

THE CONCEPT OF *ARIALUSI* IN EDO RELIGION

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Abstract

*The existential experience of **Arialusi** to the people of Edo is a priori real and a minute-to-minute phenomenon in their consciousness. To the Edo, metaphysical issues are attempts to understand the universe by means of logical investigation of reality rather than an empirical inquiry based on sensory evidence. Thus, the metaphysical issue as evident in **Arialusi** is a law of retribution and a hidden force, when activated by human conduct and external stimulus, produces corresponding effects either good or bad, fortune or misfortune, happiness or suffering. It is also a cosmic law of justice, which holds that one's life is determined by the performance in the previous life. Thus, this paper adopted religio-cosmological and mythico-exegetical methods of investigating **Arialusi** as having the propensity for religious, philosophical and sociological implications. It is revealed that **Arialusi** and reincarnation have simultaneous togetherness, and their diverse strength takes full advantage of spiritual association and easily recreates human awareness as the ritual performance is ethno-centric in nature. This paper therefore postulates that **Arialusi** is a never-ending process of life and lies in the acceptance of the need for a corrective process of experimentation with our own experience, and this presupposes our readiness to admit openly our errors and to also learn from them. To this end, **Arialusi** is not deterministic as it is binding upon the recalcitrant, but it is an eternal and immutable law of nature. It has its own reward, so also it has its seat in the soul of every human being.*

Key words: Edo, Religion, *Arialusi*, Reincarnation, Freewill.

Introduction

The Edo of Nigeria are found in the south-south part of the nation. Edo can be identified as the "Ivbia" Edo-meaning the children of Edo. They are Afenmai, Esan and Bini. Geographically, Afenmai comprises

Akoko-Edo, Etsako, Owan and environs. Esan consists of Iruokpen, Ekpoma, Irrua, Ewu, Uromi, Evbohimi, Ubiaja and Igueben. While the Bini comprises Benin, Ovia, Uhunmode, Orhionwon and their environs.¹ In essence, Edo consists of these several clans, which are bound together by language, traditions, and religious beliefs and practices. The existential experience of Edo reveals that religion to them is *a priori* real and a minute-to-minute phenomenon in their consciousness. Indeed, Edo Religion accounts for peculiar features of the individuals as regards the universe, which encompass the physical reality. Thus, in Edo, Religion identifies with human consciousness and the understanding of nature. Put differently, that something exists beyond the mundane encapsulates religion. A belief in the existence of the Supreme Being is fundamental and central to this religion. In their spiritual, rational and corporate existence, their religion becomes their will and précis of their life and possession.

It is worth-noting that Edo Religion is replete with spirituality, redemptive values against evils, misfortune and anxiety. To the Edo, spiritual or metaphysical issues are attempts to understand the universe by means of logical investigation of reality rather than an empirical inquiry based on sensory evidence. Suffice to state that some of these metaphysical issues are *Arialusi*,² reincarnation and death. Thus, the metaphysical issue as evident in *Arialusi* is a law of retribution and a hidden force which when activated by human conduct and external stimulus, produces corresponding effects either good or bad, fortune or misfortune, happiness or suffering. *Arialusi* is the law of retributive justice in Edo Religion. It is also a cosmic law of justice, which holds that one's life is determined by the performance in the previous life. To this end, the paper seeks to explore Edo Religion, and to x-ray *Arialusi* with the aim of evaluating its religious, philosophical and sociological considerations.

Edo Religion: An Overview

It is important to establish that religion has a powerful, motivating and controlling influence in human existence and relationship. It is thus co-extensive with the life of the people who believe in the supernatural world. Religion is not created in isolation nor does it set out to fill a vacuum. In other words, religion is not an abstract idea but the uncertainty of the world drives humankind to look into religion as a link between two worlds – the supersensible and the sensible. As a matter of fact, there is no society bereft of religion. Dopamu is apposite when he states that there is

no known society that exists without religion³. In fact, Abe argues that religion is the provenance and the consummation of all things. According to him, “In the beginning, it was religion; and in the end it shall be all religion”⁴. In realistic terms, religion has explained the world and human understanding of nature. Significantly, religion has been defined by a handful of scholars. However, the various definitions of religion thus far proffered have not been able to satisfy the definitive quest for a universally acceptable definition. Though a new definition is not given here, it is worthwhile to examine some of them in order to establish the religious worldview of the Edo.

Ejiofor attests to the fact that: “Religion is the complex of beliefs and behaviour of man in the supernatural sphere and realities and the dynamic linkage of the supernatural with the natural.”⁵ The above shows that religion plays an important role in the lives of humankind. In point of fact, religion is identified with the consciousness of the individual in his or her environments as well as an aid for self-preservation. “Men take off from religion; men march along with religion and they arrive at religion with a minute-to-minute phenomenon.”⁶ Ejiofor further buttresses that religion is:

The pride of the mind, the strength of the will, the relish of human emotions, a coveted object of delicate sentimentality; in short, it is the comprehensive resume of man’s spiritual, rational and corporate existence.⁷

These definitions reveal certain essential elements as relating to Edo Religion. Thus, some of the elements are concept of God, gods, relationship of man to ultimate values, a creed; a code; a cult; belief, action, feeling, supersensible world, social order, the relish of human emotions; the pride of the mind and among others are indispensable for Edo Religion. And all these form the bases of Edo religious philosophy.

Awolalu and Dopamu trace the origin of Edo to Oduduwa.⁸ However, some scholars such as Ojior, Omogui and Osayinmwese have debunked the claim that the origin of Edo is traceable to Oduduwa, rather it is the other way round.⁹ However, it is not out of place to state categorically that Edo and Yoruba have common origin. It suffices to support Idowu that religion is the keynote of the people:

Religion forms the foundation and all-governing principle of life... As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and

diviners whom they believe to be interpreters of the will of the deity. Through all the circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles, it is the Deity who is in control.¹⁰

The foregoing reveals that Edo people believe in the existence of God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, reincarnation, witchcraft, sorcery, and *Arialusi*. They call the Supreme Being *Osanobuwa*-the Owner of the universe. However, Etsako and Akoko-Edo call the Supreme Being *Oghena Osinegba*, or *Omolua* and *Oshiomshi* or *Adayeba* respectively. Awolalu and Dopamu have explicitly explained the coalescing meaning of *Osanobuwa* as *Osa* which implies “the source of all beings,” “*No*” means who or which “*B*” means “carries or sustains” and *Wa* or *Uwa* means the “world or the universe”¹¹ The Supreme Being with slight different names from other people of Edo is still recognized as the Creator of all things and the Sustainer of the universe. He is supreme over all and is eternal, having known the end from the beginning.

Therefore, Edo people derive their existence from *Osanobuwa*. Their belief in God resides in their religion. However, these beliefs are not fully documented; rather they are couched in oral tradition. This oral tradition is transmitted in songs, folklores, proverbs, aetiology, pithy sayings, myths, and liturgies. Religion, to the Edo people, is a matter of course. They worship *Osanobuwa* and venerate divinities like *Olokun*, *Ayelala*, *Ashigidi*, *Oole* and *Adaobi*, and ancestors like *Uda*, *Obazu*, *Okosan*, *Oyangbe* and *Ogholodio* as means to an end.

Religion has a pride of place for the people and they subsequently derive satisfaction from it as well as a sense of security. Without any equivocation, in their spiritual, rational and corporate existence, their religion becomes their will and précis of their life and possession. The tenets of their religion provide the people with shared values, cultural altruism and responsibilities. Indeed, Edo religion accounts for the peculiar features of the individuals concerning the universe, which encompass the physical reality. The wonder of the thick forest, the power of the rivers, the magnificent rocks and high mountains with the corresponding mystery of the human person all manifest a supreme power behind these physical realities¹². Edo people strongly believe that *Osanobuwa* is the Creator of the world and the final arbiter. The universe is under the total control of *Osanobuwa* and His method of rule is essentially theocratic. This is evident in the headship of every Edo community. Every Edo community leader is seen as possessing both

spiritual and political power and his subjects revere the king as one having divine authority. The people believe that the kings are the representatives of *Osanobuwa* here and now.¹³ However, the import of kingship as God's representative was not as pronounced as it is today. The influx of acculturation among the Nupe and Yoruba has popularised this among the Edo. Community leaders are so revered today that they are seen as next to *Osanobuwa*.

Edo Religion is basically and inveterately rooted in its nature and traditions. It is as old as the people themselves. The religion seeks the fulfilment of human existence and the goal of life. In fact, through the religion of the "Edoid"¹⁴ or Edo group, they are able to understand the incomprehensible, and face the reality that goes beyond the realm of the physical. Thus, Edo Religion is replete with the spirituality, redemptive values against evils.¹⁵ Furthermore, the religion of the Edoid brings to the fore the knowledge of *Osanobuwa* and an emotional practical relationship with Him. The principal aim of Edo Religion is to know the unknown in the orbit of the known; to observe the unobservable in the sphere of the observable; to see the unseen in the world of the seen; and to activate faith in the faithless at the level of belief.

Like other religions, Edo Religion derives sustenance from constant devotion to a Supreme Being, which is fully revealed as major truth. To this end, Edo Religion becomes the law of life, pathway to God-realization, absolute value truth, living power, justice, and morality.

In a nutshell, Edo Religion speaks the language of the people. Etuk argues that religion "exists in the very air they breathe and in the water they drink. There are no founders in this religion; and so there are no cults of personality and no creeds to fight for".¹⁶ In practical terms, Edo Religion is not individualistic in nature despite the fact that there are no often-public gatherings. Rather, it is people's parliament and collectivity. Of all the religions practised, Religion of the people of Africa in general and Edo in particular is the most accommodating and tolerant. The Religion is never keen in missiology and its tenets are never misrepresented in the scheme of things. "Its hierarchy needs no fear of loss of members or encroachment on its territory by rival religions. In fact...(it) could boast that it draws its adherents from all walks of life, all confessions and all professions within the society".¹⁷

In some respects, Edo Religion, like the African Religion in general, does not have documents to popularize the set beliefs and practices like some other religions have. It has suffered some setbacks for

this lack of documentation of holy or secret books and hymnal. Also, the death of traditional custodians always cast a heavy blow to these beliefs and practices, because a handful of them make these beliefs and practices mystic without reach. However, in recent time, the Holy Aruosa church in Benin has helped in no small measure to popularise these beliefs and practices. Interestingly, during Igue festival as well as other traditional celebrations, Holy Aruosa church becomes a rallying point to showcase the orthodox beliefs and practices, and to offer thanksgiving to *Osanobuwa*.¹⁸

The influx of the Western conceptions, civilization and acculturation has been sadly responsible for negligence and abandonment. Be that as it may, one thing is certain, namely; “the religion thereby made itself so readily accessible that anyone could come to it without feeling alienated... In this way, the...religion lends itself readily to use; one did not have to go to school in order to learn it, or to be an educated person in order to understand it; and one did not have to master anything in order to be admitted to its membership”.¹⁹ Of a truth, this religion has not been preached to the people from without; it is not imported from abroad; Edo have not been proselytized into it; rather it is the normal way of experiencing life itself.

The Concept of *Arialusi*

Like Africans, Edo believe that *Osanobuwa* has imbued man with inherent potentials. In fact, some of these inherent potentials are intangible or immaterial in humankind. These immaterial potentials are described in philosophical parlance as metaphysical phenomena.²⁰ These metaphysical issues are prevalent in African worldview. African people believe that an inquiry into the fundamental nature of reality is a generic feature exhibited in experience, with the attendant essence of existence and reality. This implies that reality is the essence of metaphysics and its effulgent effects constitute its existence. To the Edo, metaphysical issues are attempts to understand the universe by means of a logical investigation of reality rather than an empirical inquiry or appearance based on sensory evidence. Eliade captures the African and perhaps Edo strand of metaphysics as “rationally coherent and logically consistent systems of thought...believed to reveal the way the world really is”.²¹ Suffice it to state that *Arialusi* is one of these metaphysical issues. In strong terms, these metaphysical issues supersede the physical issues. In other words, life to the Edo is spiritual, and it takes the spiritual to determine and control the physical events, which make us to conclude that one’s thought, speech and

behaviour either good or bad, imprint themselves as a hidden force or potential in one's life. This hidden force or potential when activated by an external stimulus or natural law, produces corresponding effects either good or bad, happiness or suffering, progress or retrogression. The foregoing, therefore, is understood as *Arialusi*. *Arialusi* ultimately depicts the law of retributive justice, law of nemesis, the law of sowing and reaping, and also describes the corresponding consequence of good or bad acts in humans or the society at large. In point of fact, corresponding consequence of good effects arising from good acts is not spoken of in the society compared to the bad effects.²²

However, it is generally attested to that when an individual flourishes in the present existence, it, therefore, means that the individual's previous life was lived in good conduct hence the attendant good effects in his/her present state. In the same vein, it is the belief of the people of Edo that when a particular society experiences boost, it goes to show that the previous existence of this particular society was lived in good conduct, having upheld the complete ethos, norms, "dos" and conventions of that particular society. Be that as it may, bad acts supplant that of the good. This statement is also supported by Asekhome who also posits that it is true *Arialusi* exists, and this specially happens to those with bad conduct or behaviour in their former existence, thereby making their behaviour transferable to the present existence.²³ *Arialusi* is sociologically seen as a generational curse platform without reference to *Osanobuwa*. In other words, *Osanobuwa* does not interfere with the workings of *Arialusi*. Rather *Arialusi* is a natural and social mechanism to showcase the result of immoral acts and as well as checkmate the evil conduct of individuals in the society. It is discovered that ritual performances in expiating *Arialusi* are different because *Arialusi* has varying degrees. This is thus evident in the fact that what is obtainable in a particular community is different from others in which case, the ritual performance is ethno-centric in nature.

Conclusively, *Arialusi* in its totality is at once real, metaphysical, scientific and moral in nature, involving the perception of knower and the victims in both thought and deed. There is a never-ending process of life. *Arialusi* lies in the acceptances of the need for a corrective process of experimentation with our own experience and this presupposes our readiness to admit openly our errors and to also learn from them. *Arialusi* is a reality and metaphysical ideal especially on freedom from its curse, justice and morality. Therefore, *Arialusi* is binding upon the recalcitrant, because it is an eternal and immutable law of nature. It has its own reward,

and has its seat in the soul of every human being. To this end, a human being can avoid *Arialusi*, when he/she aims for the highest moral law, the good of humankind, nobleness of character, purity of soul and good motive, selfless service and goodness of means. The continuous existence and progress of the human depend on his/her moral self. *Arialusi* is anonymous with allegiance to the natural and moral law, which pervades the whole of human life.

Religious Concept of *Arialusi*

Chinua Achebe remarks, “Whatever is deep-rooted in antiquity has evidence scattered here and there”. In the case of Edo, a lot of evidence as regards *Arialusi* abounds in the people’s religion. The realities of *Arialusi* are prevalent among the Edo group. Although, *Arialusi* may be seen as metaphysical phenomenon, it is human nature to seek to know or to understand this reality beyond whatever we perceive with our senses.²⁴ It is true that human kind is uncompromisingly religious because of their natural tendency towards religion. “This religion is based on the metaphysical principle that there is more to reality than is perceptible with the senses and on the metaphysical tendency towards realities that are beyond sense perception, a tendency which is part of human nature”.²⁵ The above reveals that *Arialusi* has religious character because it possesses religious ingredients. Hence, it is more appropriate to understand that *Arialusi* may be described as metaphysical phenomenon but has religious foundation and tenets. The belief in *Arialusi* is the first order while the metaphysical exposition is characterized by the second order. Therefore, *Arialusi* as a religious concept can be understood as a metaphysical concept in Edo.

Arialusi as an aspect of Edo religious belief is tied to the doctrine of reincarnation. *Arialusi* simply means the network of causes and effects, actions and reactions. In simple language, *Arialusi* is the law of sowing and reaping. That is, if an individual sows goodness or evil, the individual will also reap good or evil accordingly. Abolagba refers to this as *Agbon arekeraba* which literally means you reap what you sow.²⁶ Etymologically, *Agbon arekeraba* as idiomatic expression means that when you sow a rubber tree in a particular place, in years to come, the rubber tree becomes a rubber depot/forest. Put differently, you plant a rubber tree and it multiplies into a rubber forest in years to come.²⁷ Therefore, *Arialusi* refers to the totality of human actions sown and their attendant reactions in present state resulting from the previous life, all of

which spill over to the future if not checked. If it is however checked the incident will be totally stopped.

From time immemorial, the concept of *Arialusi* has been part and parcel of the Edo, and it has been built in their consciousness, which explicitly and cleverly informed and informs the individual's ability to live in accordance with the societal expectation in line with laws of nature. *Arialusi* permeates an individual's life to faithfully and dutifully perform religious actions, by eschewing excessive materialism, sinful behaviour, evil duties, unprofitable obligations and conducting religious ceremonies. *Arialusi* is quite religiously appealing because it has meditative powers to attach oneself to good deeds by securing the blessings and favours of the gods and of nature. This ensures happiness for the entire community. Through this medium, communities are brought together religiously, just as the clan prospers collectively. In the same vein, it also has meditative wherewithal to attach itself to bad deeds resulting in endless suffering individually and collectively. This also ensures setbacks not only for the individual but also for the entire community. Ohiokhokhai described a situation in his life when he could not marry for years after he became a lecturer in the University. This situation lingered until it was discovered through *Akwere*-Oracle that he was unfair to women in his previous life, and subsequently rituals that involved goat, dog, alligator, and red oil were performed to put an end to this evil occurrence. He has since married and has borne children.²⁸

In Edo Religion, it is appreciated that *Osanobuwa* has every desire concerning how things should go in the material world. He is eager to see that living beings become fulfilled, happy and advanced in spiritual wisdom and knowledge. The Supreme Being with His good intention for mankind does not have a position as far as *Arialusi* is concerned. In other words, as far as *Osanobuwa* is concerned in Edo religious belief, He is totally excepted from influencing or being responsible for *Arialusi*. Anyway, God is never brought to this phenomenon. Iriemi posits that every act or deed is human responsibility despite the fact that there are external forces or agents. *Arialusi* is human-induced. "It cannot be described as fate or man's lot in life, rather *Arialusi* is human free will, act and responsibility".²⁹ This in fact makes *Osanobuwa* completely benevolent, all- good, all-wise, all-encompassing and completely excused from the workings of *Arialusi*. The Edo believe that *Arialusi* is a spiritual mechanism to checkmate human conduct with attendant result in its full capacity. To this end, it is totally void of God's interference. Also, the

people strongly believe that it is nature that acts, *Arialusi* is not a judgement or reward from *Osanobuwa*, rather it is bad act or deed that automatically brings bad effect or result. *Arialusi* is purely a natural phenomenon governed by natural laws that act automatically with complete justice. *Arialusi* is seen as spiritually originated law; an extended expression of natural acts. *Arialusi* has the knack to harmonize and influence the gods, nature, weather, harvest and enemies through right intent. In fact, *Arialusi* relates to the individual's action with questions of morality, responsibility, reward and punishment.

In religious terms, the effect of *Arialusi* can be discontinued by the Priest –*Ohen* who through the command of the oracle, ritual performance, ceremonies, rites and offerings, which are religious creeds, can remove and change the consequences of *Arialusi*. The rituals are good and are apparently anchored on evaluation of actions based on ritual exactitude; good being equated with the correct performance of the rite, while bad with the incorrect performance of the rite.³⁰ Thus, the ritual is indispensable for sustaining a spiritual force-field strong enough to ward off demonic entities that torment, confuse and misguide affected individuals. Priests-*Ohen* assume primary responsibility for this discontinuity and for the total well-being of the community. However, it is a fact that individuals are clearly instructed to be responsibly concerned with good personal conduct and not to expect the priesthood alone to secure and safeguard their *Arialusi* through the performance of sacred rites.

The most fascinating aspect is that reincarnation and *Arialusi* are being interlinkingly inseparable. Apparently, the former cannot be dismembered from the latter. This implies that there is cyclical continuation in the order of *Arialusi*. All human deeds here and now affect human future in the reincarnated lives. Azenabor agrees that reincarnation is dynamic in that it accommodates solidarity and unbroken unity of life that operates both simultaneously and successively. This is an uninterrupted chain of life, preserved by reincarnation where the soul of the grandparent appears in a newborn child in a rejuvenated state with exact features in the previous life. Thus, the past, present and future are subsequently made to blend into each other without sharp difference³¹. This assertion expresses the fact that both exact features and behaviour are prevalent. These account for *Arialusi*, whichever way the behaviour looks like, except this regeneration is associated with moral life.

In Edo religious thought, reincarnation is not a pagan concept; it is a means to understand the love and justice of *Osanobuwa* concerning continuity. This shows that one could reincarnate to reap whatever one had sown in one's previous existence. Reincarnation to the Edo makes possible to humankind a new opportunity to have the basic knowledge of *Osanobuwa* and His subsequent love and justice. The love and justice lie in the fact that humankind has the privilege to right the wrong now. Onimhawo et al remarkably support the foregoing and appeal to those with wrong perception that whatever mistake they make now will be corrected in the next reincarnation, should rather watch it and be morally upright now.³² As those with such wrong orientation will come back to eat the fruits of their past deeds. Omijeh sums up by saying that it is as a result of reincarnation that *Ehi* becomes plausible which accounts for the notion of personal responsibility; for after all; one's own destiny is determined by one's self. Thus, this notion of personal responsibility enjoins good behaviour and the need to struggle to achieve a fulfilled life. This *Ehi* suffers particular misfortunes and also enjoys fortunes.³³ It is expedient to note that reincarnation and *Arialusi* are religious perceptions recognized in Edo Religious context.

Conclusively, *Arialusi* is replete with mythico-cosmological realities. It is an ingredient for religious consideration. Among the Edo, the concept of *Arialusi* is all-embracing, is always extant and checkmates the activities of individuals in the community. It is without the interference and intervention of *Osanobuwa*. *Arialusi* is a factor that determine and instills disciplines, good conduct and human uprightness. On both metaphysical and religious grounds, there is the coherent justification that an individual is affected by what he/she has meritoriously done.

Philosophical Concept of *Arialusi*

This is the belief in cause and effect; the good and bad; and reward and punishment respectively carried over from previous existence to the present and subsequent future. Omonokhua asserts that *Arialusi* is the law of cause and effect, and that nothing happens by chance, and nature does not have vacuums.³⁴ Omijeh posits that the individual is the maker of his own destiny; he determines his own actions, his future life and experience, his happiness and misery, his success and failure.³⁵ *Arialusi* is inexorable, infallible and unailing. Like Africa, nothing exists or occurs without a cause and thus human actions will be the effects of various causes to which they are necessarily connected. When a cause produces a similar

effect in a logical sequence, it means that it is logically a necessity of causality. All the acts performed wilfully and consciously by individual persons bring about attendant results either good or bad. Iroegbu opines that “most human tragedies and predicament are a result of the moral evil done by men and women”.³⁶ Therefore, the universe is an orderly cosmos, not a chaotic universe, laws govern it and things happen only according to these laws.

It is imperative to note that human beings are free moral agents in Edo perspective. Despite the fact that they also recognize predestination in Edo philosophy, they dismiss the view that humans are robots in this material world. Isiramen and Akhilomen maintain that “man is free. Without freedom, man would not be able to alter God-given destiny in anyway...Thus, from the practical life of Edo, man is also free.... An essential aspect of man’s nature is responsibility”.³⁷ Iriemi supports this fact that *Arialusi* is not fateful or fatalistic. He adds further that it is brought about by human conscious action and responsibility.³⁸ This is to establish that in Edo, humans make choices in the midst of varieties. In the same vein, Edo in this context explain away the doctrine of determinism. As far as *Arialusi* and reincarnation are concerned philosophically, determinism has nothing to do with them. Despite the fact that this explanation is not acceptable to the Western philosophers, it is true that *Arialusi* is not deterministic as it appears to be. Omoregbe’s statement is apposite when he says that:

A close look at this doctrine would show that it is in the final analysis not deterministic, as it appears to be. It is true that I am not in control of what is happening to me now but I am reaping what I freely sowed. Although the reaping is not by my own choice the sowing was. I freely performed the actions in the past, for which I am suffering now. Evil is done freely, it is the consequence of it that is not free, the cause is freely brought about, but the effect is automatic and inevitable, whether one likes it or not. Therefore he who chooses the cause indirectly chooses the effect as well.³⁹

The above affirms that human actions are not deterministic, because the individual is a rational and moral being, and a rational and moral being has reason for doing anything he/she likes because his/her action is a conscious action. Human actions are not performed under duress. In fact, freewill is self and moral responsibility. *Arialusi* hinges self responsibility on cause and effect; consequence though not free, gives

individuals' personal continuity and destiny. Put differently, this self-responsibility that is glued to *Arialusi* is a powerful tool in determining the course of life. This self-responsibility has the propensity for making choice between good and bad, reward or punishment, gratitude or resentment; regret or excitement. In essence, freewill is decision-making ability, and with freewill individual does good and is unreservedly praised and rewarded. With the same freewill, the individual does evil and is blamed and punished. Iroegbu argues that:

To remove the suffering caused by man's free acts would entail making man no longer free. He will become just like stones and grass, thereby not blameworthy or praise-worthy. He would no longer be man, a participator in divine life and creativity.⁴⁰

Sequel to the above, the individual is free and aware of punishment. A robot *per se* according to Edo religious thought, does not commit evil and is not morally inclined at all. Therefore, freedom and decision-making ability to do evil and good go together. Iroegbu evaluates the foregoing argument by recognizing the fact that humankind is no automation, stone and tree that have no freedom of action at all rather his action is free as his action is not pre-determined.⁴¹ He goes further to say as follows:

Indeed, we cannot deny human freedom without denying an obvious reality; that we do act out of choice and free decision. Such a denial would immediately involve us in the self-contradiction of both our way of life, and our manner of assessments and of the deposit of values, as well as of the culture of appreciations, and our laws of punishing and rewarding. That man is not free, or is no freer would issue in a topsy-turvy type of society and a confusion of relationships and identities.⁴²

It is worthy of note that in Edo milieu *Osanobuwa* does not destroy or remove human freedom in a providential sense of His care, love and justice. Human individual does evil acts because he/she chooses to do so or to desist from doing so. *Arialusi* inflicted on himself/herself and probably on others is a product of the noble freewill that he/she has: to do or not to do. In other words, freewill entails responsibility. And responsibility is a great act of honour, deserving praise when well executed, and deserving blame and being culpable when badly executed.

There is no forgiveness within the province of *Arialusi*.

Nothing can prevent the effect of a cause. Whatever a person sows, he/she must reap. This is called *Agbon arekeraba*. An evil action is a cause; no forgiveness can prevent the effect from following the cause. It is better as it is urged not to do evil than to do it and expect forgiveness.⁴³ However, you must reap what you sow. It is not out of place to state that in the process of reaping the free action, the cause of the suffering can be found through *Akwere*- oracle by the immediate family. This can alter the cause of it through ritual performance. This is the only exception in this philosophical school. But once this is not discovered, the suffering will continue *ad infinitum*. Like the case of Ohiokhokhai mentioned above, he further buttressed that he faintly remembered that he was not fair to the opposite sex in his previous existence. Similarly, Alukpe, one of my informants also subscribed to the fact that he was aware that he died in a hut gulfed with fire hence till date the scars are conspicuous in his back. As a teacher and herbalist, he prescribed the rituals to the father, which had since been carried out.⁴⁴ This aspect recognises the fact that there is “old soul” that remembers the previous deeds and as well establishes belief in reincarnation.

Essentially, Edo belief in reincarnation is well established, and this directs the activity and explanation in living life and after death. Uduigwomen asserts that reincarnation encompasses procreation and rite of remembrance accorded the departed member of a family. To him, these are moral virtues and are wrapped in the goal of continuous existence that provide for immortality. The exhibition of moral virtues here and now calls for good reincarnation and continuity in the lineage of existence.⁴⁵ Echekwube supports this by saying that the objective reality of humankind is the interaction and what is worth seeking. In fact, the doctrine of reincarnation is preparatory to accepting the intercessory roles of ancestors who have been canonized and universally accepted as models worthy of emulation.⁴⁶ Through reincarnation, their lifestyles encourage many to turn from their evil and wicked ways. This quality is what humanity needs today in abundance in order to remove suffering and sustain the essence of existence, which the Igarra people call “*Ozaveshe*” meaning “the essence of human beings means life”. This is the “totality of African humanistic approach to life...and parents who believe in the African approach to the fact that man is meant to procreate and fill the earth”.⁴⁷ By and large, reincarnation as evident in *Arialusi* is encapsulated in moral virtues and transformation or evil and immoralities depending on the choice of the individual. However, we disagree with Echekwube when he says that

reincarnation is void of immoralities but with moral fiber. In fact, there are cases of born-to-die children who they have scars on their bodies. Similarly, those children behave abnormally as a result of their previous deeds. If this is true, it means that there should have been no *Arialusi*, but in practical terms, *Arialusi* is further helped by reincarnation. Therefore, reincarnation that he calls regeneration and *Arialusi* are matter of course. As a matter of fact, *Arialusi* is best understood as punishment of the evils done in this physical world. This material world is an arena of natural justice with fairness and equality as its watchwords. In a nutshell, this world accommodates both good and evil, which thus makes the universe not to be one-sided in an attempt to view the extent of reward or punishment, resentment or excitement.

Sociological Consideration of *Arialusi*

The concept of *Arialusi* is not only exclusively individualistic in Edo Religion, but also obviously collective. As sin is not only individualistic in Africa but also communal so also *Arialusi* is. The idea of interdependence is discovered in the concept of *Arialusi*. Undoubtedly, there is a collective aspect of *Arialusi*; as a result, our lives and actions are always interconnected with the lives and actions of others in dynamic interrelations. At times, it is certainly difficult to detach our own actions and their effects from those of others. In other words, *Arialusi* is thus also a wholesomely social concept, since it implies the manner in which it affects the lives of people as a result of interconnectedness of all reality.

Arialusi is communal because at the dawn of consciousness, people have often noticed that certain activities have had adverse effects on them. The concept of *Arialusi* not only affects the doer but also affects others. The extent of *Arialusi* determines the extent of the effects. Ohimai discussed a situation between 2004 and 2006 when women initiation in Uhonmora was completely abandoned and the attendant effects were barrenness and infant mortality, until the oracle was consulted.⁴⁸ In another development, Alukpe described a situation when the people of Uokhai in Owan-East lynched one of the emissaries sent by the Oba of Benin. The attendant effects became worrisome and the current Oba of Benin performed the rituals in 1979.⁴⁹ These are pointers to the fact that in Edo religious circle *Arialusi* is also communal at times.

Khapoya maintains that African societies are collective societies, and the groups' interest clearly outweighs those of the individuals. He adds further that when a person commits an offence against another, the

offence reflects badly not just on the individual offender but on his/her groups as well. His/her group is therefore held accountable.⁵⁰ It is interesting to stress that any *Arialusi* seen in the individual has corresponding implication on the group or society at large.

Unah posits that we could not have authentic individuals without the collective, and we could not have the collective without the individuals whether they be fallen or risen. He maintains that the individual must rise above the ordinary mien of the world to assert his distinctive character which he has to do within the matrix of the human community. Thus, to aspire to the collective life and to attain authentic selfhood are co-ordinate perspectives.⁵¹

Succinctly therefore, communal *Arialusi* is prevalent in Edo, and this brings about solidarity suffering. Suffering as a font of solidarity can be immense and spontaneous. This idea of solidarity in suffering is also a praxis of humanity. Not only that, it is true not only of human beings but also of nature as well as other inhabitants. We can therefore agree with Dopamu in this regard that there are accidents of nature,⁵² that humans cannot account for their causes. This suffering can be interpreted to mean the fate of the earth. But on individual or group it is font of solidarity suffering. Thus, this negative solidarity where people experience evil is substantially their architect. As a matter of fact, this suffering is not fate and accident of nature completely as Dopamu has rightly posited; rather it is a collective action that brings about the adverse effect they collectively suffer. *Arialusi* is a social mechanism in Edo society to checkmate evil conduct on the individual or group. Any suffering of *Arialusi* means social ostracism.

It is worth asserting that the help of the oracle can jointly prescribe rituals to be carried out in a bid to finding solution to this evil occurrence. This solution can be described not as only individual freedom, but also as actualization of this interconnectedness that would allow persons to overcome selfish behaviour; and to work creatively within the cyclical world.

Conclusion

Worthy of note is the fact that *Arialusi* describes the totality of human actions and their corresponding reactions in present existence resulting from the past life, all of which spill over to the future, if not checked. This reality transcends the way we perceive with our senses. In realistic terms, *Arialusi* speaks of metaphysical consciousness that

presupposes reality. Thus, this paper has so far revealed that *Arialusi* has the propensity for religious, philosophical and sociological implications. It is apparent that *Arialusi* and reincarnation have simultaneous togetherness, and their diverse strength takes full advantage of spiritual association and easily recreates human awareness. It is thus evident in the fact that what is obtainable in a particular community is different from the others. In which case, the ritual performance is ethno-centric in nature.

Finally, *Arialusi* in its totality is a *priori* real, involving the perception of knower and the miscreants in both thought and deed. This is a never-ending process of life. *Arialusi* lies in the acceptance of a corrective process of experimentation with our own experience, and this presupposes our readiness to admit openly our errors and to also learn from them. To this end, *Arialusi* is binding upon the recalcitrant, because it is an eternal and immutable law of nature. It has its own reward, while its seat in the soul of every human being. Summarily, just actions, moral and good virtues produce just reactions, good fruits and higher rebirth. In the same manner, unjust actions, immoral and wrong virtues produce unpleasant reactions, bad fruits and low rebirth. All these are *sine qua non* for the law of retributive justice.

Notes and References

1. A. Egharevba, *The History of Benin*, (Ibadan: Daystar, 1966) p.70
2. *Arialusi* is the law of retributive justice in Edo Religion. *Arialusi* is defined as generational curse and anti-social behaviours, which are intimately linked with the misdeeds of the deviant in his or her previous life. It is also a cosmic law of justice, which holds that one's life is determined by the performance in the previous existence. It pays one in one's own coin. *Arialusi* is similar in concept to the Law of *Karma* in Hinduism. This is an excerpt from my unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 2009.
3. Ade P. Dopamu. "The History of the Relationship between Religion and Science" *CORES: Journal of the confluence of Religion and Science*. LSI, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, VOL.1, No. 1, 2005. p.1
4. G.O. Abe, "Yahwism Tradition Visa-a-vis African culture: The Nigerian Milieu" The first Inaugural Lecture delivered at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, on the 17th March 2004. p.3.
5. L.U. Ejiofor "Religion and a Healthy Political System" *Nigerian Dialogue*, Vol. 1 No. 1 July 1974, p.63.
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Ibid
- 8 J.Omosade Awolalu and P. Ade. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan, Macmillan, 2005, p.6.
- 9 See O.T.Ojior, *Etsako Traditional, Political, and Social System*, Georgia:Afflactus Publications Inc, 2001, pp.139-142
- 10 E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman Ltd, 1996, p.5.
- 11 J.Omosade Awolalu and P. Ade. Dopamu, p.40.
- 12 C.A Omonokhua, *The God of our Ancestors: An Approach to Etsako Contextual Theology* Benin city: Hexagon, 2005, p.34.
- 13 J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Ade. Dopamu, p.166.
- 14 The term "Edoid" linguistically connotes the languages and dialects of Edo people. For details, see Z.I. Oseni, *Afenmai Proverb, Collected, Translated and Annotated*, Auch: Darun-Nur, 2003, p.x. However, previous endeavours by Elugbe, Egbokhare, and Oseni have studied the socio-linguistics, annotation, thematics or structure of the various dialects in Edoland. In view of the above, I decided to adopt the word "Edoid" to describe the people since we cannot confine the usage of this word to the dialects and language of the

people. Within the context of this work, Edoid therefore goes beyond the dialects and situates the people in the position of their gamut of dialects as one entity hence the nomenclature.

15 Ibid, p.32.

16 Udo Etuk, *Religion and Cultural Identity*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2002, p.35.

17 Ibid. p.36.

18 A. Egharevba, p.56

19 Etuk, p.36

20 Mircea Eliade, (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7. New York: Macmillian 1995, p.437.

21 Ibid. p.485

22 An interview with Mr. Iriemi Aigboma, 44years, Uzebba, 28th December, 2006.

23 An interview with Elder Asekhame, 89years, Uhonmora, 28th December, 2006.

24 J. Omoregbe, *Metaphysics without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*, Lagos: JERP, 2004, p.103.

25 Ibid

26 Peter Agbolagba, also known as Golden Lucky, a musician and Pastor, who sang this music in one of his albums in 2005, precisely the fourth album.

27 An interview conducted with Peter Agbolagba, 33years, Uroe, 12th May, 2007.

28 An interview conducted with Ruddy Ohiokhokhai, 50years, Lecturer, Department of History, University of Benin, Benin, 28th December, 2007.

29 An interview with Mr. Iriemi Aigboma, 44years, Uzebba, 28th December, 2006.

30 An interview with Elder Udusevbokhai Okizi, 74years, Ivbodohen, 2nd January, 2007.

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- 36 P.O. Iroegbu, *Kpim of Predicaments*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004, p.63.
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- 38 An interview with Mr. Iriemi Agboma, 44years, Uzebba, 28th December, 2007.
- 39 J. Omoregbe, *Comparative Philosophy, East and West*, Lagos: JERP, 2004, p.17.
- 40 P.O. Iroegbu. p.63.
- 41 Ibid, p.65.
- 42 Ibid
- 43 C. A. Omonokhua, *The God of our Ancestors: An Approach to Etsako Contextual Theology*,p.86
- 44 An interview with E.C. Alukpe, 48years, Ikpeyan, 26th December,2006.
- 45 A.F. Uduigwomen, (ed), *Footmarks on African Philosophy*, Lagos: OOP, 2002, p.75.
- 46 A.O. Echekwube, “A Metaphysical Analysis of the Concept of Reincarnation: Towards Global Harmony and Peace”. An Inaugural Lecture, Series 15 delivered at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, 26th September, 2002 p.32.
- 47 Ibid. p.35
- 48 An interview with Elder G.I.Ohimai, 73 years, Uhonmora, 27th December,2006
- 49 An interview with E.C.Alukpe, 48 years, Ikpeyan, 26th December,2006
- 50 V.B.Khapoya, *The African Experience, An Introduction*, (2nd ed.), New Jersey: Prentice-Hall,1998, p.44
- 51 Jim Unah, *Heidegger’s Existentialism: An Essay on Applied Ontology*, Lagos: Panaf Publishing Inc,1996, p.53.
- 52 P. Ade Dopamu, *Esu: The Invisible Foe of Man*, Ijebu-Ode: Shebiotimo Publication, 2000, p.205