of evil, including in the Yoruba Religion, Kazeem argues, still in pursuit of decolonisation of Olodumare, that Oduwole was deliberately dressing Olodumare in Hellenised robes. According to Kazeem (2013), Oduwole had posited that "the philosophical problem of evil is a universal one. Regardless of race, culture or tradition, as long as one believes in a supreme or ultimate Being... and as long as we accept that evil is not an illusion, the problem exists. However, the various attempts to justify God in the face of evil differ" (125). Kazeem denies the universality of the problem because of the inherent contradictions in the logical stating of the problem, which he claims is non-existent in Yoruba Religion. Although there exist evils in Yoruba, "that does not necessarily lead to the philosophical problem of evil in Yoruba philosophical thinking" (125). He states the problem of evil as follows:

> (i) "Olodumare exists.
> (ii) Olodumare has infinite and perfect attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence.
> (iii) Evil exists." (125)

John Mackie has also offered a probable solution as follows:

> If one is prepared to say that God is not perfectly good, or not quite omnipotent or that evil does not exist or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists or there are limits to which an omnipotent God can do, the problem of evil will not arise for you. (Quoted in Kazeem 2013, 120)

Earlier, Sogolo appeared to have responded to this solution when he said that Olodumare is not all-powerful, all-good or all-loving. In response to Mackie, proposition (ii) is denied; therefore, the philosophical-logical problem of evil is solved by the Yoruba. Mackie does not deny the existence of the problem of evil just as Oduwole. And as Kazeem agrees, the problem is solved by acknowledging, as it were, that Olodumare does not assume God-categories. Thus, through correct rituals to appropriate divinities, the problem is solved. This logically does not deny the existence of the problem of evil, but affirms it and suggests how the Yoruba have creatively and ritually solved it. However, the point that Oduwole possibly misunderstood is her insistence on the justification of God/Olodumare in the face of the problem. The Yoruba do not justify Olodumare since "Olodumare is seen by the Yoruba as the ultimate cause of all visible process in the world" (122). In fact, Kazeem emphatically states that "Olodumare is not having the infinite attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, omni-benevolence, etc" (126). Additionally, "Olodumare... and his divinities are said to be capable of doing good and bad" (126).

If Kazeem had stopped his decolonisation argument at that point, it would have been substantially understood that Olodumare is not God or that Olodumare does not envy God or that Idowu was completely wrong. But Kazeem enunciates as follows:

> One could argue that Olodumare can be exonerated from being responsible for some forms of evil: social and psychological evil, moral evil and intellectual evil. These evils are products of man's making through freedom, choice, and responsibility. However, Olodumare and the coterie of divinities are blame-worthy and cannot be rationally defended in the face of physical and spiritual evils. This is because these evils are beyond human control, and they are of Olodumare and his divinities' makings. While this position can be seen as a better explanation towards resolving the ageless philosophical problem of evil, nonetheless, such a position raises further issues (of metaphysical relevance) beyond the traditional philosophical problem of evil: Why did Olodumare create a world with the intermediary support of the divinities to have so much power and unrestricted freedom and exercise of principalities or power to cause evil in the world? Why has Olodumare decided to introduce the concept of evil to human language, dictionary, and experience? (126-127).

The implications of the above are caustic for Kazeem's decolonisation efforts. He has unambiguously accepted the universality of the philosophical problem of evil, thus proving the thesis of Oduwole right; he has unwittingly endorsed that the philosophical problem of evil exists in Yoruba Religion; he has demonstrated the reality of the problem of evil; by these very questions, rather than insisting that Olodumare is not God, Olodumare is God; therefore, no decolonisation is necessary, or done. Consequently Idowu was correct. But one must observe that Kazeem consistently keeps to the use of Olodumare appropriately; he does not interchange Olodumare and God as Bewaji does.

Kola Abimbola: Olodumare, not a Supreme Being

Kola Abimbola seems to be more critical about Bolaji Idowu than the earlier writers of Yoruba Religion of the same school. According to him, Idowu and "a host of scholars of Yoruba theology have compared and re-interpreted Yoruba theological accounts of the cosmos and its inhabitants in such a way that Yoruba theology is not distinguishable from that of

Christianity" (Abimbola 2006, 53). In real sense, according to Abimbola, Olodumare is neither a male nor a female. Similarly, in Professor Christopher Dime's (2004) Inaugural Lecture titled: "God: Male, Female or Asexual?" such conclusion is reached. In fact, Dime even concludes that God may likely be a female because of the attributes ascribed to 'her' such as loving, caring, merciful, tending, gracious, etc. These virtues, Dime argues, are amply more demonstrated by women than men. As such Abimbola (2006) maintains that the gendered-biased rendition of Olodumare in literature is totally at variance with the Ifa corpus. He notes that since Ifa corpus refers to Olodumare as 'It,' it is conceptually incongruous to think of Olodumare in genderised language since 'Its' nature is purely in spirit form. Consequently Olodumare is a "High 'Deity,' and on the basis of the Ifa corpus, "Olodumare cannot be a Supreme Being" (51). This also accounts for why "Olodumare is believed to be too mighty to be captured by any anthropomorphic, artistic, literary, or iconographic representation" (52). It is because of 'Its' 'It-ness' that no temples, shrines, sacrifices or liturgy are ascribed or offered to 'It.'

Abimbola further contends that Olodumare could not be a Supreme Being because of 'Its' [eternal] co-existence with three other deities such as Obatala, Esu and Ifa. Olodumare did not create or bring them into existence; this is antithetical to Kazeem's thesis that Olodumare did not create them, but brought them into existence. As such, 'It' is not all-knowing since Ifa is the god of wisdom, a god Olodumare 'Itself' regularly consulted for knowledge, wisdom and advice. The creation was jointly done by all the divinities (52). The immediate implication of this joint venture is that Olodumare does not have any form of absolute rule over other divinities. Whichever of them that 'presides' over an affair is 'appointed' on the basis of the nature of the 'business' in question. Thus, leadership position is rotational but on the preponderance and dexterity of a particular deity as regards the nature of work to be done. This is the power relations scheme of the Yoruba supernatural world. "The best way to understand power in the Yoruba supernatural world is to distinguish between existential and functional hierarchies. In the existential hierarchy, we can identify four levels of chronological/existential superiority..." (59).

Level 1 of the existential hierarchy consists of Olodumare, Obatala, Ifa and Esu. Level 2 comprises other divinities. Level 3 houses humans, plants and animals. Level 4 is the domain of the ancestors. The four levels form the spherical cosmic shape contrary to Olupona's (2011) view that "the Yoruba world opens out in the four directions of the universe" (7). Olupona also talks about three spheres rather than four levels in the hierarchy. Abimbola (2006) asserts that it is only when it comes to political and administrative issues that Olodumare is regarded as supreme. At the functional hierarchy that involves policing, law and order, Esu is above Olodumare. He says it more eloquently thus:

> In issues of political administration of the cosmos, Olodumare is supreme. In issues of knowledge and wisdom, Ifa is supreme. In issues of creation and corporeality, Obatala is supreme. So it is erroneous to say of Olodumare that: "He is creator", "He is king", "He is omnipotent", "He is All-wise, All-knowing, All-seeing... thereby equating Olodumare's role with that of the Christian God. (72)

In the same vein, Abimbola rejects the five-day in a week analysis of Bolaji Idowu. Abimbola insists instead that the Yoruba week consists of four days; in Yoruba counting, the first day is not inclusive unlike the Western rendering of days in a week (52-56). Yet the Yoruba speaking people commonly say, for instance, "out of the 365 days that make a year, there is one day in which one form of sacrifice or another is not offered to the god"

(Olupona 2011, 86). Adding to the already complex counting, Samson Fatokun (2009), in his analysis of Ela, as the son of Olodumare, talks about the seven days in the Yoruba week which corresponds with the Passion Week in Christianity. What this portends is that there is the possibility of one account being 'traditional tradition,' another 'invented tradition' and yet the other 'colonial tradition' (1-14).

Hence when Esu is depicted as the "universal policeman" (Abimbola 2006, 70), "Inspector General of Police," "Special Relations Officer" between heaven and earth (Idowu 1996, 79), "divine police officer" (Olupona 2011, 34), or Olodumare's "intelligence gatherer" (Falola 2013, 5), though all the descriptions carry colonial import, Abimbola maintains that it is an expression of political and administrative hierarchy, since by such political arrangement the chief police office will ultimately report to the chief executive officer. One immediate challenge Abimbola's thesis has thrown up is that the diffused monotheistic conception, which gives a static hierarchical structure where Olodumare enjoys more quanta of supremacy over other divinities, can no longer be sustained. Since the chief executive position is dynamic and fluid, and dependent upon the matter for adjudication, every other member of Abimbola's Level 1 qualifies to enjoy such supremacy. Therefore, Yoruba Religion is unequivocally polytheistic.

This opens an important vista of analysing the Yoruba political-monarchical system, which is believed to have been structured in similitude to the supernatural cosmic order. If this interpretation is correct and the truth, then an oba as the vicegerent of Olodumare cannot enjoy sole priority in all matters in his kingdom. It is true that Ooni of Ile-Ife for instance has high ranking chiefs, various religious priests, etc., charged with different responsibilities and contributing to the over all administration of the kingdom. When it comes to religious matters such as offering sacrifices, the priests take charge. This means, according to Abimbola's thesis, that the chief priest is higher than the Ooni, and it is only when it comes to political administrative matters that the Ooni takes precedence. It is only on this basis that the authority of an oba can be checked and balanced.

Jacob Olupona's (2011) narrative of the Ife political and religious structure appears to have supported Abimbola's position. According to Olupona, the Ooni of Ife is variously referred to as Olofin Ajalaye, i.e. "Divine Ruler of the World or Oluwaye, Ooni Orisa, i.e. "Lord of the Universe, the Deity King" (93). Immediately below the Ooni in hierarchy are the Otun Ife, i.e. the right hand chiefs, followed by Osi Ife, i.e. junior palace chiefs. While the Otun Ife are the most senior chiefs that take charge of the city's affairs because the Ooni, by taboo is confined to the palace, the Osi Ife perform their duties within the palace. The third level consists of the Isoro, i.e. priest-chiefs, who are chiefs of their lineage, but exercise enormous "ritual and to some extent political power, especially over their own lineages and territorially based clans" (96). He further reveals that the third position they occupy today might not have been so in pre-colonial period. He reports Fasogbon as saying that the Isoro occupied the position being presently occupied by the Osi Ife. Fasogbon informed that the Isoro powers extended to political, religious and judicial levels. As a matter of fact, the "Isoro were forbidden to remove the symbol of their priestly and kingship authority – their coronets – before the Ooni" (97). In addition, when the Isoro performed sacrifice for the Ooni, the latter stood "at attention, a significant reference to the 'momentary' submissiveness of the Ooni, the god-king" (97).

We have not lost sight of the argument: the place of Olodumare in the scheme of things among the co-existent divinities. "Olodumare is regarded as king of heaven, the Olofin

Orun, a great and mighty king, of whom the earthly king, the Olofin Aye or Oba Aye, is but a replica" (87). Again, Abimbola (2006) says that in the joint venture of creation, "Ogun fashions skeletons, Obatala moulds forms and shapes, and Olodumare *imparts* the breath of life" (72). The word, "imparts" is very instructive here because it connotes a transfer of an essential quality; for, as Segun Ogungbemi underscores it, after the divinities had finished their moulding assignments, "the Supreme Being gave life" (Ogungbemi 2013, 79). Although Abimbola prefers to argue that Olodumare is not a Supreme Being, there is a simple logic to depict that Olodumare qualifies to be a Supreme Being. Even the "division of labour" methodology applied to the creation process clearly shows that an assigner gives out assignments to others and they in turn report to the assigner. In 'imparting' life to what the other divinities had moulded, Olodumare did it so secretly, that not even the prying eyes of Orunmila could see it. Clearly, this suggests that Olodumare has greater power and wisdom than Orunmila. It is imperative to draw Abimbola's attention to the fact that the issue here is creation and not political or epistemological discourses where, according to him, Olodumare and Orunmila would have presided respectively. In fact, the domain of creation, he argues, belonged to Obatala to preside over.

This impartation of Olodumare connotes a 'power' or an 'essence' that no other divinities possess. It is also worth noting that Abimbola does not refer to Olodumare as a divinity. Since Olodumare is not thought of as a divinity, though he co-exists with some other divinities, it is just logical to conclude that Olodumare is a Supreme Being, higher than other divinities. This is despite his "relative silence after the world has been created" and the apparently overarching activities of the divinities (Olupona 2011, 33). Finally, with regard to the 'It-ness' of Olodumare, one may say with some level of certainty, that in many linguistic renditions of spirit beings, genderised terms are used. In a patriarchy, genderised conceptualisation of Olodumare will not be out of place.

Olodumare, Who are You?

In "The Risk Being God," Benson Igboin (2005) argues that irreconcilable opinions about deities abound to the extent that most people are bemused on who/what to believe. Interestingly enough, all of these opinions are ascribed to the same deities or deity as the case may be. Igboin cited the case of God in Christianity in which many theologians and priests, though opining contrast ideas about God, yet claim to have received such opinions as revelations from God. There is a true life story involving a pastor who invited other pastors and well-wishers to his book launch. One of the invited pastors announced that God told him to raise fund for the author-pastor. The bewildered guests felt that it could have been a secret arrangement between the two of them. The guest pastor had hardly finished when the host, the author-pastor walked up to the podium to tell the guests that God had told him that he was to merely invite people to the book launch as a token of thanksgiving rather than fund-raising; that as a result he had boldly printed "Not for Sale" on the books and that the guests were to take copies and distribute freely to people (66-85).

The same applies to the different averments we have been trying to examine thus far. From the cluster of opinions about Olodumare above, apparently deriving from the Ifa corpus or claimed to have derived from it, we may simply paint an amorphous, ambivalent or battered image of the Yoruba deity. To this complexity, one is even hesitant to add the full implications of Ogungbemi's (2013) argument of the non-existence of Esu. According to him, Esu does not exist in reality; he is simply a mythical or mental construct

that lives only in the figment of the Yoruba imagination. The real 'Esu' is the existential man *qua* man (85-86). With all the attachment to Olodumare that Esu has been shown to demonstrate or represent, if Esu does not exist in reality, does Olodumare? This answer to this question will form a body of another intellectual inquiry. If Esu does not exist, it will mean that the philosophical refutations and positions of the decolonisers cannot be sustained. Bewaji's virile leadership virtues anchored on the personality of Esu will hopelessly crash; Kazeem's asseveration on the philosophical problem of evil in Yoruba philosophy and religion loses its ground, and Abimbola's rotational presidency will be drastically altered.

In the meantime, we have seen an Olodumare who is completely 'local' to about sixty million Yoruba spread across the world (Ogungbemi, 2013, 85). We have also seen an Olodumare that is only collectively powerful but hides his weakness in the overarching activeness of his or 'Its' divinities. We have also been introduced to an Olodumare that is scared to confront global expansive terrain where other Gods contest for more space. This is despite the fact that the Yoruba have spread beyond the shores of West Africa to the Diaspora Yoruba 'nations' where they are believed to be practising their autochthonous faith. In any case, when a deity is over-rationalised, it forms an abstract mode that appeals less to the hearts of people; when he is cast as an intellectual weakling, he appeals less to the minds of the people too; but when he is fairly presented, he speaks to the souls and consciousness of the people more. But let us narrate a final story of an Olodumare that may probably not fit into the foregoing icons:

> Olodumare, the Supreme Being, decided to create the world in the sacred city of Ile-Ife. Ile-Ife, the city where creation took place, means literally 'an expansive land.' This same Ile-Ife is the center from which *the inhabitants of the world first viewed daylight*. In fact, Ile-Ife [is] the place where the earth spreads. In addition, Ile-Ife is *the first city in the world*: the birthplace of the gods and the place where the principal deities, or *orisa*, first came *to the world* and became associated with *all that came to exist*. ... Like the sacred city centers of Jerusalem, Mecca, Banaras, and Rome, Ile-Ife, signifies and forms the core of Yoruba identity. Although Ife historians' comparisons of Ile-Ife and its religiously meaningful sites to places mentioned in the Bible may sound strange to Western ears, in the imagination of the Yoruba such parallel religious motifs are quite natural. The same Ile-Ife is the city of 201 Gods ... the great city of Ile-Ife, the Yoruba world opens out in *the four directions of the universe*. (Olupona 2011, 7;29;30)

One indisputable observation in the account above is the use of universal, all-inclusive language, and a multi-cultural reflection on Olodumare. The account impels one to think of Olodumare as a universal deity, a deity that is bold and courageous to confront the world. If Ile-Ife is the first city and centre of the universe, and where the universe issues out, a deity that created from there cannot be conceived less than a universal one. Comparatively, if God of Jerusalem and Allah of Mecca are universal deities, on the basis of this story, Olodumare is a universal deity. If the whole universe as we know it is one, and God, Allah, Olodumare and a coterie of other deities are claiming sole ownership, there is 'an intellectual sense' in which it may be argued that they are all one but known by different names in accordance with cultural diversities. Again, if what makes God and Allah universal deities includes the spread of their devotees across the world, it is suggestive that since Olodumare also has devotees across the world, he is a universal deity. But should or shouldn't that imply consequently that Olodumare, like God and Allah, is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent? Shouldn't an Olodumare who honestly admits his creation of both evil and good and equally creates practical ways

of solving them be all-powerful, since all-powerfulness includes limitless capacity to do good and evil, acknowledging that these attributes do not cover the propensity of evil in the missionary deities?

Nevertheless, if we have to synchronise the various images of Olodumare thus far created, a linguistic reflection is imperative. That is the point from which Idowu started his theological and philosophical argument; unfortunately, that is the point that our decolonisers abandoned completely. To be taken seriously, decolonisers and critics of Idowu must as a pre-requisite fault his linguistic premise in the same Yoruba language, before proceeding to fault the arguments therefrom. In fact, Modupe Oduyoye has also supported a linguistic clarification of terms by his dextrous analysis of the names of God across global linguistic planes. For instance, Oduyoye (1983) finds that the Hebrew Yahweh, meaning God could have equivalent meaning in Dahomey Yehwe, meaning divine (355). Beyond this, we may ask: if Yoruba were the missionaries evangelising the Hebrews, and meeting them for the first time, how would they translate Olodumare to the Hebrews? What linguistic and theological equivalents would they find for Esu, Ogun, Ela, Sango, Orunmila or Olodumare other than Satan, Michael, Jesus, Gabriel, Holy Spirit or Yahweh? These translational equivalents may not fit perfectly well because of cultural and cosmogonic differences, but they essentially convey critical theological and philosophical worldviews from which religious insight can be gained.

As Liwhu Batiang (2014) argues, the total avoidance of linguistic engagement as done by our decolonising philosophers tells much on the competence of engagement and responsible decolonisation. Batiang posits that since language is a "carrier of culture" it is imperative to begin philosophical and theological disquisition from it. By so doing, the language is not only enriched and expanded, but its philosophical arguments are strengthened as done by Ngugi wa Thiongo and Akinwunmi Isola who abandoned writing in English language for their mother tongue. He writes: "whereas Isola and Ngugi, who write in the mother tongue, draw from the fountain and perpetually enrich it by giving it back to the people who own the language, one like Achebe would draw from the fountain parasitically without giving back to the language or its people" (603). Although Idowu, like Achebe might not have written their works entirely in their mother tongue, there is a huge sense in which they have oiled their works in their mother tongue; unlike those who think in Western language and write in mother tongue or simply transliterate Western ideas into their mother tongues (605). One fears that the decolonising efforts stem heavily from the Western categories, and also rendered in Western language, which has not surpassed Idowu's thesis. Bewaji (2012) views this as a part of Western reductionism aimed at fostering narrow utilitarian nest. The failure of logical positivism to reduce philosophy to "the logic of scientific grammar/language analysis" (398) should serve as a signal to the insistence of linguistic triumphalism. But Pearce holds the view that "philosophy, as a linguistic activity, must examine the concepts embedded in specific languages in order to clarify or even dissolve wider philosophical problems. Autochthonous African languages embody world-views and concepts different from those embedded in other languages" (399). Bewaji could not fault this, but asseverate that "philosophers must attend to and examine concepts embedded in languages they use to see how these illumine both universal and specific problems" (399).

One also observes that unlike Idowu, the decolonising 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. Such deviations weaken and sentimentalise their arguments. Apart from that, they have not been able to present a uniform account of Olodumare, therefore, it is difficult to assert that their refutation of Idowu's thesis is tenable.

Conclusion

All the decolonisation philosophers examined here agree that Esu is not Satan or Devil but was erroneously translated so in Yoruba language and theology. But Olodumare is not so conceived. The discrepancies are obvious, and need be harmonised critically in order to have a thorough decolonisation of Olodumare. One can also conjecture that if Olodumare is also ignorantly adopted by the translators of the Bible, the decolonising philosophers ought to have proffered an alternative because there cannot be a vacuum. The realistic question is: what would be the appropriate content-meaning equivalents of God and Devil in Yoruba language? Correct translation must be at once faithful to Yoruba Religion and Christianity for all practical purposes, and at the same time sustain the intellectual integrity of the decolonisers. As we await the answers, we may suggest that for now, there are two pairs of Esu and Olodumare: one pair is true and faithful to traditional Yoruba Religion and the other true and faithful to Christianity in Yoruba land.

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