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**Metaphysical Expansion of *ABIKU (DIE AGAIN)* among the YORUBAS****Dr. Selome Kuponu<sup>\*1</sup> & Joseph Moyinoluwa Talabi<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo Lagos, Nigeria**Article History**

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**Abstract:** Reincarnation remains a hotly debated issue in religion and philosophy. *Abiku (Die Again)* is one of the metaphysical dimensions of reincarnation and it aptly describes a phenomenon where there is repeated mortality and birth through the same mother. According to Yoruba metaphysical understanding, the *Abikus* are spirit beings prior to becoming humans. They often display their traits as foetus right from pregnancy in women down to when they are actually born. They live as dictated by the *Mother-Earth*. However, critics have argued that the traditional ignorant in biology and lack of understanding of how genetics work are attributed to the rationality of reincarnation especially when it comes to the concept of *Abiku*. However, there is a whole level of metaphysical dimension on the fact that in some cases of *Abiku*, the unnatural and circumstantial marks made on some people who have died, such as gun shot, deliberate and accidental deformities on the dead do reappear on the child that is born; these cannot be adequately explained as a biological family trait. As such, it is the position of this paper that there is metaphysical dimension to *Abiku* phenomenon among Yoruba's which is highly questionable philosophically.

**Keywords:** *Abiku*, Human Being, Metaphysical, Spirit, Yoruba.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Reincarnation remains a hotly debated issue in religion and philosophy. In its basic framework, it is a belief or ideology that after someone dies; his or her immortal soul is separated from the body and lives again in another physical body.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it means rebirth. In a way, this concept is closely connected to the idea of immortality. Immortality connotes a state of being that is not subjected to death. Helparn notes that death is cessation of life.<sup>2</sup> For life to continue therefore there is need for there to be element of immortality. It is this element of immortality that gives rise to the doctrine of reincarnation or rebirth in different cultures around the world. Indeed, Moody succinctly notes that the idea of reincarnation has its imprint in different cultures around the world. For him, “the notion that one passes into another realm of existence upon physical death is among the most venerable of human beliefs.”<sup>3</sup>

As such, the idea that “some aspects of the human being survive even after the physical body ceases to function, and is ultimately destroyed” is entrenched in some cultures of which Yoruba culture is notable. For the Yorubas, the part of human being that remains after death is the soul. For them, it is the immaterial aspect of human being. As such, the belief in immortality of soul is entrenched among the traditional Yorubas.<sup>4</sup> It is upon the belief of immortality that reincarnation is built. According to the Yoruba philosophical idea, reincarnation which they call *Atunwaye* may be conceptualized in three different forms: *ipadawaye* (Ancestor’s rebirth), *Akudaaya* (die and reappear) and *Abiku* (born to die).

Thus, the idea of *Abiku* is one of the metaphysical dimensions of reincarnation and it aptly describes a phenomenon where there is repeated mortality and birth through the same mother. In this case, the Yorùbá believes that it is the same soul reoccurring many times over to be born as a child. In philosophical studies, the concept of *Abiku* has been subject of hotly debates, with several attempts made to offer explanations for the seemingly metaphysical nature of *Abiku*. This paper conducts a critically exposition of *Abiku* among the Yorubas.

**Yoruba People and Culture**

The Yorùbás are groups of people who are related culturally and share the same language, though with some variations. The Yorùbá tribe is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and one of the largest homogenous groups in Africa. They live mostly in South-Western part of Nigeria, comprising Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos

<sup>1</sup> Osanyinbi, O. B., & Adedeji, G. M. (2015). The Impact of the Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation among Yorùbá Christians in Akure. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 15,17.

<sup>2</sup> Helparn, M. (2006). Death. In *Encyclopedia Americana International Edition* (vol. 8, p. 563). Danbury Connecticut: Scholastic Library Publishing, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Moody, R. A. (1975). *Life after Death: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death*. Mockingbird Books.

<sup>4</sup> Moody, R. A. (1975). *Life after Death: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death*. Mockingbird Books.

States.<sup>5</sup> Some parts of Kwara and Kogi States also have Yorùbá people living there. Beyond Nigeria, Yorùbá people are found in Republic of Benin, Dahomey, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Jamaica. Culture can be described as the total way of life of a people and it consists of the language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols. Every society has its own culture, although, the cultures might be different from society to society. The Yorùbá culture has their common way of doing things that is, their way of life. It consists of their language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols. All these have been passed down from generation to generation, through their oral traditions, viz; myths, folklores, stories, songs proverbs and wise sayings. It is also reflected in their art and crafts. Their festivals and traditional religion also reflect their cultural beliefs.

## THE ABIKU (*BORN TO DIE*) PHENOMENON

*Abiku* is a dimension of reincarnation in Yorùbá philosophical thought. According to them, it is a phenomenon where there is repeated mortality and birth through the same mother. In this case, the Yorùbás believe that it is the same soul reoccurring to be born as child many times over. The basis for this belief was outlined by Awolalu and Dopamu that "this is based upon the belief that there is a circle of wicked spirits who, of their own volition enter the wombs of pregnant women and are born only to die shortly after."<sup>6</sup> The Yorubas were able to reach this conclusion based on experience. Often times, in ancient times, the Yorubas are being said to have made marks on the dead child before it is buried to disfigure it and discourage it from appearing again; however such mark often reappear on the child born thereafter. To them, this is a strong evidence to show that it is the same child that is reborn and as such there is a strong support for the belief in *Abiku* phenomenon.

According to Falana and Osanyinbí, "such children are usually named *Maku* [Do not die], *Kokumo* [It will not die again], *Kasimaawo* [Let us watch this one], *Arinka* [Unstable walker], *Igbokoyi/Igbekoyi* (the burial ground rejects this), *Malomo* (Do not go again), *Ayedun* (Life or the earth is sweet), *Durojaiye* (Wait and enjoy life), *Durosiniyi* (Wait and bury me), *Kokumo* (Not dying again), *Apara* (One who comes and goes), *Ikujore* (Death leaves him), *Biobaku* (If he does not die), *Petirin* (He has been walking for a long time)".<sup>7</sup> These names are given as a form of appeal to the children to stay and not die again. Some are given in hope that the child will not die again. Others express doubt on whether the child will stay for long or they simply reserve judgement on it. Some others however are believed to taunt the child, make him/her realise that he/she has been identified as *abiku* child, which will make him/her stay or worse still, die and never reincarnate again.<sup>8</sup>

*Abiku* children are prone to sickness and as such they give their parents a lot of psychological problems. Often, the parents usually try their best to prevent the child from dying again until she dies and they helplessly give up. Nonetheless, Yorùbá also believes that the circle can be stopped by the intervention of a powerful Babalawo [spiritualist]. There are some connections between this belief and the Yorùbá belief in *emere*, which is a phenomenon of familiar spirits believed to come to the world for a short time to play, achieving nothing other than to punish some persons.<sup>9</sup>

The Yorùbás believe that *emere* causes the *abiku* phenomenon, but in their view not all *emeres* are *abikus*. The *emeres* children are believed to possibly live longer than the *abiku* children. However, they do not live to achieve anything other than to die when expectations about them are high, dashing the hopes of their parents. They are believed to be cruel and have some irrational behaviours which some attribute to their relationship with their playmates in heaven.

Impressions of *emere* may be summarized as "bad kids from bad parents, who bring bad luck to their parents."<sup>10</sup> Their problems are seen as predominantly behavioural and experiential. There is no "date with death" or physical illness issues as with *abiku*. An additional twist is the notion that medical science has actually reduced the number of *abiku* worldwide, and they boast an ability to diagnose *abiku* in uterus by divination. But since *emere* could cause *abiku*, the *abiku* has the potential both to die on a date or at will and to be associated with psychological problems. The comparison of *emere* with witchcraft is noted.<sup>11</sup>

In recent times, the belief in *abiku* has waned, though it has not totally vanished, especially with the advent of orthodox medicine which has been able to reduce infant mortality rates and sickle cell anaemia. Perhaps, this agrees with

<sup>5</sup>O. B., Osanyinbí, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 6, (2016) 59-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2016.61007>

<sup>6</sup>Awolalu & Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, 202

<sup>7</sup>O. B., Osanyinbí, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 64.

<sup>8</sup>O. B., Osanyinbí, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 64.

<sup>9</sup>O. B., Osanyinbí, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 64.

<sup>10</sup>O. B., Osanyinbí, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 64.

<sup>11</sup>S. T. C. Ilchukwu, Ogbanje/Abiku and Cultural Conceptualizations of Psychopathology in Nigeria. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10, (2007). 239-255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13694670600621795>

the view of Ilechukwu that the *abiku* syndrome must have been as a result of lack of medical care, jaundice and especially sickle cell anaemia.

### Philosophical Appraisal of *Abiku* in Recent Studies

In spite of the traditional belief in existence of *Abiku* in Yoruba traditional understanding, the concept of *Abiku* is highly questionable philosophically. The very basis of *Abiku* which is reincarnation is reasonably flawed and cannot be scientifically and empirically proven. Several scholars such as Oluwole, Mbiti, Idowu and Oduwole have raised some philosophical questions and answers regarding African view of reincarnation and immortality. For instance Oduwole points out that Oluwole raised some philosophical questions which are fundamental and crucial in reviewing the idea of reincarnation.<sup>12</sup> For her, these questions (some of which have been discussed in this paper) relate to the rational justification, logical consistency, epistemological and explanatory role of the belief in reincarnation. She added the following questions, which may be regarded as philosophical enquiry or response to the idea of reincarnation:

- What is the difference between children who resemble those who are still alive and those whose semblance with dead parents or grandparents, for example, is taken as cases of reincarnation?
- Is it not plausible to take the two cases above as a simple case of family resemblance?
- Which aspect of man reincarnates? Is it the “*Emi*” (life-force) or “*Ara*” (body) or “*Ori*” (personality soul)? This question is important in the light of the “*Yiya Ori*” (knowing the head) ceremony which reveals not only the type of “*Ori*” a child has brought to the world but also the type of ancestor that has probably reincarnated.
- The above question, no doubt, creates a further problem in respect of the relationship between “*Ori*” “*Emi*” and “*Ara*”. That is, how does the “*Ara*” interact with the “*Emi*” and “*Ori*” as they are the nonphysical aspects of man?
- There is also the problem of personal identity. Since the body is useful in identifying a person, how then can we recognise souls in their reincarnated state?
- From the above, one can ask in what state are disembodied souls? How can we recognise them?
- How do we differentiate disembodied souls from unembodied souls?<sup>13</sup>

These questions made the revealed the fundamental flaws of the belief in *Abiku* as established among the traditional Yoruba society. However some early Yoruba philosophers such as Idowu and Dopamu had endeavoured to provide explanation to the phenomenon of reincarnation. For instance, Idowu argued for partial reincarnation. His plausible explanation is that the issue of reincarnation shrouded in mysteries. It borders lies in metaphysical world that may defies logic. Idowu is of the view that there is yet a lot one does not know about human nature. Whilst, his position may be acceptable in some quarters, the reincarnation remains an enigmatic matter. In this paper, the researcher echoes again the view of Oduwole that “the belief in reincarnation, whether classical or partial with all its attending problems, needs to be re-examined especially in the light of the scientific explanation of genetic factors and family resemblance.”<sup>14</sup> She writes:

The simple genetic explanation of family resemblance, for example, may be a better explanation to the belief in reincarnation. This is not only for its open-endedness, but because it is simple, and it solves many problems than the belief reincarnation creates. Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) in the cells (gene) of every living creature accounts for the hereditary factor or family resemblance in every unit, be it animal or human being. This then helps to explain why a child displays the character trait of a parent while he is alive and at the same time another child displays the same qualities of the parent after his death. This is a situation which looks paradoxical and which the Yoruba man will consider as reincarnation.<sup>15</sup>

While science might have proffer solution to some of the issues raised in Yoruba idea of reincarnation, the issue still remains that some aspect of reincarnation defies logic and scientific investigation. It is plausible to assert that there is uncharted spiritual realm or what may be called metaphysical realm. This may lead us to consider the rationality of reincarnation within the ambit of Yoruba Philosophy.

### Metaphysical Exposition of *Abiku* among Yoruba

Though science cannot find veritable answer to *Abiku* Phenomenon, however the Yorubas have metaphysical response for this phenomenon. According to this view, the *Abikus* are not mere or ordinary humans. They are spirit beings prior to becoming humans. It is believed that they are order of spiritual beings that have inhabited the earth for quite a long time. During random unstructured interview, it was discovered that an *Abiku*, on sighting a suitable pregnant

<sup>12</sup>E.O. Oduwole, “Philosophy And The Challenge Of Relevance In African Society,” 79th Inaugural Lecture Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye, Ogun-State, 2018

<sup>13</sup>E. O., Oduwole, “Immortality and Reincarnation in Yoruba Thought System: Some Comments”, *Journal of Yoruba Folklore*, Ago-Iwoye, (1997)1:17 –22.

<sup>14</sup>E.O. Oduwole, “Philosophy And The Challenge Of Relevance In African Society,” 27

<sup>15</sup>E.O. Oduwole, “Philosophy And The Challenge Of Relevance In African Society,” 27.

woman, enters her womb, send away the fetus already growing in the womb and positions itself in there. Prior to the unholy intrusion, *Abikus* inhabited unfrequented peripheries of neighborhoods. They like forests, bush paths and roads. They also like living inside trees-enormous and sacred “trees like the iroko, baobab and silk-cotton.”<sup>16</sup> They are also fond of hanging around ant-hills. Therefore, it is often advisable and considered a taboo for pregnant women to walk in these places right before the day breaks and during dark nights. It is also widely believed that *Abikus* also come out when it is hot and sunny so pregnant women are advised not to come out when it is hot and sunny.

It is equally believed that every *abiku* tells *Mother Earth* how long it intends to stay and does everything it can to stick to that time frame. Indeed, some *Abikus* pledge to die a few days after they are born or months. Others might stay till right after their wedding night. They may choose to return to the same family several times until the mother’s body dries out with age or decide to make their rounds with different mothers. During their stay in the human world, *Abikus* seek each other’s company. When the whole household is fast asleep, the infant transforms itself into a grown-up being and goes off to meet with other sojourners like itself. Right before dawn, it returns to its mother’s side, re-transformed into the body of the infant.

Above all else, *Abikus* want power. The endless cycle of death and rebirth can be tough, so deep down *Abikus* envy humans and their mortality. They can never experience the peace that only death brings. But an *Abiku* is a slave to its desire for power. It is the power that makes the incessant comings and goings all worth it. There is a financial dimension to the desire for power. Anyway, parents give everything they own to keep the child from dying, whether in the form of money spent in treating incurable illnesses or money spent visiting the Babalawo. Every penny the parent spends enters the *Abiku*’s bank account, so to speak.<sup>17</sup> You may not know this, but the tears shed by the mother for the death of an *Abiku* is more precious than diamond. The *Abiku* collects it and sells, it very expensively in the spirit world. This also accounts for why *Abikus* prefer to die young. Dying young, beautiful, and deeply loved means more tears, more sorrow, more pain for the mother—all these are the needs of *Abiku* to gain power, wealth, and fame in the spirit world. Indeed, *Abikus* are known for their beauty.

To cure *Abiku*, the Yoruba has three ways:<sup>18</sup> A visit to the Babalawo (or perhaps a pastor) is the knee-jerk reaction of many parents. The Babalawo tries all he can to “earth” the *Abiku*. Earthing is the word for forcing an *Abiku* to adopt its human family as its true and only family. It has been noted that “*Abiku* children have no respect for the Babalawos (and presumably pastors too), considering them to be so much “mumbo jumbo.”<sup>19</sup> Whenever they can, *Abikus* like disgracing Babalawos (and of course pastors) by showing how ineffectual their remedies are.<sup>20</sup>

Another technique is naming the child. It could be a name that appeases the child and tries to cajole it into staying alive like: “*Durojaiye* (Wait and enjoy life); *Pakuti* (Shun death and stop dying); *Rotimi* (Stay and put up with me); *Omolelebe* (the child should be appeased); and *Eloe* (Appeal).” It could also be a name that is more hopeful like: “*Igbekoyi* (Bush [the popular cemetery for the *Abikus*] has rejected this [*Abiku* child]); *Kokumo* (It does [or will] not die again); *Ajitoni* (It wakes up [and is alive] today, and therefore we wish it many happy returns); *Ajeigbe* (Monetary expenses are never a waste [as our expenses on you shall be a waste]).” A name of complaint: “*Kosoko* (No more hoe is available [to dig any grave]); *Jolokoosimi* (Let the owner of the hoe take a rest); *Anwoko* (We are yet to find a hoe [to dig a grave]).”<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, a name of contempt: “*Kilanko* (Wherefore should the naming be ceremonious?); *Oku* (The dead, the deceased); *Aja* (A common dog); *Omonife* (It cannot be known by any better name than the mere one of a ‘child’); and *Tepontan* (No longer feared, respected and cherished).” When all else fails and the *Abiku* has refused to stay and has the audacity to return, the dead body of the *Abiku* is mutilated. The fingers could be cut off, the corpse burned, etc. The idea behind this is that even though *Abikus* shuttle between the spirit and the human world, this, admittedly, hectic life is not supposed to take its toll on the *Abiku*’s body. An *Abiku* could be excommunicated for returning to the spirit world with a burnt body or a mark running down its back. Banished from the spirit world, it is forced to make a life for itself in the human world.

### Philosophical Critique

From the perspective of this paper, the concept of *Abiku* is fraught with various philosophical problems. The first problem identified is the problem of “personal identity.” Grace succinctly articulates this issue:

<sup>16</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 64.

<sup>17</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, An Evaluation of the Akure Yorùbá Traditional Belief in Reincarnation. 65.

<sup>18</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, 65.

<sup>19</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, 65.

<sup>20</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, 66.

<sup>21</sup>Q. B., Osanyinbi, & K. Falana, 66

The question at stake is how to identify a person who is said to be an incarnate of another person. In other words what are the grounds by which a person now living is judged to be the same person as one who has lived and died in some past generation of ancestors? What are the criteria for identification of incarnate persons?<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore essential to analysis some of such common criteria of identity in order to determine their validity especially to examine the veracity of reincarnation. However, in *Abiku* cases, it is sometimes claimed that the bodies of such incarnate person bear some marks or scars on the exact spots where the incarnate person had such scars on his body in his previous existence as it is in case of *Abiku*.<sup>23</sup> But, philosophically, the basic problem here is how do we identify the body of the reincarnated person? Grace also explains on this when she observes that:

Considering the criteria for body identity and applying this criterion in identifying the incarnate person would require that the physical characteristics of the living person would correspond to those he had in his previous existence. But this cannot hold since his body in the previous existence has already undergone decomposition and disintegration. This is why it even becomes mysterious to say that we can identify incarnate persons by the marks or scars on their present body which reflect the scars they had in their previous existence.<sup>24</sup>

Grace points here is so apt. The fact that the previous body that the soul of the reincarnated person inhabited is now decomposed made the body identification a serious issue. Even if we agree that the bodily identity holds; how do we establish the truth of the other claim that the soul in person "A" (for instance) now living is the soul of an ancestor who has died? How plausible is it for the same soul to dwell in more than one body at the same or different times? And how is it decided which goes with which body?<sup>25</sup> These are basic questions about the concept of reincarnation that need critical answers.

It is obvious that logically it is difficult to account for the relationship of souls with their incarnate bodies or persons, it would ever become more difficult to account for what makes for the continuity or sameness of persons from one cycle of reincarnation to another. Moreover, it is important to ask the following questions on bodily identity in relations to reincarnation: if the identity of the incarnate person is not bodily, is there an essential core, a true self, an inner person, a sort of identity of the person which would be the same as the current one? How do we identify the reincarnated person in this case? This is because the argument is flawed if we have to go by identity of the incarnate person.

Besides, if we agree that the issue of bodily identification may be viewed in the sense that the reincarnated person may possess a body that is not physical. Then the memory of the reincarnate person may be used as a possible criterion for the identification. The thesis here is that in reincarnation, a person can remember events in his past life. Such claim is problematic. First, it is difficult to establish the truth value of such a claim since we can neither confirm nor disprove it.<sup>26</sup> Apart from that, this article agrees with Umezurike that memory may not be a reliable criterion to identify incarnate persons for many other reasons.

Reincarnation presupposes that people possess an immaterial non-spatial substance which constitutes the personality. One objection to this view, that human beings are essentially corporeal is stated by Corliss Lamont:

If we carefully examine their accounts, we find that...they actually provide this spirit with a body... (T) heir descriptions give to it activities, functions, and environments usually pertaining to earthly existence and natural bodies. The immortal personality...enjoys and suffers a great many experiences that would simply be impossible without the co-operation of ...the body.<sup>27</sup>

Even if one conceded the possibility of reincarnation, one would still have to justify the identification of the soul with the new "flesh and blood person."<sup>28</sup> Broad makes the point:

If I cannot clearly conceive what it would be like to be an unembodied person, I find it almost incredible that the experiences of such a person...could be sufficiently continuous with those had in his lifetime by any deceased human being as to constitute together the experiences of one and the same person.<sup>29</sup>

Many philosophers have argued that the bodily continuity is more essential to personal identity than memory because memory claims can be true or false; thus memory in itself is not enough to make you the same person

<sup>22</sup>G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 90-91.

<sup>23</sup>G. Umezurike, 90-91.

<sup>24</sup>G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 90.

<sup>25</sup>G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 90.

<sup>26</sup>G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 89.

<sup>27</sup>C. Lamont, *The Illusion of Immortality*, New York: Unger/Continuum, 1990. 46.

<sup>28</sup>G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 92.

<sup>29</sup>C.D, Broad "On Survival without a body" in *Immortality*, Edited by Paul Edwards, New York: Macmillan, 1992

overtime... bodily continuity, they argue, is required.<sup>30</sup> Another problem of reincarnation in any form is the age regression problems which is stated by Stace:

When an old man dies, what kind of consciousness is supposed to survive? Is it his consciousness as it was just before death which may perhaps have become imbecile? Or is it the consciousness of his mature middle age? Or is it the infant mind that he had when he was a baby? The point of these questions is not that we do not know the answers...The point is that all possible answers are equally senseless...will the old man who dies suddenly revert to his middle years after death? And will the infant who dies suddenly become mature.<sup>31</sup>

The conceptual problems for the justifications of reincarnation make reincarnation a highly implausible possibility. Modern science demonstrates the dependence of consciousness on the brain, verifying that the mind (or soul) must die with the body. This conclusion is emotionally difficult to accept. Nevertheless, we cannot base our beliefs on what we want to be true; the truth can only be found by weighing the evidence for a given idea. In the case of reincarnation, the extinction hypothesis is supported by strong and incontrovertible evidence from the hard experimental data of physiological psychology, whereas the idea of reincarnation is supported at best by weak and questionable anecdotal evidence from parapsychology. Past-life memories are also considered evidence for reincarnation. There has been evidence accumulated by parapsychologists where people provide accurate historical details when they describe "memories" of "past lives" while under hypnosis. This evidence, however, is more consistent with an alternative explanation cryptomnesia. Melvin Harris describes this phenomena:

To understand Cryptomnesia, we must think of the subconscious mind as a vast, muddled storehouse of information. This information comes from books, newspapers and magazines, from lectures, television, and radio; from direct observation and even from overhead scraps of conversation. Under normal circumstances most of this knowledge is not subject to recall, but sometimes these deeply buried memories are spontaneously revived. They may reemerge in a baffling form; since their origins are completely forgotten.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, there are numerous cases, where information from past-life regressions has been traced back to such mundane causes upon further investigation.<sup>33</sup> In fact:

In all the (past life) cases so far that have been elicited under hypnosis, either there was no such person as the one described or the character in question could have been known to the informant who...might consciously be quite unaware of the source of this knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

From all that has been said about the reality of the idea of reincarnation, it is obvious that there are missing links in between the cycles of reincarnation that need to be explained. Reincarnation may have some points in some justifications for reincarnation, but as we have seen in this work, those justifications are not convincing enough to make us accept the idea of reincarnation without doubts. From a philosophical point of view reincarnation poses some interesting problems: what is it that is reincarnated? Can a man's soul reincarnate a female baby? If yes, then the incarnate baby is no longer them same person. How can one single soul reincarnate many babies? Why is it that most incarnate children of the same ancestor don't like each other, yet they are assumed to be the same person? These and many more questions point to the fact with clarity that reincarnation is not real, and does not seem to offer an explanation for some strange phenomena such as the ability of some people to regress to a past life under hypnosis.<sup>35</sup>

Reincarnation claims to explain why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people: they are being rewarded or punished for actions in past lives (karma). But since bad things also happen to bad people, the most reasonable belief is that there is no design to the distribution of good and bad happenings to people. Lastly, since there is no difference between a baby with a soul that has been around before in other bodies, and a baby with a new or no soul at all, it follows that the idea of an immortal soul adds nothing to our concept of a human being.

The rationality of reincarnation in Yoruba Philosophy is understood from our analysis of dimensions of reincarnation above borders on the Yoruba people's cosmology and their spiritual understanding. Critics may claim that the traditional ignorant in biology and lack of understanding of how genetics works also attribute the rationality of reincarnation especially when it comes to the concept of *Abiku*. We know that one of the justification for belief in reincarnation is family resemblance, in which case, children resemble their dead ancestors, having some physical and mental features identical with theirs. This may border on genetics. However, there is a whole level of metaphysical dimension on the fact that in some cases of *Abiku*, the unnatural and circumstantial marks made on some people, such as

<sup>30</sup> P. Edwards "The dependence of consciousness on the Brain", In *Immortality*, Edited by Paul Edwards, New York; Macmillan, 1992.48-49

<sup>31</sup> W. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1960. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Harris Melvin, "Are Past life Regressions Evidence of Reincarnation?" *Free Inquiry*, Fall, 1986. 19.

<sup>33</sup> P. Edwards "The dependence of consciousness on the Brain", 9.

<sup>34</sup> B. John, "Parapsychology and the mind-body problem". In *The Oxford Companion to the mind*. Edited by Richard L. Gregory, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 262.

<sup>35</sup> G. Umezurike, "A Philosophical/Critical Analysis of the Idea of Reincarnation" 95,

gun shot and deliberate and accidental deformities on the dead do reappear on the child that is born, which cannot be adequately explained as a biological family trait.

### Concluding Remark

The subject of reincarnation remains enigmatic issues among scholars and non-scholars alike. Though the increasing development in genetic studies and scientific and psychological breakthrough into nature of humans may offer answers to some mysterious problems of reincarnation, the spiritual issues raised can only find their answers in the realm of metaphysical. The answers to these spiritual issues may lie in philosophical arguments of other religions especially Abrahamic religions. It is in this regards that this paper suggests further comparative and in-depth studies into issues of *Abiku* from African philosophical perspectives.

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