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## Full Length Research

# The Epistemology of ‘gods’ and ‘goddesses’ in Yoruba Traditional Thought: Imperative in understanding their Contemporary thought patterns, Beliefs and Values

Abiodun M. Jinadu, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria

[abbeyjinadu2015@gmail.com](mailto:abbeyjinadu2015@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The gods and goddesses are objects of worship and reverence among the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria. The aim of the essay is to analyse the roles of gods and goddesses in African (Yoruba) culture and their impacts on contemporary societal values. The purpose of this essay is to engage in a cursory analysis of Yoruba gods and goddesses and their significance in understanding the unique Yoruba culture. The justification for this study arises from the Yoruba people's strong attachment to their beliefs, despite the significant influence of modernity, technology, and world religions such as Christianity and Islam. Epistemological analysis is the methodology employed to dig out the knowledge embedded in Yoruba traditional thought on gods and goddesses as well as to conceptualise the idea of gods and goddesses in Yoruba society. Value theory serves as the theoretical framework for this research. An extensive discussion of the gods and goddesses in Yoruba thought reveals that they bring varieties of goodness to contemporary society. This subject is discussed in a section before the conclusion follows.

**Keywords:** Gods, goddess, Yoruba, Epistemology, Belief, Values,

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## INTRODUCTION

The Yoruba people of West West Africa Nigeria and Benin Republic) have a rich cultural heritage rooted in their ancient beliefs and practices (PHOEBE, 2004). At the centre of this cultural landscape are the revered gods and goddesses, known as the Orishas, who embody the forces of nature, human virtues, and vices. These divine beings play a vital role in Yoruba society, influencing various aspects of life, from birth to death and beyond (Abimbola, 2005). These divine beings embody the forces of nature, human virtues, and vices, influencing various aspects of Yoruba life. Through their stories, myths, rituals, and symbolism, the Orishas provide an avenue for

understanding Yoruba values, morality, and spirituality (Lawal, 2003).

The problem identified in this essay is there is a lack of philosophical analysis and depth of the nature and extent of influence of gods and goddesses in Yoruba literaryworks (Bruno, 2013). This knowledge gap has led to a superficial understanding of Yoruba culture, neglecting the rich philosophical insights it offers. The problem is further compounded by the dominance of Western philosophical perspectives, which often overlook the unique contributions of African cultures like Yoruba. African gods generally have a negative reputation, especially for the way they are explained by the Western communities. The Westernisation of Africa has made

Yoruba indigenes look upon their past gods as evil and undesirable. Additionally, there exists an unspoken stigma against anyone who dares to learn more about these gods and goddesses (Abu, 2022). This is because the Western world introduced different religious practices, mainly Christianity, and Islamists described Yoruba gods and goddesses as unholy entities who were to be relegated. Given this, it is the task of this essay to engage in an epistemological search of the role of gods and goddesses in shaping societal values and norms in Yoruba society (Omotade, 2017).

The aim of this work is to attempt an epistemological analysis of the idea of the gods and goddesses in Yoruba socio-cultural thought to seek the knowledge and values it gives. This will significantly contribute to strengthening our understanding of the epistemic closures affecting Yoruba philosophy, epistemology, ethics, and worldview (Afolayan, 2016).

This work argues that the gods and goddesses in Yoruba mythology, philosophy, thought, and belief systems shape perspectives on values, morality, and behavioural patterns (Adebanwi and Ebenezer, 2010). Furthermore, an epistemological analysis of these deities will demonstrate how they embody and promote human values, offering a distinct perspective on ethics and morality. It is also observed that the gods and goddesses in Yoruba mythology play a crucial role in shaping societal values and norms; a philosophical analysis of their roles reveals a unique ethical framework that prioritises community, balance, and harmony.

The purpose of analysing this problem is threefold: Firstly, it seeks to provide a philosophical analysis of the roles of gods and goddesses in Yoruba mythology and to highlight their influence on societal values and norms. Secondly, it aims to demonstrate the significance of Yoruba philosophy in contributing to global philosophical discourse, challenging the dominance of Western perspectives. Finally, this long essay hopes to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Yoruba culture, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and exchange.

In the Yoruba ethical system, Olodumare is the Supreme Being, the creator of man, the prime and final source of guidance, and the custodian of morality. God made man, and it is He who implants in him the sense of right and wrong (Haslanger, 2018). The concept or the issue of right has always been part of human nature, And He, the Supreme Being, is the universally recognised binding moral value in the religion of the Yoruba.

This study employs epistemological analysis as the method of research. Epistemological analysis will serve as a tool to unveil the historical background, origin, nature, and limits of knowledge of gods and goddesses within the understanding of traditional Yoruba society. Epistemological analysis enables us to identify the types of knowledge that gods and goddesses bring, determine the relationships between them, and distinguish their

characteristics (Osuji, 2021). Through this method, we will examine the concepts and relevance of the ideologies of traditional Yoruba thought patterns and contemporary Yoruba philosophy concerning gods and goddesses and explain their role in shaping the history of Yoruba values, beliefs, behaviours, thought patterns, and more. It will enable us to unveil, explain, and interpret the phenomena underpinning the Yoruba concepts involved. Epistemological analysis enables us to subject the role of gods and goddesses in shaping society to a critical and rigorous examination, especially those sources of data obtained from texts, journals, cultural reviews, anthropological works, and other forms of historical archives.

The significance of this work is both practical and theoretical. It is practical in correcting misconceptions about Yoruba myths, thought patterns, and lexicology that have been misunderstood. It is theoretical in that it contributes essentially to literature on Yoruba philosophy and value. It thus contributes deeply to the understanding of Yoruba culture and philosophy, highlighting its unique ethical and cultural framework. It provides new perspectives on the roles of gods and goddesses in understanding Yoruba societal values and norms, as well as offering a fresh perspective on ethics and morality emphasises community balance and harmony, showcasing a rich worldview within the diversity of African philosophical thought. This research has significantly promoted cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. It enhances our understanding of Yoruba mythology, highlighting its philosophical significance in shaping the people and their daily lives.

This research work is done within the philosophical lens of the role of Yoruba gods and goddesses and shall be limited to the traditional Yoruba landscape. Philosophical work on the Yoruba notion of value, morality and social justice shall be consulted as well.

## 2. The Nature of Value Theory

Value theory involves various approaches that examine how, why, and to what degree humans value things and whether the object or subject of valuing is a person, idea, object, or anything else. It unravels further that it is also known as ethics or axiology. Value determines conditions of being and non-being, determining relationships as well as goals and processes. Values are important since they determine how we see, what actions are worthy, and how they are to be pursued. This is where historical factors play important roles in the engineering of values in society. The engineered values are then regarded as cultures: they are enshrined in the stories, theories, technologies, arts, educational systems, religious practices, patterns of relations (economic, political, filial, relaxation, sexual orientations) and

numerous others for making peace, war, conflict management, etc.

The term “value theory” is used in at least three different ways in philosophy. In its broadest sense, “value theory” is a catch-all label used to encompass all branches of moral philosophy, social and political philosophy, aesthetics, and sometimes feminist philosophy and the philosophy of religion, whatever areas of philosophy are deemed to encompass some “evaluative” aspect. In its narrowest sense, “value theory” is used for a relatively narrow area of normative ethical theory, particularly but not exclusively, of concern to consequentialists. In this narrow sense, “value theory” is roughly synonymous with “axiology.”. Axiology can be thought of as primarily concerned with classifying what things are good and how good they are. For instance, a traditional question of axiology concerns whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states or objective states of the world (Mark 2008).

In a more useful sense, “value theory” refers to the area of moral philosophy that addresses theoretical questions regarding value and goodness across all varieties of value theory. The theory of value, so construed, encompasses axiology; theoretical questions about value constitute a core domain of interest in moral theory, often cross the boundaries between the normative and the metaethical, and have a distinguished history of investigation (Mark 2024).

Value theory involves various approaches that examine how, why, and to what degree humans value things and whether the object or subject of valuing is a person, idea, object, or anything else. Within philosophy, it is also known as ethics or axiology. Traditionally, philosophical investigations in value theory have sought to understand the concept of “the good”. Today, some work in value theory has trended more towards empirical science, recording what people do value and attempting to understand why they value it in the context of psychology, sociology and economics (Henderson, 2013). Critical thinking about values is part of a branch of philosophy called axiology, but when it comes to applying these values in real life, urgent decisions often take priority over theoretical ideas. For instance, pragmatism, a philosophy in the United States, is exemplified by the Trump administration in the White House.

It is metaphysics of values, a mode of understanding the foundations of existence and construction of reality. Saying that philosophy considers value does not mean that other intellectual disciplines do not do so, for the reason why these different areas command study is because they have enshrined in them cognitive or epistemic ideas, which are of interest to human beings intrinsically or instrumentally. To this end one can say that the humanities, including the social sciences, as well as the natural and applied sciences, are aimed at discovering intellectual secrets of nature, the

environment, and reality. All human societies have made efforts to gain ideas, information, and knowledge regarding all aspects of existence. Life is the first area of value that humans have examined, but in doing this, it has become clear that knowledge is probably the second most important of the values that human beings have discovered. Here, value theory will serve as a theoretical frame to examine the conception of gods and goddesses in Yoruba socio-cultural thought and belief patterns.

The Yorùbá civilisation is one of the most ancient, advanced, and urbanised in the world. Various forms of evidence have demonstrated this. Among these sources are the archaeological, anthropological, socio-political-cultural engineering, leisure and entertainment engagements, linguistic-communal organisations, highly articulate and well-formulated epistemological, scientific and mathematical traditions, technological and pharmacological traditions, ontological and axiological traditions and the values that feed, nurture and derive from these accoutrements of highly advanced culture (Ingham, 2004). This is because Yorùbá society is large, centralised in Western Nigeria, and diffused through various circumstances of dispersals and exigencies to other parts of Western and Central Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean; it is well-nigh impossible to annotate a homogenous value system; it will be trite to say such a diverse and highly civilised people would not have a homogenous value system. Hence, an awareness of this danger of presumed unanimity signals a caveat: that as much as even a small community of humans may display individual value variations, when it comes to large segments of humanity, indicating a common value system or tradition becomes even more challenging (Bewaji, 2016).

Even though each person in the community may have different values, it is still important to talk about a “common” value system that helps people understand important issues, make sense of things, and make decisions, based on the history and backgrounds of different cultures around the world. The Yorùbá value system is by far more advanced in being more eco-respecting, eco-friendly, and geared toward sustainable human habitation in a world in which he/she constitutes one small fraction of sentience. Our discussion will be developed as responses to the following questions: (a) What are values? (b) How are values derived? (c) Are there Yorùbá values? (d) What is the environment? (e) How are concepts of the environment derived? (f) What is the relationship between values and the environment? (g) What is the relationship between Yorùbá values and the environment? And (h) What inferences do these have for a one health approach to the environment and sustainable human global co-existence?

In virtue of human gregariousness, physiological, psychological, and intellectual dispositions, it can be argued that values underguard virtually all aspects of

human existence. Interactions and modes of being are moderated by ideas, beliefs, suppositions, and expectations that are steeped in Osuji (2021) and that create notions of values. Values evolve in various ways, consciously or otherwise, to authenticate the processes of being. One may also contend that it is not just human beings who evolve values; other primates and animals in nature, which have the capacity for feeling, emotion, memory, history, reason, and intellectual traditions, also develop value-like notions and find various ingenious ways to orchestrate and defend them. What, then, are values? (Bewaji, 2016)

### 3. The Gods and Goddess in Yoruba Traditional Thought

In Yoruba thought, God is known as Olodumare. Olodumare is the lord over all Yoruba divinities and human beings. This is because he created the divinities and all other living beings (Oladipupo, 2016). The Yoruba believe in one supreme God, Olorun/Olorun Olodumare. A people honour Olodumare and recognise Oduduwa as the arch-ancestor of the Yoruba (Sandra, 1996). Abimbola summarised the attributes of Olodumare, as the Yoruba High God has no cult of his own among the humans. He also has no temples or shrines. Sacrifices are never made to him. Consequently, Olodumare has no liturgy, iconography, or priesthood. He is the supreme example of an abstract divinity too mighty to be captured by any artistic, literary, or idealistic simplification (Adewale, 2008). Olodumare exists in the thoughts and minds of every Yoruba. Olodumare has a lot of similarities with the God of other religions. Andrea Greene has argued that African thoughts and practices of a supreme being change from time to time and from one tribe to another. Unlike divinities, Olodumare does not have a day or month set apart to worship him. All ordinary divinities have special days of worship and festivals. In Yoruba thought, every time people honour divinities, they are indirectly contacting Olodumare. He deals directly with human beings.

Osun is one divinity through whom the Yoruba relate to God. The other members of Orisa (divinities) are egungun masquerades, Oro, Obatala/Orisa-nla, Orunmila/fa, Sango, Oya, Iyemoja, Osun Osogbo, Esulalu, Orisa Oko, Sonponna, Orisa Ibeji, Osanyin and so on. All divinities owe their existence and personhood to Olodumare (Adewale, 2008). They are emissaries of Olodumare, God in Yoruba belief. From the beginning, all divinities originated in heaven, where God resides. Olodumare is considered both the father and mother of all divinities. All divinities function and serve as Olodumare's emissaries. Each deity has special priests, temples, religious communities and seasons of worship (Olu-Osayomi, 2017).

In Yoruba society, these divinities are instrumental to the continuance of peaceful co-existence. The divinities, which are the gods and goddesses, ensure there is protection of values, cultures and traditions, especially the statutory ideals of Olodumare in the lives of the people. The Yoruba society is known for her unique beliefs on gods and goddesses, which are conceived to be instruments of the Supreme Being (Olodumare). In Yoruba culture, gods and goddesses play a significant role in shaping societal values and norms. Idowu says in this regard that the Yoruba derive immediately from His own divine nature.

He is Oba Mimo, Oba Pipe-Pure King, Perfect King; He is Alaaafunfun-oke — The one clothed in white, who dwells above; He is Ikinnifin, Alatiko I ona — Essentially a white object, white fabric without pattern (entirely white). In Him alone can be resolved the ever-baffling problem of right conduct which we inevitably encounter in the divinities or ancestral sanctions. In order to aid man in ethical living, Olodumare has put in him Ifaaya — The Oracle of the Heart or The Oracle which is in the heart. It is this 'oracle of the heart' that guides man and determines his ethical life. One is a good or a bad person in accordance with how he responds to or disobeys; the guidance of the heart is a person's conscience — the law of God written in the heart (Olu-Osayomi, 2017).

As earlier mentioned, the Yoruba gods and goddesses include gun, Sango, Iyemoja, Osanyin, Orisa-nla, Osun, and other divinities in the Yoruba societies. Osun, as a special divinity of Osogbo, rules and protects the people from dangers and wars. Unlike most other divinities, Osun is not a seasonal goddess. She is active all year round. On the contrary, Sango, the god of thunder and lightning, is active only during the rainy season. A Yoruba proverb says, *enikan ki bu Sango leru*, meaning no one invokes Sango during the dry season (Bamgbose, 1968). He would not respond or act on behalf of the devotee during the dry season.

According to historical Yoruba beliefs, kings are considered as "alaseigbakeji Orisa", which means second in command to gods in nature and in authority. It adds more dignity to the personhood of Osun, as all the people in Osogbo, including the kings, recognise the authority of Osun. The official title of the king is "Ataoja". Ataoja means one who spreads his hands to welcome the fish of the Osun River during the Osun festival. Osun's authority is widely recognised among the Yoruba (Oyefeso, 2022). All prospective kings of Osogbo, otherwise known as the Ataoja of Osogbo, were religiously, physically and psychologically prepared by oral tradition for the throne of Osogbo. The Ataoja is the administrative and spiritual head of the town. Osun still influences the decisions of the king, chiefs, priests and the economy of Osogbo each day. Individually, the people of Osogbo honour her daily in words and deeds. She promotes communal harmony among the Osogbo people.

She also promotes harmony among divinities, Osogbo leadership and the people of Osogbo (Adewale, 2008).

According to Bolaji Idowu, he argues that the Yoruba gods and goddesses as messengers of Olodumare possess great powers (Olu-Osayomi, 2017). To him, Ogun is one of the earliest Yoruba deities that are said to derive their power directly from “Olodumare or “Olorun (the Supreme Being, or God; the sustainer and upholder of the universe). Ogun is an important and highly regarded Yoruba deity. He is described as a pan-Yoruba deity of fairly uniform character and significance, “the deity of iron and war”. (Peel, 1994). According to Yoruba mythology, Ogun was a hunter who usually came down from heaven by a “spider” thread upon the primordial marshy waste (Olu-Osayomi, 2017) for his hunting expedition. This was before the earth was founded. “There was a critical lacuna in the finishing of the universe as a unified cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings and between those beings and the forces of nature.” (Yakubu, 2009)

However, when the earth was founded and its furniture arranged, Ogun and other deities decided to come down from heaven to take over the affairs of the world. However, they were unable to navigate through the bush at a location referred to as “no road,” which caused them to stop and ultimately accept their fate (Olu-Osayomi, 2017). Orisanla tried to cut a way through, but his machete bent because it was lead. Of all the divinities, it was only Ogun who possessed the implement which was adequate for the task (Olu-Osayomi, 2017). So, he cleared a path with his magical tool. As a result of this, Ogun was invited to be their chief or head (Olu-Osayomi, 2017). By virtue of his power and status, Ogun received the title of Osin-Imale Chief among the divinities when they arrived at Ile-Ife, the “headquarters” (Olu-Osayomi, 2017). Therefore, Ogun was unable to adjust himself to live a settled community life because of his prowess in hunting and carnage. So, he decided to dwell on “Top of the Hill”, which means Ori-Oke. As “the lone one, after a short time, Ogun became tired of his seclusion and sought the settled life which he once rejected. At first, his fierce and forbidding appearance made it impossible for him to find a home in any community (Olu-Osayomi, 2017).

### 3.1 Historical and Cultural Context of Yoruba Gods and Goddesses

Africans love watching movies about foreign gods like Thor, Loki, Odin, and Zeus. They enjoy these films, unaware that the characters represent local gods from other cultures (Abu, 2022).

It is not only the supernatural that has been rejected; even certain indigenous traditions and the old traditional religion of the African (Yoruba) people have been devalued and abandoned for Christianity and Islam. The

myths that describe the presence of the Yoruba gods are quite intriguing. Aside from being intriguing, is it not also expected of us to cherish our traditions and uphold our religious beliefs? Individuals have the freedom to choose whatever religion they find solace in. If certain individuals have chosen to follow another religion as long as they strongly believe it is the right path to total spiritualism, that is good. However, this is not to say that individuals do not owe it to their roots to at least learn the ways of old (Abu, 2022).

The history of the Yoruba religion began in the Stone Age. Agriculture from the Middle East highly influenced the people to develop the religion around 600 BC (Khadijah, 2024). The Yoruba people, in southwestern Nigeria, have a rich cultural heritage rooted in their ancient beliefs and practices. Historically, the Yoruba kingdom dates back to the 11th century, with the city of Ife serving as its spiritual and political capital. The Orishas were believed to have inhabited the earth before human creation, shaping the world and its destiny. The Supreme Being, Olodumare, was considered the ultimate creator, while the Orishas served as intermediaries between the divine and human realms.

Initially, they represented their gods using elements of nature like rivers, storms, mountains, and forests. The Yoruba gods became more anthropomorphic (Osuji, 2021) due to the spread of agriculture, metallurgy, and modernisation. The Yoruba religion comprises religious and spiritual concepts, teachings, the Yoruba mythology, history, and their practices (Khadijah, 2024). The supreme deity of the Yoruba is called Olódùmarè. He is a distant god believed to live in the sky and the mightiest of the four supreme deities in the Yoruba religion: Olódùmarè – the Supreme Creator; Ọlórún – the ruler of the Heavens; Ọlọfi – the conduit between Orún (Heaven) and Ayé (Earth); Nana Buluku – androgynous Supreme Creator (Khadijah, 2024).

The Yoruba religion was deeply intertwined with daily life, as each Orisha was associated with specific aspects of nature, human experiences, and occupations. For instance, Ogun, the god of ironworking and war, was revered by blacksmiths and warriors, while Osun or Oshun, the goddess of love and fertility, was honoured by those seeking romance and prosperity. The cultural context of Yoruba religion was characterised by a strong sense of community and social hierarchy. The Yoruba belief system was also influenced by their historical experiences, including the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. The forced migration of Yoruba people to the Americas led to the blending of their beliefs with those of other cultures, resulting in syncretic religions like Santería and Candomblé.

### 3.2 Symbolic Representation and Attributes of the Yoruba Gods and Goddesses

In Yoruba mythology, the Orisa are gods and goddesses who govern different aspects of the natural

and spiritual world. Each god has their own unique personality and domain, and they work together to maintain balance in the world. The Orisa are often depicted as human-like beings with superhuman strength and abilities. They are also said to be able to transform into animals or other forms. Yoruba mythology teaches that there are four main Orisa: Obatala, Olorun, Oshun, and Shango. These four gods represent the elements of earth, air, water, and fire, respectively. The Orisa are revered and are thought to be able to help humans in their everyday lives. Many people turn to the Orisa for guidance and protection. In Olajubu's words, he argues that the Yoruba scripture includes prescriptions that emanate from daily enactment of ritual through diverse modes of performance and recitations (Olajubu, 2004).

It is said that Obatala is the god of creation and also the Yorubas' chief god. The name Obatala (Oba-ti-ala) means "Lord of the White Cloth," which is explained by the fact that white is the colour devoted to Obatala, whose temples, figures, and paraphernalia are always painted white, and whose followers wear white cloths. Another derivation is Oba-ti-ala, "Lord of Visions", which gains some credence from the fact that Obatala is known as Orisha oj'enia, "The Orisha who enters man", and Alabalese (Al-ba-ni-ase), "He who predicts the future", because he inspires oracles and priests and reveals the future through visions. "Lord of the White Cloth", on the other hand, is the most widely used and appears to be the proper translation. The god is always depicted wearing a white robe. (Minna, 2022)

According to the priests, Obatala was created by Olorun, who then delegated control of the firmament and the world to him and retreated to slumber. Obatala is thus a sky god but in a more anthropomorphic form than Olorun and fulfils functions that have nothing to do with the firmament. Obatala created the first man and woman out of clay, earning him the title of Alamore, "Owner of the best clay", and because he kneaded the clay himself, he is known as Orishakpokpo, "Owner of the best clay (Minna, 2022)". Ogun is considered the god of iron by the ancient Yoruba people, and this belief is still held on to by them. In Yoruba mythology, Ogun is the god of war and iron. "One who pierces" is what the name Ogun means (gun, to pierce, or thrust with something pointed). People who employ iron tools or weapons and blacksmiths in particular venerate him. Ogun can be represented by any iron object, and because iron ore is located on the ground, he holds it in high regard. He is among the individuals who emerged from Yemoja's body (Minna, 2022).

He is also the patron deity of blacksmiths, hunters, and warriors. Ogun is one of the most important gods in the Yoruba pantheon and is honoured with many festivals and celebrations throughout the year. Ogun is usually depicted as a tall, muscular man carrying an axe or sword. He is usually associated with the colour red, and his symbols include fire, iron, and animals such as the dog

and the ram. Ogun is a powerful and vital god and is revered for his strength, courage, and ability to protect his people. He is also seen as a guardian of justice and is invoked when legal disputes need to be settled (Minna, 2022).

Oshun is the Yoruba goddess of love, beauty, and fertility. She is associated with the Niger River in West Africa and is often depicted holding a river shell or wearing a crown of freshwater shells. She is known for her ability to help people in need and her willingness to fight for justice. If an individual is looking for a goddess to help him or her with matters of the heart, Oshun is the perfect choice. She can help such a person to find love, heal a broken heart, and increase your fertility. This is the belief of the Yoruba people.

Esu is the god of mischief in Yoruba religion. He is also known as the Trickster and associated with chaos, disorder, and confusion. Esu is usually depicted as a human with animal features, such as horns or hooves. Esu is a god of mischief, and as such, he has many different aspects. He can be a trickster, jester, and even a bit of a rabble-rouser. But at his core, he is a god of change and chaos (Minna, 2022). Esu, known by various names such as Eshu, Eleggua, or Legba, is a revered deity in the Yoruba religion and plays a significant role in the spiritual beliefs of many practitioners of African and Afro-Caribbean religions like Santeria, Candomblé, and Vodou. Esu is a complex and multifaceted entity, embodying a wide array of attributes that make him both revered and feared in equal measure. At the core of Esu's essence lies duality. He is neither purely good nor purely evil; rather, he embodies the delicate balance between these forces. Esu is the guardian of the crossroads, symbolising the transitional nature of life and the choices we make at pivotal moments. As the gatekeeper between the physical and spiritual realms, he holds the keys to unlocking hidden knowledge and mysteries, serving as a mediator between humans and the divine.

Esu is often depicted as mischievous and unpredictable, possessing a whimsical and enigmatic nature that defies easy categorisation. He is both a trickster and a wise counsellor, capable of testing individuals through challenges and obstacles that serve as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. By navigating these cunning trials with humility and respect, one can gain Esu's favour and tap into his transformative powers. Another aspect of Esu's character is his role as a messenger and communicator. He is the conduit through which prayers and offerings are delivered to other deities, ensuring that messages reach their intended recipients. As the master of language and speech, Esu possesses the power to confuse or clarify, to block or facilitate communication between beings. This attribute highlights his pivotal position in the spiritual hierarchy, where he acts as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds. Moreover, Esu embodies the principle of balance and

equilibrium. He teaches the importance of embracing contradictions and finding harmony in opposites, urging his devotees to accept the dualities present in life without judgement or resistance.

Esu is known for his ability to disrupt the status quo and to upend the expectations of others. He is the god of surprises, and as such, he is often associated with change. Whether that change is good or bad is up to interpretation, but it is change nonetheless. Esu is also a god of chaos. He revels in creating disorder and confusion. For him, the world is a playground, and he loves to stir things up just for the fun of it. This can be seen in his interactions with humans, where he often leads them astray or causes them to behave in ways that are out of character for them. Despite his mischievous nature, Esu is not all bad. He also has a protective side, and he is known for helping those who have been wronged or who are facing difficult situations. He is a god of justice, and he will fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. Esu is usually depicted as a young man with a mischievous grin on his face. He is often shown carrying a bag of tricks, which he uses to play pranks on people. He is also said to be very quick and agile, able to outrun anyone who tries to chase him. People who worship Esu offer him gifts of food and drink and often omit small offerings. (Minna, 2022)

The ancestral Shango was the fourth king of the town of Oyo. Oral tradition describes him as powerful, with a voice like thunder and a mouth that spewed fire when he spoke. When a subordinate chief challenged his rule, many townspeople were impressed by the subordinate's feats of magic and deserted Shango. Defeated in the eyes of the majority of his subjects, Shango left Oyo and committed suicide by hanging himself. His faithful followers, however, claimed that he really ascended to the heavens on a chain. They claimed that his disappearance was not death but merely the occasion of his transformation into an orisha. He later took on some of the attributes of a preexisting deity, Jakuta, who represented the wrath of God and whose name continues to be associated with Shango in Cuba. Shango's followers eventually succeeded in securing a place for their cult in the religious and political system of Oyo, and the Shango cult ultimately became integral to the installation of Oyo's kings. It spread widely when Oyo became the centre of an expansive empire that ruled most of the other Yoruba kingdoms, as well as the Edo and the Fon, both of whom incorporated Shango worship into their religions and continued his cult even after they ceased being under Oyo's control.

#### **4. An Analysis of the Role of 'gods and goddesses' in Yoruba Society and Its Significance in Understanding Yoruba Culture**

The Yoruba creation story has different versions

. Each confirms the Yoruba religion have many gods and goddesses although it offer different explanations regarding how they came to exist. Each one represents specific ideas, objects or natural phenomena. Yorubas believe that Olodumare created the gods and goddesses and threw powers of dominion into the air. Each caught powers that enabled them to participate in the creation and oversee different spheres of influence. Olodumare created the Yoruba people through Oduduwa. Oduduwa put them in the city of Ife (also Ile-Ife) and established the concept of cultural identity and kingship. After Orisha Obatala separated the land from the waters, Osun or Oshun was the only female among the 17 Orishas or gods and goddesses Olodumare sent down to complete the work (Khadijah, 2024).

The male Orishas return to Olodumare to confess their failures. They told him that they ignored Oshun for being young and a woman. Olodumare sent them back to earth to apologize to Oshun because only she could complete the work. Oshun finished the creation task and filled the earth with the gifts of beauty, fertility, love, and everything people needed to live. The Orishas give people Ashe/Ase (life) and Ayanmo (fate). One chooses their destiny before birth and reincarnates to achieve it in the next life (Khadijah, 2024).

However, Yoruba gods and goddesses are instrumental to all the mythological creation stories. This conception of human person to the Yoruba people is one which is not without certain inconsistencies. Despite this, the gods role in the creation and development of person cannot be under emphasized. These impacts and the conception of human person in Yoruba traditional society will be discussed subsequently in this chapter. The Yoruba gods and goddesses include Osun, Ogun, Oya, Yemoja, Orisa-nla or Obatala, hung in and so on.

Ogun is one of the earliest Yoruba deities that are said to derive their powers directly from "Olodumare" or "Olorun" (the Supreme Being, or God; the sustainer and upholder of the universe). Ogun is an important and highly regarded Yoruba deity. He is described as a pan-Yoruba deity of fairly uniform character and significance, "the deity of iron and war (Peel, 1994)." According to Yoruba mythology, Ogun was a hunter who usually came down from heaven by a "spider" thread upon the primordial masy waste, (Adewale, 2008) for his hunting expedition. This was before the earth was founded. "There was a critical lacuna, in the finishing of the universe as a unified cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings and between those beings and the forces of nature (Yakubu, 2009)."

However, when the earth was founded and its furniture arranged, Ogun and other deities decided to come down from heaven in order to take over the affairs of the world. They were unable to get through the bush at a place of "no road", and came to a halt" and resigned by submitting to fate (Adewale, 2008). Orisanla tried to cut

a way through, but his machete bent because it was lead. Of all the divinities, it was only Ogun who possessed the implement which was adequate for the task (Adewale, 2008). So, he cleared a part with his magical tool. As a result of this, Ogun was invited to be their chief or head (Adewale, 2008). By virtue of his power and status, Ogun received the title of Osin-Imale – Chief among the divinities, when they arrived at Ile-Ife, the “headquarters” (Adewale, 2008). Therefore, Ogun was unable to adjust himself to live a settled community life because of his prowess in hunting and carnage. So, he decided to dwell on “Top of the hill”, which means Ori-Oke. As “the lone one, after a short time, Ogun became tired of his seclusion and sought the settled life which he once rejected. At first, his fierce and forbidding appearance made it impossible for him to find a home in any community (Adewale, 2008).

The elders of Ire would achieve what other gods fail to achieve. They begged and persuaded Ogun into accepting to become their king. Ogun is crowned the king of Ire “Ogun onire – Ogun, the lord of Ire”, and that becomes the beginning of a major travail of the people of the town. Thence, Ogun the great warrior, exhibitionist stud, annihilator and imbibitor extra ordinaire was leading his men in battle, doing what he did best, slaughtering the enemies of his people (Yakubu, 2009). His relationship with man is one of perpetual hazard. The traditional bard at Ire-Ekiti, according to Oyin Ogunba, captured this ghoulish nature of Ogun in their chant when they sing:

Ojilegbeje oniyan (One thousand four hundred and forty people)

Kee suse ninu oko (Ogun Working in Ogun's farm)

Ororo ebibu ni (They are all in bits and pieces,)

Se li ei lorun, (Those of them who have heads)

Eyi koo ba loren (Have no necks)

Seli ei lori, (Those who have necks Have no meads (Ogunba, 2005).

The people of Ire mourn the day they invited a god to be their king. As an annihilator, neither Ogun nor his sword understands the word “retreat” in war. His “superfluity of naughtiness” and “sadistic pleasure in wickedness” is made clear in the saying:

Nibo l'ati pade re? (Where does one meet him?)

A pade re n'ibi ija (One meets him in the place of battle;)

A pade re n'ibi ita; (One meets him in the place of wrangling;)

A pde re n'ibi agbara eje (One meets him in the place where torrents of blood, )

Gbe nda ni l'orun bi omi ago. (Fill with longing as a cup of water does the thirsty (Adewale, 2008).

The implication of this is that, Yoruba culture emphasize the place of leadership and continued importance of Ogun as a vital force that can safeguards human life. In the words of Olusegun Oladipo, Ogun is believed to have put finishing touches to the creation of man; he made human bones and assembled them. He completed Orisanla's job of moulding the physical body of man by the cutting or craving of hands and legs to the shapes (Olusegun, 1988). In traditional Yoruba society, such things as circumcision, tribal marking, tattooing, or any surgical operations that may be necessary to keep man in good health” are associated with Ogun (Adewale, 2008).

Osun, as a special divinity of Osogbo, rules and protects the people from dangers and wars. Unlike most other divinities, Osun is not a seasonal goddess. She is active all year round. On the contrary, Sango (the god of thunder and lightning), is active only during the rainy season. A Yoruba proverb says, enikan ki bu Sango loru, meaning no one invokes Sango during the dry season (Ogungbemi, 2013). He would not respond or act on behalf of the devotee during the dry season.

According to historical Yoruba beliefs, kings are second in command to gods in nature and in authority. It adds more dignity to the personhood of Osun, as the people in Osogbo, including the kings, recognize the authority of Osun. The official title of the king is "Ataoja" which means one who spreads his hands to welcome the fish of the Osun River during the Osun festival. Osun's authority is widely recognized among the Yoruba (Ogungbemi, 2014). All prospective kings of Osogbo were religiously, physically and psychologically prepared by oral tradition for the throne of Osogbo. The Ataoja is the administrative and spiritual head of the town. Osun still influences the decisions of the king, chiefs, priests and the economy of Osogbo each day. Individually, the people of Osogbo honor her daily in words and deeds. She promotes communal harmony among the Osogbo people. She also promotes harmony among divinities, Osogbo leadership and the people of Osogbo (Adewale, 2008).

Yemoja unlike Ògún which is attributed to Ondo state people, is majorly associated with the Ògún state people which are part of the Yoruba society as well. The name ‘Yemoja’ is a contraction of three Yoruba words Yeye-Omo-eja, meaning ‘mother of fishes’. She is a river goddess identified with the river Ogun in Ogun State, Nigeria. Yemoja is an Orisa (divinity) originally of the Yoruba religion that has now become prominent in many Afro-American religions (Mattijs, 2009). She is recognized, honored, and worshipped not only in Africa

but also in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Uruguay, and other parts of the world. There are a series of variations in the name of this goddess according to various localities, because Yemoja went with the members of the Yoruba tribe when they were captured and taken to various areas throughout the world as slaves. She then became very popular and well known in their midst. She was given different names and was even honored in Bahia as the Candomble goddess of the deep seas (Mattijs, 2009).

Moreover, Yemoja worship promotes moral standards. The celebration of the Yemoja festival serves as one of the social sanctions used to enforce morality, in addition to preserving the values and norms enshrined in the people's culture and traditions. Yemoja is regarded as a divinity of morality that purifies both heart and body. In every stratum of human life, a particular form of ethics is established. Although the specifics may differ between cultures, these ethics still serve the same fundamental purpose. Thus, the Yoruba have found it necessary to introduce elements of subtle coercion in the performance of their ethical duties. Such an approach is very important because a society without a solid ethical foundation will disintegrate into moral decadence and its consequent vicious effects on political, social and economic life (Ede, 2023).

Furthermore, Yemoja promotes a sense of community among its followers. The Yemoja shrine serves as a centre of unity and binds the worshippers together. Thus, a member does not live her life alone. She is a member of the corporate body. Even by the doctrine of the Yoruba theology, humans are believed to be in a covenant relationship with fellow members of the same cultic group and society at large. The implication of this relationship is that any harm done to one member affects other members. Thus, it is necessary for every member to seek the wellbeing of one another and avoid any action that may offset the peaceful atmosphere of the society (Oladipupo, 2013).

The worship of deities has always been a major religious preoccupation among the Yoruba. Among these deities is Ayelala, a water goddess, who is not only worshiped with pomp and pageantry but also highly revered and respected for its judicial powers (Oluwafunminiye and Famiyesin, 2022). As a deity of retribution and justice, Ayelala is believed to possess great powers which she uses against varying forms of social vice, such as armed robbery, sexual offences, and witchcraft to mention a few. Ayelala is reputed for seeking vengeance when the offender has forgotten her or his crime, and strikes her victims by inflicting on them bodily swelling and in few cases, dryness. Such is Ayelala's overwhelming power and potency that the deity seeks to control the boundaries of morality and at the same time forms a major bulwark against societal impropriety (Oluwafunminiye and Famiyesin, 2022).

For the Yoruba, Olodumare, the Supreme Being, is viewed as superior to, and distinct from, other deities, though they express their worship and dependence on the latter. Between man and deity, there exist strong links which helps to build a relationship where "responses of worship and offering of sacrifices to the divinities" are aptly discharged. This relationship creates an enabling environment for law and order to reign even as people shun acts that could result in colossal penalties from the deity (Olanrewaju, 2009). It is here that the deity, Ayelala comes into play. Ayelala's powers are so great that little acts of immorality invite instant fury and consequences. Adherents of the goddess usually call for caution and restraint around her because the binding forces that birthed her demand openness and truth. Anything short of these is an invitation to disastrous retribution by the deity (Oluwafunminiye and Famiyesin, 2022). Also, there exist certain gods in Yoruba society that work with God in the creation sojourn. The conception of person among various cultural groups' in Africa, specifically among the Yoruba is better understood and appreciated via a sojourn in to their metaphysical postulation of the universe.

According to the Yoruba mythological account, four stages were involved in the creation of a human being (Oladipupo, 2018). These four stages include, Ara (Physical stage): The stage whereby the moulding of the human body (Ara) takes places. Human body is moulded according to this mythological account as moulded and created by Obatala or Orisa-nla as delegated by the supreme being (Olodumare). Èmí or Eemi (Spiritual stage): In this second stage or aspect the breath of life is being breath into the lifeless body mould by Orisa-nla. This stage is important because it is the moment the body becomes a life force. Ori-inu (Spiritual stage): This stage is the stage when the life carrying body moves to the house of Ajala to choose or receive their destiny. Ile-Aye: After choosing or receiving ones destiny the ori carrying body moves to "bode", so as to meet the gatekeeper (Onibode) which is Orunmila baba ifa.

The Yoruba word for person as a whole being is "Eniyan (Abdul-Rasheed, 2007)..". The physical or tangible element of the human person is the "Ara", which is literally called the body. This body (Ara) consist of other material part of the individual which include, ese, oju, ifun, okan and what have you. According to Makinde, "the physical element of person is a creation of Orisanla (the Yoruba God of creation) who is charged by Olodumare per of Heaven) with the responsibility of moulding human beings out of clay. These bodies were moulded in different shapes, some of which are characterized by their beauty, and some by their ugliness and deformity" (Ogungbemi, 2013). The Ara (body) is usually described in physical terms like heavy or light, strong, big, hot, cold and so on (Ogungbemi, 2013). The act of moulding the Ara (body) by Orisanla, as recorded by Makinde, takes place in the fifth heaven (Orun Akaso) (Ogungbemi, 2013).

## 5. Value Theory in Yoruba Culture, Mythology and Practices Of Gods And Goddesses

Perhaps one of the reasons why the Yoruba presuppose that their divinities should be evoked in all their daily life is because they are attributed with special powers. For instance, Orunmila is one of the higher or benevolent primordial divinities in Yoruba culture. The Yoruba postulate that Olodumare has endowed Orunmila with special wisdom and knowledge to the end that he may be his accredited representative in matters relating to man's destiny: Orunmila possesses (Banwo, 2023).. Also, the divinities are regarded as the ministers of the Supreme Being in the World as well as the intermediaries between Man and the Supreme Being they are charged with the duty of keeping moral order in the society. These divinities command good behavior and good character among the people. They punish the recalcitrant and reward the compliance (Iwatosin and Olukayode, 2020). Among the Yoruba, there are some divinities that are regarded as guardians of public morality, these include Ogun, Sango, Ayelala, Sonponna, Obatala, Orunmila, Osun and others. Apart from the above, we also have the ancestors. They are vested with how the family they left behind conduct their day to day practical living. Morality in form of custodianship and sanctions are with them and the reward and punishment as at when due the moral activities of the members of their families. They are the invisible agents who have the responsibility of teaching and inculcating the ethics of the religion (Iwatosin and Olukayode, 2020).

The concept of "value", on its face, derives from human appreciation of worth, importance, or utility of some/thing, where "something" or "thing" could stand for a being, an idea, a material or resource, a location, etc. To this end, "value" could be the concept used to describe those attributes, helping to annotate the regard the item deserves. To have value in the above sense is to be important, to be of worth and to be useful. But that is not all: to have value also could mean to be numerable, with potential for the quantity to have significance statistically, demographically, chronologically, symbolically, contextually, substantively or expressively. It may also mean the principles, ideologies, or standards by which one and one's society/community lives, relates to others, makes decisions, or determines modes of existence. But "value" could also mean substitution cost or exchange equivalence or benefit derivable from a substance, item, or idea (Bewaj, 2016).

From these ideas, it would seem clear that values suffuse and are integral to all aspects of existence and moderate inter and intra relationships between humans, animals, nature, and the universe or multiverse. They become refined and reified over time, thereby assisting in determining the modes of being which members of different societies exhibit. Values also tend to take on

autonomous lives, as these require such independence to gain the kinds of traction that allow for various mechanisms of adjudication praise, blame, reward, punishment, etc. These elements of values are manifested in the critical areas of decision making for example, a culture built on the idea of divine providence but often are obscured by the fact that in many instances the values are not explicitly formulated, humans may be too busy just living/surviving to have enough time to examine the metaphysical presuppositions that underlie the ways of being that make a people who they are (Bewaj, 2016).

Circumstances of existence or coming about of societies differ, both in the environment of existence and contexts of survival. This means that different cultural handlers, as values, evolve and subsist to deal with exigencies of being. Apart from life and knowledge, humans value stability, and hence seek to enshrine values aimed at creating and maintaining standards of evaluation, which are conducive to the preservation of life in as best condition as possible, using the value of knowledge as tool. This translates into another value trope: power. Now, it must not be supposed that "power" means the ability to compel, force, subject, act upon, produce an effect, or influence that one thing/ being may have over other things/being. It may also manifest in the capacity to determine what individuals or groups have the freedom to even contemplate as truth, reality, or identity as where some people decide their God is the real God and all other gods are fake, their educational system is genuine, while others are backward or unscientific (Gordon and Gordon, 2006)). Thus, "power" is valued intrinsically and extrinsically. To this end, it can be seen that values guide purposeful action, making human behavior superior, in many respects, to the behavior of other sentient beings in the world (Bewaj, 2016).

Value determines conditions of being and non-being, determining relationships as well as goal and processes. Values determine how we see what we see, what actions are worthy and how these are to be pursued. This is where historical factors play important roles in the engineering of values in society. The engineered values are then regarded as cultures: they are enshrined in the stories, theories, technologies, arts, educational systems, religious practices, patterns of relations (economic, political, filial, relaxation, sexual orientations) and numerous others for making peace, war, conflict management, etc. These values then assist in underwriting what society considers important to preserve, perpetuate by propagation or jettison by rejection or destruction (Bewaji, 2016).

## 5. Varieties of goodness in Yoruba Culture and Myths

In the Yorùbá cultural intelligence that we have

explored, the question of agency is a universal one which pervades not just the domain of humans, but also animals, plants, and other entities in nature, including the streams, rivers, seas, oceans, wind, clouds, rainfall, sunlight, etc. Such a holistic reflective view of the universe/multiverse requires cognitive respect for all things, which in turn leads to care and attention to what is revealed through the agencies and entities surrounding our spaces. Thus, while Yorùbá culture celebrates wonder and inquisitiveness, encouraging evidence-gathering efforts as a means of gaining knowledge, there is no arrogation of intellectual supremacy of omniscience to any being, whether natural or supernatural; hence, Olódùmarè consults Òrúnmìlà, his diviner, when confused or in need of an understanding of events past, present, and future.

According to Wande Abimbola, according to the myths, there were occasions when, there being no physical barrier between heaven and earth at that time, Ifá was summoned by Olódùmarè (God Almighty) to heaven to use his immense wisdom to solve problems for Him. Ifá finally returned to heaven in annoyance due to an insult given to him by one of his children. Shortly after this, the earth was thrown into enormous confusion. Famine and pestilence raged throughout the earth. So severe was the calamity that the fertility cycle in human beings was disrupted. *Aboyún kò bímọ; Ágán kò t'owọ àlà b'osùn* (Pregnant women no longer delivered; Barren women remained barren) (Wande, 1976).

The supernatural has obligations of respect and responsibility, and the natural has obligations of attention and respect toward those that not only make life happy but also meaningful. Hence, it is not strange for humans to learn from things around us, as humans observe the habits and behaviour of animals, plants, and things in nature to gain insights into the use, tendencies, and beauty of everything. Such cognitive attentiveness and respect cannot lead to arrogance, nor does it translate into the appropriation by the intuitive beings of things that do not speak our language or that seem to be of lower rank. If everything were uniform, the world would be unlivable, and there would be no systemic interdependence, which is what makes everything work together for good and ill. In this context, the good possesses an inherent ability to become ill, while the ill can yield good if there is patience to learn from nature and use those insights for correction and reconciliation (Bewaji, 2016).

### 5.1 Intrinsic Value

In Yoruba mythology, intrinsic value and agent-relative values are deeply intertwined in Yoruba culture. Individuals are believed to have rights and worth, which makes them reflect the culture's philosophical and ethical perspectives. That is, the intrinsic value is therefore

derived from the divine creations of humans and not from external factors. Intrinsic values are embodied in the concept of individual destiny, Ori-inu which refers to an individual's predetermined destiny or purpose in life. This idea suggests that every person has inherent worth and value, regardless of external circumstances. The concept of ìwà (character) further emphasizes the importance of moral excellence and good character for its own sake.

In Yoruba mythology, intrinsic value is deeply rooted in the concept of destiny. This idea suggests that every person has inherent worth and value, regardless of external circumstances. The concept of ìwà (character) further emphasizes the importance of moral excellence and good character for its own sake. According to Yoruba thought, human life possesses inherent dignity and worth, irrespective of social status, achievements, or relationships. This intrinsic value is grounded in the divine creation of humans and the sacredness of life. Olodumare, the Supreme God, is often invoked to underscore the intrinsic value of human existence. This perspective encourages individuals to respect and honor human life, regardless of external factors.

### 5.2 Agent Relative Value

Agent-relative value in Yoruba mythology emphasizes the importance of relationships, community, and social context. Ègbòn (respect for elders) and Ọmọ Ọ̀àgbà (filial piety) illustrate the significance of honoring ancestors, family, and community ties. Loyalty (ìyàwò) to one's community and leaders is also vital. These values are relative to the agent's position within their social network. For instance, a child's obligations to their parents are distinct from their obligations to their community. Yoruba gods and goddesses, such as Esu or Èshù and Ogun, embody these agent-relative values. Èsù's loyalty to his community and Ogun's protection of his people demonstrate the importance of prioritizing relationships and community. This agent-relative perspective recognizes that individual actions have consequences within their social context, encouraging individuals to consider their responsibilities and obligations to others. By honoring these relationships, individuals maintain social harmony and balance.

On the other hand, agent-relative values are exemplified in the importance of respects. Respect in Yoruba means *Ibowo fun agba* or better still *òwò* (respect for elders). This is why the Yoruba people will argue that *Omo na ni òwò fun awon asaaju e*, meaning the child thus have respect for his elders. These values highlight the significance of honoring ancestors, family, and community ties. Loyalty to one's community and leaders is also a vital agent-relative value. The Yoruba pantheon of gods and goddesses illustrates these values. For instance, Olodumare (the Supreme God) represents the intrinsic value of human life and purpose. In contrast,

Èshù (the trickster god) and Ogun (the warrior god) embody agent-relative values of loyalty and respect. The philosophical implications of Yoruba mythology are profound. The emphasis on teleology and virtue ethics (Iwà) underscores the importance of living a purpose-driven life and cultivating moral character. The communitarian aspect of Yoruba mythology highlights the interconnectedness of individuals within their community.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary

This paper explores the epistemology of gods and goddesses in Yoruba traditional thought, emphasising their vital role in shaping societal values, beliefs, and moral frameworks. It underscores the deep-rooted cultural significance of the Orishas, such as Olodumare, Osun, Ogun, Sango, and others, highlighting their functions as intermediaries between the divine and human realms. Through an epistemological lens, the study examines how these deities embody and promote core Yoruba virtues like community, harmony, morality, and balance. The research reviews the historical development of Yoruba religion, its mythological narratives of creation, and the symbolic attributes associated with each deity, illustrating their influence on social norms and individual conduct. Employing value theory, the paper demonstrates that Yoruba gods and goddesses are not merely religious figures but also carriers of intrinsic and agent-relative values, fostering moral excellence, social cohesion, and respect for nature and ancestors. The work critically addresses misconceptions stemming from Western perspectives, advocating for a richer understanding of Yoruba philosophical insights and their contributions to global discourse.

### 6.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Yoruba pantheon of gods and goddesses embodies a complex epistemic system that fundamentally informs the society's moral, cultural, and social values. Their roles extend beyond spiritual rituals to encompass ethical principles that prioritise community harmony, moral character, and respect for nature. An epistemological analysis reveals that these deities serve as repositories of indigenous knowledge and moral guidance, fostering a worldview that emphasises balance, interconnectedness, and purpose-driven living. Recognising the philosophical depth of Yoruba traditional thought challenges Western narratives and underscores the importance of valuing indigenous epistemologies. Appreciating the influence of these divine beings is crucial for fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching

global philosophical discourse. Ultimately, the Yoruba conception of gods and goddesses offers profound insights into how divine principles shape human behaviour and societal norms, advocating for a holistic approach to morality rooted in tradition, community, and reverence for the natural world.

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