

ON THE POSTMODERN GROUNDWORK OF YORÙBÁ ETHNO-EPISTEMOLOGY AND IFÁ DIVINATION

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Abstract

Even when postmodern philosophy reveals divergent thematic issues and approaches, as corollary to the enormous scholarly intentions in the field, three common denominators are deep-seated. Firstly, postmodern philosophy debunks the possibility of having an objective truth, only to settle for the subjectivity of truths, thereby repudiating the correspondence theory of truth. Secondly, postmodern philosophy admits linguistic deconstruction in a bid to get at newer meanings and interpretations of texts. Thirdly, postmodern philosophy is a version of anti-realism and is opposed to the possibility of transcendental standpoints. Whereas these dominant and popular structures are admitted by postmodern philosophy, it is the thesis of this essay that the traditional *Yorùbá* have long before contact with the West been exemplifying these characterizations of postmodern philosophy. To justify this proposition, this essay ventures into the *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology and *Ifá* divination procedure. It is therefore not an error to submit as does this article that *Yorùbá* philosophy is oblique toward a postmodern locus.

Keywords: Postmodernism, African Philosophy, Ethno-Epistemology, *Ifá*, *Yorùbá*

Introduction

The aim of this inquiry is to show that there are places of agreement or convergence between the main thrusts of postmodernism on the one hand and traditional *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology as well as *Ifá* divination system on the other hand. The first task hence, is to unearth the core theme of postmodernism. This is the focus of the next section. The section that follows then explores the inner kernel in *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology and *Ifá* divination as to disclose the striking semblances with the three dominant contentions within the postmodern discursive fray.

Postmodernism: Emergence and Essence

The word ‘postmodernism’ started garnering widespread academic attention with regularity in the 1960s and 1970s (Griffin, 2007: vii). Relying on the authority of Bernd Magnus, who is an expert on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, this essay acquiesces that postmodernism is in tandem with three central concepts: “‘anti-realism’; ‘opposition to transcendental arguments and transcendental standpoints’; and ‘rejection of truth as correspondence to reality’” (Magnus, 1995). My intention to employ the thrust of Magnus is not calculated to exclude the possibility of other views on the thematic issues of postmodernism. Neither does it serve as the conclusive verdict on the discourse. I rely on Magnus’s assertion for the parallels it inspires with indigenous *Yorùbá* episteme.

I observe that it is to the credit of Friedrich Nietzsche that philosophical thinking was transformed into postmodernism. Nietzsche rejected Kant’s transcendentalism as nothing but

an illusion (Griffin, 2007:153). Postmodernism is, however, shy of a univocal definition. For instance, Arnold Toynbee used the concept to designate a new cycle in the history of Western civilization, starting around 1875. Irvin Howe (1959) and Harry Levin (1960) perceive postmodernism as a falling off from the great modernist movement. This was an era where the correspondence theory of truth had gained much notoriety and superiority over the other shades of truth. According to the correspondence theory, something is adjudged to be true in so much as it agrees to objective reality verifiable in the actual world. The correspondence theory of truth caused people to believe that scientific truth equals absolute truth. Postmodernism corrects this by denying the equivalency between scientific truth and absolute truth. All scientific conclusions are now understood to be tentative simply because no one has ever made the infinite number of observations required to learn if there are any exceptions. It is therefore not an overstatement that postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. Simon Malpas shares this perception too when he renders that “postmodernism, with its focus and style of representation, is often read as a successor of modernism, the collection of literary and cultural movements across Europe and North America during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century” (Malpas, 2005:12). But beyond the reaction to modernism, postmodernism has “safely integrated into the current social order” (Baumann, 1992: 98). Jean-Francois Lyotard (1992:11), who engages each of modernism and postmodernism, sees within each, a potentially disruptive form whose task is “...presenting the existence of something unrepresentable. Showing that there is something we can conceive of that we can neither see nor show.” What Lyotard means by this is that rather than reproducing what is immediately recognisable, modern and postmodern works of art disrupt recognition by alluding to what a particular culture represses or excludes from its normal means of communication. They are, in other words, deliberately difficult and disturbing, challenging accepted practices of presentation and understanding (Malpas, 2005:29).

It should be hinted that after Nietzsche, two philosophical issues and a development in the field of Physics served as catalyst for the emergence of postmodernism. The first problem is that of hermeneutics. The burning conundrum involves how to know the valid and true message of a text. For Hans-George Gadamer (1976), the reader or interpreter cannot objectively grasp the specific intent of the author. Hence, he recommends a new meaning through dialogue with the text. In a related fashion, Jacques Derrida (1967) puts that “there is no such thing as outside-of-the-text.” In this guise, Tim Woods (1999:49) explains: “It is in the field of literary studies that the term ‘postmodernism’ has received the widest usage and provoked the most intense debate. There have been many attempts to theorise the consequences and manifestations of postmodernism for literature, all usually running into problems of historical and formal definition.”

The second factor that instigated the dominance of the postmodern attitude does not exclude the consideration, whether or not language is capable of describing truth objectively. In reaction, Wittgenstein admits that, “we may not advance any kind of theory. We must do

away with all explanation, and description alone must take place” (Wittgenstein, 1963:126). This evinces not only that language is incapable of attaining truth but is socially conditioned. Hence, truth by extension is socially conditioned. This approach is captured by the ‘use theory of meaning’. The ‘use’ theory of meaning in language, allows us to decipher that when an expression is used, the meaning is already assumed in social behavior (Ofuasia & Dasaolu, 2017:75-80). Elsewhere, one gleans that:

Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that words and sentences are more like game pieces or tokens, used to make moves in rule-governed conventional social practices. A “meaning” is not an abstract object; meaning is a matter of the role an expression plays in human social behavior. To know the expression’s meaning is just to know how to deploy the expression appropriately in conversational settings (Lycan, 2008:76).

The above may serve as the impetus for Richard Rorty to have affirmed that truth is what his fellow academics allow him to get away with (Rorty, 1998:96). Clearly, this leaves no vilification that truth is a social construct but not objective. The third but not the least, is the eroding of Newtonian Mechanics by Relativity and Quantum Theories. Newtonian Mechanics supports the bold vision of absolutes which has failed to cope with the current scientific realities of the 20th century (Alozie, 2004:4-6). The advent of the Relativity and Quantum theories ushered in the abandonment of belief in absolutes wherein all concepts and existents become relative to one another (Hawkins, 1988). With these development, philosopher such as Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michael Foucault, to name a few have used these breakthroughs to identify the boundaries and themes of postmodernism.

From the foregoing discourse on the emergence of the postmodern attitude, it needs no embellishment that postmodernism reacts mainly to the operative and given modes of thought prevalent in the modern era. However, the term ‘postmodernism’ is actually lacking a consensual definition. This study will admit that postmodernism involves a broad movement that developed in the middle of the 20th century with strong influence across disciplines like philosophy, the arts, architecture and criticism, all of which signified the turn from modernism (Mura, 2012:69). Even as this study concerns mainly with the philosophic dimension, the three popular and cardinal ingredients of postmodern philosophy will now be tersely articulated.

One of the indisputable themes in a postmodern philosophy is the emphasis on subjective truth and rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. In other words, postmodernism denies the possibility of attaining a universal proposition. This approach has been captured by Lyotard’s famous phrase: “incredulity towards metanarrative” (Lyotard, 1984:xxiv). A metanarrative however is a unifying grand story seeking to explain how the world is. However, a critic could point out that the postmodern lure from grand narrative is itself a universal proposition. Granted, however, it needs to be said that vis-à-vis modernism, the

postmodern agenda strives for relativity in narratives. In other words, the absence of a universal truth is reiterated by postmodernism. This however, is not the case with relative truths. To amplify, truths which are particular to an individual, a group of individuals are endorsed and admitted. Postmodernism, by promoting the notion of subjective truths, by implication will definitely support relativism with regards to culture, morality, values and even revelation. David Ray Griffin corroborates this outlook as he chronicles that:

The belief in universal truths is widely rejected by deconstructive postmodern thinkers who urge, however paradoxically, that the (universal) truth is that all truths are local, because the criteria for truth, being culturally conditioned or even created, are relative to a particular culture. A similar position is taken with regard to values, such as the traditional axiological trinity of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness (Griffin, 2007:43).

If there are no objective truths, then it follows that a corresponding theory of truth will necessarily be non-existent in a postmodern epistemology. Correspondence theory rests on the belief that a proposition is true if it ratifies an objective reality. For instance, the proposition: “It is raining” will require to be true, the objective reality of water showering from the clouds. Postmodern scholars however, reject this outlook. Specifically, it has been recommended that, “We...[should] give up the correspondence theory of truth, and start treating moral and scientific beliefs as tools for achieving greater human happiness, rather than as representations of the intrinsic nature of reality” (Rorty, 1998:96). There are two broad reasons for this conclusion. One is the claim that the idea of truth as correspondence cannot be made intelligible. The other reason is the claim that the idea that truth consists in correspondence has harmful consequences, with a central claim being that this idea, being absolutist, works against the development of a pluralistic attitude (Griffin, 2007:vii).

Another key theme is that of linguistic deconstruction. Jacques Derrida is a foremost representative of the deconstructionist movement. Derrida and his followers nevertheless seem to be committed to one fairly clear historical proposition: that philosophy and literature in the Western tradition had for too long falsely supposed that the relationship between language and world was, on the contrary, well founded and reliable (even, for some religions, guaranteed by God). This false ‘logocentric’ confidence in language as the mirror of nature is the illusion that the meaning of a word has its origin in the structure of reality itself and hence makes the truth about that structure directly present to the mind (Butler, 2002:17). The emphasis on language and deconstruction is mostly affected by literature and even philosophic texts. In this way, a reader’s interpretation of the text becomes more important than the text itself. It is also significant to realize that the subjectivity of the reader in determining what the author intended is crucial. It does not strike one at this juncture why Derrida utters that “there is no such thing as outside-of-the-text” (Derrida, 1967). The original intention of the author is not the most important thing. Rather, this goal is shifted to the reader who is allowed to invent meanings and interpretation from the author’s singular intention. For instance, postmodernism pokes whether or not “a Shakespearean play means

exactly the same thing today as it did when first performed” (Ward, 2003:162). Since each author is a product of her/his cultural setting, s/he will use language as befitting for any condition, or social context in a Wittgensteinian fashion. In a nutshell, postmodernism admits that words cannot describe the objective world but only refer to other words. Hence, no matter how a writer constructs a sentence, it can never tell us about the real world, but only about the world as understood by the reader. Evidently, this is the ‘death of the author’.

The third common denominator present among postmodern philosophers is anti-realism. Perhaps to see how this outlook works, a definition of realism could help. In the words of Michael Huemer, a foremost expert in contemporary epistemology, realism holds that “we have immediate (non-inferential) knowledge of the existence of, and some of the properties of, the external objects that we perceive” (Huemer, 2002:27). Now, anti-realism simply denies the possibility of knowing these external objects. By extension, there is no real world out there. What is out there is nothing but individual constructs of how the world is. In postmodern parlance, this means subjective construct of the world for each individual. Necessarily, anti-realism does away with a correspondence theory of truth since it denies the possibility of truth as an entity mediating between objective world and propositions about the world. Thus, according to the postmodernist paradigm of anti-realism, there is no real world to which truth can correspond. A classic example of the concept that words do not refer to reality is found in Foucault’s essay entitled, “This Is Not a Pipe.” In this essay, he analyzes a 1966 painting by Magritte that shows a picture of a pipe on a blackboard with the written phrase “This is not a pipe” (Foucault, 1983:49). Above the blackboard is an abstraction of a pipe hanging in the air. Foucault insists that none of these is a pipe, but merely a text that simulates a pipe. The primary idea behind this “word play” is the postmodern insistence that all human beings are conditioned by their culture and language—their situation in life—and that no one is able to break through his or her situation to engage a universe with objectively true statements of fact.

With the three key themes that are suggestive of postmodern philosophy tersely and distinctly chronicled, the onus is to see how the traditional *Yorùbá* perspective is redolent of each of these. This is precisely the focus of the section that follows.

An Exploration of *Yorùbá* Ethno-Epistemology and *Ifá* Divination System.

The methodology of Ordinary Language Analysis as the basis of linguistic expressions in *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology has been well demonstrated (Fasiku, 2008:87). Basically, Ordinary Language Analysis consists primarily in applying the method of analytic philosophy to assess the ways that words and concepts are understood and used. It was first applied to the *Yorùbá* language by Barry Hallen and John Olubi Sodipo.

According to Hallen (1998), Ordinary Language Analysis accentuates ordinary, common and collective uses of language. In this wise, greater importance is attached to descriptions, and to analysis rather than to criticisms. In mainstream philosophy, “usage of language follows some

regimented or strictly controlled pattern” (Fasiku, 2008:87), as such, any strange use of language that is contrary to this technical and strict sense of language is considered primitive, illogical and unreasonable. What Ordinary Language Analysis suggests is that this strict and technical use of language, which is the feature of the mainstream philosophy, is not the only way of doing philosophy” (Ibid.). From this, it may be deduced that mainstream epistemology is not the only way of doing epistemology. For this reason, a perusal of some concepts or words in the *Yorùbá* linguistic framework reveals that a direct interpretation or translation into the English language would yield little or no comprehension.

The foregoing, when applied to the epistemic outlook of the *Yorùbá*, reeks in ethno-epistemology. And ethno-epistemology treats all human epistemological activities as fully natural phenomena to be described, understood and evaluated from a broadly anthropological and fully *a posteriori* perspective (Maffie, 2005). It “insists upon studying the activities of philosophers in the same manner as anthropology studies the activities of priests, shamans, and scientists” (Maffie, 2005).

Ethno-epistemology has three distinct areas of inquiry: ethno-epistemology of folk epistemology; ethno-epistemology of cognitive specialists; and ethno-epistemology of epistemology” (Maffie, 2005). The ethno-epistemology of folk epistemology deals largely with the “pre-reflective, untutored, and uncritical workaday epistemic concepts, intuitions, judgments, and norms of ordinary people” (Maffie, 2005). This is where the epistemology of the *Yorùbá*, which concerns this essay, locates. The ethno-epistemology of cognitive specialists examines the epistemological activities of curers, shamans, diviners, priests, and scientists. The ethno-epistemology of epistemology, the third field examines the epistemological activities of epistemologists, i.e. individuals who reflect critically, abstractly and generally upon the nature, source and limits of knowledge per se.

According to Hallen (2004:296), the English word ‘know’ does not translate unproblematically into *Yorùbá*, since ‘mò’, the nearest *Yorùbá* approximation, still requires eyewitness acquaintance. This implies that the degree of value attached to eyewitness cognition is variable among cultures (Hallen, 2004: 296). Furthermore, the distinction made in *Yorùbá* language and culture between *ìmò* (putative knowledge) and *ìgbàgbó* (putative belief) reflects a similar concern about the evidential status of first-hand versus second-hand information. Persons are said to *mò* (know) or to have *ìmò* (knowledgeable) only of something they have witnessed in a first-hand or personal manner. The example most frequently cited by discussants, virtually as a paradigm, is a visual perception of a scene or an event as it is taking place. *Ìmò* is said to apply to sensory perception generally, even if what may be experienced directly by touch is more limited than is the case with perception. *Ìmò* implies a good deal more than mere sensation. Perception implies cognition as well, meaning that the persons concerned must comprehend that which they are experiencing. The term ‘*òtítọ́*’ (truth) is associated with ‘*ìmò*’ in certain respects that parallel the manner in which ‘true’ and ‘truth’ are paired with ‘know’/‘knowledge’ in the English language. In English language,

‘truth’ is principally a property of propositional knowledge, of statements human beings make about things, while among the traditional *Yorùbá*, *òtító* may be a property of both propositions and certain forms of experience (Hallen, 2004:297). Obviously, this requires a little more elaboration.

Now, it needs to be stated at this point that *ìgbàgbó*, is not belief in the Western sense. Hallen explicates that ‘belief’, *ìgbàgbó* applies to everything that may be construed as second-hand information. In English culture, this would be regarded as propositional knowledge. Thus, the things one is taught in the course of a formal education, what one learns from books, from the English-language culture decrees that some propositional or second-hand information classified as ‘knowledge’, should be accepted as true. On the other hand, *Yorùbá* usage is insistent that, since classified as *ìgbàgbó* (putative belief), it can only be accepted as a possible (*ó ʃeéʃe*) truth but not an absolute truth. In plane language, there is a tentative and fallible approach to knowledge among the traditional *Yorùbá*. Does this not deny the possibility of an objective truth? Is it not the case that the *Yorùbá* distinction and forms of experience mediating among the trio of knowledge (*ìmò*), truth (*òtító*) and belief (*ìgbàgbó*) validate subjectivity of truth? It is the case that the mediation between the trio not only opposes an objective truth but is as well the main reason why the Gettier problem is alien and impermissible among the *Yorùbá*.¹

The argument is a testament to the fact that the *Yorùbá* are cautious in their claims to knowing. The *Yorùbá*, know very well that there is no knowledge that is infallible. This is in consonant with the falsifiability caution lauded by Karl Popper.

Nevertheless, there is a connection between *ìmò* and *ìgbàgbó/gbàbó*. *Ìgbàgbó* is indicative of any experience or information, which is not first-hand, personal, and direct. *Ìgbàgbó* is ‘comprehending, and deciding to accept as possible (as ‘possibly true’ rather than as ‘true’), information that one receives in a second-hand manner” (Hallen, 2004:298). *Ìmò*, on the other hand, is first-hand experience and *ìgbàgbó* (information gained on the basis of second-hand experience) together exhaust all of the information that human beings have at their disposal (Hallen, 2004).

For the *Yorùbá*, the distinction between what is known, what is unknown, what is yet to be known and what is to be believed rests on very cautious assumptions. The *Yorùbá* admit the verification thesis of using the senses to observe. Further, the falsifiability thesis presents itself in the manner through which the *knowledge* of one person is automatically relegated as *belief* or *possible truth* for another person, in an attempt to underscore the fallibilistic tendencies surrounding the process of knowing.

¹For a detailed analysis of this, see Emmanuel Ofuasia & Oluwaseyi Grace Ojo (2016). “On the Gettier Problem and Yoruba ‘Epistemology’: Analytic Forays into Ethno-Philosophy.” *Philosophia: E-Journal of Philosophy and Culture*. 14: 146-165.

From the exposition of the *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology, two of the three themes in postmodern philosophy are replete. Firstly, there is no doubt in the obvious that the idea of an absolute and unshakeable truth has no place among the traditional *Yorùbá*. One begins to see the postmodern attitude among these peoples when all what passes muster as *true* in mainstream Western tradition are taken as belief among the *Yorùbá*. For a belief to be elevated to a truth status, first-hand experience is the criterion. But even this truth status is subjective since it is the individual's first-hand experience. Hence, in postmodern parlance, the correspondence theory has no place. It has been established among the *Yorùbá* long before the word 'postmodernism' entered the Western discursive fray, the "incredulity towards metanarrative" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). The traditional *Yorùbá* society did not and has never sought any reason to provide a grand narrative truth about the world. This claim may be objected, however, that indigenous concepts like '*ìwà*' and '*ọmọ́lúàbí*' are grand theories. In this regard, I grant that this portrays some of the issues and challenges leveled against postmodernism. I concede that there are some grand elements, especially in the area of morality without which no society can strive for the ideal. While it may deem that moral and epistemic concepts undergo refinement due to human dynamism, they still remain ideals that the *Yorùbá* must strive towards realizing. Hence, for the traditional *Yorùbá* society and as Rorty avers, that which is true is what the society allows her to get away with. Impliedly, some grand theories are simultaneously conservative and dynamic.

In a related vein, traditional *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology does away with realism and transcendental standpoints. This is the case not only for the *Yorùbá* but other African cultures as well. For instance, while discussing the attributes of God among Africans, Sogolo (1983:157) harps:

He knows more than we do, but unlike the Christian God, He does not know everything. He is more powerful than we are but He is not all-powerful. God, in Africa is more benevolent than we are but He too can do evil and therefore not omni-benevolent. In short, God in African religion is not transcendental (my emphasis).

The foregoing has been corroborated by Samuel Ade Ali who reveals that God among the *Yorùbá* is not responsible for the metanarrative of all that persist. In his own words "*Olodumare* is not absolutely the genesis and ultimate explanation of all things in Yoruba metaphysics..." (Ali, 2006:23). Elsewhere, it is gleaned that the *Yorùbá* "neither regards *Olodumare* as the creator of the world nor as a perfect Being" (Oluwole, 1995:18).

The thrust of these excerpts is that the *Yorùbá* does not construe a transcendental existence that is not only conjectural but speculative. The anti-realistic attitude among the traditional *Yorùbá* is rooted in the ethno-epistemology as there is no basis for construing what the world is like. There are as many constructions of the world as there are individuals. This implies a subjective construction of the world for each *Yorùbá* but which is overruled by that of the

community, where necessary. And even that which the community allows each knower to go away with is relative and becoming.

Given the postmodern attitude in *Yorùbá* ethno-epistemology, it may be asked: How can a culture deem as primitive as “not sharing the world’s history” (Hegel, 1956:99) engage in deconstructionism? A quick glance at the *Ifá* divination procedure is an exemplification of this postmodern attitude. But before the glimpse, the question of the meaning of *Ifá* needs attention.

Ifá has been conceived as a verbal corpus of *Yorùbá* pristine wisdom, knowledge, philosophy and metaphysics which has been with and has been used by the Yoruba in Nigeria and the Diaspora. For William Bascom “the word *Ifá* is used to mean both the system of divination and the deity who controls it; and this deity is known also as *Ọrúnmìlà*” (Bascom, 1969:1). What is apparent in these conceptions is the interchangeably use of *Ifá* and *Ọrúnmìlà* (Balogun & Fayemi, 2008:376). Oyekunle Adegboyega corroborates this perspective but goes further when he avers: “...*Ifa* and *Orunmila* are used to refer to the deity while the name *Ifa* is used also for the system of divination” (Adegboyega, 2017:31). In total, there are 256 *Odùs*. Sixteen (16) of these are the major *Odùs* perceived as the first set of learners from *Ọrúnmìlà*, whereas the other 240 have been passed as learners from the first set of apprentices (Oluwole, 1996: 2). In any case, some of the *Odùs* bear the name of the first set of apprentices (Oluwole, 2014:41-8).

With the foregoing notes on *Ifá* clearly enunciated, the next task is to see how deconstructionism as a postmodern attitude is employed. However, for this to be grasped easily, the *Ifá* divination procedure is germane. And in the words of Joachim Wach, divination is “the exploration and interpretation of the will of the Godhead...done in the spirit of devotion and submission rather than coercion and manipulation” (Wach, 1958:111). With this idea of divination and the intrinsic interpretation, it is suggestive that the divination procedure of *Ifá* is a deconstructionist agenda. In his description of the process, renowned erudite on *Ifá* scholarship Wande Abimbola reveals:

When the client enters the house of the *Ifá* priest, he salutes him and expresses a wish to ‘talk with the divinity’. The *Ifá* priest then takes out his divining chain and lays it on a mat or a raffia tray in front of the client. The client whispers his problem to a coin or a cowry shell and drops it on the *Ifá* instruments. Alternatively, the client could pick up the divining chain or the *ìbò* and whisper his problem to it directly. In either case, it is believed that the wishes of the client’s *Orí* (God of predestination who knows what is good for every person) have been communicated to *Ifá* who will then produce the appropriate answer through the first *Odù* which the *Ifá* priest will cast when he manipulates his divining chain (Abimbola, 1977:9).

Upon the manipulation of the divination chain (i.e. *opele*) by the diviner (*babaláwo*, for man/*iyanIfá*, for woman), an *Odù* surfaces. In regard to the *Odù* that surfaces, the *babaláwo/iyanIfá*:

...then begins to chant verses from the *Odù* which he has seen while the client watches and listens. The priest chants as many poems as he knows from that *Odù* until he chants a poem which tells a story containing a problem similar to the client's own problem. At that stage, the client stops him and asks for further explanation of that particular poem. The *Ifá* priest will interpret that particular poem and mention the sacrifice which the client must perform (Abimbola, 1977:9-10).

It is only then, that the seeker will make effort to explain his problem(s) directly to the *babaláwo/iyanIfá*, who will now help the seeker to interpret the verse (*esè*) of the *Odù* that is relevant to what the client seeks from *Ifá*. But if the seeker has further questions, or if the sacrifice is not specified by the *esè*, they can ask *Ifá* further 'yes' or 'no' questions through the use of *ibò* (Bascom, 1969:13).

The *ibò* comprises a piece of bone, which stands for 'no' and two cowries tied together, which symbolize 'yes'. The *babaláwo/iyanIfá* will ask *Òrúnmìlà* the question and then touch the *ibò* to each of the shells of the *opele* before handing them to the seeker (Ogunnaike, 2015:261). The seeker cups the bone and the cowries between his palms, shakes them, and then separates them, taking one in each fist. Then the *babaláwo/iyanIfá* casts the *opele* twice. If the *Odù* that appears first is senior to that which appears second, the seeker opens his left hand to reveal the answer. If the junior *Odù* appears first, the right hand is opened (Ogunnaike, 2015:261). In this way, the seeker can ask *Òrúnmìlà* a number of direct, 'yes-or-no' questions and make the answer to his or her question quite specific.

It does not need much explanation to disinter the postmodern attitude in the *Ifá* divination process. The 'author' obviously 'is dead' and this births the possible interpretation that mediates. Recall as was stated hitherto, that each of the *Odùs* coincides with the disciples or apprentices of *Ifá*. But during the divination process, it is only the appearance of an *Odù* that reminds one of the 'author'. Regardless of the initial message of the *Odù* that surfaces, a new interpretation is given through the dialogic engagement of both the client/supplicant and the *babaláwo/iyanIfá*. It is the similitude between this interpretation and the solution provided by the *Odù* which surfaces that is responsible for the dynamism in *Ifá* divination. It also needs to be stated that a single *Odù* can yield several interpretations for different client/supplicant. This is precisely where the dynamic and deconstructionist aspects of *Ifá* divination appear. The deconstructionist exercise involved in the divination process is not vitiated but even authenticated as emphasis is not placed on the original content and intent of the surfacing *Odù*. Rather, this goal is shifted to the joint effort or collaboration of the supplicant and the *babaláwo/iyanIfá* as they invent meanings and interpretation from the *Odù's* singular intention. The entire approach is similar to Glen Ward's postmodern skepticism whether or

not “a Shakespearean play means exactly the same thing today as it did when first performed” (Ward, 2003:162). In the same way, we may inquire if the *Odù* that surfaces during divination means exactly the same thing today as it did when it was first cast. It is the position of this work that the *Yorùbá* divination system never assumes as universal and final, the messages embedded in the *Ifá* corpus. This justifies the postmodern locus adorned to the corpus.

Conclusion

The onus of this drudgery has been to disclose the originality of the postmodern locus among the traditional *Yorùbá* prior alien contact. Whereas Western scholars started engaging this approach from Nietzsche onward, the postmodern attitude to reality has always been original to the traditional *Yorùbá*. Hence, when popular religions such as the Abrahamic monotheisms, which have revealed, static and immutable truths have had a torrid time engaging with the religious and celestial implications of postmodernism, traditional *Yorùbá* religion is not vitiated by this threat. Yet the traditions that are original to the Abrahamic monotheisms have denigrated African religions and thought-systems as paganism and were circumspect of their depictions of reality. They hold that truth, as revealed within their texts, is eternal and immutable for all times. However, it is the case that the truth in these texts no long wields much influence as it used to on humans, hence Whitehead’s (1948: 191) finding that “in this respect, the old phraseology is at variance with the psychology of modern civilizations” (Ibid.). The traditional *Yorùbá* thought-system and the *Ifá* anthology on the other hand, perceive reality as simultaneously conservative and dynamic, *suggesting* a postmodern leaning several centuries before contact with alien minds.

I must stress that the entire focus of this inquiry is to draw inferences from the *Yorùbá* thought-system, parallels with the dominant thematic structure of postmodernism in the Western parlance. Perhaps provided there is the lure to explore this research lacuna further, it could become conclusive and final, that the *Yorùbá* thought-system is postmodern philosophy. At this moment however, I can only infer from the foregoing, that there are realities in *Yorùbá* indigenous knowledge system that are *suggestive* of a postmodern locus.

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