

MORAL FOUNDATION OF AFRICAN
CULTURE:

THE YORUBA PERSPECTIVE

A. DEBOYEJO OLUWASEUN
MATRIC NO.: 080105006

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF ARTS
ADEKUNLE AJASIN UNIVERSITY,
AKUNGBA-AKOKO, ONDO STATE.

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MORAL FOUNDATION OF AFRICAN CULTURE: THE YORUBA PERSPECTIVE

BY

ADEBOYEJO OLUWASEUN

MARTICULATION NUMBER: 080105006

**BEING A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
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**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by Adeboyejo Oluwaseun, matriculation number; 080105006 of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Adekunle Ajasin University , Ondo State under my supervision.



Dr. B.A. Akinnawonu
Supervisor

02-04-2013

Date

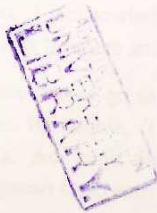


Prof. Segun Ogungbemi
Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

In memory of my late father, Pa Festus Adeboyejo, an
Educationist per excellence and a caring father.



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INTRODUCTION

The yardstick for measuring any moral foundations in an African culture can be viewed through their various religious beliefs and practices. The one that best exemplifies this is the African Traditional Religion (ATR), which can be seen in the five main structures of the (ATR) which has the belief in God, the Supreme Being at the apex, followed by the belief in divinities, the belief in spirits, belief in ancestors and belief in mysterious powers such as magic and medicine and the present day significance. It is important to note that the five structures provided the basis for the assertion that Africans are in all religions because religion is an expression of a relationship between individuals and God. The Yoruba according to J.S. Mbiti, B. Idowu and others unarguably possess a conception of supreme deity which they call "Olorun", (The Owner of Heaven), Olodunmare (One who has superlative greatness, the everlasting majesty upon whom man can depend), Eleda (the creator), Alaaye (The ever living), Elemi (The Owner of life), Oloye ori (The Owner or controller of this day or the daily happening).¹ Parrider asserts that "the Yoruba sees everything as coming from God and at the end, it will return to God thereby accepting fate whether good or bad. Moreover, these attributes show that the Supreme Being in African culture is regarded as the ultimate reality, and a religious object."² After all, they constantly mention Him in prayers and in time of difficulties.

It is commonly believed by Africans that God created divinities to fulfill specific functions assigned to them, they also stand as intermediaries between God and Man. For instance, Esu is the divinity of mischief, which can make things difficult for mankind. Sango, Orunmila, Orisanya amongst others are also assigned for a particular function. The belief in Spirits occupies a prominent place in Africa especially the Yoruba, they believe in nature Spirits and Human spirits.

Also, the human spirits which can be classified into two; the long dead and the recently dead ones. They are ghost spirits and the spirits of Abiku. It is believed that the spirits of those who recently died are still around and are visiting their families. Some are harmful as they wander around and some steal into the womb of the pregnant woman, they are referred to as Abiku.³ The ancestors are believed to still be part of their family which they have left physically and can also take new forms through reincarnation. The belief in these structures listed above contributes to the moral conducts of individuals; this is not to say that all members in the community are moral but some who know the consequences of obeying them yet still disobey and they get punished in different ramifications and these are those who constitute the bad and evil people in the society.

According to Adewumi, "this structure have amalgamated into what we call the legal bodies in our present society now with this";⁴ it is not only the structures which are invisible, it also helps to cross check the moral conduct of the individuals and the legal bodies such as the legislative, executive and the judiciary which represents arm of government that help keeps individuals in check.

The major rationale behind this research work is to examine the ethical implication of Yoruba culture to human society, the communal life of the Yoruba people and to examine the various problems associated with morality and ethics as a result of communal life of the Yoruba people. This is to enhance the main thrust of this study which is set to see how religion affects the moral and ethical foundation of the Yoruba culture.

The secondary sources of data collection were explored from text books and internet, also the scope is limited to the religious belief and the moral conduct of an individual in a

community. In attaining this, analytical method was adopted. This was adopted in order to give a conceptual analysis of the core issues associated with morality in our contemporary society.

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CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF THE YORUBA PEOPLE

Origin of the Yoruba People

The Yoruba people of whom there are more than twenty five million occupy the south western corner of Nigeria, the Yoruba people are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The majority of the Yoruba languages are found inhabiting in Nigeria, these languages vary from one culture to another in other words their intonation and pronunciation of some words distinguish them from other group. By one's intonation and pronunciation one can really tell where a person belongs. "The oral history of the Yoruba describes an origin myth, which tells of God lowering a chain down at Ile-Ife, which came Oduduwa, the ancestor of all people, bringing with him a cock, some earth, and a palm kernel".¹ The earth was thrown into the water, the cock went in and scratched it to become land and the kernel grew into three branches with sixteen limbs, representing the original sixteen kingdoms. According to Atanda as cited in Oguntomisin, "Ife is where the founding deities Oduduwa and Obatala began the creation of the world, and directed by the paramount Deity Olodumare. Obatala created the first humans out of clay while O duduwa became the first divine king of the Yoruba".² However in history, there have been problem of sources as to where the Yoruba people came existing sources and the tendency by oral traditions. They agree that they came from Ile-Ife but have different creation story for instance, Stride and Ifeka argued that "the Yoruba claims that Olorun the Supreme God, adhered his son, Oduduwa, to climb down from the heaven on a chain with three items".³ They further stated that "Oduduwa scattered a handful of dirt over the ocean, thus creating Ile-Ife, and then put a cockerel on the land which dug hole".⁴ Oduduwa planted a palm nut in the hole and from there sprang a great tree with sixteen branches representing the families of the early Yoruba states.

Like we reiterated, the origin of the Yoruba people can be termed the Ife Tradition with its many variants, claims that the ancestors of the Yoruba people came from heaven: They were sent by the most High God (Olorun or Olodumare) to create the earth and human beings. As recorded by Afolabi, "these ancestors were Obatala, Oduduwa, Obameri, Obawinrin etc. in which Olodumare made Obatala the leader".⁵ There are also two accounts of Oduduwa. It is also in history that Oduduwa manoeuvred Obatala and became the leader following two accounts of assumption of leadership by Oduduwa. In one account, according to Atanda as cited in Oguntomisin, "leadership fell on Oduduwa by default. Obatala the original leader was said to have been drunk with palm wine and slept off, and so Oduduwa assumed the leadership to execute the mission given to him by Olodumare. In another version, Oduduwa used force to wrest leadership from Obatala".⁶ This account points to a fact that Obatala has already established himself in office before Oduduwa arrived to displace him. Whichever account we want to use, it posits that Oduduwa was the aggressor and Obatala the victim.

Another creation account is that proposed by Rev. Samuel Johnson got from the historians to the effect that the Yoruba people originated from Mecca in Arabia. They are said to have sprung from Lamurudu one of the kings of Mecca whose offspring were; Oduduwa, the ancestor of the Yoruba, (as well as) the things of Hogobiri and Kukawa, two tribes in the Hausa country".⁷ They left Mecca, the tradition asserts, in consequence of a civil war which broke out in that country following the rise of Islam. After travelling eastwards of Mecca for ninety days Oduduwa with his children settled down at Ile-Ife.

Another creation account is dream from the water of Sultan Bello of Sokoto in 1824 to Clapperton who publicized it.

The inhabitants of this province (Yoruba) originated from the remnants of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribes of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the west of Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yarooba, son of Khatan, out of Arabia to the western coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa till they reached Yoruba where they fixed their residence. On their way they left a tribe of their own people. Thus it is supposed that all tribes of the Sudan who inhabit the mountains are originated from them as also are the inhabitants of Yaory.⁸

New Hypothesis of Origin

The theory of origin had to develop in the cause of time and new scholars to expand the previously held notion of the creation theory. The starting point of the origin of the Yoruba people is the emergence of Yoruba as a distinct language. Thus, Yoruba people originated from somewhere in West Africa and not from Mecca or Egypt. This is because the Yoruba language is classified by linguist among the Kwa group of the Niger Congo family of languages. The speakers of other Kwa group of languages such as Edo, Igbo, and Ewe etc must therefore be indigenous to an area of Niger Congo river systems. And that of course means West Africa, in the geographical sense.⁹ The new hypothesis displaced the notion that the Yoruba people did not emanate from Egypt or Nubia rather have been in existence before the advent of Oduduwa. They were not only indigenous to West Africa but also they may have inhabited their homeland and immediate neighbourhood since the dawn of their history. As Akinjogbin posits, the Ikedu tradition, oldest Ife tradition of origin relates that "Before Oduduwa, between 93 and 97 Kings reigned at Ile-Ife".¹⁰ Taking an average length of 20 years for each reign. In other words, monarchy and organized society had existed at least for about 2000 years before the advent of Oduduwa which is dated about the 10th century B.C. This suggestion has been termed reasonable when it is remembered from linguistics evidence, the time suggested for the emergence of Yoruba as a distinct language is

within 2000B.C. – 1000B.C. and can equally say that the Yoruba people existed between these periods.¹¹

Yoruba Art and Culture

The Yoruba people can be classified as very talented in terms of Arts and Crafts. Their work of art consisted of terra coltas, bronzes, monoliths and stone carving.¹² which were very unique and doubt was at first expressed by some whether the works were within the competence of Africans by the first Europeans who encountered them not until renowned scholars of art such as Bernard Fagg, Frank Willett, etc have come to appreciate the fact that these works of art were indigenous achievements.¹³ In which its excellence and beauty can be compared with what was produced by the classical Greeks. There has not been history how the art industry developed except that of the discovery and the use of iron which was thrown in Nok area in the Niger Valley and modern Nigeria by 2nd century B.C. They created metal tools and weapon such as machetes, axes and hoes. These tools made it easier for the Yoruba to farm the land. They planted crops including yam which is the most important food for the Yoruba in their Homeland of Nigeria. Potters, Blacksmiths, Carver's leather and Bead weavers are important to Yoruba society because they all contribute to the economy. The goods that they produce are made to be used and also have great artistic value. Music and dance are also in Yoruba culture for those living in Nigeria as well as in Diaspora. Yoruba music and dance are used for many different occasions in life such as religions, festivals, royal occasions and entertainment. Yoruba traditional musics focus on Yoruba deities. Drums and singing are the main elements of Yoruba music. Instruments such as metal bells (Agogo) and wind instrument are sometimes used.

Yoruba Religious Belief

The Yoruba according to B. Idowu, possess a conception of supreme deity which they call Olodumare connoting one "who contains all the complexities of the world or has the fullness or superlative greatness, the everlasting majesty upon whom man can depend".¹⁴ They believed that the universe and all that is in there – man, animals, Plant etc as well as its governing principles were created and controlled by this Supreme Being. It is believed that he is up there in the sky with hidden messengers, the angel supervising and controlling man actions and inaction on the surface of the earth which they call Orun and the angels who perpetuate His orders in heaven (Orun) and earth (Aye) which the Yoruba people believe that they are invisible and calls them Emi airi (unseen spirits) which contact on the basis that man himself is made up of two elements. "Ara" (body) and "Emi" (soul or spirit). The physical and the spiritual respectively amongst other things like "eye" (blood). It is believed that when a man dies, his soul joins or returns to the spirit world from where it emanated from while the body decomposes into dust of which it was gotten from and that is why the Yoruba do not lay emphasis on the earthly or physical appearances of a being rather emphasis is laid on the value of a being, what comes from a being and on that grounds the person is either regarded as a good person or a bad person. It is important to note that the Yoruba religion comprises Islam and Christianity, which include the belief in Orisa and the primordial divinities who were deified.¹⁵

Like we reiterated earlier, according to Awolalu, the Yoruba people believe in one Supreme Being, the creator of all things and he is vehemently called "Olorun" (The Owner of heaven or the Lord whose abode is in heaven), "Olodumare" (one who has superlative greatness or the one who has a big pot), Eleda (creator) Alaaye (the ever-living),Elemi (the owner of life),

Oloye oni (the owner or controller of this day or of the daily happenings). He further stated that the revealing attributes given to him. He was hailed as unique, immortal, omnipotent, omniscient, righteous, holy and transcendent¹⁶. Also in the mode of wishes or prayer which the people had Awolalu has given good examples: for people going to sleep, the usual prayer was "Olorun so wa mo jo" (may God watch over us till day break) and for those going on a journey, the prayer was "Mo fi Olorun sin yin o" (I pray God may go with you). Parrinder asserts that "the Yoruba sees everything as coming from God and at the end it will return to God thereby accepting fate whether good or bad, God is still God".¹⁷

The people only call on the Orisas in time of crisis that they see as intermediaries for guidance as to what to do to please Olorun. They believed that crises were brought by forces of evil while forces of good fortune were also under the ultimate control of the Supreme Being who manipulates these forces through the spirits. The objects of Orisa varied from relativistic. For instance the Yoruba worship the Earth (Ile) because it was believed that it was used to mould man, provide habitation for him, was used to grow food which sustained him and it is also in it that man's body would be buried when he dies. He further stated that "lagoons and the sea were also worshipped by those living near them because it was believed that the spirits in them provided fish for food, prevented river accidents, and supplied barren women children examples are Yemoja, Olokun, Osun amongst others. Certain trees like the Iroko tree, "Ayan" and "Omo" were believed to be the abode of spirits".¹⁸ Mountain and hills serve as protections in some places, where the spirits in them were also regarded as source of fertility to crops and human beings for instance Olumo in Abeokuta, the Olusunta in Ikere-Ekiti, the Orosun in Idanre, the Oke-Iragbiyi in Iragbiyi and the Akolu in Eruwa became local Orisa. Apart from those Orisa's associated with natural phenomenon there are also those that pertain to man himself such Orisa include Ori (head) was

worshipped. It required no shrine because it lives in man and is usually worshipped in cases of unusual and chronic ill-lucks. The spirit of the dead which they believed is mortal and watches over those that they have left behind particularly his or her children and those related to them. According to Awolalu, "Man spirit like other spirit is personified as Orisa and would have to be constantly propitiated and worshipped. Failure to do so could make him, like other Orisa, angry and malevolent. For these reasons, families had shrines for worshipping the spirit of their dead ancestors."¹⁹ So also if he is an hero he will be worshipped not only by her family but all those who came or he has rescued, some of these heroes came to have national significance in Yoruba land and cut across town and state boundaries they include, Obatala, Oduduwa, Ogun , Sango, Orunmila and Esu. It worshipped due to their contributions they made when they were alive. For instance, Obatala was worshipped because of the myth associated with the creation of human beings; Ogun was associated with iron which purports to the fact that all that has to do with the use of iron must worship him. Oduduwa and Sango are worshipped over the political fortune of Ile-Ife and Oyo respectively. Orunmila was deified for his reputed wisdom, which was being used through Ifa oracle to unravel the mysteries of the future and to ascertain the wishes of the other Orisa. Esu erroneously translated as Satan of the Christian concept or Shatian of the Muslim faith was a messenger and whatever sacrifices they made to appease any of the gods, the pattern that belongs to Esu should be set aside for him because it is believed that without Esu the dynamics of ritual would not exist. Apart from Esu, the desired effect of sacrifices to the Orisa could be thwarted by the "Alajogun" (warrior-spirits).²⁰ They are bearers of evil and distress to mankind. Whenever man erred, the "Alajogun" brings prescribed punishments as appropriate. These include Ofo (loss), Oran (trouble), Epe (curse) Arun (disease) and Iku (death). Also evil groups of human beings served as the agents of Alajogun; these are Aje (witches) and Oso (male wizard) which can

known for tending to give special names to each twins.²² It is usually believed that some twins are able to bestow happiness, bring wealth and good health for their families and the community while some bring disaster, disease and death. The very first to come out is called Taye/Taiwo (the first to taste the world and second is called Kehinde (the one that comes after the first). Taye being born first is considered as the younger twin, his elder Kehinde is supposed to send out his partner to see what the outside world look like. As soon as Taiwo has given a signal by crying, Kehinde will follow. Kehinde is supposed to be more careful, more intelligent and more reflective, while Taiwo is believed to be more curious and adventurous, more nonchalant than Kehinde. Twins were considered of pre-natural origin and raised emotional reactions. In ancient times, the Yoruba used to reject and even sacrifices new born twins but as it is now are not only accepted and welcomed they are anticipated because women feel it eases them the stress and pressure of undergoing labour twice and having their stomach protrude twice in an interval of six months or a year. Their birth is an occasion of great rejoicing, feast are organised for the whole community and even of neighbouring villages if the twins are children of prominent member of the tribe.

On the third day, a visit is paid by the parents to the Babalawo of the community. Through the interpretation of the Ifa oracle which includes not less than 1,600 sayings, he is able to drive out whatever evil spirits may threaten the new born twins. He instructs the mother of the twins on what colour the twins should wear or avoid. The Babalawo is important to the twins because he possesses power that could make one of the twins or both of them to die if they are said to possessed demonic powers that would ruin their parent and the society.

The Yoruba believe that twins share the same soul, when a newborn twin dies the life of the living one is in danger because it would be disturbed for the balancing of the soul which they both possess in together. To evade the danger, a special ritual is carried out after consulting the

be countered by Oogun (medicine) but the concept Ogun supersedes medicine, it also involves mystical, pre-natural powers that rest in the hands of a group called Babalawo (the father of mysteries) in care of Ifa or Adahunse (medicine man). Both of them were capable of repelling any attack of the Alajogun and the witches by their incantations and medicinal preparations which can be worn or carried they may take the form of Oruka (ring), Ifunpa (amulet), ado (small gourd), Igbadi (girdle) and Ikobore (wrapped needle). It might take the form of incision of marks on the head and body usually called (Gbere).

The duties of the medicine man went beyond countering or neutralizing the forces of the Alajogun and the witches. He also made curative and preventive medicine as Awolalu posits.

The professional skill of a medicine man includes cunning, alleviating and preventing disease as well as restoring and preserving health. In many case he is a diviner, a priests, well as a manufacturer of charms (and) drugs. He has the means of ascertaining the causes of ailments, misfortunes and death.²¹

There are also evil medicine men which the Yoruba call Ologun ika, they are the sorcerers. Medicine making also involved the use of magic by tapping the primary force of nature that is believed was created in the universe by Olodumare.

The man is the head of the family but we will start with the living arrangement of the Yoruba family. The head of the family is usually the most senior male member and the men are normally polygamous, with each wife having a separate room. The Yoruba present the highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world (4.4% of all maternities). It is believed that the high frequency among the Yoruba people largely depends on the consumption of special species of yam containing oestrogen substances. Twins are very important for the Yoruba and they are often

Babalawo, a wooden (small) figure is carved as a symbolic substitute for the deceased twin, an initiation of the living twin is usually done to the carved image called an effigy until it grows of age to know the truth, on the contrary of both the twins die, Effigies are made called "Ere Ibeji" and would be placed at a corner of the house and would be treated like living ones bathed and clothed on a regular basis in accord with the popular Saying "Dead Ibeji's expenses are expenses for the living". The mother of the deceased twins are according to customs enjoys certain privilege in the society where they belong which is relative.

Many Yoruba scholars have elucidated the meaning of Ifa. Some of these scholars include William Bascon, Olufemi Taiwo amongst others. According to Taiwo, "Ifa is a system of divination based on 16 basic and 256 derivative figures (Odu) obtained either by manipulation of 16 palm nuts (Ikin) or by the toss of a chain (Opele) of 8 half seed shells".²³ Ifa is a special divinity among the Yoruba. The Yoruba believe that it was Olodumare who sent Ifa forth from the heavens and who charge him to use his wisdom to repair the world. The wisdom, knowledge and immunity with which Olodumare endowed Ifa account for Ifa's pre-eminence among the divinities in Yoruba land which can be seen from Ifa nickname, "Akerefinu - sogbon" which is translated in English to connote the fact that Ifa is reputed to be among the youngest gods, yet Ifa is endowed with unfathomable knowledge. Ifa transcends the limit of human understanding as it is possible for Ifa to reveal simultaneously problem and solution barricading human destiny and can also see the future as to what will become of a person if he or she continues a particular lifestyle. According to Taiwo, the striking feature like we reiterated earlier is that Ifa possesses wisdom due to Ifa's knowing, the Ifa priest does not ask the client to affirm a faith in Ifa before or during or after consultation also the capacity of Ifa to know a client's fate is not affected by the non-membership of a supplicant in the Ifa tradition and that is why Ifa is frequently consulted when things are not

going the way they are supposed to for individuals, groups, or society as a whole.²⁴ This prompts us to list the various Ifa that exist. There is Ifa for the individual, called Ifa-eni, Ifa-egbe (society or club), Ifa-ilu (town, nation, country), Ifa-ipo (that of holding an office) among others. Our focus would be on Ifa eni as Segun Gbedegesin posits

When the clients enter the house of the Ifa priest, he salutes him and expresses a wish to "talk with the divinity". Ifa, priest then takes out his divining chain and lays it on a mat or a rapper tray front of the client. The client whispers his problem to a corn or a cowry shell and drops it on the Ifa instruments. Alternatively, the client could pick up the divining chain or the Ibo and whisper his problem it directly. In either case, it is believed that the wishes of the client's Ori (God of predestination who knows that what is good for every person) have been communicated to Ifa who will then produce the appropriate answer through the first Odu which the Ifa priest will come when he manipulates his diving chain.²⁵

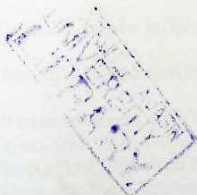
We choose to talk on Ifa eni (that which deals with individuality) because individuals encounter problems all the time and which is also the most common form. Whenever a society, nation or country has a problem it would actually take the prominent ones in the society to go and inquire what the problem is or rather delegate somebody or appoint someone to do that for them which actually happens when there is an epidemic or disaster which they strongly believe a solution would be proffered and the source and causes of the problems would be exposed, giving them preventive measures against a reoccurrence of that problem.

The Babalawo on dropping his divining chain or cowry which scatters on the mat, makes an expression which in time might install fear into the client by the Babalawo constantly glaring at the chain he casted down which he thereby explains to the client and question are asked on what and how to avert such incidence and where necessarily the client would be asked to placate the gods using sacrifices.

In history, there has been two stories concerning the concept of destiny. They are seen in Ogegunda and in Ogundameji. In the former, is told the story of how Ori (the bearer of a person's destiny, is prenatal chosen in Orun (heaven) and how once chosen, it is irrevocable. It is the story of three friends – Oriseeku (the son of Ogun), Orileemere (the son of Iya) and Afuwape the son of Orunmila). After Obatala had finished moulding their bodies, they were asked to go to Alaja, the heavenly potter of Ori, to choose their Ori. They were warned not to cut their journey for any reason and after choosing their Ori they should proceed to the earth. Oriseeku and Orileemere did as they were told but Afuwape thwarted the instruction and went off to see his father when he got to his father, he met some diviners with him who advised him to carry out some scarifies in order for him to choose a good Ori and he did. Before getting to Ajala, he encountered some obstacles which he successfully overcame and went forth choosing a good Ori and he became successful. In the latter, the gods were asked if they are willing to follow their aficionado to the grave, none of them agreed not even Orunmila the prominent figure among them. They concluded that it is only a person's Ori that would go with him to the grave which is true because the head is never cut off before they are buried except in mysterious accidents where the location of the body is difficult to find and if at all they find fragment of the body, it is buried. Therefore, the story concludes that no Orisa blesses a person without the consent of his or her Ori. Because the Ori is an individualistic property.

There have been problems in history as to how man acquires the Ori, according to African conception of Ori, It can be acquired in various ways i.e. Akunlegba(one that will kneel to collect) Akunleyan (one that will kneel and be given to) Ayanmo. Some have asked whether it is by choice. The Ori determines man's lot on earth whether he will be successful depends on the Ori which he choose while in heaven. A person can also change his or her Ori by performing some

sacrifices. Also it is believed that the type of character exhibited by somebody changes his or her destiny for instance a person who has a good destiny to put it better bright future gets influenced by friends and ends his life in jail.



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CHAPTER TWO

DESTINY, NARRATIVE AND THE CIRCULAR LIFE OF THE
HUMAN BEING

The concept of destiny is derived from the Latin "destinare" meaning to appoint, designate, and direct. It is the determination of a course, direction, and purpose for a person or a thing. In the context of human life, destiny is often understood as a pre-ordained path or a goal that one is fated to achieve. However, many philosophers and theologians have questioned the existence of destiny, arguing that it is a human construct or a mere illusion. Some believe that destiny is a combination of fate and free will, while others see it as a purely deterministic force. The concept of destiny is also closely related to the idea of narrative, as many people view their lives as a story that is being written. In this sense, destiny is the plot of the story, and the human being is the protagonist. The circularity of life, as mentioned in the title, suggests that life is not a straight line but a cycle that repeats itself. This idea is often found in ancient philosophies and religions, where the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is a central theme. The text on this page likely explores these concepts in depth, discussing the philosophical and theological implications of destiny and the circular nature of human existence.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING MORALITY AND THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE YORUBA PEOPLE.

The term morality is derived from the Latin "moralitas" meaning to manner, character, and proper behaviour. Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are "good" and those that are "bad".¹ Morality is widely known for its relativity because it is not the same for every human culture and any culture without a modicum of morality, such culture will collapse. It is also, simply the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interest of the individual to those of others in the society. According to Wiredu, "Morality is used to mean two things, to say an action is moral we mean that action is morally right and to say an action is immoral we mean such an action is morally bad".² To define morality, a person will use the rules or habits in line with the right or wrong he or she follows because morality is the quality of being in accord with standards of right and wrong conducts or a system of ideas that fall into that same category³. Morality is needed for adjustment in any society for attaining the morally accepted behaviour in the individual and in the community at large. Morality cannot be discussed extensively without an adequate reference to ethics or moral philosophy as others might put it which is a branch amongst the four cardinal branches of the discipline called philosophy that studies human behaviour and conducts in a very different way.

The word Ethics is derived from the Greek word "ethos" which means character. Ethics can be defined as the normative science of human conduct.⁴ Or the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law. According to Agulana as cited in Owolabi, Ethics is a

systematic reflection upon human behaviour with regard to how they ought to behave and what they ought to do. Ethics however, has no univocal definition. It has been defined in various ways by moral philosophers, depending on their understanding of what philosophy itself is. For example, the philosophers of the analytical school define it as the branch of philosophy which helps us to clarify moral terms and concepts⁵.

Ethics is concerned with the question of right and wrong in human behaviour. It deals with how men ought to behave, and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways and right to behave in certain other ways. In other words, Ethics studies the reasons why certain kinds of actions are morally right and commendable.

According to Omoregbe, Ethics is the branch of philosophy that helps us understand which ways of life are worth following and which actions are right or wrong. Good and bad or right and wrong actions are known in classical moral philosophy as "virtue" and "vices" respectively. Hence the British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes defines Ethics or Moral philosophy as "the science of virtue and vice". It is also defined as the branch of philosophy which deals with "the morality of human actions".⁶ Williams Lille defined it as "the normative science of human conduct".⁷ Ethics therefore reminds us of the negative consequences of bad actions and the approbation that follows good deeds. The question to ask at this junction is what makes an action right (good) or wrong (bad) which ethics tries to examine, this would be buttressed afterwards. Ethics can be classified into three aspects.

- i. Normative ethics
- ii. Descriptive ethics
- iii. Meta ethics

Normative Ethics

This aspect of ethics deals with the norms, standards or principle of human behaviour. It is concerned with questions as to what is the moral standard. What is good or right? Which actions are worth rejecting? Normative ethics is also referred to as prescriptive ethics because it prescribes what ought to be rather than what is, for example, if one says killing is bad, it would be unethical to say he hates it or because it is against God's law. For a proposition to be ethical it must be backed by a reasonable argument that is based on moral considerations. For instance, one should say killing is bad based on the fact that it destroys a man's worth and it is not a good deed to take someone else's life because he can't create it.

Descriptive Ethics

Descriptive ethics is also known as comparative ethics, is the study of people's beliefs about morality. It deals with examining existing moral trends in order to ascertain what and how people feel about them. The major objective of descriptive ethics is to discover the nature of morality, For instance the question what is morality? Would bring forth different opinions from different people because people see things differently and each and every one is entitled to tell or say the way it appears to him. It also discovers what the different opinions to be taken as expression of morality. This gives rise to descriptive ethics. This means that values, interests and ethical principles of individuals conflict in the course of appraising moral actions.

Meta ethics

This aspect of ethics deals with the analysis of ethical terms as good, evil, obligation, duty, principle, moral, or immoral etc. to convey a moral opinion it is required to have an understanding of moral term used. Meta-ethics sub divides into two; they are "naturalism" and "Anti-naturalism". The former explains or defines moral goodness in terms of natural objects while the latter maintain that moral goodness is not a natural property that can be ascribed naturalistic terms and conditions. The central problem in meta-ethics is the problem as to what precisely we mean when we say that an action is good or bad. How do we define a good action? It is concerned with issues and questions about morality as opposed to questions within morality. However, problem arises in philosophy when we fail to clarify the concepts we want to use and thereby using them ambiguously as Tom Regan rightly puts it.

If we do not have a clear understanding of the meaning of words, we will not have a clear understanding of our question, and if we do not understand our question, we will not counta answers to them, this is especially true in the case of questions that ask whether something is morally wrong. For example, whether the use of violence is wrong, if we don't understand what violence is, how can we even begin to consider the question of its morality.⁸

To resolve conflicts, there is a need for conceptual analysis and clarification for instance, two people may be involved in a moral disagreement without realizing that the dispute relies solely on the fact they have misunderstood the terms in use. Meta-ethics is referred to as the field of inquiry that considers the meaning of ethical terms, meta-ethics sorts to resolve the confusion that arises from the inappropriate use of a word.

Relationship between Ethics and Morality

The relationship between ethics and morality is similar to the relationship between logic and thinking or relationship between theology and religion. This shows that the latter is the basis for the former ethics itself before study portrays we have a sense of morality itself as old as creation. Their etymological term "ethos" and "moralitas" respectively are identical both words referring to customary behaviour. Morality is looking at how good or bad our conduct is, and our standards about conduct. Ethics is used to refer to the formal study of those standards or conduct the term "moral" has two meaning, a moral and immoral.⁹ We say for example free rational being is a moral being. In other words, man is by nature a moral being. This means that a man is subjected to the moral law and is morally responsible for his actions. An ethical or moral person is one who struggles with his or her actions will have negative effect on others.

The other meaning of the term "moral" is opposed to the term "immoral". This term means morally bad or morally evil, we say for example the criminals are living immoral lives.

It is apt to say from the definition of ethics as the systematic study of morality or the fundamental moral principles shows that there is a relationship between the duo. Hence, we can't discuss morality outside the scope of ethics or else it would have no meaning. We can also see the relationship between ethics and morality following the characteristics of ethics posed by J.K Ayantayo. He classified ethics into six;

1. Business ethics
2. Medical ethics
3. Educational ethics

4. Political ethics
5. Engineering ethics
6. Economic ethics

Business Ethics

Business ethics deals with moral rules and norms underlying business activities such as buying, selling, manufacturing and distribution of goods and services.

Medical ethics

This is the aspect of Ethics that deals with medical practises that have to do with the application of medical knowledge to solve human problems such as abortion, artificial insemination, blood transfusion, euthanasia amongst others.

Educational ethics

Educational ethics is concerned with oral rules related to the process of imparting knowledge in people. Every aspect of education raises moral questions of good and bad, For instance, students are not supposed to cheat in their exams, they ought to read and prepare for it. Lecturers should not be biased in grading student's papers among many others.

Political Ethics

This aspect of Ethics ruminates on moral issues about making which will ensure good governance. In this sense, both the rulers and the ruled have specific moral rules to follow. For instance election result should not be falsified.

Engineering Ethics



This deals with practical application of engineering services for the benefit of humanity as it affects people's well being.

Economic Ethics

This deals with moral rules associated with allocation of science material and human resources for the benefit of the public. For instance, hoarding of food materials in order to make them scarce and amassing more profit when it is released is morally wrong.

Consequently, from the above characteristics of ethics, we can see that all our daily activities is surrounded by ethics the notion of morality, we can therefore say, that ethics or morality is a social enterprise that has no boundary. As long as Man lives, he shall be talking about ethics.¹⁰ Morality as we have seen so far is universal in character in other words; it revolves around every aspect of our life. Before an action can be said to be right or wrong, good or bad, there must be a criteria for judging such actions that would either justify a person in performing such an action or refrain such a person from doing the action. For instance, under situation ethics, a hungry man who steals from a rich man's table to feed himself has done nothing wrong to be punished because is stealing was justified based on the fact that he needed to preserve his soul from dying which is the ultimate virtue according to Aristotle and other medieval philosophers. Moreso, a man who goes to the chemist to steal drugs because he can't afford it to give to his dying wife has done nothing wrong because he has the desire to save his wife. We are of the view that if the man actually succeeds in saving his wife then he has done nothing wrong but if after stealing the drugs and administering it on his wife then she still dies, then the man has done something wrong because he had deprived another man's means of survival without a just cause. On the contrary, the christian ethics is against such behaviours like killing, stealing under any

circumstances according to what is written in the Bible. "Thou shall not steal", "Thou shall not kill". This actually brings us to what exactly is the moral standard?

For the christian ethics, the ten commandments are the moral standards which preach living among each other, helping the needy, paying tithes, do not be greedy to mention but few. The Bible stands as the moral standard in that whatever the Bible condemns, the christians also condemn and whoever does not condemn, he is seen as immoral, so also the Muslims according to this set of believers. The Holy Quran is the moral standard and they as followers of Mohammed must condemn whatever He condemns. However, there is a variation in ethical opinions as to how we can differentiate a right action from a wrong action. A central theme with all these views is the problem associated with it, for instance the Christian ethics which sees the Bible as the moral standard would only appraise actions advocated by the Bible and rejects all actions that is contrary to it. The problem with this kind of view is that some people do not believe in God, for example, the atheist and the agonistics do not know any moral standard and would do anything they feel is right. The intuitionist who also believed that adequate knowledge about a thing can only be derived from intuition not the sense experience because it is fallible and therefore cannot be trusted. It differs from person to person, in other words, people's intuition conflict and "intuition itself provides no way of deciding which of two conflicting intuition is correct".¹¹ someone following his intuition might say "killing is bad" while another following his intuition might say "killing is good" on a closer look, both of them might be either right or wrong depending on the person's orientation. The question that pops up in the mind of a vibrant reader or writer would be where does this function intuition come from?

What makes an Action Morally Right or Wrong?

An action can be morally right if it is in credence with the divine command theory. This position however is the major problem in the study of ethics. The question of what is the Divine command theory? Is it written by a man of God? People's opinions are different. Some people feel that actions are right or wrong because they feel so; this view is known as the conventionalist theory in ethics. Conventionalism is a practice derived from the conventionalist movement in ethics; this theory holds that what makes an action right or wrong is because of someone's saying or believing that it is so. For example, to the conventionalist, what makes murder morally wrong is because someone says or believes that it is wrong. But "Conventionalist disagree among themselves as to who says so does the job".¹² A conventionalist theory is the divine command theory as stated earlier. It holds that "an act is right or wrong because God says that it is". So they would argue that murder is intrinsically bad. Another conventionalist theory is "Ethical Relativism". This position holds that right or wrong actions are determined by the society they fall in because societies vary from each other, what some societies might consider wrong might be right for another society which brings forth "culture shock" especially seeing something very strange for the first time. For instance the people of Eskimos who offer their wives as means of entertaining their visitors, which is a taboo in Yoruba culture, in a nutshell the culture of society A is different from the culture of society B. This view also holds that there cannot be only one moral standard that is applicable to all men wherever they might be found, Ethical relativism is largely affected by time, place and also situation one finds himself. Therefore, no acts are in themselves morally right or wrong, good or bad.

However, problem lies in the divine command theory if it is the yard stick for measuring morally right actions then what is going to be view of an atheist (one that does not believe in God

or any supernatural being). He would know what morally right and wrong for instance. The divine command theory prohibits killing and adultery. An atheist would definitely not see these actions as morally wrong because God condemns it but might feel it is bad if and only if he feels so and it on this ground that Christopher Agulana posits that "it is the individual and not God's or society's that makes an action right or wrong".¹³ It is important to say that moral actions are right actions and non moral actions are actions that are morally wrong. Hence, it is necessary to make a distinction between moral actions and non-moral actions. A moral issue or actions are those which involve differences of beliefs and not a matter of preference in other words, as moral dispute would involve a factual disagreement (or a disagreement in belief). Oral issues are those which involve a specific kind of experiences i.e. a special kind of feelings such as religion or aesthetic feelings (some people think they arise from conscience). In ethics, when we are talking about rightness or wrongness of an action, we have to raise questions on the moral standard of the point of view of right and wrong. An action can be right viewing it from a different perspectives, an action can be right absolutely or relatively, legally, divine or spiritually, circumstantially, customarily or professionally.¹⁴ Every actions is unique, consequently the same kind of action cannot remain normally the same in all situations, whether an actions is to be considered good or evil depends on the situation in which it is performed an example is a family that was scattered during the second world war. A man was captured and taken to a camp in Wales, the wife too was captured and taken to a prison camp in Ukraine and the children were all scattered. The man, however, was soon released and he went back home to Germany, and after weeks of searching, he found his children but had no idea where his wife was and they were desperately looking for her. News got to his wife in Ukraine that her family were together again and where desperately looking for her. But she could be released on two conditions. First, if the person is critically ill or pregnant

in the case of women. Mrs. Berger, decided to become pregnant so that she could be released and go back to her family. She arranged with one of the guards to make her pregnant and he did, her condition was medically verified and she was released and she went home to join her family and told her husband how she got out of prison and the husband praised her action. The question posed at this junction is that, is her action morally right or wrong?¹⁵

According to the divine command theory what she did was profane because it is written in the "book" "thou shall not commit adultery" which she did to set herself free from prison. My position is that she did the right thing for her to see her family again and also on that long run preventing her husband from committing adultery because he might probably think she is dead or maybe she has gotten another family elsewhere.

Moreover, like other philosophical problems, this problem has not been resolved, whether morality is a function of passion or reason. They have separated into two camps each arguing for each side, those arguing for reason will be called the "rationalist" for convenience they include, Aristotle, Plato the Stoics, Thomas Aquinas, Baruch Spinoza and Wilson on the other hand, those arguing for the passion, these are the philosophers who are not rationalists they include, Hobbes, Hume, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Unamuno.

Plato was the first in history that contended whether morality is a function of reason or the passion. He started by bringing into focus the tripartite of the soul which are in three aspects, namely, the rational part (reason), the spirited (the higher emotions) and the appetitive part (lower emotions). Plato sees morality in terms of self-discipline to live a moral life, to live a life of self discipline and this means bringing passion under the strict control of the reason. To buttress his point, he gave an analogy of a charioteer whose chariot is being driven

driven by two horses. One of the horses representing the higher emotions is tamed and easily controlled while the other horse representing the lower emotions is wild and intractable. The latter is said to always lead the chariot astray because it is not tamed thereby making the charioteer which represents (reason) difficult to control. Morality, according to Plato is reason. The question as to whether morality is the function of reason or that of the passions was answered by Aristotle, a follower of Plato. The passion leads to astray, and anybody who follows the dictate of the passion will be led into vulgar and immoral ways such a person, According to Aristotle, "A man who lives according to the dictate of passion will not listen to arguments intended to dissuade him from doing so".¹⁶

The stoics whose slogan was "live according to reason" went further than Plato and Aristotle. For man to live happier and a moral life, he must eradicate passion because the passion leads to astray because an irrational elements in man's nature. Moreso, according to Spinoza, Man is enslaved by the passions and moral progress is nothing other than progress in liberating oneself from the servitude of the passion.

The irrationalists are of the view that morality is not the function of reason, but of the heart. For it is the heart that leads man to God and to live a moral life. All of them see morality as the function of feelings. Hume puts it better as he contends that morality is of the passion and not of reason. He opines, "Reason is, and ought only to be slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any officer than to serve and obey there moral judgment". Hume says moral judgments are not based on rational calculation but on sentiments, feelings and emotions. For Miguel De Unamuno, rejecting Aristotle's saying "man is a rational animal" he argues that what distinguishes man from the animal is the passion-feeling not reason, "I do not know why he has not been defined as an affective animal. Perhaps that which differentiates

him from other animal is feeling rather than reason; this view to an extent is also problematic as would be seen afterwards".¹⁷

This position seems to be the appropriate of the other two views, in our own view, man is a conglomerate of both the passion and reason and to lack one of these would detest existence. According to Miguel De Unamuno what distinguishes man from the animals is the passion not reason but on a close scrutiny, we would see that his arguments are a debased form of an argument. I feel that only the passions i.e. feeling is a striking similarity between man and other animals because we as humans protect our young ones from harm if we can, and so also all animals sort to protect her young ones from being devoured by other wild animals and the only thing they lack is reason. Experience has shown that the young ones tend to mate with their own mother to bring forth other seeds. Unamuno was right in saying that it is only humans that smile and weep but failed to realize that weeping and smiling is an integrated product of reason and emotion. It is because man is a blend of reason and the passion and that is why he weeps and smiles. He says i do not know why he has not been defined as an affective animal. For Hume, "Reason is the slave of the passion that it can claim no other functions than that of serving and obeying them".¹⁸ This proposition necessarily points to the fact that men are free and rational beings. Morality would be meaningless according to Walter T. Stace, if men were not free as he opines "it is certain, he says, "that if there is no free will; there could be no morality concerned with what men ought to do, and what they ought not to do".¹⁹ This presupposes that men are free. If men were not free, it would be impossible to blame, praise and punish an individual doing something right or wrong.

The Individuals in the Yoruba Community

The word for an individual or a person in Yoruba is "Eniyan" but these terms have two meanings, firstly the normative meaning and lastly the literal meaning. The former indicates, "the moral standing of the human being who is thus determined as (either) falling short (or living to the expectation) of what it takes to be recognised as such". The concept "Eniyan" consists of four elements which are crucial to its existence, these are Ara (body), Okan (mind), Emi (soul) and Ori (head). According to Segun Gbadegesin, "Ara" is a "physical-material part of the human being, it includes the external and internal components: flesh, blood, heart, intestine etc".²⁰ the second element is "Okan".

In Yoruba language it appears to have a dual character. On the one hand it is acknowledged as the physical origin responsible for the circulation of blood, and it can be thus identified on the other hand, however, it is also concerned as the source of emotional and psychic reaction".²¹

The third component is "Emi" (soul). This is the non-physical aspect in man rather spiritual; it is also immortal because it does not die rather returns to the Supreme Being when Eniyan dies. It is said to be very powerful because it can be said to make vengeance on those that tormented it while it was one earth. It is also referred to as the life giving agent.

Finally, the fourth element of a person/Eniyan "Ori". Ori has a dual nature, on the one hand, it refers to the physical head which rest on the body and, on the other hand, it refers to Eniyan's destiny which states man's fate on earth.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th edition third definition is more plausible, it defines the community as "the feeling of sharing things and belonging to a group in the place where you live" therefore a community is a social-political arrangement

usually made up of peers, group of person, who are linked together by interpersonal bonds which are not necessarily biological. And therefore, predicted on the social being and belongings of people with communal values, which serves as the foundational basis for communalism which defines and guides social relations in the form of attitudes and behaviour that should exist between individual living together in a community who not only share a social life but also a sense of common good. The community, no matter how viewed, is larger than any institution within it such as the schools, mosque, church market etc. And therefore it is apt to say that individual in the community is tied by communal is gregarious and they do not believe in isolation, the individual makes up the community and the community makes up the individual. Hence, the well being of the community is often used as a determinant of the well being of the individual, even though the converse does not always hold. This is because not everybody in the community contributes to the societal well being for instance in the Yoruba community there are deviants, miscreants and those that are insane, who contribute negatively to the community. For a man/woman to be regarded as a prominent member of the community he/she must have created a niche for himself and must have distinguished himself in various way by contributing to the advancement of that community, the personalities of members of the society are also part of his environment in the sense that, the society must be able to count on its members to contribute to social functioning.²² To elucidate this relationship of the individual in the community, there is a need for me to start with the origin of the individual. The family is the main origin of the individual which is also called for convenience the family of orientation. In the Yoruba community, a child is not owned individually but collectively. When the child is born the new baby arrives into the waiting hands of the elders of the household. Experienced elderly wives in the household serve as

midwives, they see that the new baby is delivered safely and the mother is in no danger after delivery. The baby is not given to the mother after birth except during breast feeding the baby then rest in the care of co-wives, husband's mother and step-mothers and whole lot of others, including senior sister's nieces and cousins. Hence, a child who misbehaves is corrected immediately and may be punished by any of the elders. This progress of socialization that begins in the family finally gets into the larger community where the child is further exposed to the display of selfless efforts by others to uplift the community having a fist-hand experiences of her adults, have contributed to the welfare of children, how women and men work on the farms and how warriors risk their lives to save the community accepting these facts, they themselves now see the community as part of them and as Mbiti opines between the community and the individual which has become a communal dictum among many African exponents of communalism, "I am because we are, and since one is, therefore I am" and expresses the strong dependence of the individual on his community.²³

The structure of traditional Yoruba society is communal. This means that the organisation of socio-economic life is based on the principle of common ownership of land, which is the major means of production in a non-industrial Nigerian subsistence economy for instance, the community owns the land and gives it out to any individual (adult) of that community whenever he needs to make use of it which purports to the solidarity and generosity in the Yoruba community. Moreso, there is system called "owe" which beseech people to help one another on specific task through their cooperative endeavour, for instance, building a house or clearing a forest for farm but requires help from others in which is given freely by others in the community based on reciprocity that is whenever him too is called upon he will respond. Sometimes sons-in-law are called to help in the task. Another kind of mutual

cooperation among the Yorubas is known as "Aro" in the form of a standard co-operative association. A member may call upon the group to help him harvest or plant or clear the weeds. He only has to feed the participants and later on harvest also be called upon to help.²⁴ This does not mean conflicts because they are different people and may be offended somehow, as it can be seen in the proverb "another man's meat is another man's poison" but avenue for resolution of conflict exist among the Yoruba community as elders are willing to intervene reconciling the dispute parties on the basis of the community's accepted moral principles.

Morality and Ethics in western and non western societies where similar importance in human social and interpersonal behaviour are under the necessity of the adjustment of interest among the individuals for convenience the community determines what constitutes the good life of the individual, and the concept of right and wrong. In others words, the community prescribes norms, values and give meaning to the life of the individuals. Each person like we reiterated earlier is a representative of not only himself but for his or her family and what he/she is doing or not doing well will affect him and his family which would change people's perception about them in the society for example one is expected even in the pursuit of his own interest to be careful not to tarnish any tradition laid in his family.

To have a good grasps of the nature of morality in the Yoruba culture, some ethical concepts have to be discussed. There are numerous and they are "Ese", "Eewo". "Egbin", "Abuku". "Ibaye", "idaa" among others. Starting with "Eewo",²⁵ this is interpreted to mean taboo in English language in relation to things prohibited by the Supreme Being, the ancestors, for instance, consuming the offerings meant for the gods or ancestors to repel the consequences sacrifices have to be made to the unseen forces that have been offended. Yet

another is "Abuku" which literally translates "blemish". In the Yoruba understanding of morality to act against moral expectations is to exhibit a moral blemish, and will for instance, be shy, as a consequence, to raise their voices in public to participate in the discussion of community affairs. In fact, to have such a blemish is to be unworthy of communion with one's peer or holding a responsible office in the community.

Religion as a Factor in the Communal Life of the Yoruba

According to J.S Mbiti, Africans are religious in all things when he opines:

Because traditional permeate all department of life, There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Whenever the Africans is, there is his religion. He carried it to fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.²⁶

From Mbiti's quote, it is obvious that the individual in the Yoruba community cannot do without a modicum of religion as these can be seen in Bolaji Idowu's structure of the African traditional religion.

To start with the first is the belief:

- i. The belief in God
- ii. The belief in divinities
- iii. The belief in Spirit
- iv. The belief in ancestors
- v. The practice of magic and medicine.²⁷

It is important to note that the five structures provided the basis for the assertion that Africans are in all religions because religion is an expression of a relationship between individuals and God.

This is the belief that the Supreme Being is called Oyame by the Akans, Chukwu by the Igbos, and Oludumare by the Yoruba to mention but a few. He is regarded as the maker of all things, the world. The sustainer and ruler, the giver of life who is above all divinities in heaven and on earth. He is a Supreme Judge and controller of human destiny. These attributes shows that the Supreme Being in African culture is regarded as the ultimate reality, and a religious object. After all, they constantly mention Him in prayers and in time of difficulties. These are man-made in the sense that they are maintained by human beings.

Beliefs in Divinities

It is ubiquitously believed by Africans that God created the divinities to fulfil specific functions, and owe their existence to Him as they have no existence of their own and have no absolute authority. Their authority is delegated from the Supreme Being. They also stand as intermediaries between God and man each of them can be regarded as "head of departments" because they own particular job. For instance, Ogun is in charge of metallic substances and all activates connected with metals. Sango is in charge of thunder, Ile is associated with agriculture, fertility and productivity. These divinities include Ori-nla, Orunmila, Sango, Esu, Olokun only some of this divinities would be discussed.

Orinsa-nla

This among the Yoruba is the Arch-divinity. He is believed to have been saddled with the responsibility of creation of the earth and the moulding of human frames. He is sometimes called "Orisa mori-mori". And the circumstance in which he moulds depends on his mood, in other words he is said to mould good frames when he is happy and bad frames when in bad mood. He is also kind of whiteness and purity anything that has to do with him is always white even his priests dress in white and his temple is painted white.

Orunmila

Like we reiterated earlier, Orunmila is God's deputy concerning issues of wisdom and knowledge and nicknamed "Eleri Ipin" meaning witness to man's destiny.

Sango

This is the thunder and lightning divinity. It is believed among the Yoruba that he was the 4th Alafin of Oyo and his reign was tyrannical. Hence, he is a deified personality. In his rage, he could kill by spurning fire from his mouth to his enemies

Esu

The Esu is the divinity of mischief, which can make things difficult for mankind. He is in charge of rituals and human conduct. It is his duty to look into the behaviour and conducts of human and also other divinities.

Belief in Sprits

The existence of spirit occupies a prominent place in Africa. All Africans especially the Yoruba believes that there exist two spirits; the nature spirits and the human spirits. The nature spirit involves those spirits that make some natural things sacred and defiling them would be very harmful to those who defy them. For instance, the Iroko tree is very good for

firewood but should not be used for firewood by a male gender. Also, the human spirit which is classified into two; the long dead and the recently dead ones. They are the ghost spirits and the spirit of Abiku. It is believed that the spirits of those who have recently died are still around and are visiting their families. Some are harmful as they wonder around and some steal into the womb of the pregnant woman these are the Abiku – a case where a woman give series of birth and the child that dies come back to the world and dies again causing sorrow and agony to the mother and the family concerned.

The Ancestors

The ancestors are believed to still be part of their families which they have left physically and can also take new forms through reincarnation a process whereby the ancestor live again but in the lives of their grandchildren these children are called Babatunde, Iyabo, Yetunde, Babajide. Similarities are seen in these children in most cases in terms of character and disposition the child might possess. However, the ancestors stand as shield to their families when pleased and also could attack their families with plagues if they are angry with them. We suffice to note that not all dead ones are qualified to become ancestors. As there are requirements to fulfil before one can be qualified to be an ancestors these include, that the person must have lived a good life while on earth must have died a good death, not by accident or through poison, must have grown up to an old age before he dies by those who had already become ancestors and another condition is that he must be of a good and enviable character before he dies.

The belief in these structure listed above contributes to the moral conducts of individuals; this is not to say that all members in the community are moral. Some who know

the consequences of obeying them yet still disobey and they get punished in different ramifications. And these are those who constitute the bad and evil people in the societies or holding a responsible office in the community.



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CHAPTER THREE

MORALITY IN AFRICAN CULTURE

Morality in the Africa context is a modicum for societal order for every rational being. It keeps the individuals in check inculcating morally acceptable characters that ensure peace, harmony, love, generosity and humility to mention but a few. The belief in God and in other spiritual beings implies a certain type of conduct which constitutes the criteria for moral foundations, these conducts are established by God and watched over by the divinities and the ancestors who are worshipped; this is done through sacrifices, offerings, prayers, invocations, praises, music and dance.

Peace as a product of morality

All human beings desire peace and it (peace) is defined as the totality of well beings, fullness of life. And in Yoruba, it is called "Alafia" connoting "the sum total of all that man may desire; an undistributed harmonious life".¹ if one is therefore lacking in any of the basic things that are considered essential to life in an African society (like good health, a wife or a husband, children, means of sustenance of one's family) or if one, having all these things and yet he or she is not having a good relationship with other members of the community either living or dead cannot be said to have peace. Also any action that is capable of hindering another from attaining the fullness of life is considered a breach of peace. A selfish or unjust person, even when he or she is not violent is seen as an antisocial and is therefore regarded by the African as enemy of peace.² Harmony as well brings peace when a person or group of persons discharges their religious and social duties as Emefia (1987) posits.

The goal of interaction of beings in Africa world-views is the maintenance of the interaction of beings leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved, and enhances the growth of life. A pernicious influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the harmony and integration of the whole.³

Hence, anyone who breaches the harmonious co-existence of the members of the community is made to make up for it through reparation. The harmony that is to be maintained for human to experience peace is not only but also spiritual and comic as J.V Taylor opines.

A man's well-being consists in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality. When things go well with him he knows he is at peace and of a piece with the scheme of things and there can be no greater good than that. If things go wrong then somewhere he has fallen out of step, the whole system of divination exists to help him discover the point at which the harmony has been broken and how it may be restored.⁴

In many African societies, there are specific periods of the year marked out for the promotion of peace. During this period, which may last for a week or a month, litigations are suspended while quarrels and all forms of violent and unjust acts are avoided for fear of incurring the wrath of God, the deities and the ancestors. The scared period sometimes proceed the planting season and it is believed that any breach which is not adequately atoned for would lead to a poor harvest. If a person breaks either the spiritual or the cosmic harmony, the lack of peace that ensues reverts on the entire community. Sometimes individual's reparations in terms of sacrifices are not enough to restore the harmony and all the members of the community are called upon to right the wrong. There is thus a strong sense of the social dimensions of immoral conduct. Of all the breaches of social harmony and cosmic harmony, terminating human life is the most serious because life is sacred and come from God and he

alone has the right to interrupt it at anytime he chooses. Therefore spilling of human blood defiles the earth and this can be seen for instance when anything that has blood is killed like the ram, goat or chicken. It is morally advised to dig a hole and collect the blood from the animal and later cover it up with sand and it is unethical to leave the blood flowing or on the ground. Also human beings turn to God who they believe is the source of universal order and harmony to restore peace due to their limitations in attaining and maintaining peace in themselves and in the society at large and that is one of the main reasons for sacrifice and offerings. They make expiatory sacrifices to make up for an evil act, remove an abomination, placate the deserved wrath of God, the divinities and the ancestors and thus restore equilibrium that was distributed by the sinful act, by these sacrifices, usually perform what the Yoruba would refer to as Ebo, Etutu (propitiatory sacrifices). According to Awolalu, this sacrifice is carried out when there is an outbreak of plague and diseases, famine failure of crops and sudden death which the people believe is as result of the anger of the gods or God, the manipulation of the evil spirits or defilement by men. This is done by making efforts to locate the causes of the trouble and to remove them placate the divinities, the gods or God and win them back to their sides. These cannot be successful with the priest of the divinities or gods for instance Sango and Ayelala in the Yoruba divinities hate stealing, witchcraft, bad medicine and other vicious practices.⁵ When Sango visits the perpetrators he hurls a stone which damages windows, doors, houses, and even human beings. The Magba the chief priest of Sango has to be notified. The belief is that if the rite is not performed there would be no peace in the land. They beseech God and the divinities to help restore peace that has been violated.

Peace is also a precondition for progress in as much as justice is the prerequisite for peace so is peace a precondition for progress.⁶ Africa in the world and in the Diaspora hardly talk of progress without making recourse to peace, a Yoruba song expresses this in very simple and straight term "I want to build a home/I want to have children... Without peace, these things are impossible".⁷ In a culture that sees progress as divine blessing, it is impossible to think of true progression, the midst of moral, social and cosmic disorder. From what was said earlier regarding peace as the fullness of life, it may appear that one who has peace already has everything and does not need to make any further progress. If one's life is already full, nothing can be needed to make any further progress. If one's life is already full, nothing can be added to it. In reality, however this kind of fullness of life is never totally realizable in this life. The best that one can hope to obtain in this life is only approximation of the fullness of life. This then always allows some room for progress. When an individual or the community has peace within, the terrain is prepared for yet more peace, and this brings the individual or the community closer to the fullness of life. This is the true meaning of progress. It is just another word for more peace. And there cannot be more peace unless there is some peace already.

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CONCLUSION

The belief in God and the other structure have contributed to the social order this does not mean that there are no chaos in the world today but at least there is still peace which exist amongst people in the community. The Yoruba people believe that they (structure in the ATR) are able to punish them on earth and in the afterlife they still get punished that means there is no escape for the wicked unlike the ruling bodies present in the world today that also maintain societal order by laying emphasis on the fundamental rights which must not be trodden. There are cases in which people defy these laws and yet go away with it. There are taboos which because of these structures are avoided so as not to kindle their wrath among this is the idea the someone should not place his/her hands in rain drops from the roof. It is called "Eewo" in Yoruba land that which is not worth saying and forbidden. It is believed among the Yoruba that keeping of the taboo give joy, happiness, wealth, comfort and long life and the violation of the command of the taboo bring about misfortune and mystery on the person that violate it while, it is prohibited action and the breaking of it is followed by supernatural penalty. For instance it is believed the yam is a sacred entity because it was formally a man and should not be kicked, if kicked, the penalty for the culprit is that he would be lame because kicking the yam would eventually break it which would ease deterioration, salt also must not be trodden under foot, the penalty for doing this is that the soles of the offenders feet will ooze water. Yam must not be peeled inside the house, the penalty is that the inmates will quarrel; A woman must not eat too many kolanuts the penalty is that she will have Abiku. A child must not eat chicken gizzard the penalty is that the child would not grow and finally a woman must not eat the buttocks of a chicken if she does, the penalty is that she would break many homes with her gossips because her mouth will become loss. It is variously held that the Oba is the

representative of the gods and hence it is taboo to wear the Oba's paraphernalia. Particularly his Ade (crown), "Opa Ase" (sceptre) and "Bata ileke" (royal beaded shoes) are objects of veneration and should not be worn by anybody other than the king himself. Also a mad person is not to enter the kings market otherwise he will not be cured of his insanity. More to this is the incest taboo where people are not supposed to marry if they are from the same family. The fears of these things are seen as sacred help to contribute to the moral development and upbringing in the individual.

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