

## DEATH(*ISU*): SUSPENDED ANIMATION PROGRAMME IN EBIRA TAO THOUGHT

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### ***Abstract***

*The study seeks to examine death (isu) in Ebira Tao thought system. The Ebira people resides in the middle belt of Nigeria. As people they strongly believe that the tripod metaphysical issues of birth, death and hereafter form the most fundamental thought-provoking phenomena which impact on humankind existential reality. Death generally generates expectations, anxiety, fear, sympathy, pain, sorrow and even joy in the existential life of the people subsumed into the notion of suspended animation. Logically, the ratiocinative spirit behind this line of thought is more of idealistic realism due to the pragmatic occurrence of death in man's life experience. **In the light of the above** the study seeks to expose and appraise human existence in the light of birth, death and life-after-death as transitional odyssey from the physical realm of the mundane world into the spiritual enclave of reality. And as well posits that these tripods form the eternal process of suspended animation since man lives, die and live in the two worlds of the physical and the spiritual. Thus, the paper discovers that a detailed explication of these concepts leads to accepting death and life-after-death as fundamentally shrouded in a process of suspended reality of an individual who occupies two worlds (physical/visible realm and spiritual/invisible realm) at two different times and places. The paper conclude by asserting that human life is existential in an experiential world, and that the issue of death and life-after-death of the same person is the subsuming the whole process of existence into one of suspended animation programme of the Divine Programmer*

**Keywords:** Animation, Death, Pragmatic, Ratiocinative, Existential

### **Introduction**

Birth, death and hereafter or life-after-death forms the most fundamental thought-provoking phenomena which impact on humankind in the physical and spiritual life existence. This tripod (birth, death and hereafter) remains the essence as well as mystery of divine creation process network and devoid of human manipulation. Death generates expectation, anxiety, fear, sympathy, pain, sorrow and even joy in the existential life of the people which can be subsumed into the notion of suspended animation programme. Logically, the ratiocinative spirit behind this line of thought is more of idealistic realism due to the pragmatic occurrence of death in man's life experience.

This study seeks to expose and appraise human existence in the light of birth, death and life-after-death as transitional odyssey from the physical realm of the mundane world into the spiritual enclave of reality. And as well posits that these tripods form the

eternal process of suspended animation since man lives, die and live in the two worlds of the physical and the spiritual. Thus, a detailed explication of this work leads to accepting death and life-after-death as fundamentally shrouded in a process of suspended reality of an individual who occupies two worlds (physical/visible realm and spiritual/invisible realm) at two different times and places (Mbiti 149). The paper apart from the introduction is divided into five parts, the first examine the notion of human existence, section two looks at the universal conception of death, while the third section looks at African notion of death, section four looks at **Death as Transitional Process in African (Ebira Tao) Thought, this will be followed by the fifth section which examines Life-After-Death as Basis for Suspended Animation Process in African Metaphysics, this will be followed by conclusion.**

### **Human Existence**

The creation of man is awesomely mysterious as no one asked the Ultimate Creator to fashion out this wonderful enigma called man in the first place. It is only after the initial creation process that man decides to besiege the Creator through petitionary prayers or “protest” when his aspiration in regard to fertility and procreation suffer retardation. Thus man in his existential life often behaves as if he is the master of his life only to be caught shut by death. The human existential experience is characterized with challenges of facticity as well as possibilities of life. Surmounting these existential stumbling blocks leaves man in perplexities, fear, sorrow and sympathy. Awesomely, man stumbles and wobbles his way through the odds from birth to old age, if he is “lucky” or has his life terminated in his prime without attaining the status of an elder of the family, clan, tribe, or community. Fundamentally, the African frowns at this unpleasant scenario which is seen as impinging or disrupting the ontological harmony of the society. Be this as it may, man is at a loss as to the early exit from the physical world. However, the Ultimate Planner informs man in one revered religious books that “And the life of the world is only amusement and play” (Quran 29:64). Confounding questions resonate more often within the reflective minds: are human beings really the master of their lives? What are the implications of life and death? Or does human being really have a choice whether to perpetually live on earth or to eagerly long for death? These are potent questions that confront humankind in the context, as Lenrie Peters in his poem “The Fence” summates:

Here where the dim past and future mingles, there nebulous hopes and aspirations... There where truth and untruth struggle in endless and bloody combat... There where time moves forwards and backwards with not one moment's pause for sighting... There where the body ages relentlessly and only the feeble mind can wander back... open-souled amazement. There where all opposite arrive to play the inner senses (113)

### **The Notion of Death**

It usually takes a philosophical impulse and inspiration to write on the issues of death and life-after-death as it provokes as well as it illuminates the mind and heart of man in order to bring out the clear vision of the varied complexities therein. Man is the centre of the universe as well as the measures of all things therein in the universe. Invariably, all

discussions on existence become meaningful if the subject matter revolves round human existence. The philosophical and moral perception of death often portrays it as dreadful. Human beings talk less about death but consciousness reminds them that the unity of purpose that exist between mind and body sooner or later shall come to an abrupt end. Ogungbemi posits that discussion on the concept of death and the living-dead often provoke sympathy and fear. Thus, Ogungbemi, contends “It is not palatable subject. It is a common belief that being born into this world is an entrance and you cannot have an entrance without an exit. Therefore, death necessarily the exit of man on earth” (Ogungbeme,2007p.12).

The issue of death is a commonly acknowledged universal phenomenon. No sane human being can claim ignorance of this most-often discussed aspect of human essence. Steve Job, the Founder and CEO of Apple Computers in United States of America expresses his belief thus:

Make every day count. Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure--- these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose (17).

The notion of force or being is a core aspect of African cosmological and ontological belief-system. In essence everything has force or everything is imbued with vital energy or vital force in African metaphysics (Mbiti). For death to be able to affect man, it invariably connotes that it is a force capable of discharging the lethal responsibility of dismembering man by removing the soul from the body thereby disrupting the ontological harmony in man and the society. If it is true that death is force and has the capacity and capability to influence and affect man at any point in time, then, death is a higher force in the hierarchy of forces in African ontology and rank among those forces capable of inflicting damage to man. Death can also be termed as “spirit” which “refers to either a special mode of being or an entity existing in that mode” (Horton 181); for, the ontology of any “distinctive African world-view is replete with spirits” (Idoniboye 83-5).

Upon this understanding of the African perception, forces or beings are differentiated in African ontology into species according to their vital power or their inherent rank in a pyramidal or conical form. Through the interpretative understanding of the African mentality, forces are designated as both visible and invisible which is elucidated in African (Ebira Tao) perception of hierarchy of forces.

Furthermore, Tempels contends that the Ultimate Creator of the universe and its contents is at the apex of the hierarchy. “Above all forces is God, Spirit and Creator. It is He who has force, power, in Himself. He gives existence, power of survival and increase, to other forces. In relation to other forces, He is “He who increases force” (29). All other forces depend on God for sustenance and are believed not only accountable for their activities in the different realms of existence but serve as servants to Him.

It is important to note here that death as a force takes directive and order from the Ultimate Creator in the execution of its activities on living things (including man) ( ). It is in the light of this fundamental notion that death as a force can be likened to an intelligent emissary who does not disobey or fail to carry out its ordained responsibilities of snuffing life out of living things without prior notice of the time and place and who the next victim(s) ( ) would be. In this regard, death can be seen as an overbearing force capable of transversing the whole gamut of the universe in order to fulfilling its apportioned tasks. Hence, death is not bounded by spacio-temporal boundaries.

One is bound to ask the question that: Is man destined to die? The answer to this question is that man has been destined to die right from the abode of the Creator. Death is a fixed destiny which man must pass through. It cannot be altered transferred or evaded as death is a necessity in order to fulfil the pre-ordained or pre-destined choice that each individual had already made before his Creator (Makinde, 1988,p.57). This is vividly explicated in the Yoruba concept of person and choice of inner head (*Ori*). Here one is made to believe that one has the free choice of his destiny and as such assume responsibility for the consequence. Similarly, it is common African (Yoruba) perception that death is a creation of *Olodumare* (God), according to Idowu, (1962,p.187). It is apt to note that God not only create the two worlds according to His wish but He owns and sustain the worlds in an egalitarian manner where one cannot fault Him (Awolalu and Dopamu, 208).

But there is a problem with the above view that God creates death as a means of removing man from earth. This problem did not indicate why man dies prematurely without attaining old age where man can meaningfully contribute to the ontological harmony of the bond between the living and the living dead. This notion cannot be sustained because God did not discuss His plans with man before creating man. Hence, He cannot be seen as insensitive to the above notion. The goal of God is eternal process for humanity whereby man needs to transverse the physical world before entering the everlasting spiritual world. The bridge as an equipoise between the physical world and the spiritual world is dead which must be crossed by all living things, including man.

To the African, the natural change that occur as a result of death indicates that human being has a goal relative to it, which in most cases is an ultimate goal common to all thing. The reason for this perception of the African is the fact that every change is an attempt to achieve another state, status or form ( ). This is in consonance with Aristotelian idea of change and form. Hence, change is a continuous process for object composed of matter and form since the object still has the potentiality to receive another form, until it reaches the state of immutability and immobility (which is a state of complete rest) where no further acquisition of form is possible. In human context, therefore, this state of immutability and immobility can only occur after death when man tries to attain immortality.

It is important to note that, in death man transits into the invisible world that is invisible to the senses. Thus, Edeh is of the view that:

The place is completely different from the material world in terms of imperceptibility to the senses and ... entirely different world of its own, a world where the human beings who have left this material world

remain until they are able to be reincarnated. Hence, there must be two worlds in existence- the visible and invisible worlds (75).

An intriguing aspect of life-after-death is the aspect of the role of the ancestors and the issue of reincarnation. One is bound to ask the question: what are the roles of ancestors in the reality of African existential life. Since we cannot equate the ancestors with God, then the onus placed on man is, according to Kwame (1996, p.168) to give “the greatest reverence we, the descendants of the ancestors, can show to them is to let them rest in peace. The critical assessment of the belief in the theory of incarnation and the ancestral world poses apparent contradiction as well as incompatibility. Why some would hold to the fact that reincarnation in African thought does not mean that the ancestral spirit that is born again but that the child that is supposed to come under the influence of ancestor and thereby receive part of the ancestors' vitality and qualities. To many other people, there are basically three facets of human personality viz, the first holds that one transforms into an ancestral spirits. The second goes into the spirit world. The third reincarnate to be born again (173). In this regard, there is this belief that the process of reincarnation goes beyond one time. There are several rounds that the soul of a man makes after death in the process of reincarnation. Those that have completed their reincarnation trips stay permanently in the ancestral world, while the reincarnating ancestors are those still to complete their number of rounds.

Furthermore, if we go by Plato's explanation of the nature of reality, the real world has the characteristics of Parmenides' realm of being; but Plato's real world contains multiplicity as well as permanent entities. Thus, Plato's metaphysical theory emphasizes the ideal intelligible reality as the important and significant realm of the universe; it at the same time tries to give some account of the world of appearance. A life directed in terms of the ultimate goal of contemplating reality (though in physical context) should as a matter of fact, be one in which the soul soars upward to the perfect world of idea of the body. In this context, if the soul lives a direct harmonious life with the body, this could be leading a human being to liberation from the sense world into the real world . Egbeke (2001, p.21) posits from the Aristotelian angle that, every natural object is always undergoing change. The changing nature of the visible world must be a fundamental characteristic of reality. The changing natural world is intelligible if we know the actual constituents and how they operate.

It is common knowledge that Africans subscribe to the causal axiom that “whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence” (Flew, 262). Sodipo asserts that the Supreme Being is identified in Yoruba traditional thought as the ultimate cause of all visible causes in the world while the activities and clan of lesser gods are recognized to constitute important secondary causes. It is also believed that chance occurrences in nature, society or in the life of an individual person has no basis in African ontology. To the African all events have causes, whether natural or supernatural, which presupposes that the belief in chance occurrences will only amount to betrayal and ignorance of the real cause of the event. From the above view, the African believe that God cause death but still regard premature death as act of malevolence. To the African, man should attain full maturity of eldership where he lives life fully in the physical world and transits to immortality in the spiritual world of the ancestors through death.

### **Death as Transitional Process in Ebira Tao Thought System**

The Ebira Tao believe that the process of birth is the first visible rhythm of a new generation which is accompanied rite of birth performed in order to accord the person a corporate social being of the society. Death on the other hand, is an inevitable episode of demise which occurs within human existence. The destination of man's life journey extends into the netherworld in spirit form as a delayed experience. It is in the light of this that Mbiti (1969) opines that the African life cycle is embedded into an ontological rhythm fundamentally momentous in the life of an individual. According to Mbiti:

Human life has another rhythm of nature which nothing can destroy. On the level of the individual, this rhythm includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, and death, entry into the community of the departed and finally entry into the community of the spirits (25).

Mbiti's position to some extent explains the Ebira Tao notion of death and life after death. However, the Ebira Tao has a holistic approach to life existence in accordance with the cosmo-ontological foundation of the people's belief system, Rotimi, substantiate this by contending that "death is not always seen as evil especially when the individual is of age, it is seen as a welcome development since the individual is seen as entry or transiting into another stage of his existence" (1998, p.76). In essence, death is a necessary qualification that permits the aged death to join the community of the spirits of ancestor ship.

This reflection on the issue of death and after-life has its *loci* in Ebira Tao cosmo-ontological perception. The cultural, environmental, politico-episteme, mythico-religious and ethnic-linguistic perspectives provide the Ebira Tao people with the material object for ponder, wonder, questioning as well as responding to the over bearing challenges occasioned by the reality of death which is ever present in man's experiential existence (Onwuanibe, 1984, p. 183).

Sharing similar perception with the Igbo, the Ebira Tao thought mourns their dead with grief and sympathy; they remain resolute and hopeful that death is not an end in itself but a process of transition. In essence, the dead is reborn into another life which is completely different from the visible world that the departed individual had left (John, 1989, p32). It is on this note that we can sufficiently place the ancestors or the living dead who duels in a new life with new status and rank. In this abode of the living dead, the Ebira Tao believe that the ancestors have influence on the life existence of the living on earth. This view is succinctly occasioned during the annual festivals such as the *Ekuechi* (night masquerade festival). In his analysis, Rotime believes that, this masquerade cult festival is embedded with certain significant connotation unique to the Ebira Tao belief system. This involves the transmogrification of the ancestral spirits into the realm of the living felicitating and admonishing the home stead of the essence of maintaining the ontological balance and harmonious living within the family and the community (41).

This group of nature spirits though freely navigates both the spiritual and physical realms with utmost ease but inferior to the power and force of God who either strengthens or diminishes this group's power, if necessary. Thus, Ebira holds that the universe presents certain coherence in this conical structure where there exist a well ordered pattern of

power and authority. For them the category of the ancestors is believed to be the emissaries and ambassadors of God and man. They are saddled with the responsibility of carrying information and communicating at all times with man and God. For the Ebira Tao: "Ancestors were fathers who founded the different clans"(John, 52). This view was amply expressed by Temple, when he asserts that "patriarchs were the first to whom God communicated his vital force, with the power of exercising their influences on all posterity" (Tempels 29). It is this chain of authority that the Ebira Tao cherishes the importance of the ancestors in the affairs of man. This recognized chain of hierarchy upon which the ancestors occupies high rank binds men to God. The ancestors are not regarded as merely dead members of the society but has special roles to play in the success or otherwise of human existence. For the Ebira Tao, the ancestors are not dead completely but alive in a diminished life and reduced vital energy. And that is why inferentially, it is certain that the Eku (which is the masquerade cult system) with its mysterious manifestations isolated in the domain of the dead as masquerading motif. The living-dead are believed to have acquired greater knowledge of life and vital or natural forces are only used to strengthen the life of man on earth. The superior forces of the living-dead by primogeniture can be employed to reinforce the living posterity.

Within the threshold of this category of ancestors are ranks; and the spiritualized beings belong to higher hierarchy. The occupiers of this position are the first parents of the tribes who are already on their way to complete the stage of their immortality. The chain they formed is the link with which the forces of the elders exercise their vitalizing influence on the living generation. Noteworthy is the fact that there exists a symbiotic relationship between the unborn, the living and the living-dead which crystallized into a "dome of continuity" (Soyinka 76). The Ebira Tao people believes that those unborn have vital forces residing in our loins awaiting the appropriate time to be sprouted out. The-yet-to be born are the off springs of the future which must be protected at all cost as they are the hope of continuity. The ancestors need the close affinity so that they can enjoy constant remembrance through the pouring of libation during festivals and other special occasions just as the living needs the service of the ancestors as emissaries to God. It is this symbiosis that strengthened the African humanity.

The people strongly believe that the abode of the non- human spirits envelops the universe. Some of these non-human spirits according to Edeh (76) are men and women who lived good and purposeful lives while on earth; the bad spirits on the other hand are departed souls who live abominable lives while on earth before their demise. In some societies, those in this latter category need to be cleansed spiritually with rituals before burial in order to be able to enter into the midst of the living dead. In essence, they belief that both good and bad spirits interact with the living on earth- with those humans who share like minds with either of the two sets of spirit. But in the contemporary epoch, with the coming of Islam and Christianity, the beliefs in the presence of guardian angels as emissaries of the Almighty God carry out functions such as writing the deeds or actions and inactions of men while on earth. To the adherents of the above two religions, this function of the angels is for accountability purpose which every human is believed to account for on the future date after death and or on the day of judgment in Heaven.

Furthermore, it should be noted that human existential world is characterized with fortunes and misfortunes experienced on daily basis in our traditional societies. Hence the

Ebira Tao people hold that the real success and happiness of man depends largely on his good work, righteous living and being in good company of good spirits while on earth. Though the good spirits respect the freedom of man to exercise his free will, nonetheless, the guidance of good spirits is a necessity in order to maintain ontological harmony within the cosmo-ontological order of the Ebira Tao people.

In traditional and contemporary societies, family members have tasted the sorrows of losing members to death; this sorrow is not born alone. According to Mbiti (118) “they are sorrows of the community and the African societies at large”. Hence, there is usually the rite of passage for the departed soul in order to sympathize as well as bade the soul good bye till we meet. It is in this regard, that the African tends to perform all necessary rituals that will clear any encumbrance or inhibition against the soul getting to the abode of the ancestors.

In other words, the goals of rites of passage in Ebira Tao perception are to achieve an objective and subjective outcome which in essence binds the ritual issues of socio-cultural transitions in human life. This above view instructively and significantly tends to consider the cultural rite of passage of an individual member of the society as having corresponding effect on the society itself (Iroegbu, *The Audacity of Ibi Ebibi* 22). This in effect is a transformational effect railed into a patterned, repetitive and symbolic enactment of the people's cultural belief whose goal is to align belief system of the individual with that of the society. Thus, the symbolic essence of the processes of the Ebira Tao rite of passage of an individual member of the society lies in the cultural system whose performance is ordained by both the tradition and the religion of the people. As the case in most societies in Africa, rite of passage “is one which is usually ordained by the religion or by the tradition of a group. A rite of passage will essentially succeed in moving individuals from one social state or status to another” (Iroegbu *The Audacity of Ibi Ebibi* 22). In essence one is bound to hold that both individual's perception of themselves and society's perception of individuals are concentrically interwoven and mutually transformed together.

The major significance of a rite of passage involves three essential stages of experience (Iroegbu *The Audacity of Ibi Ebibi* 22). The first is a “period of separation” from the present social state of seclusion. This transition includes movement from homeland to foreign land, life to death, pregnancy to childbirth, peace time to war time or vice versa where one social space or state necessarily gives way for the other. The second state is the “period of transition” in which one is located between two states of social being. In this regard, the individual is captured in neither one thing nor the other, and such a moment provides for a change in one's body and psychic framework. The final stage is the “integration phase” which embodies various rites of metaphysical incorporation whereby the individual in question is absorbed into a new social role. Such as becoming an elder, or dying and assuming a venerated identity of an ancestor. This integration phase in particular accord and a affirm reunification and re integration into the society and world order of this mundane world and the other world.

According to Opoku, (1978, p.137) the ancestors play significant role in the communal life of the African. This is an indication that the ancestors are not cut off from the living, for they may still reveal themselves in dreams or appear to their living relatives to guide or correct them in their daily affairs on earth. Thus, in different part of Ebira Tao

in particular many people have claimed to have encountered their departed ones especially if the living was not aware about the departed soul's demise. Such claims and beliefs have great influence on African belief in the intermingling of the living and the living dead. Most importantly, in African rite of passage, participants are placed in a transitional realm that has few of the attributes of either the past or coming – to – state, and by existing in such a non-ordinary realm which facilitates gradual psychological opening of the initiates to profound interior change (Turner and Tambia 123 - 166).

Traditionally, dead bodies are buried in graves. Graves in Ebira Tao thought do not serve as the abode of the dead but as the fulfilment of the divined to return back to earth in the cause of rites of separation/disconnection from the human world but also ensure the process of transition and integration to the other divine world, where the dead person is believed to settle down properly. In some instances, elders of the community while alive may have directed his/her family members to commit to earth their remains in a specified place. The right to make a choice of a specific place was acceptable to the people in the past as well as in contemporary period. Thus, Ebeh (2010, p. 96), argues that death, grave and burial ceremonies among the Igala people of Kogi state just like the Ebira Tao allows the “living persons to suggest how best to handle and bury their dead bodies, however with reverence, respect and in well dug-up graves”. An important tomb site housing the remains of Pa Obege in a rock at Eika-Ohizeyin, Okehi LGA of Kogi State provides unique information. As one of the strongest medicine-men in Ebiraland in ancient period, Pa Obege demonstrated his prowess by instructing that at death, his corpse should be laid on a chosen site on the rock and behold the body disappeared into the rock leaving behind a shape of a grave. This tomb site is now a tourist attraction to the earth-diviners and non-diviners. Essentially, in most traditional societies graves are considered as the acclaimed abode of the dead through which the world of the ancestor is linked. Public cemeteries are common sites in Ebiraland and elsewhere in Africa; with differentiation based on, especially, religious divides (with the Muslims, Christians and traditionalists having their separate cemeteries even within the same village, town or city).

### **Life-After-Death as Basis for Suspended Animation Process in Ebira Tao**

Arsing from our understanding of Ebira Tao notion of death and burial rites. The Ebira people strongly believe that upon death, one enters a state of after-life where death is profound connection with the cosmological forces of the physical and the spiritual worlds. The knowledge of after-life serves as comfort when loved ones die as we hope to see again. The above view if sustained, significantly reduces the morbid fear that characterizes death.

The strong feeling of reunification with the living-dead in future life confirms the belief of the Ebira people of life-after-death. Thus, the belief that there is after-life or life-after-death means that there is resurrection as succinctly held by the adherents of Islam and Christianity.

First, the Creator of life and death is still capable of restoring life to the dead. Second, God has resurrected human in sleep when presumed dead; in coma and trance in unconscious state. The concept of life after death is not a monopoly of Islam and Christianity religions but a belief strongly held by the Ebira People. The tradition also holds that one who gives life to earth after death shall give life to man after encountering

death.

It is in the light of these views that Iroegbu, Pantaleon in *Enwisdomization and African philosophy* writes:

The most fundamental objective of the philosophical quest is the penetration of the being of the human person towards the fuller requirements of his being as human-in-the-world destined for higher-being in the ontological sense of sharing in the continuity of being hereafter... Full being hereafter is in view of full being in the totality of the now (155)

Thus, the African strive assiduously to ensuring that,

All his having, knowing and acting as well as all his relating have this fullness of being in the present reincarnational, ancestral and transcendental world as their *terminus ad quem*. Equally all the other aspects of life, and study-anthropological, epistemological, hermeneutical, socio-political and axiological- are ultimately directed towards the full ontological realization of being as human both in his corporeality and in his spirituality (Iroegbu, *Enwisdomization* 155).

Death as transformation of man is a necessary consequence of the appropriated materials in the fact that all human existential life experience is dynamically progressive or retrograde into the level of the next world or hereafter. It is this regard that death helps to reconstruct man from a previously deconstructed, clarified or purified raw material (physical human being)

Among the Ebira Tao, the physical world and the spiritual world dovetail and inhabited by force or beings that are hierarchically acknowledge. Thus, objects or non-objects are placed in an ontological order according to their vital ranks (Ajana, 1990, p. 63). In this regard, the Ebira people believe that humankind is the centre of all created forces or beings and as such regarded as measure of all things in existence as posited by Protagoras of Abdera. Human superiority over other forces or beings stems from human individuals possession of intelligence which placed him on a higher pedestal among beings in the universe. Writing on the same issue, John, (1961,p.101) believes that “things stand at the disposal of *muntu* or 'at hand' for man”. Man's intelligence gives him an edge and control over spiritual life-force. However, the magnitude of an individual man's sovereignty is a function of that individual's ontological vital rank or superior/higher vital force with which he can use to influence other forces.

The idea of reincarnation in Ebira Tao ontology presupposes the coming back to life of the erstwhile departed soul in such a way that the major traits and characteristics are well noticed in the reincarnated being. The Ebira Tao rite of reincarnation remains an indelible practice among the people, even in the present period. To buttress this view further, Ibrahim, believes,

“The Ebira Tao hold the notion that the living-dead are reincarnated in totality” (108). Unlike in other cultures as stated by Mbiti, who contend that aspect of their personalities of physical characteristics are re-born in their descendants.(133)

During the reincarnation process of a child, the Ebira Tao besiege the Ultimate, the ancestors and the earth to ensure that the new initiate fully participate in the harmonious and prosperous living on earth just like his/her forbearer that he reincarnate. This idea that man can live again through reincarnation succinctly supports the assertion that the issue of death and hereafter is suspended animation program of the Ultimate Creator.

### **Conclusion**

Existence in Ebira Tao thought system is viewed holistically, this is because it is interwoven and held to be integrative, because it considers all the facets of human reality. The tripod issues of human existence (life), human transition (death) and life-after-death (suspended animation) is in totality the very essence of human personality in both the physical and spiritual worlds. It is from the holistic view that this key essence of the Ebira Tao thought system as regards the above tripods that one can really understand the essence of their ontology. In this paper we have considered, the Ebira Tao and African human existence one whole in which the individual is essential a member of the community that transverse the two worlds.

The study considered death as inevitable and among the Ebira Tao not as agonies and destruction. But a stage in life that requires transition to higher life, And that death can be faced with human courage and the unconquerable spirit of man. The issue of death is seen as a composite picture of man's life existence which is to be born today and only to die tomorrow and thereafter resurrect in the netherworld. This resurrection only happens as a result of the immortality of the very essence of man which is his soul. The presentation of death in two different images of reality only subsumed into the process of suspended animation as a possible reconciliation with the ancestral world on a higher pedestal.

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