

# The Phenomenon of Reincarnation in Traditional African Society: A Reflection on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Gracy Osifo's *Dizzy Angel*

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## Abstract

Reincarnation is a concept with a plethora of literatures in the field of research. Despite this, it has remained abstruse, skeptical, thorny and something of esoteric philosophical knowledge to many. This stems from the variety of hypothetical stance of scholars and opinion molders on the topic. While the western world regards it as a primitive belief of the ignorant heathen based on their logic of the new 'resurrection orientation,' according to the Christian tenet, the traditional African society is wedded to the belief. Based on this, the research attempts to ascertain the veracity of reincarnation as a phenomenon and its influence in traditional African society. This it does through reflections on two selected texts by Africans, which are: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta and *Dizzy Angel* by Gracy Osifo. The reflections are based on Plato's philosophical proposition(s) on reincarnation. The paper discovers that in traditional African society, reincarnation is not only seen as a cultural significance but also an eternal verity. However, it urges more objective researches on this topic so as to unravel the mystery behind born-to-die children's reincarnation which this paper notes in passing as a controversial rarity in traditional African setting.

**Keywords:** *Reincarnation, Traditional African Society, Cultural Significance, Belief System, Rebirth, Death, Birth.*

## INTRODUCTION

In human race, there are always some experiences that have not been able to put to rest cosmologically in analytical philosophy. One of it is re-embodiment or better still, what is called reincarnation. Reincarnation may translate to taking on bodily form again by a soul after death. Some scholars will prefer calling it rebirth. It can be likened to taking off some clothes and putting on new other ones in simple terms. It goes by different names in line with the different forms of re-embodiment which applies to all beings, from the lowest to the highest. However, this research focuses on the particular form of re-embodiment which pertains to man alone-reincarnation.

Reincarnation is a concept of constant universal debate in terms of belief system. The Western societies have a different view of it from both the Eastern and traditional African societies. For instance, the western countries have always disputed the eternal verity and validity of reincarnation because they feel it threatens their faith and belief in the Bible. They have their culture tied around the Christian tenets. So, it is viewed as a forbidden fruit in that part of the world. However, this after-life issue is not supposed to be treated with a dismissive

logic. Burley (2016:15-38) agrees with this view when he wonders why reincarnation being one of the many simple beliefs about what happens when we die should hover in cobweb of doubts in the philosophy of religion corridor. In fact, this goes to show that reincarnation has not been demystified and as a result, has remained a rocket science till today. Scholars have continued to discuss it in their writings but parenthetically sometimes, according to available evidence (Anderson, 1974:82; Knox, 1974:93-94; Quinn, 1978:354). All these have made reincarnation look not only Latin and Greek to the curious mind but also fiction and fashioned out.

Contrary to the above, both the Eastern and traditional African societies are wedded to reincarnation, so much that it forms a necessary part of their existential concerns. These societies are immersed in esoteric practices or beliefs, mysticism and patriarchal spirits, and cherish their relationship as a vital priority. To them, reincarnation is a phenomenon that provides credible answers to the questions about humanity's essence, origin and divine decree. As a result, those who doubt the reality of rebirth are said to wallow in spiritual penury in their own eyes. While they refer to the westerners as people with an 'unwashed eyes' for opposing reincarnation vehemently, the western world bases its opposition on the Bible or the logic of new 'resurrection orientation'.

From the above, one can see that reincarnation has been a universal issue with vital components requiring sensory or extrasensory perceptions. This is owing to the fact that factors inherent in it such as life, death, spirit and matter are metaphysically and epistemologically open-ended terms. Of course, there is no part of the world one can be without finding people with strong faith in spiritual matters amidst the everyday struggles for survival, shrouded in uncertainty. This has been the case with traditional African society. They believe that the dead are not gone forever. As a result, they are in constant communion with the spirits of their ancestors. This underlines their conviction in the possibility of the return of these spirits to the world by assuming a new flesh in the form of newborn. In contrast, the western world that has metamorphosed into modern society today supports the notion that upon death, the physical body falls to pieces. They refer to this reincarnation as a myth, superstition and primitive belief. This is a pure blatant contradiction to reality for those from traditional African setting.

As a mind-boggling aspect of reality, reincarnation has been constantly seen by the traditional African society as a metaphysical clue to the mystery of life and death. To them, natural law of cycle seems to apply here. Therefore, if trees should spring up and later die, a year comes and goes; the moon and the sun rise and set, why would human mind not know that life on this plane, earth, would toe same cyclic designs? So, rebirth or reincarnation as the case may be, is one of the numerous cyclic designs which involve humans. Dr de Purucker (1974) affirms this cyclic pattern of life in terms of evolution as he says: "Growth is eternal. Evolution is without beginning and it is endless. We pass through all the mansions of life, as the ages of eternity slowly stream by into the limitless ocean of the past". In other words, our soul is eternal, desiring progression, and can transit through experiences from period to period, wearing new flesh so as to enable it get to its final total growth and self-expression.

With these, one can see that human life is truly an essential part of extraterrestrial developmental plan or arrangement. So, it is not surprising when people ask out of curious thirst for knowledge in search of answers why we live, as well as the purpose of this life. Ordinarily, academic researches would have cleared some cobweb of confusion here, but the worry and headache trying to get soothing clarity on the mystery of after-life through

scholarship has been that there is a plethora of dissenting voices. The slant views on it by some of these scholars result from their religious affiliations according to available evidence.

Despite the dissenting voices against reincarnation, the phenomenon has continued to loom large in the daily lives of the traditional Africans, including those from eastern societies such as China, India, Japan, among others. For instance, in traditional African society, there is the belief that the name one bears contributes a lot in the life one lives. As a result, names such as 'Nnanna' in Ibo ethnic society and 'Babatunde' in Yoruba ethnic society, (all in Nigeria) which both mean "my father's father" are suggestive of coming back to life again by a dead ancestor. The ancestor here according to Mbiti (1990), is the living death. The personalities of the bearers of these names may physically resemble those of the men named after them, or something in their behaviours pointing out the men's past lives is found in them. In other words, the names represent past parents, siblings or relatives of the bearers who lived in the past but believed to have been reborn. This may explain why Ajaye (2021) boldly asserts that reincarnation is not a Christian doctrine but a fundamental belief in African traditional religion... These people are treated with love, care and respect beyond their birth by the people around them, believing that their past parents have come back to live with them. In view of this, this research attempts to ascertain the veracity of reincarnation and its sway in the lives of the traditional Africans in the traditional African setting. This it does with reflections on two texts written by Buchi Emecheta, called *The Joys of Motherhood* and the other by Gracy Osifo known as *Dizzy Angel*. The research is a qualitative one anchored on Plato's philosophical proposition on reincarnation. While the paper notes that reincarnation is seen as a doctrine and almost a cultural significance in traditional African society, it observes that the western world has continued to dismiss it with a wave of voice. Meanwhile, more researches are needed on this topic to unravel nuances around the reincarnation of born-to-die children type, which in the opinion of this paper, remains controversial and hazy.

### Origin of Reincarnation

Reincarnation is traced to cultural significance of people of the earliest time. Probably, this may explain why it always suffers bullying and manhandling academically as a superstitious belief, encouraged by the western malignant attitude against it. This apart, story told that it is a part of native mores in India then near 800BC. It later spreads as a cultural identity in some eastern religious practices in China, Japan, among others. Buddha is the one that shifts the narrative of reincarnation from mythical and ritualistic to rational and ethical principles (Karel Werner, 2014:5). More so, the scholarly contributions of Brahmana then are equally supportive in the development of doctrine of rebirth, especially in Upanishad. The doctrine tends to center around karmic law and its repercussions, as well as imbalance in the favour people enjoy in life. This imbalance of life in terms of doing well or bad by people in the eastern religion is interpreted to be what the previous life on earth presents. So, they believe through the doctrine of reincarnation that one can suffer or enjoy in this life according to one's past life deeds.

Outside of this, in the traditional African society (talking about the African continent), reincarnation has a root in such societies as Lango and Sebei in Uganda, Nupe, Ibos and Yorubas of Nigeria, Akan in Ghana, Akamba in Kenya and Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, Luo and Illa of Zambia, among others (The Sunrise Magazine, 1980). In this part of the world and continent, there is no clear-cut period in the past traced to be the origin of reincarnation as every available record shows that it has been around Africa as a time honoured practice. Therefore, unlike in eastern countries under Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, and so on, Africa

under traditional tribal culture, the creed of many lives and bodies belongs to an immemorial past.

However in the traditional African society, the issue of rebirth or reincarnation is understood to be one of the common means of showing family solidarity and unbroken inter-generational unity in the cycle of existence (Akinpelu Oyekunle and Ezekiel Mkhwanazi, 2024:3157). As a result, there are variations of reincarnation among these African societies. While some practice partial reincarnation, others engage in total practice of it. For instance, in the ancient Egypt, there is this believe in rebirth that human body is of many different parts. So, they view reincarnation from the angle of man having multiple bodies. This apart, in Zambia, some tribal societies refer to reincarnation as *musedi chingule*. This expression represents “double shadow” in its interpretation. They believe that soul is spirit which survives physical death only to pick up another flesh much later for life’s continuation. Then, the Illa people believe that in reincarnation, the spirit is without sex. In Ghana, the Akan people accept that unless the soul reaches its goal and fulfills it, it will continue to be born many times. It confirms what Jones (1962:55) says “...that reincarnation is a hand that man has stretched out for that fuller life”.

From the above, it is crystal clear that the death of one does not end everything about one in life in traditional African society. Plato agrees with this when he says that the indestructible human soul appears in different bodies at different times (Phaedo: 80b). This is further affirmed by Douglas Campbell (2022:643) when he states that reincarnation is the primary tool that the gods have to ensure the perfection of the cosmos. So, to the traditional Africans, it is really an eternal verity, not mythology as some critics say, though the origin of reincarnation in the African continent belongs to the hazy past. It is a spiritual imperative to both the eastern and traditional African society.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Reincarnation is a concept mired down in a fray of belief among the western, eastern and traditional Africa societies. Except the western world, from the eastern society down to the traditional African one, reincarnation is seen as a formulated worldview with sufficient answers to existential concerns. However, reincarnation to the western world is an anathema, fantasy and out of fashion idea bearing unsettling experiences. Therefore, everything about it is riding on the orientation of one.

Reincarnation is derived from the Latin etymological words-‘re’, meaning, again, back from and ‘incarnatus’ which is to make flesh. In other words, reincarnation is simply the belief of soul coming back again from the great world beyond wearing or bearing new flesh. No wonder Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony (2014:22) submits that the Greeks and the Orientals would define reincarnation as the eternity of the soul. This points out that the death of flesh is an entryway to afterlife by the soul. So, it survives death and journeys on while the flesh or this mortal coil is shuffled off.

Moreover, some scholars may approach the idea of reincarnation from the angle of death-birth recurrence. In view of this, Anameze (1996:12) argues that reincarnation is “the belief in a cyclic process of death and birth”. This is further affirmed by Ekwunife (1999:14-21) when he says that it is “a cyclic return of a dead personality into a new born child of their families”. By extension, the Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Philosophy refers to reincarnation as “the postulated rebirth of the human soul in another form after bodily death”. Then, to Freeman

(1974), it is the cycle of successive rebirth. All these show that Jack London in *The Star Rover* is right when he says that he started life not at his birth, but long ago for he had been for several years and vowed that he would still be born again and again times without number, hear him:

I did not neither begin when I was born, nor when I was conceived. I have been growing, developing through incalculable myriads of millenniums. All my previous selves have their voices, echoes, promptings, in me. Oh, incalculable times again shall I be born (1915).

So, here, Jack is talking about cyclic life-death he has undergone and will continue to.

On a clearer note, in traditional African society, some tribal societies believe that the soul that reincarnates is mature and may be multiple. As a result, such a soul may be reborn in the corporeal realm, yet, remains in the metaphysical world. Following this, Arazu (2004:4) notes that:

It is the coming back to birth of the dead on our earth, of someone who has achieved what the society accepts as adulthood and maturity and merited to be reborn to carry out a definite assignment. Same ancestor existing in the spirit world is said to reincarnate in more than one actually living person.

If Arazu is making a sense in this regard, the curious mind will definitely see born-to-die children (Ogbanje or Abiku) as not qualified to reincarnate because they are not fully mature and do not attain adulthood in the eyes of the society. They can be regarded as an unusual or controversial type of reincarnation since their cyclic death is hapless and cursed probably by spirit deities or kindred spirits they always have a pact and communion with. They are called changelings in mythic ideation.

In view of the above, Cardinal Francis Arinze, as a disciple of the modern religious philosophy acknowledges the fact about reincarnation. Arinze (1971) states that “There is a belief in reincarnation... Among the ancestors, only the good ones are believed to be reincarnated”. This confession leaves a question mark still on the status of these born-to-die children. This is because they have neither a good life lived at the tender age they die, nor attained adulthood enough to be regarded as ancestors. Some people may even classify them as devil incarnate, otherwise *diabolus incarnatus* in Latin. So, can anything good come out of the devil? This forms part of the reason the research reflects on born-to-die children as reincarnation type in one of the novels selected for review.

Furthermore, some traditionalists in Africa will hold the view that in reincarnation, the soul does not reincarnate, but the influential traits of a person. As a result, Opoku (1978:138) submits that “the African belief in reincarnation is quite distinctive for it is only the dominant characteristics and the spirit of the ancestors which are believed to be reincarnated in his descendants and not his soul”. This is a different view of reincarnation in the eastern societies which believe that it is the soul that reincarnates. Moreover, Okwesili (1993:5) toes the same line with Opoku when he states “... a child on his way into the world goes under the influence of his spirit and the child is given certain physical traits...”

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that the concept of reincarnation has tapering nuances across the societies that espouse it as part of their cultural patterns. It emerges from secret spiritual teachings in spiritual temples and esoteric beliefs of the people as well as mythic reality. What is more, its veracity in traditional African society is dominantly timeless. It is really a theory of cyclic birth and death. This research therefore reflects on the reincarnation of



the old, the young and that of the born-to-die children otherwise changelings, in the selected texts to reinforce the belief in traditional African society as a phenomenon.

### **Plato's philosophical proposition of Reincarnation**

Plato believes that reincarnation is real. His proposition about reincarnation is that of soul and body. He describes the soul as immortal and indestructible (Republic: 608d, Meno: 81e). This also has some echoes in the remotest parts of Africa. Plato is of the view that soul is rewarded through reincarnation all riding on its past deeds. This position takes root in the karmic law and its consequences which eastern religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Taoism, among others teach their members.

Plato's postulation here is that the soul survives death. As a result, he declares in his *Metaphysics* that a made soul can be immortal and self-moving (Timaeus 34b7 and 92c7). This may be why he refers to the soul as being superior to the body which succumbs to death. He clarifies this view in *Epinomis*. *Epinomis* is assumed to be spurious dialogue in philosophy with anonymous author (Enrico Volpe, 2023:15).

Moreover, despite the superiority of the soul over the body, Plato sees both of them from the angle of opposition and interaction. Though contradictory terms, they exist interdependently. He outlines hair, bone, flesh and blood as parts of the body and desire, pleasure, habits, beliefs and characteristics as components of the soul (Phaedo:265e1-2). He argues that the soul works as a system with the body and their many parts. However, he therefore concludes that since the opposite of life is death, the living creatures and thing come to be from the dead (Phaedo, 71e). This underlines life-death cyclic pattern, which is reincarnation.

From the views of Plato above, Mbiti (1975:119) agrees with him that the soul lasts beyond death as being seen in both religion and philosophy. However, what is not captured by Plato here is whether he believes in total or partial reincarnation. These two aspects of reincarnation have been said to exist among its crusaders. Norman (2010:11) distinguishes between the two aspects when he says that total reincarnation involves..."the passing of the complete vital essence of a person from one body into another, without any residue vital essence left behind in some sort of afterlife world" while "only some of the characteristics of a deceased ancestor are reborn into one or more descendants" under partial reincarnation. To sum it up, he states that African traditional society practises partial reincarnation.

Following these submissions here, the research therefore examines both the veracity and the extent of sway reincarnation holds in traditional African society and their lives in the selected texts. This provides a platform to unveil whether there is either total or partial reincarnation in the belief system of African natives as part of their cultural identity.

### **Empirical Evidence of Reincarnation in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood***

The issue of reincarnation is an intellectually overwhelming aspect of the traditional Africans and their lives. There are divergent views about it. Instead of these views producing therapeutic, convergent convictions, they have continued to tower in endless parallel disputations. Therefore, this research in the midst of these raging verbal gymnastics urges all parties to be objective and fair in order to stand future researchers on the topic in good stead.

However, Emecheta has through her novel entitled *The Joys of Motherhood* laboured artistically to provide some clarifications in the controversy that reincarnation belief presents. In the text, she handles reincarnation as an African belief to the level that even if one is

opposing it, one will not feel it lost on one. In fact, her approach to it captures the everyday experience of the traditional African people.

In the text under reflection, Emecheta uses the characters such as the slave girl of Agunwa, Nwokocha Agbadi's senior wife, as well as Nnamdio, Nnu Ego's son, to make reincarnation more real than imagined. In the land of Ogboli traditional African society which is one of the rural settings of the text, Nwokocha Agbadi is known as a skilled hunter warrior and traditionalist with rare courage. In a group hunting expedition in Ogboli, he proves himself an exceptional brave hunter by killing an elephant almost at the cost of his life as he sustains a fatal injury on the shoulder. While his home is seethed with the villagers on his feat, the colleagues bring home the injured Agbadi and leave him in the care of one medicine man at Ogboli. This medicine man, also known as "dibia" (in local parlance, meaning diviner) puts Nwokocha Agbadi in an intensive care with herbal concoctions. In this condition, because Agbadi is in love with Ona, the daughter of Obi Umunna of Ogboli, the damsel is brought in to look after him to help his recovery emotionally. His senior wife, Agunwa, is not considered for this job. At night, love-making escapade occurs between Agbadi and Ona, his caregiver and concubine, with Agunwa, the senior wife, left watching the event helplessly in bitterness. This emotional harvest results in the pregnancy of Ona. As Agunwa battles to bear the news of Ona's pregnancy much later, she falls ill. She has a slave girl who looks after her while she is treated by the medicine man. The medicine man's effort is not enough to save her life, so, she passes on.

The next is preparation for her interment. The Ogboli tradition demands that any villager of Agunwa's social status who is mature and has attained full adulthood should be buried with a slave whenever the person dies if such a person has one. So, when the grave of Agunwa is ready, the eldest son of Agunwa drags her slave girl out amidst her protest to be spared. He knocks her down to death with a stick on the head into the grave. Before she breathes her last, she vows to "come back" to life into Agbadi's family not as a slave this time but as a legitimate daughter. This apart, when Ona's pregnancy is due for delivery, she puts to bed a baby girl with a lump-like scar on the head. This lump is believed to be the scar of the stick used to knock down to death late Agunwa's slave who vows to return to life as a freeborn as the "dibia" (diviner) consulted declares that she is the reincarnation of the slave girl. So, she has fulfilled her promise of "coming back" to life. The baby is named Nnu Ego. As she grows up, a lot of sacrifices are carried out to appease her "chi" (personal god) so that she is misfortune-free in life. This is reincarnation at work.

In another development, when Nnu Ego finally grows into adulthood and marries, she stays in Lagos with the husband, Nnaife Owulum. With time, she becomes pregnant. One day, she gets a message that her father, Nwokocha Agbadi, is critically ill and at the point of death. She travels to Ogboli to see her father. At home, while she is discussing with her sick father, he touches her belly and immediately enters the throes of death and later dies. After his father's funeral, Nnu Ego returns with her husband to Lagos.

She gives birth shortly to a baby boy, resembling her late father in every way. Adankwo, a co-wife to Nnu Ego on seeing Nnu Ego's father's vital force or personality in the new born baby named him "Nnamdio", meaning 'my father is alive'. Adankwo believes together with others that Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father, has "come back" to life in the boy for he really looks like him. Meanwhile, the boy, as he grows up, behaves like the dead or late Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father (pp151-155).

In conclusion, Emecheta from the way she handles reincarnation in the text reveals that even if she has been initiated into the religious philosophy of the modern world by the “resurrection orientation” according to Archbishop Obinna, the pulse of reincarnation is still being felt around her. The type of reincarnation in the text involves the young represented by the slave girl, and that of the fully mature adult, represented by Nwokocha Agbadi. Apart from this, the observation made from the descriptions of the characters that portray reincarnation in the text, there is no need arguing endlessly because it appears as if she says to the reincarnation critics “welcome”, knowing full well that the belief is a moot point.

### **Empirical Evidence of Reincarnation in Gracy Osifo’s *Dizzy Angel***

As earlier noted, reincarnation has a spectrum of viewpoints but none seems to have produced a dowsing result so far. This is probably why it has remained controversial and thorny. On the pages of newspapers, journals, textbooks, discourse on reincarnation is seen luring every perceptive and analytical mind. All these are efforts to get to the root of this belief system. In the text under reflection by Osifo, it captures the reincarnation type called changelings in mythic thought or simply born-to-die children.

In Osifo’s novel, *Dizzy Angel*, she presents the belief system of Bebiri, an imaginary village in traditional African society, located in the eastern Nigeria, in an attempt to establish that there is reincarnation of that kind in Africa. She makes traditional African spiritual mystiques or ambience such as offering of sacrifices, libation, divination, incantation, black art, etc, unquestionable existence to the curious mind.

Osifo uses the character “Ogbanje” in Igbo whose English name is Hannah to drive home her proof of born-to-die children’s reincarnation in the text. She dies only to be reborn thereby suffering the mother. Ogbanje is so-called because her father, Dolise Agu, the mother, Obiageli and the entire household of Agu feel that they are tired of her “coming and going” (cyclic rebirth).

The name is recommended by a great medicine man called Tatakori, as a way to stop Ogbanje from her cyclic birth and death. According to Tatakori, the name ‘Ogbanje’, will sound unpleasant, repulsive and rejecting to her kindred’s spirits in the spirit world. Apart from giving her the name, she is also given tattooed marks on her cheeks with some thick vertical lines to make her look ugly to the killer spirits. To cap it all, she is even betrothed to an Olokun priest in an effort to make her live (pp43-46).

Due to her several birth and death in the past, this last time she is born, the father, Dolise Agu, does not bother to say a word of welcome to her (p43). Everybody believes that she is the same persons born before her and who have died time without number in infancy, and probably takes joy in reincarnating constantly. This is an act that has kept making some scholars doubt recognizing born-to-die children’s reincarnation.

Curious to let her live, sacrifices and rituals are carried out for her to stay alive, but at a stage, she begins to undergo or experience a sense of fainting bouts. This is interpreted by Tatakori and other deific representatives with spiritual knowledge as a sign that she is itching to go back to her kindred’s spirits, a thing people around her have been suspecting right from her birth. Out of fear of losing her again to the cold hand of death, her grandmother, Odede, intensifies consultations with oracles and medicine men in a bid to find life-strengthening solution for Ogbanje (or Hannah). However, the truth is that changelings naturally wicked children. They are not the kind of humans that live but are born to torment their mothers through constant birth and death cycle, usually at a tender age or even in infancy.



So, when Ogbanje clocks twelve, since other children before her usually dies at the age of ten or before, Dolise Agu and his family begins to have a slender hope of her staying alive. As a result, her father, Dolise, asks her to promise him she would not die again in his conversation with her as seen here: "...But you must promise me one thing, he paused. "What?" asked Ogbanje looking up at her father. 'What must I promise you? 'Two things actually', said Dolise, looking straight into Ogbanje's eyes. 'The first thing is that, you must promise me not to die in your youth' (p48). In this discussion, Ogbanje's father is putting it to her that she wields the power that allows her to die many times and be born again and again but she protests it thus: 'I can't promise any such thing. Do I know when I will die?... remember that I do not own myself' (p49). By this, she is referring to her pact with the kindred's spirits in the last statement.

As part of the efforts to make Ogbanje live, the Olokun priest she is betrothed to recommends digging out Ogbanje's treasure from the ground so as to disable the life-threatening pact she has kept with her killer spirits in the great world beyond. When the exercise begins, it produces unbelievable, shocking results as presented here by the narrator, thus: 'Uloji, the Olokun priest took Ogbanje round her father's compound under the gaze of neighbours, friends and her parents. After a lot of sweating, pleading and coaxing, Ogbanje very reluctantly pointed at the umbrella tree in the center of the compound. Uloji dug furiously, reciting incantations. After digging for thirty minutes, he brought out a bundle of things tied together with a red strap of cloth. There was a yell of amazement from the spectators. The bundle contained human hair, needles, several pieces of cloth, which Uloji claimed belonged to Ogbanje, and some gold earrings. In the center of the bundle was a round, shiny, red stone. This, Uloji said, was the most the most important treasure (pp147-148)'.

After this event, Ogbanje begins to radiate life and does not die again to be reborn. In other words, breaking her spiritual pact with the killer spirits has stopped her from her endless cycle of birth and rebirth. So, one can see that born-to-die children can be stopped from premature death. What is more, the 'Ogbanje' (spirit child) in Igbo and 'Abiku' (born-to-die child) in Yoruba ethnic societies of Nigeria are viewed by Nwankwo Nnabuchi (1987:35) as "...living spirits who are free from any bondage, except that of their own volition, they have chosen that route of spirituality". So, they are rich and well-provided for by the killer spirits that they find nothing so attractive, material wise, as to stay alive on earth upon birth.

Chinwe Achebe (1962:11) submits that Ogbanjes or Abikus are "those wicked children who when they died, entered their mother's womb to be born again". Achebe (1986:27) further opines that Ogbanjes are...part human and part spirit beings whose lives are confounded by the added loyalty they owe to spirit deities. She concludes that Ogbanje's "one common characteristics is that they die not necessarily young, but prematurely by choice". Moreover, Ekwunife (2000) believes that Ogbanje's reincarnation is not a genuine one and therefore, should not be confused with the belief in many bodies and soul as far as the tribal societies in Africa are concerned. He adds that genuine reincarnation accepted in Africa ensures ...the bond between the living and the dead.

To sum it up, Osifo has done her bit by showing readers what she knows about the fate of born-to-die children's reincarnation. The question here remains whether this type of reincarnation they represent is acknowledged in Africa as genuine or rejected. This has raised a lot of dusts among scholars. In the midst of the raging debates, the research calls for further investigations that will help clarify this nagging belief system.

## Influence of Reincarnation in Traditional African Society

In society where reincarnation as a belief system is entrenched in the people, especially in Africa, a number of things are felt and observed in the people's lives. For instance, where it is discovered in African society that a person who has lived in a family and died, reincarnated in a child, the relatives of the child and other people around will always accord such a child filial piety, avuncular support, maternal or paternal kindness, respect, love and solidarity. These serve as an honour to the departed in the fold and as well, an ancestral veneration.

In the text, *The Joys of Motherhood* reviewed here, when Ona gives birth to Nnu Ego, the identification and declaration by the diviners that she is the reincarnation of Agunwa's slave girl who vowed to return to life as a freeborn before dying marks a new phase of life in Agbadi, the father. First, Nwokocha Agbadi executes a lot of sacrifices to appease her 'chi' (personal god, representing the dead slave girl of Agunwa), who manifests her personality or vital force in Nnu Ego, the daughter. This is to ensure her life is misfortune-free. Second, the joy Nnu Ego gives to her dad is of immense scale. Moreover, others within the family circle and beyond are always kind and helpful to her. Also, one can observe even with a look without blinkers at the birth of Ogbanje in *Dizzy Angel* by Osifo, that at the time she begins to show a sign of staying alive, her father, Dolise Agu, wants her to promise him she will not die again. Even her grandmother, Odede, is seen consulting diviners and oracles while at the same time carrying out sacrifices to guarantee the stay of Ogbanje alive. All these are a demonstration of intense love and solidarity around these children by their families and relatives.

Again, when Nnamdio is born by Nnu Ego, everybody sees from the appearance and conduct of the boy that Nnu Ego's dead father has returned to life, hence, the name, 'Nnamdio'. The love of the mother and that of the relatives of Nnaife Owulu, the father, knows no bound as they make him a rallying point. So, the influence of reincarnation in the lives of traditional Africans is enormous. However, one can detect who is reincarnated through the name a person takes, as there is this strong belief in Africa that any name a person answers contributes a lot to either who or what such a person represents or who or what he or she becomes in life. The characters that are used to portray reincarnation in the texts have symbolic names. 'Ogbanje' is born-to-die child or spirit child or changelings in mythic thought. That is the Igbo name for those wicked children who take delight in dying only to be born again and again. Then, 'Nnamdio' is simply 'my father is alive'. As a result, names in this regard can signify that there is a reincarnation of a person(s) who has lived before, and can at the same time attract positive ambience around the bearers of the names.

## CONCLUSION

Human knowledge is more stimulating in a pancosmic vision of reality than the terrestrial philosophy only. Therefore, from one person to the other, there is knowledge variation. No one knows it all. One man's meat is another's poison. Life is a ghost train, from physical to metaphysical. Death on the other hand is a mystery. When we are born, we have both soul and body. However, at death, do they die and rot away in abyss? The perceptive mind would always believe that it is only the soul that survives death, while the body dilapidates and decomposes. The soul then will be re-clothed through another birth to begin another life journey. It sounds like myth. This has been one of the articles of faith of the traditional Africans that shape their acceptance of reincarnation. What is more, this is one of the reasons that informed tracing the veracity of reincarnation and its influence in the lives of the traditional Africans in this research.

Apart from the above, reincarnation borders on the philosophical variance of people. From the discourse so far, one can see that it is an explosive matter. The eastern, western and traditional African societies are on different wavelengths on the issue. This could be traced to their orientation backgrounds. As a result, unless this biased mind is dropped, reincarnation will never be discussed with an objective mind or mindset thereby making it more mystified than it appears at the moment.

Finally, one thing discovered in the course of this research is that the belief in reincarnation by the traditional African society is tied up to ancestral veneration and communion. To them, the dead are not gone forever but have gone for “the inter-life period of rest”, according to Dr de purucker (1974). They ‘come back’ to life after the rest through reincarnation, although, this may likely generate an endless argument. This may probably explain why Sylvester Ogbeni (2025:135) submits that reincarnation is the concept of birth, death and rebirth while adding that it is a contentious phenomenon in religious cycle across the globe. In fact, from the finding of this paper, reincarnation is really something appearing in the lives of the tribal communities as a cultural significance. Owing to this, the research encourages further researches on this topic to be based on a more scientific method so as to achieve more results and findings that will help clarify the enigma behind reincarnation and its aspects.

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