



The Belief in Divinities in Traditional Yoruba Metaphysics: Some Lessons for Local Government Reforms and Democratic Development in Nigeria

Olu-Osayomi Olusegun

Department of Languages & Literary Studies, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 26 April 2017;

Received in revised form:
18 July 2017;

Accepted: 28 July 2017;

Keywords

Yoruba belief,
Philosophem.

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the relevance of the Yoruba belief in divinities towards local government reforms in Nigeria. It further argues that elements of traditional cultural imports embedded in the Yoruba belief in divinities can be used to advance democratic development in Nigeria. The paper also looked for relationship between moral value and other socio-philosophical dimensions as the 'philosophem' for the study. The paper establishes that the idea of harmonious interaction, mutual cooperation and partnership between the divinities in traditional Yoruba metaphysics can be used to curb the problems of dictatorship, ill-distributive justice and other undemocratic practice battering the path of local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. In its contribution to knowledge, the paper emphasizes the practical relevance of the belief in divinities in traditional Yoruba metaphysics as means for understanding, regulating and sustaining democratic development in Nigeria.

© 2017 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

The wave of local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria is fast blowing across the political realms of Nigerian states. Beginning from the 1980s, there has been a gradual, but concerted attempt to reverse the trend of political despair occasioned by autocratic and military regimes, which hitherto characterized political lives in Nigeria. This attempt, according to Oladele Balogun Abiodun (2001:205) galvanizes into the demand for democratization, which is the transition from authoritarian or semi authoritarian system to democratic political system. Democratic governance, therefore, is leadership that is centered on the people and does not lose them. Democratic governance recognizes it holds power in trust for the people. Its legitimacy is derived from the authority invested in it by the people. It has to carry the people along all the time to retain its legitimacy.

The United Nation's Office of Public Administration sees local government as "a political sub-division of a nation or state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labor for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such entity is elected or otherwise locally selected". Also, the 1976 Guidelines for a reform of local government in Nigeria defined local government as "the government at local level, exercise through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas.

But today, unfortunately, this grassroots structure has not been made meaningful, and has, instead, become an endangered specie. Experiences in many states of the federation have shown that local governments administration have become the most constitutionally – abused matter in the country since the 1999 constitution became operational. Most governors failed to recognize the constitutional provision of

the local governments – as such – failed to conduct council elections. Only a handful of states had held local governments election. The others have carried on as if it is legal to run local governments without the constitution that created them. In addition, most state governors floated the idea of appointing transition committees comprising of their surrogates to oversee the affairs of the councils. This trend, sadly, has been maintained in some states till now. In others where the polls had been conducted, the governors, in connivance with corrupt electoral officials subservient to the governors of the ruling party committed mal practices which makes a mockery of the process.

The channels for disbursing council funds is also a bone of contention. When money is allocated to the councils by the Federal government from the Federation Account, it does not go directly to the councils. It is deposited in the State/ Local Government Joint Account (JAC). At the JAC Committee meetings, the council is a junior partner. There are allegations by council workers, according to THE NATIONS News paper that governors indulge in diverting council allocation through controversial deductions. Obasanjo initiated the local government reforms in 1976 to make the Local Governments autonomous, functional and developmental. He lamented that once such money was illegally deducted by governors, no Local Government chairman dare questioned or challenged such an illegality – autocratic / authoritarianism. The government remain the greatest obstacle to having a virile functional local governments in the country.

The state governments "steal" council funds under the pretense that they have done something for the councils on their behalf. As soon as the Local Government Allocation were released from the federation Account, the state governors simply deduct from the source, whatever amount they claimed were spent on behalf on the local governments.

Not allowing Local Governments to work and stealing their funds from source by states is one of the greatest disservices of all political parties in the present dispensation of our democratic experiment.

This debilitating scenario seemed to have provided a basis and indeed, a justifiable reason for the demand for local government reforms. President Goodluck Jonathan saw the need for the separation of the Local Government Accounts and the State but this move was criticized and rejected by the Governors and their commissioners. In the first instance, money allocation to the councils by the federal government is irksome to the states, which is vested with the power to create or dissolve the councils under the constitution. Again, the councils were not given substantial control over affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas and to ensure through devolution of functions to these councils and their active participation of the people that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

Today, the extent to which the said local administration reforms with its evident frailties, uncertainties and sometimes contradictions in a situation where the functions of local governments are not statutorily delegated by either the states or federal governments and ensure good governance particularly in the 21st century Nigeria remains an issues of conjecture. One of the ready-made excuses being given for many of the abnormalities experienced in the process is that democratization is a continuum that is bound to have errors, contradictions, retractions and refutations. This excuse may be partly true but the question is, when will this grassroots structure be meaningful when local government reforms have not encouraged effective democratic governance at the local government due to unequal relationship between the local government and other tiers of government in Nigeria? The importance and the relevance of the local governments in Nigeria had been eroded. Good leadership at the state and the Local government levels with integrity, dedication and lack of corruption was what could make local governments work to achieve their purposes for the people.

In view of the current strides of authoritarianism, corruption, unequal relationship, financial deprivation, it becomes inevitable to search for a new praxis that will guide the local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. The imported religion, according to Gbadebo M.D. (2003: 150) namely Christianity and Islam, do not have the same powerful hold on the people as the traditional religions, so their use as ethical instruments is not as effective. In this regard, Bolaji Idowu (1977: 211) observes in *Olodumare*:

Christianity, by a miscarriage of purpose, makes its own contribution to the detrimental changes in moral values. Somehow it has replaced the old fear of the divinities with the relieving but harmful notion of a God who is ready to forgive perhaps even more than man is prone to sin, the God in whom 'goodness' and 'severity' have been put asunder. So also does Islam unwittingly create the erroneous impression that the fulfillment of the obligatory duties and acts of penance by good works are sufficient for the purpose of winning heaven. The result of all these is that our 'enlightened' products of the two 'fashionable' religions can now steal without any twinge of moral compunction those articles of food placed for sale at cross roads and by road sides, which used to be quite safe: they can now cheerfully

appropriate other person's property; they can break covenants, or promises made on earth, with brazen indifference.

This position portrays God as benevolence, who forgives easily even when crimes are committed, that is criminals are not punished by Christian God to serve as deterrent for others. This may be why it says in the Holy Scripture that He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner (Ezekiel 33:11). Thus, the belief that even if a crime is committed God is always there to forgive. This could be why murder, theft and adultery are still very much with us. There is little chance of their elimination through education, piety or improved standards of living. As is well known, these crimes cut across all strata of society, a theft is committed by low income workers, members of middle and upper classes, millionaire, atheists, priests, civil servant, artisans, the rulers and the ruled. Thus a disposition to steal is not associated with a person's status or estate. Much the same can be said of murder and adultery (Gbadebo, 2003: 150).

It is on the above background that this paper is set to explore the philosophical relevance of the traditional Yoruba belief in divinities, to the problems of local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. The choice of this belief in divinities in traditional Yoruba metaphysics is for sake of specificity and exactness of claims.

Belief in Divinities in Traditional Yoruba Metaphysics

Man goes about his business in life without must strains, but sometimes man is hit by events which are unforeseen and for which he is not prepared. Consequently, man seeks solace in religion which reinforces him with confidence with which to cope with problems facing him. Idowu (1973: 1) has rightly observed that religion is very much and always with us at every moment of life, that is, in our innermost beings and with regard to the great and minor events of life. Hence, religion has continually dominated the life of the Yoruba.

Thus, in a bid to account for the origin of the universe and the reason for the occurrence of events in the world, according to Abiodun (2001: 206) the Yoruba came to conclusion that a being greater than man must have created the universe. The High God, the Yoruba refer to as *Olorun* or *Olodumare*. They also believe that God is creator of heaven and earth. Hence, he is depicted in local folklore as *Eleda*, *Adeda*, *Aseda* (creator and sustainer of life). He is seen as *Olorun* (ruler of the sky, the controller and owner of heaven). Other names attributed to Him are *Adakedajo* (the final judge and perfect arbiter) *Oni pin-in-eda* (the giver of destiny), *Olodumare* (supreme God), *Oba ada-eda* (the lord who creates all beings) and *oba a taye se* (the king who repairs the earth). The Yoruba believes that God has absolute authority over everything. Considering the status of *Olodumare*, Idowu (1963: 56) states:

Yoruba theology emphasizes the unique status of *Olodumare*. He is supreme over all in heaven, acknowledged by all the divinities as the Head to whom all authority and allegiance is due. He is not one among many; not even '*Olodumare*-in-council. His status of supremacy is absolute. Things do not come to pass if he disapproves. In worship, the Yoruba hold Him ultimately first and last; in man's daily life, He has the ultimate pre-eminence.

Next to the Supreme God in Traditional Yoruba Religion are divinities. The mythology of the Yoruba people contains hundreds of gods, from major gods to minor ones. The *Orisa* are sometimes called gods or divinities. In this paper, divinity refers to those hundreds of *Orisa* in traditional Yoruba

metaphysics (the number is variously given as 200, 201, 400, 600, 1060, 1440), supernatural beings, *anjonu*, nature spirit, *iwini*, the ancestor, *awon agba*, and masquerades. Mbiti (1962: 76) believed that the divinities are as many as one thousand, seven hundred but *Odu Ifa* (Akintola 1999: 53) gives the figure as four hundred and one. They are appropriately likened to the gods of the Greeks and the Romans because the *Orisas* have human-like characteristics.

Yoruba metaphysics as it applies to this paper exemplifies the view that all beings form a hierarchy. God is the highest, followed by the lesser gods, ancestors, the elders and the young ones in that order. The Yoruba divinities are considered divine. That is why they are prayed to in order to receive assistance with the problems of life. They are real ontological beings through which people could have access to *Olodumare*. Bolaji Idowu (1962: 63) affirms:

We must accept as indisputable the fact that, to any believing worshipping mind, the divinities are real as those ministering angels who all, down ages, have been constant sources of spiritual comfort for those who believe in their existence. The divinities are, in fact, so real to the worshippers that they have, for practical purposes, almost become ends in themselves, instead of the means to an end in which technically they are, according to Yoruba theology.

The Yoruba God (as in many African religions) is in essence, a neutral energy that does not show personal interest in individual human affairs. Humans must approach the High God and can gain power only by contacting invisible supernatural beings, called *Orisas*. In the words of Lucas (1948: 46), “the absence of organized worship of *Olorun* by means of which full and uninterrupted allegiance to Him could be secured has led to the worship of multitudinous gods”, such gods serve as intermediaries between God and men. Similarly, Olomola (2000: 60) asserts, “He is too passive and remote to satisfy man’s immediate needs”. The void thus left is filled by these myriads of deities. According to Clark (1972), the Yoruba believe in one Supreme Ruler, the creator of all things, who is so pure as to be approachable by such poor creatures as they are, and speak of Him as an intelligent Being who has hatred of sin and wickedness. In his words:

as the Supreme Being is considered to be removed so far from the theatre of this life to take personal oversight as to its affairs, they have in their system of worship a number of inferior deities who bear the relation of mediator between the creature and God. This is a cardinal feature in their religion. (277).

Therefore, the idea of God in Yoruba metaphysics is not a transcendental one like that of the Western God. Rather, God is regarded as an integral part of a single totality of existence. The lesser gods are also viewed from the human perspective and this is why most Yoruba communities identify specific occupations with specific gods. Thus, among the Yoruba, *Ogun* is god of iron, *Sango*, the god of thunder, *Obatala*, the creation god. Outstanding among the higher or benevolent divinities are *Orisa-nla*, *Orunmila*, *Olokun*, *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Osun*, *Oya*, *Esu* (Elegbara) and the sixteen (16) *olodus* (*Orunmila*’s own disciples, who accompanied him from heaven down to the earth) while the lower or malevolent divinities are collectively called *ALAJOGUN OR ESE*: and these include *IKU* (Death), *Ofo* (Loss), *Arun* (Diseases), *Egba* (Paralysis), *Ejo*, *Idena* (Obstacle), *Elenini* (Misfortune) etc., (Akinola, 1999: 53).

These divinities are known as the ministers of “*Olodumare*”. Some divinities, to use a modern technology, are ministers with portfolio while some others are without portfolio. Those with portfolio are those who perform real estate executive or legislative function while the others are mere titular head (Abiodun O.A, 2001).

Obatala: Obatala, the primordial divinity, is also known as *Orisa-Nla* (the absolute embodiment of divinity in Yoruba mythology); *Orisa ala* (king decked in white clothing); is the god of creation, “a principle of spiritual purity, of patience, forbearance and the moral necessity of suffering and ascetic self-control (Maduakor, 1987: xii). According to Idowu (1962: 73), *Obatala* is *Olodumare*’s executive deputy on earth, “*Ibikiji Edumare*” while *Orunmila* is his deputy in matters of knowledge and wisdom. In Yoruba mythology, the interpersonal relations and the relative power of the *Orisa* are interesting. Idowu says that the relationship between *Obatala*, the senior and the leader and *Orunmila* is very close, that *Orunmila* was sent to help and advice *Obatala*.

Obatala was empowered by *Olodumare* to mould man’s physical form, while *Olodumare* reserved for himself the task of breathing life into human shapes. According to Simpson (1980: 3) *Obatala* is responsible, therefore, for “the normal or the abnormal characteristics of human beings”. He made cripples, albinos, the hunchback, paralysis and deaf deformities while he was under the influence of palm wine. Some say the abnormalities are thought to be his way of punishing the mother for wrong doing. Idowu (1962: 73) called him the arch-divinity of Yoruba land and he “represents the idea of ritual and ethical purity and therefore the demands and sanctions of high morality. Immaculate whiteness is often associated with him – this symbolizes “holiness” and “purity”.

Orunmila: is another divinity highly regarded by the Yoruba. *Orunmila* the oracular god of wisdom, is one of *Olodumare*’s principal representatives on earth. He is the ‘presiding spirit of those capable of a prescient probing into the unknown, the unanticipated’ (Maduakor, 1987: XII). He was one of the six divinities and even the most popular that came down to the earth from *Olodumare*. Others are *Obatala* (*Orisanla*), *Esu*, *Ogun*, *Sango* and *Oro*.

For hundred years, according to Lucas (1948: 6) *Orunmila* has made so many contributions to the culture of people that the popularity and prestige of its cult could not be overwhelmed by the increasing Christian and Islamic evangelical activities in West Africa. This is because he is universally worshipped in Yoruba land and his cult is found everywhere. Traditionally, the Yoruba believe that *Olodumare* has endowed *Orunmila* with special wisdom and foreknowledge to the end that he may be His accredited representative on earth in matters relating to man’s destiny in that he is present when man is created and his destiny sealed (Idowu, 1962: 76-77). *Orunmila* can predict what is coming to pass, prescribe remedies against any eventuality. As such, he is called *elerin ipin* (the witness or advocate, of destiny, or lot, or the one who witnessed the determination of man’s destiny in heaven), *Okiti biri-a-pa-ojo-iku-da-* (The great changer, who alters the date of death). In fact, Idowu (1962: 77) acquiesces why a man should adopt *Orunmila* as his divinity: “either to make sure that his happy lot is preserved or in order that an unhappy lot may be rectified”.

Esu: is another of the Yoruba divinities. Just like the other divinities, *Obatala*, *Orunmila*, *Sango*, *Ogun* etc, *Esu* is not a fictitious entity.

He is a real ontological being that can be encountered in personal and social experience. *Esu* is a real and credible being with immense powers for both good and evil to affect the human actions, and shape human experience of richness, poverty, well being, barrenness, misery and happiness. He is a faithful friend of *Orunmila* and also a fertility god with an oversized phallus. As a divinity, *Esu's* power and influence, according to Epega, (1977: 80) touch lives in the entire planetary system comprising mankind, and even the other divinities. He is a powerful messenger between *Olodumare* and man, and that it is he, who receives earthly sacrifice in respect of Mankind for delivery to *Olodumare* in heaven.

Esu is, according to Idowu (1962: 80) "primarily a "special relations officer" between heaven and earth. The inspector – general who reports regularly to *Olodumare* on the deeds of the divinities and men, and checks and makes reports on the correctness of worship in general and sacrifices in particular... *Esu* as the approver and bearer of sacrifices to heaven is known to the *baba'lawo* as *Osetura*". Of all the Yoruba divinities, *Esu* is perhaps, the most misunderstood. He is, more often than not confused with Satan, the Devil who is himself the personification of the Spirit of Evil. The idea that *Esu* approximates the devil derives from Christianity, or, more correctly, the mechanistic transposition of Christian concepts into African traditional religion. Bolaji Idowu (1962: 80) explain that "In Yoruba theology, *Esu* is depicted as so versatile a character that one must be wary of what to say about him. He has often been sweepingly called either the "Devil" or Satan. He is certainly not the Devil of our New Testament acquaintance, who is an out and out evil power in opposition to the plan of Gods salvation of man". One good evidence that *Esu* is not the Devil is that people used to bear the name *Esu* in Yorubaland such as Esubiya, (Esu, born this), Esufunke (Esu has made me tender), Esufunmi (Esu has given me), Esugbayi, Esuronke, Esutosin, Esuseyi etc.

Ogun: Ogun is one of the earliest divinities. Among the divinities of Yoruba land, *Ogun* is indisputably another one who ranks high in status. In the indigenous belief of the Yorubas, he is universally acknowledged as a most indispensable divinity as long as all iron and steel belong to him. "He is the Orisa of war, of hunt, and in him is all pursuits in which iron and steel is used" (Simpson, 1980: 29). According to Maduakor (1989: VIII), *Ogun* is "the god of creativity, the principle of assertive, restless, exploratory will, the patron god of blacksmiths, carvers, hunters and in a technological world, drivers and precision-tool machinists".

Ogun was a hunter according to the Yoruba mythology who usually came down from heaven by a spider's thread upon the primordial masy waste for his hunting expedition. *Ogun* and other divinities, -*Orisa-Nla*, *Orunmila*, *Esu* and *Ifa*-decided to come down from heaven in order to take over the affairs of the world when the earth had been founded and its furniture arranged. Apparently, the work of the creation of the universe was yet to be contemplated at the time. There was a critical lacuna, according to Yakubu (2009: 43) in the finishing of the universe as a unified, cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings, between those beings and the forces of nature.

However, at a place of "no-road", the divinities came to a halt. The divinities could not achieve their goal. *Ogun* had observed the gap as well as the failed efforts of his colleagues to remedy the situation.

Drawing upon some *Sango's* resources in addition to his, he set out to "clear a path" a task which he soon achieved. With this feat, he becomes quite popular amongst his colleagues who offer him "the crown of the deities". It is also said that *Ogun* should have been the leader and overall head of the divinities by virtue of his power and status but showed no interest. *Ogun* refuses to become king of the gods. Rather, he keeps to himself as "the lone one". He was unable to adjust himself to live a settled-community life because of his prowess in hunting and carnage. So, he decided to dwell on "Top of the hill"-*Ori-Oke*. Then "*Ogun*-the great warrior, exhibitionist stud, annihilator and imbibor extra ordinaire-was leading his men in battle, doing what he did best-slaughtering the enemies of his people" (Yakubu, 2009: 43). Aply supporting *Ogun* in this precarious existential game with man is *Esu*, the trickster god and companion of *Ogun*.

In connection with the creation myth, the Yoruba strongly believe that *Ogun* is pioneer divinity and the lord of the road who goes in advance to make the road safe for all divine and human users and opens "the way of material and spiritual prosperity for his worshippers" (Idowu, 1962: 86). He is a pathfinder who conquers the abyss of transition. He is the custodian of rain and productivity. Through his concession of an unprecedented, heavy downpour, the earth is offered its creative essence. This is often simply illustrated by the experience of harvest which always follows a successful rainy season. *Ogun* demands sacrifice because that is his food. Failure to provide an annual festival for him, according to Simpson (1980: 30) "would have dire consequences, including famine, and strife and accident of all kinds". He is a god, not man. He is a god with a robust appetite. His appetite for food, water, wine, blood and women is extra ordinary and hardly imaginable. He is not a deity to half-measures. He shares the revolutionary and creative temper of the grand-revolutionary of Yoruba mythology, *Atunda*. "*Atunda* is the archetype of a positive revolution and the examples of "Zeus, Osiris, Yahweh, Christ" and all trail his model of progress (Yakubu, 2009: 44).

Ogun is by nature hard, fierce, and terrible". Idowu (1962: 89) assert that "yet evil is not associated with him; rather it is strongly believed that he demands justice, fair play and rectitude". *Ogun* acts as arbiter of human actions, especially those involving matters of deceit, stealing etc. He is firm, forthright, and, above all, honest in his better moments. He is also direct and straight forward in his actions, and demands the same of his followers. In fact, truthfulness is one of *Ogun's* cardinal qualities. More than anything, he hates thieves and liars, those whom the Yoruba would describe as going "zigzag". Thus, "in the courts of contemporary Nigeria, *Orisa* worshippers swear their oath of truthfulness by putting their lips to a piece of iron and invoking *Ogun's* name" (Drewal, 1989: 236). *Ogun* is portrayed as a deity of ambivalent traits.

As the master-artist, *Ogun* is the surgeon who practices the art of circumcision and the sculptor who curve wood into beautiful works of art for aesthetic contemplation and utilitarian purpose. *Ogun* represents the essence of creativity, of exploration and invention, of technological development and agricultural growth, of social security as the "shield" of orphans, and of communal renewal.

Sango: Sango is not only the god of thunder and lightning who uses these elemental cosmic forces to exert justice in human society; he also emits fire from his mouth,

especially when provoked into great anger. He is conceptualized as one of the manifestations of the wrath and power of *Olodumare*. The legend of *Sango* presents him initially as a king of Oyo. But the various exploits and life – style that were recorded about him centered on his highest achievement in conquering Death. Death, more than anything else, distinguishes humans from gods: the transcendence of his moral nature transforms the hero into a god.

It is also reported, and it is a known fact, that amongst the Yoruba, *Sango* and *Ogun* are the most feared gods in the Yoruba pantheon. They are used to detect liars and thieves as well as to dispense justice. The Yoruba does not swear by these gods. *Soponna*, the god of smallpox, is another deified divinity. In his capacity as a moral guidance, according to Oladipo (1988: 91), he also serves as executioner of God's moral sanctions.

However, the havoc wrecked by autocratic regimes on Nigeria began to receive a face lift, according to Abiodun, (2001: 211) in the late 80s and early 90s with flag off of the democratization process, as a means of institutionalizing mass political participation. The outcome of the transitional process from the existing authoritarian structures to democratic institutions and practices in Nigeria has so far been a bag of mixed fortunes; a forward-backward zigzag and complex motion of democratic surges and authoritarian drawbacks, as the country struggle to sustain its fragile democracy.

It is common, in the words of Abiodun, to note that frustrated ambitions, undue regards for the rule of law, imposition of the executive over other arms of government, uneasy tension in power shift, and social disorder are much more experienced as part of the learning process of democratic governance in Nigeria. Yet other African States such as Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, democratization processes led to the collapse of the states. The democratic development in Nigeria is such marked with uncertainty of either sustainance or consolidation. The task of institutionalizing democratic system, norms and values in Nigeria is becoming more increasingly difficult beyond imagination.

More fundamental to the democratic development in Nigeria, is the challenge of Nigeria states, to sustain democratic process while equally delivering the democratic dividends to their people. The inextricable connection between these challenges makes it difficult to address one at the neglect of the other. The degree of success experienced in the democratization process is *ipso facto* a success in the sustainance and consolidation of democracy and the delivering of democratic dividends to the people as a whole. The inability of the country to meet the social needs of her people would undermine the legitimacy of regimes, and would make democratic development impossible and authoritarianism inevitable (Abiodun, 2001: 211).

There is an urgent need, therefore, in the light of these problems to come up with solutions to local government reforms and salvage the democratization process from its present precarious conditions and channel a genuine path of democratic development in Nigeria.

The Yoruba Divinities: Prospects for Local Government Reforms and Democratic Development in Nigeria

In judging the relevance or non-relevance of values, ideas, beliefs and institutions of the traditional past to the contemporary realities, Abiodun (2001: 211) reinforcing Kwame Gyekye (1992: 294) write on the criteria to be

considered: "There are two important criteria to be used in either accepting or rejecting traditional values, attitudes, beliefs and institutions. These are: "the functionality of the ideas, and beliefs in the setting of the present and the fundamental nature of those, pristine values, beliefs and attitudes." In other words, it is the profound appreciation of the efficacy and resilience of values, ideas, beliefs and institutions of the traditional past that recommends them to the present age, and underpins their significance.

As a result of the above observations, this paper posits that the belief in divinities in traditional Yoruba metaphysics is significant, both in Gyekye's two senses, to the contemporary reflections on local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria.

A critical look at the major problems confronting local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria finds its crux, the nexus in authoritarianism, bad governance and lack of democratic values. Nigeria has been poorly served by military dictatorships for decades. These military dictatorships employed the political power in their possession as a mechanism of political control of the people rather than mechanism of mass political participation entrenched in democratic regimes. A good number of these regimes clearly continued thinly veiled authoritarian practices under the disguise of democracy.

It is important to note that findings indicate that local government reforms and democratic development have failed to triumph in Nigeria due to reasons emanating from bad governance and lack of democratic values. However, the solution to the above problem can be taken from the traditional Yoruba belief in the divinities. What is evident and highly instructive in this belief is the idea of decentralization of power. *Olodumare* as the Supreme law Giver as conceived by the Yoruba is still found to be democratic in all His dealings. Despite the fact that He is the efficient cause of the universe of whom nothing greater can be conceived to exist, never did the work of creations dictatorially or unilaterally without consulting his divinities. He frowns at wielding absolute and immutable power at the expense of his divinities both in term of creation and governing of the universe. As such, He gives the divinities portfolios which must be manned independently and harmoniously. He also empowered the divinities to attend to human problems on His behalf. Even those divinities without portfolio were given titular heads of great political significance.

Therefore, it is the argument of this paper that if Nigeria society can borrow a leaf from the practice between *Olodumare* and His divinities, local government reforms and democratic development will be on the part of progress in Nigeria, especially where there is an unequal relationship between the local government and other tiers of government and government is found to be dictatorial and authoritarian in nature.

The unnecessary conflicts arising from power tussles among the various democratic institutions is another problem bedeviling the local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. It is not uncommon in Nigeria democracy finding the federal, state and local government, the executive and legislative arms of government at war with each other, the civil society at destructive war with the government, ethnic cleavages and religious revolts. The valuable lessons of harmonious interaction between the Yoruba divinities, the ministers of *Olodumare*, who are

subordinate to Him, are highly significant to the resolution of this problem. Such harmonious relationship is indicative of the fact that mutual cooperation and partnership are ideals not to be cherished only by celestial beings, but also to be imitated by humans (Abiodun, 2001: 213).

Despite the fact that each god is assigned a duty and an area of influence with delegated powers, no divinity is self-sufficient as to operate without the cooperation of others. This is central to the harmonious interaction between the divinities. There was never a cleavage among the divinities as each performed his duties and responsibilities without necessarily infringing on others right.

The issues of human creation where *Obatala* fashions and moulds the human frame, while *Ajala* complements his efforts by endowing man with *Ori* (the determinant of human, destiny) best exemplified the notion of cooperative interactionism which is necessary among democratic institutions in Nigeria. *Olodumare* put the vital principle, the breath of life (Emi), the elements of consciousness into moulded human frame, and *Orunmila* takes charge again and sends man on his way into the world. To all those who are in the political arena in Nigeria, this paper wishes to recommend a proper study of the democratic system of governance between the Yoruba divinities. All the federal, state and local government legislators and executives should be encouraged to look inward to understudy the traditional Yoruba belief in divinities rather than wasting public funds in sponsoring them to Western world to understudy democracy. It is the belief of this paper that such kind of study by all the stakeholders will engender democratic peace among democratic institutions, on one hand in Nigeria. On the other hand, embracing the belief and cooperation that existed between Yoruba divinities by contemporary Nigerian societies will strengthen the institutions and values system that makes democracy possible in Nigeria. "This will further ensure the development of the trust, tolerance, and capacity for mutual cooperation, which makes stable peace and reconciliation possible" (Abiodun, 2001: 213).

The problem of how to give institutional expression to the will of the people in Nigeria's local government reforms and democratic development, is further worthy of mention. For many, this problem stands the core of local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. For instance, Kwame Gyekye (1992: 244) argues that the problem is how to make the will of the people explicit in real and concrete terms. In Western democratic practices, according to Abiodun (2001: 214), such institutions as the multi-party system, periodic elections, parliaments, constitutions, independent judiciary and others have been created to give expression to the will of the people.

The question is, in what ways, and to what extent, could the traditional Yoruba belief in divinities, be said to have provided a means of expressing the will of the people institutionally?

With regard to their relationship to *Olodumare*, a reflective look at the Yoruba divinities will reveal that there are primordial divinities and deified ancestors respectively. Thus *Orisa nla* or *Obatala*, *Orunmila*, *Ogun*, *Esu*, are in the camp of primordial divinities while *Sango*, *Oya*, *Soponna* etc are some of the deified divinities. The premodial or prominent divinities derived their powers directly from *Olodumare* and are believed to be charged with vital functions, universally recognized and worshipped by the Yoruba.

The deified divinities who are cultural heroes, were also assigned different functions and have different ideologies. Each of these divinities equally has its own worshippers and adherents who consult, worship and offer them sacrifices on regular basis and in turn, receive assistance with the problems of life. An individual is initiated under the protection of one of the divinities, who becomes the person's guardian deity. In this way, the people's interests and will are best presented in different divinity's camp which various adherents belong to.

Besides, another remarkable institution of decentralization that finds expression in traditional Yoruba belief is the quest for accessibility to information concerning the operations of local governments. Traditionally, the Yoruba believe that *Olodumare* has endowed *Orunmila*, a primordial divinity, with the knowledge and wisdom concerning the past, present and future of man's undertakings. *Orunmila* can predict what is coming to pass or prescribe remedies against any eventuality. As such, he is usually consulted for guidance and information in traditional Yoruba society. In the same way, it depicts the need for accessibility to information by the governed from the government over their affairs in contemporary politics.

To make local government reforms and democratic development possible in Nigeria, the government must ensure that there is a proper avenue for the populace to get adequate information concerning their affairs just as *Olodumare* was doing regularly through one of his divinities *Orunmila*, the minister of knowledge, information and the essence of wisdom. It is interesting to note that *Orunmila* who is capable of a prescient probing into the unknown, the unanticipated, is respected for giving adequate and correct information. In order to make local government reforms and democratic development possible in Nigeria, no distorted information must be given by the government.

The "observation of democratic virtues both by the citizens and the government is another condition that can hasten up" (Abiodun 2001: 214) local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. As it were in the traditional Yoruba belief, *Esu*, the god of discipline punishes all those who refuse to carry out propitiatory sacrifices for their misbehavior (W. Abimbola, 1976: 51). In this wise, he acts as the moral watch-dog on the activities of the divinities and man, thereby ensuring that those who violate the moral laws are punished. Similarly, *Sango* is conceptualized as the unseen custodian of moral codes. He exercises immense influence on the morality of the people and ensures strict adherence to *Olodumare's* law. Just as *Esu* and *Sango* are given free hands in rewarding virtuous acts and inflict deserving punishments for moral lapses when it comes to the laws of the land in Yoruba metaphysics, an independent judiciary should be encouraged. Such institution, according to Abiodun (2001: 215) must be given free hand to perform its function adequately without sacred cows or fear of intimidation. If this aspect of the belief is further considered and perhaps given modern translation in contemporary Nigeria politicking, sustainable local government reforms process will rise to its acme. Such a belief will engender meaningful democratic development in Nigeria and the inculcation of democratic virtues in the minds of all and sundry.

Conclusion

It is hoped that enough has been said to show that the institutionalization of democratic ideals such as mutual

cooperation, harmonious interactions among arms of government, responsibility, accessibility, trusteeship, consensus, mutual reconciliation, effective democratic governance, equal relationship between the local government and other tiers of government in Nigeria, all of which are signpost of local government transformation and democratic development, were found in the traditional Yoruba belief in divinities.

However, the fact is that these political values have not been allowed to affect and shape the contours of local government reforms and democratic development in contemporary Nigeria. The consequences of the neglect and despise of this traditional belief have not been palatable. It has led to disrespect for the rule of law, constitution, dictatorship, bad and ineffective democratic governance, perverted democratization of political structures, authoritarianism, social disorder occasioned by distributive injustice of democratic dividends which are dominant in Nigeria's political scene, and other undemocratic practices battering the path of local government reforms and democratic development in Nigeria. These are features of Nigerian politics, which can hardly be derived from Yoruba tradition. Hence, the process of local government reforms and democratic development in post – Colonial Nigeria has been an odyssey, along arduous journey with no acme in sight (Abiodun, 2001: 215). Resorting to the indigenous traditional Yoruba belief in divinities could be a redemptive approach. This is because of the lessons and relevance it has for local government reforms and sustainable democratic development in the 21st century Nigeria. On this note, the paper recommends that a worthwhile consideration and cognizance should be given to the Yoruba belief in divinities in Nigeria's quest for sustainable local government reforms and democratic development.

References

Abimbola, Wande. (1976). *Ifa and Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus*. Ibadan: Oxford University.

Abiodun, O.B. (2001). "The Belief in God (Olodumare) and Divinities in Traditional Yoruba Thought. Some lessons for the Democratization process in Contemporary Africa. In IBA Essays on African Literature in Honour of Oyin Ogunba (eds.) Wole Ogundele and Gbemisola Adeoti. Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd.

Adebowale, Oluymisi. (2000). "The Theme of Religion in Alagba Jeremaya" In *Odu: A Journal of West African Studies*. Ile-Ife: O.A.U Press Limited, Jan/July.

Aiyejina, Funso (2010). *Esu Elegbara: A Source of an Alter/Native Theory of African Literature and Criticism*. Lagos: CBAAC.

Akintola, Akinbowale (1999). *Yoruba Ethics and Metaphysics*. Ogbomoso: Valour Publishing Ventures Limited.

Akporobaro, F.B.O. (2005). *Introduction to African Oral Literature*. Lagos: Princeton publishing Company.

Clark, W.H. (1974). *Travels and Exploration in Yorubaland, 1854-1858* (ed.) J.A. Adeniran, et al.

Drewal, Henry John (1989). "Art or Accident: Yoruba Body Artists and their Deity Ogun" In *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*. (ed.) Sandra. T. Barnes, U.S.A: Indiana University Press.

Epega, Afolabi. (1977). *Ifa the Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Imole Oluwa Institute.

Gyekye, Kwame (1992). "Traditional Political Ideas: Their Relevance to Development in Contemporary Africa", *Ghanaian Philosophical Studies* Vol. 1.

Idowu, Bolaji (1962). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman.

Lucas, J.O. (1948). *The Religion of the Yoruba*. Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop.

Maduakor, Obi. (1991). *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to His Writing*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*. Ibadan: Heinemann.

Gbadebo, M.D. (2003) "Gods and Ethics in Traditional African Religion and Philosophy" In: IBA Essays on African Literature in Honour of Oyin Ogunba (eds.) Wole Ogundele and Gbemisola Adeoti. Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd.

Oladipo, O.T. (1998). *An African Concept of Reality: A Philosophical Analysis*, (Ph.D Thesis) Department of Philosophy, Ibadan, University of Ibadan.

_____ (ed.) (1988). *Remarking Africa: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century*, Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Olomola, Isola (2000). "The Decline of Traditional Deities: A case study of Egungun Ado" In *Odu: A Journal of West African Studies* 40.

Olu-Osayomi, Olusegun (2013). *Yoruba Divinities in Selected Nigerian Plays*. Unpublished. Ph.D Thesis, Babcock University.

Omolafe, John (1998). "The Significance of Cosmological Categories", *The Journal of Religious Studies*, India, Vol. XXXIX, No.1.

P'Bitek, Okot, (1970). *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Kampala, East African Literature Bureau.

Peel, J.D.Y. (1994). "Comparative Analysis of 'Ogun' in Pre-Colonial Yoruba", Seminar, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

Simpson, E. George. (1980). *Yoruba Religion & Medicine in Ibadan*. Ibadan: University Press.

Smith, O. (ed.) (2000). *Democracy and International Relations: Critical Problems*, London: Macmillan.

Sodipo, J.O (1973). "Notes on the Concept of Cause and Chance" In *Yoruba Traditional Thought, Second Order*, Vol. II, No.2.

Sogolo, G.S. (1993). *Foundation of African Philosophy: A Definite Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Udu, Yakubu (ed.) (2010). *Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol. 8, No. 1, 2 & 3. Lagos: African Cultural Institute.