

A Critical Review of Joyzy Pius Egunjobi's Mystery of Mysteries of Death from the Psychospiritual and Multicultural Perspectives

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Abstract: *Over the years, researchers from different fields of study have tried to address the mysteries of death. This paper examines the concept of man as a substance, death, life after death, reincarnation, transmigration of souls, and transvitation. It analyzes significant congruences, parallels, differences, and critical issues surrounding the mysteries of death. The concepts are significant as they depict the dilemmas that the living experience in the world regarding their own impending deaths as well as relationships with the death of loved ones. It also draws from experiences that emanate from both cultural and religious contexts. Finally, it addresses conflicts that psychotherapists may face in handling issues of spirituality and multiculturalism of death in therapy and its implications.*

Key Words: *Death, After life, Purgatory, Transmigration, Reincarnation, Transvitation*

I. Introduction

Joyzy Pius Egunjobi (2004) in "Transvitation: The Mystery of The Mysteries of Death" explains the many realities that make up the world which includes the visible and the invisible, and the physical and metaphysical. The visible and physical can be explained by science therefore the focus of this discourse is on the invisible and metaphysical that can probably be better described by the dead as this refers to life after death. He argues that three fundamental questions needed to be addressed; whether a dead man can die again, whether someone can be dead and still be living and what the underlying principles behind the existence after death were. Egunjobi's work critically analyzes Bidemi and his world of knowledge as a biopsychosociotechno-spiritual human person who is created to continuously struggle from conception through life into death and beyond. Once dead, the soul of man transmigrates into a spiritual body that continues to struggle from one state to another until the age limit of 80 is reached. Depending on what state is attained: reward or punishment is the end result. If a pure state is attained then a reward is gained into the bosom of the Maker. However, if the pure state is not attained then one is punished to start the struggle all over again through reincarnation. This change of state which is more or less similar to transmigration is what the author has termed *transvitation theory*. From his viewpoint, the theory simply expounds some concepts relating to death or life after death. He concludes with the mystery of living with a ghost in which though separated in death from a loved one in the material body, the spiritual body now presenting as a corporeal being continues to appear. However, this is all in his imagination.

II. The Study in View

Metaphysically, Egunjobi presents Bidemi's world as one made up of many realities: visible and invisible, physical and metaphysical. He underscores the inability of experimental science in explaining the unseen realities manifested in the visible ones. And it is the work of great minds to discover those things of the invisible

and the metaphysical realities. Giving an example of the mystery of the miracle to death, the author relates Bidemi's theology and even quotes the Bible as authority in explaining the invisible mysteries (Ecclesiastes 1:9; 3:15). The author of the article in review wrote about the mystery of death which happens to be the best example of the unseen reality revealing itself in visible realities as created beings. He observed that what makes up the world, therefore, is not all that is visible, perceivable, sensual, and physical but also, that which is unseen, invisible, mysterious, and metaphysical.

III. Rationality and the Core of humankind

According to him man has the highest form of rationality. Added to rationality is instinct which for him is common to all animals, even plants as well, as at different levels and degrees. Egunjobi further observed that, the higher the rationality of any animate being (all animals), the lower the instinct; in the same way, the higher the instinct, the lower the degree of rationality. The author refers to humankind as being in a state of struggle perpetually till he finds fulfillment in his Maker. One key concept explored in this article is man as a substance made up of three parts: body, soul and Core. The body in its material form co-exists with the soul which is the vessel that contains the Core. He refers to the Core as the mysterious point of intercession between the body and the soul. He observed that without this Core man cannot exist. Therefore, once the Core is damaged then the body which cannot exist on its own dies. Man has no spiritual soul with conscious awareness independent of the material body. Congruence is drawn in this article, which affirms that there must be a separation of the body and soul that leaves the material body lifeless but death never has the last word (Evans, 2019). This process is a painful struggle no matter the form of death and signifies the end of phase of human existence on earth but not the end of man.

IV. Continuous Struggle and Purgatory

Egunjobi presents Bidemi's most puzzling question: how can a dead man talk? He made the assertion that it is not possible for the living man to explain adequately what death is for lack of experience, and that everything in the world has something to contribute to the total make-up of the world. He critically observed that while all living things are struggling; other beings stop struggling in struggle at a point in time, but man continues in his own struggle until he reaches the perfect and incorruptible form of struggle in the bosom of the Supreme Struggle, his Maker. This is in congruence to the Christian faith and specifically the Catholic wing, purgatory is viewed as a "state of struggle". The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes purgatory as *a state of final purification after death and before entrance into heaven for those who died in God's friendship, but were only imperfectly purified; a final cleansing of human imperfection before one is able to enter the joy of heaven* (CCC No.1031; cf. 1472). Jesus declared in the Beatitudes: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). In order to see God, face to face in heaven (the beatific vision), our hearts need to be totally purified. This purification can begin on earth, but, if we die without this purification being complete, this will occur in purgatory, a condition of existence in which every trace of attachment to evil is eliminated and every imperfection of the soul corrected (John Paul II, 1999).

In contrast to Hinduism, the idea of karma is that if a person lives a good life, he will go to a "higher" plane of existence and, if the sum of his acts in life is negative, he will descend to a "lower" plane. Typically, the Indian caste system for example, is a direct result of the belief in karma. Those born poor, in the lowest caste, must remain in that caste in order to be purged of the bad karma that landed them there in the first place (Gilad, E, 2019).

V. Death and Afterlife

The mystery of death and afterlife has been studied in many contexts. There is consensus that death is not the end of man but a separation of soul from the body; and it does not matter the cause or form. This separation is a struggle too. Death is death whether from accidents, sickness or naturally in sleep and the soul transits to another life. Many religions and cultures believe in life after death. For example, Muslims believe the soul is

immortal and the destination of the soul depends on a person's good and bad deeds. Dastmalchian (2017), posits that the Quran prescribes that a full human experience comprises life in the world, purgatory after death and resurrection; and end of the world where one either receives reward or punishment according to judgment on the afterlife. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5: 10 Paul describes a longing to leave behind the suffering of earthly life and to be with the Lord in eternity, "*for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*". Fundamentally, what one does while on earth influences what happens when he ceases to live in material nature and the soul faces judgment.

Among the Jewish, souls can be reborn in different bodies if those souls have not completed their missions on earth. At the time of the resurrection, the individual soul will be split among the various bodies it once inhabited, and the portion of the soul whose mission was completed in a particular body will return to that body. Further, among Christians Christ is the key to life and what happens in the afterlife. Death is likened to resting or sleep (1 Thess. 4:13-14; Dan. 12:2; 1 Kings 2:10) because in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22). This further affirms the Christian teachings about how we live on earth as a preparation for the afterlife. Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead, making it a very important hinge of their faith in Jesus Christ, who resurrected to eternal glory. This is contained both in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Church as narrated in "the Apostles' Creed"- the resurrection of the body. For example, John 11:25-26: "*Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life....'*"

In contrast, Buddhists do not believe that eternal individual souls exist; instead people experience reincarnation based on the actions and desires of life. Indeed, the ultimate goal is to end the cycle of reincarnation and reach an enlightened state (nirvana) that portends freedom from suffering (Kachru, 2021). The enlightened state considered an exemplary end means that no future lives can be constituted by the life in question hence no more suffering. Similarities are drawn in Hinduism where the core belief focuses on reincarnation of an eternal immortal soul based on its actions in life (karma). The ultimate goal is to achieve freedom from reincarnation (moksha) through good deeds, meditation and spiritual devotion (Stoeber, 2022).

However, in many African cultures' death is not death, it is merely a rite of passage to another life. When one dies, the only variation is that the body perishes while the spirit lives on retaining the individual's identity. Death is a big issue among the Luo of Kenya and there is always a cause of death. Indeed, there is no natural death- in old age a man is called by the ancestors for more spiritual duties. If one dies young the cause of death is sought and the 'death spirit' chased away and the rituals performed to ensure the spirit does not return to disturb the living.

VI. Transvitation vs Transmigration

As the writer holds in the article under review, term transvitation does not exist in the English dictionary but the theory expounds concepts relating to death. The change of one's state from life to death is a transition phase to the afterlife as postulated in the contexts of religion and cultural beliefs. For instance, according to Christian faith, human life is not perishable at death yet the paradox is that it is through death that one enters real life in union with God. This concept of transvitation mirrors reincarnation considered as a rite of passage according to Buddhism and Hinduism; and resurrection in Christianity and Judaism. On the other hand, transmigration of souls is the belief that, after death, the soul or spirit migrates to another physical or metaphysical state. That is, the spiritual body goes with the soul at death, leaving the material body lifeless. By Transvitation, the author presents Bidemi's understanding in simple language, as a change from one state of life to another. Related to this transmigration is reincarnation which is closely linked to the idea of karma. Reincarnation and karma are both religious concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism, though certain aspects of both differ based on the religious tradition; while within Christian cycles the related topic is resurrection. The transmigration of souls, reincarnation, and similar concepts are common in many cultures around the world, and these beliefs have had a powerful impact on their societies and how they deal with death of loved ones.

In love with a ghost

Egunjobi holds that Bidemi's dilemma with Angela- the supposed ghost wife persists that he seeks therapy with Sharon who has a dual relationship with Bidemi. His imagination that his wife is a ghost stems from his in-depth search for the truth about her background which takes him back to Enugu. His predicament deepens when he meets Felicia – the mirror image of Angela. How can someone be dead and still living? Why would there be such close semblance yet not identical? His search reveals the intricacies of people's lives and relationships in the Ozubulu as well as the secrets that families keep. Similarities can be drawn with most cultures where there is some notion of immortality of the soul. For example, the Igbo holds that a person does not die but joins the ancestors and life continues after corporeal death through rebirth in another form of body (Igbo & Ayika, 2021). Among the Luo community in Kenya the dead are buried in the ancestral land where the spirit of the dead would join the spirit world. Besides, children are named after the dead as one of the ways to keep the memory alive and the spirit of a dead one continues to live in a child. If the infant is not appropriately named, he/she will cry both day and night and all efforts to soothe will not work. The person wishing to be named will also send a dream about the matter. It is amazing that once the infant is given the appropriate name, he/she calms down immediately. Indeed, the child grows to have similar tendencies and character and sometimes appearance as the one they are named after.

VII. Implications for Psycho-spiritual and Multicultural Therapy

In most cases religion and culture seem to be intertwined. This is evidenced during burial rites where both religious and cultural rites are performed. Religious beliefs shape culture and in every culture, death is associated with rituals and customs to enable people with the grieving process and offer a sense of stability, balance and closure. Each culture has its own beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life and what happens after death which may also overlap or even be in conflict with their religious beliefs hence the complexity. Therapists therefore require sensitivity to both when working with diverse individuals, families or groups. It is imperative that therapists develop multicultural sensitivity to understand, appreciate and respect these perspectives and not make assumptions when working with clients from diverse backgrounds. For example, as part of coping family members may have encounters with the deceased that may occur in dreams or when bereaved persons report having seen, felt, smelled, or talked with the deceased may have cultural explanations. Besides, spiritual, moral, or religious practices and activities may be perceived as helpful in coping with the loss, especially in dealing with guilt feelings (Smid et al, 2018). The therapist's role would be a deeper understanding of client perspective and how to support the healing process.

VIII. Conclusion

Egunjobi tried to bring out metaphysically, the critical question of human life after death. This he did by use of the self- coined transvitation concept, a new theory which signifies close interrelationship with world religion beliefs like, reincarnation, transmigration and resurrection. The central argument is that death is not the end of man but leads to change of one's state of life and that there is life beyond death which accords with the teaching of religion. Although the story is fictional, the ideas tackled are relatable to everyday experiences of man as he ponders over life after death, the relationship with the Maker and whether resemblance between people is a sign of reincarnation or transmigration. The author relates critically the underlying fact that life doesn't end with death, as a belief in many world religions. Transmigration of souls, and related concepts are common in many cultures around the world, and these beliefs have had a powerful impact on their lives and cultures taking different forms.

At death, there are cultural beliefs about meeting the dead in the afterlife and his spirit watching over those left behind. The concepts discussed are a reality of the challenges clients may present in therapy including how to cope with death of a loved one, disruption of death in the family system and why it happens especially where one dies young. In most African cultures when someone dies young the question is who is responsible and why. It is therefore critical that a therapist understands, appreciates and respects the cultures and spiritual contexts of

clients considering different human beings respond to differently to death. This is best done at assessment which should be comprehensive enough to incorporate the cultural and spiritual dimensions as these will also influence the process of healing.

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