

Translating the Hebrew Name יהוה into the Yoruba language of Nigeria in the Yoruba Bible

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Scholars are not unanimous about the correct pronunciation of the tetragrammaton, YHWH. The exact origin and meaning of the name have also been a subject of debate among scholars. Since translation is also interpretation, no one can give a correct translation of any word without knowing the actual meaning. While the Septuagint (LXX) translates the Hebrew word יהוה into Kurios, an English translation (New Revised Standard Version – NRSV) translates it as LORD. The translation of יהוה into the Yoruba language in the Yoruba Bible is *Oluwa* which I consider unacceptable. The purpose of this article is to propose the translation of the Hebrew יהוה to the most appropriate Yoruba name for the supreme God (*Oladumare* instead of *Oluwa*) which cannot be misunderstood by any Yoruba reader.¹

Keywords: Old Testament; Yahweh; African traditional religion; Olodumare; Oluwa; Translation; Yoruba language.

Introduction

The name יהוה refers to the God of Israel. These four Hebrew letters are referred to as tetragram or tetragrammaton by scholars (Hamilton 2011:64; Shaw 2016:759–762). Tetragrammaton comes from a Greek word τετραγράμματον and a Latin script YHWH which literally means four letters and יהוה in Hebrew. The name appears more than 6 823 times in the Old Testament (Renn 2005:339–440). The fact that the vowel signs in the tetragrammaton were not represented in the writing system, originally led to the question of what vowels should apply to it or how to pronounce it (Ortiepp 2011:12).

Most of the earlier translators of the Yoruba Bible may not have understood the original languages directly (Komolafe 2012). What appears to compound the situation is that the European supervisors of the Yoruba Bible translators were not native speakers of the Yoruba language (*BibeliMimo* 1900).

Given that the word יהוה is translated to 'LORD' in the English versions of the Bible (e.g. King James Version [KJV] and Revised Standard Version [RSV]), it is assumed that it means *Oluwa* in the Yoruba Bible. Because of this, the translators of the Yoruba Bible (*BibeliMimo* and *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka*) translated Yahweh to *Oluwa* and *Jehofa*. I believe such translations are inappropriate. I propose that a better translation is *Oladumare*. What appears to be a more serious problem is the fact that, to my knowledge, there have been no attempts to correct these inappropriate Yoruba translations.

The purpose of this article is to express the problems with the present translation of the Bible into the Yoruba language and to suggest a more appropriate translation of the name *Yahweh* in the Yoruba Bible. This article also emphasises the urgent need for a retranslation of the Yoruba Bible by competent native scholars who are experts in Hebrew, Greek and the Yoruba languages.²

To achieve the above objectives, this article discusses the origin and meaning of the name יהוה as well as the translation of it into the Greek, English and Yoruba versions of the Bible. Various translation theories, attempted for a credible translation, will be briefly surveyed. As there has

1. There are many other words in the Old Testament that have been mistranslated into the Yoruba language. These include the Old Testament book titles such as *Genesis* to *Genesisi*, *Exodus* to *Exodu*, *Numbers* to *Numeri*, *Leviticus* to *Lefitiku*, *Deuteronomy* to *Deuteronomi* and *Psalms* to *Orin Dafidi* (Adamo 1984:454–482). Thus, there is an urgent need to retranslate the entire Yoruba Bible into the Yoruba language from Hebrew and Greek.

2. The Yoruba people, often considered to be one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa south of the Sahara, are primarily located in South-western Nigeria. There are also a few Yoruba people in Benin and Togo.

Note: This article was originally presented as a paper at the SASNES/OTSSA conferences at the North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa on 14–16 August 2018. This article does not represent a lack of appreciation for the contribution of missionaries. God has used whatever mistakes they made to bless us in Africa. I am a product of those blessings.

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been no single perfect translation theory from the numerous suggestions, an attempt will be made to use a combination of theories that may apply to this article. Among the principles which may be used to achieve this, is a combination of dynamic equivalence, linguistic, cultural and postcolonial translation theories.

Origin and meaning of the name יְהוָה

Origin

Exodus 3:13–15 has been a subject of debate among scholars.³ The number of interpretations of the meaning and functions of the divine name in the text of Exodus 3:14, which have been proposed over many centuries, seems endless. One can only mention a few of them.

In Exodus 3:14, Moses asks God how he should answer his people when they ask for his name. God gave him three answers in verses 14 and 15 (Phillips 1998:81–84):

1. 'I am who I am' (3:14a – NRSV).
2. 'I am has sent me to you' (3:14b – NRSV).
3. 'Tell the Israelites, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has sent me to you' (3:15 – NRSV).

What appears to be the author's concern in Exodus is the identification of the God of the forefathers and the God who appears to Moses in the burning bush (Phillips 1998:81–84).

There have been debates regarding the origin of the word יְהוָה, and whether it was newly created by Moses or pre-mosaic. While some scholars believe that the name existed before Moses and that Moses took it from an earlier tradition, others believe that Moses invented it (Foerster 1965:1065–1066; Mowinckel 1961:21–23). Many reasons for this view are cited. Firstly, such a name was found in Akkadian proper names and in Ras Shamra texts which dated as far back as the 15th to 13th centuries BCE (Foerster 1965:1065–1066); secondly, in Egyptian or African religions, especially Amon Re, reference to the 'King of the gods', is also cited as the possible origin of the Yahweh religion that has contributed to Yahweh theological tradition (Foerster 1965:1065–1066); thirdly, also the Kennite hypothesis is cited as a reason, because Moses became the son-in-law of Jethro, the priest of Midian, who worshipped Yahweh before Moses. It was therefore suggested that Moses was bound by oath to his father-in-law and that is why he later adopted the name יְהוָה (Jdg 1:16; Foerster 1965:1066); and fourthly, the primitive abbreviation *Yah* that is related to the moon cult *Ya-huwa*, which means 'oh he', could also be a reason (Mowinckel 1961:21–23).

3. According to Phillips (1998:81–84), the first person singular of the verb to be, *I am* in Exodus 3:14, is a later interpolation and attempt to explain the meaning of the divine name *Yahweh*. Exodus 3:14b is a redactional transition to verse 15, probably inserted by the Proto-Deuteronomists and that, in their revision of the Sinai narrative, they introduced verse 14 (Phillips 1998:81–84). Exodus 3:14a is also regarded as an interpolation derived from Hosea 1:9 (Phillips 1998:81–84). The answer to Moses' question is, in the first place *Yahweh*; and secondly, who the God of the fathers is. There is only one place where the word אֱלֹהִים was used in the Old Testament, viz. in Hosea, which many scholars believe that it has a reference to Exodus 3:14. It means that the covenant relationship established with Israel in Sinai has been terminated. However, Phillips (1998:81–84) thinks that Hosea should be interpreted independently of Exodus 3:14.

Several scholars have rejected the above theories (Beitzel 1980:5–20; Foerster 1965:1066; Hamilton 2011:64; Jacob 1964:48; Kearney 2002:75–85). It is suggested that it originated from the verbal root הָהָה or הָהָה. Beitzel 1980:5–20 believes that the relationship between the verb הָהָה and the divine name *Yahweh* is that of etymology. It means that the origin of the word יְהוָה is from God's lips itself, according to the Exodus 3 tradition (Foerster 1965:1066).

Meaning

Different commentators interpret the words אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אָהָה differently. Some believe the words are an ambiguous and contradictory answer to Moses' question when he asked God for his name in Exodus 3:14 (Sachs 2010:244–246). According to Sachs (2010:244–246), אֲהָה means 'I am', or 'I shall be', because it signifies an action that is not yet concluded and therefore אֲהָה אֲשֶׁר אָהָה can mean different ways of 'self-definition'. Firstly, 'I am who I am', which refers to 'an eternally unchanging Being'; secondly, 'I am who I shall be', which stands for 'a fundamental constancy regardless of variations'; thirdly, 'I shall be who I am', which is 'the evolution that is inherent in the essence of God'; and fourthly, 'I shall be who I shall be', which can also have two meanings: 'To everyone I am something else', or 'each person has a different idea of me'.

According to Schild (1954:296), 'I am who I am' is regarded as the explanation of the meaning of the divine name which connects with the root of the verb 'to be' (הָהָה). This verb 'to be' has two connotations: expression of 'identity' or 'existence'. This verse is meant to express the mystery of God and how impossible it is to define his name (Schild 1954:296–302). According to Schild (1954:296–302), 'I am' means therefore 'I am not telling you who and what I am', or 'I am I'. In other words, God cannot be defined. He is his own definition.

No doubt the Hebrew Bible calls God different names ranging from generic to the proper. Examples of the generic names is El or Elohim, Adonai and others. Adonai, which is used very frequently, is the traditional and pious reading replacement of the proper name of God, namely יְהוָה (Sonek 2009:174–183). Barton (1998:1–6) has rightly said, 'in every age, interpreters ask different questions, and so different aspects of the text's meaning emerge'. Thus, a new meaning of the text also emerged in the interpretative process according to the readers' presupposition and interest. There is therefore the need for constant reinterpretation (Sonek 2009:174–183).

According to Sonek (2009:174–184), there are two major ways of interpreting Exodus 3:14: positive and negative. The positive way is to interpret the tetragrammaton as a disclosure of the nature of God; and the negative way of interpreting the text of Exodus 3:14 is that both the names and its literary context conceal the nature of God.

A closer examination of Exodus 3:13–15 shows that it contains parallel phrases and two divine names of God, namely *Yahweh* and *Elohim*. Some people see these two

names as an indicator of the passage coming from two different sources. Yahweh is a personal name, while Elohim is a generic name (Hertog 2002:213–228).

In Exodus 3:13, the generic name of God is used. Moses asked God, 'If I say to the Israelites', 'God [Elohim] of your ancestors has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?', what shall I say to them?' (NRSV). Here, Exodus 3:14 is supposed to be the explanation of the Name of God (אֶלְאָנֹה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹה [I am who I am], v. 14; [I am has sent me to you], v. 14 – NRSV).

Exodus 3:15 uses the name of God in its proper form, namely יהוה. God told Moses, 'The Lord (יהוה), the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has sent me to you' (Ex 3:15). 'This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations' (Ex 3:15 – NRSV; Sonek 2009:174–184). Thus, the tetragrammaton was to supplement the name Elohim (Kearney 2002:75–85). Yahweh is more of a name of invocation that makes God more personal and eschatological. In other words, God ceases to be the 'unnameable, the inaccessible, ... and impassable' (Kearney 2002:75–85). The name revealed to Moses, is not some kind of secret name or essence, but as God who is the coming God who may be (Kearney 2002:75–85). The name יהוה can be understood to be *qal* imperfect third person singular form of the verb *to be* יהה. If it is a *qal* imperfect singular third person, it should mean 'he is', 'he will be', or 'he who exists' (Sonek 2009:174–184). However, if the name is taken as the *hiphil* form of יהה, the meaning will be 'he who causes things to exist', or 'he who causes events to happen' (Brownlee 1977:39–46; Sonek 2009:174–184).

The revelation of the name of God in Exodus 3:13–15 serves two purposes. Firstly, it confirms that the same God who speaks to Moses is the same One who spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 15); and secondly, Exodus' name reassures Moses and the Israelites that God will also be with them at all times (Sonek 2009:174–184).

Apart from Exodus 3:14, no other passage in the Old Testament tries to explain the actual meaning of the word יהוה. Scholars have not been able to reach a unanimous agreement concerning the linguistic meaning of the tetragrammaton. One scholar (Beitzel 1980:5–20) proposes that it is fruitless to try to know the meaning of the tetragrammaton, because the original form *Yah*, *Yahuor* *Yo* was just an 'emotional ejaculation' or 'solemn cultic cry'.

According to Hamilton (2011:64), the term אהיה is the first person imperfect of the verb יהה which means 'I was', 'I am', and 'I will be', and may also mean 'that', 'what' and 'who'. Hamilton (2011:64) believes that אהיה אשר אהיה could be translated in the following ways:

1. 'I who I am';
2. 'I am who I was';
3. 'I am who I shall be';
4. 'I was who I am';

5. 'I who I was';
6. 'I was who I shall be';
7. 'I shall be who I am';
8. 'I shall be who I was';
9. 'I shall be who I shall be'.

The nine suggested meanings above suggest the same meaning stated in different ways and in different tenses.

Translation of יהוה into English versions

The LXX translated the Hebrew word יהוה to *Kurios*. It appears 9 000 times in the LXX (Bintenhard 1976:511).⁴ In this case, the LXX seems to strengthen the Jewish tendency of avoiding the utterance of the name יהוה (Mundhenk 2010:58–63; Oseka 2016:13–44). When the KJV was translated, the word *Yahweh* was translated as *LORD*; thus following the later translation of the LXX to *Kurios*. In 1901, the revision done by the 'American divines', The American Standard Version (ASV), retained the term *LORD*. The same term is used in the RSV of 1952 which sets out to make the Bible clearer to the public by changing some of the archaic words. The New American Standard Version (NASV) of 1960 used this same term in some of its passages. The Jerusalem Bible (TJB) and the New International Version (NIV) used the same word, *viz.* *LORD*.

Translating the name יהוה into the Yoruba language in the Yoruba Bible

The first translation of the Yoruba Bible, *BibeliMimo*, was printed in 1884 and reprinted in 1900. Bishop Ajayi Crowther played a significant role in the translation. He was supervised by British missionaries (*BibeliMimo* 900). There is also a 1959 edition in which some of the misprinting and other incorrect words were replaced by the United Bible Society. Some of the words that were revised are:

- *okorin* becomes *okunrin* – wrong spelling of a male is corrected;
- *obirin* becomes *obinrin* – wrong spelling of a female is corrected;
- *Ndao* becomes *Rara o* (Lk 22:35) – a word (no), which is not even a Yoruba word, is corrected;
- *daiyafa* becomes *daiyaja* (Dt 1:28) – the correct spelling of the phrase 'to fear', is corrected;
- *Gabasi* becomes *Ila orun* (Nm 2:3) – the wrong word, which is not even a Yoruba word, is corrected to 'rising sun';
- *yama* becomes *orun* (Ez 41:12) – the wrong word, which is not even a Yoruba word, is corrected to 'sun';
- *Nos* becomes *Mose* (Ex 18:12) – the name of Moses is corrected;
- *ogboni* becomes *okunrin* (Ez 23:23) – the wrong word, which means a male, is corrected;
- *Oledo* becomes *Olododo* (1 Cor 1:9) – the wrong word (zero) is corrected to righteousness.

⁴The word in the LXX, refers to *men* about 190 times and 15 times to *ba'al*. The word can also refer to a commander, ruler or lord.

In 1980, another version of the Yoruba Bible (*Bibeli Yoruba Atoka*) was translated into modern Yoruba language with references or concordance. It translated יהוה to *Jehofa*.⁵

Translation principles

Although the purpose of this article is not the discussion of translation theories, I believe that it is important to mention various major translation theories before arriving at the suggested translation of the Hebrew name יהוה into the Yoruba language in the Yoruba Bible. I will begin with E.A. Nida (1914–2011), who is regarded as the most distinguished and influential theorist of Bible translation of the 20th century. He is best known for the concept of dynamic equivalence – later renamed as ‘functional equivalence’ (Cheung 2011:51). Nida’s work came into prominence in the 1960s after publishing his books, *Toward a science of translating* (1964) and *The theory and practice of translation* (1969). The 1960s has been described as ‘The age of equivalence’ (Malmkær 2005:5; Pym 2004:44). Four of Nida’s translation principles are still notably crucial to this work. Firstly, a translator must reproduce the meaning of the passage as understood by the writer (Nida & Taber 1982:8); secondly, the translator must choose the closest or most natural equivalent meaning (Nida & Taber 1982:8); thirdly, meaningless words or vocabularies must be avoided in the text (Nida & Taber 1982:30); and fourthly, priority must be given to the need of the audience or readers about the forms of the written language (Nida & Taber 1982:31). According to Robert Bratcher (1999:588), a translator has three tasks: firstly, to determine the form of the original text; secondly, to ascertain the meaning of the original text; and thirdly, to transfer the meaning to the target language in such a way that the readers of the translation understand it as did the readers of the original. Other scholars were concerned about the dynamic equivalence and that translators should find the dynamic equivalence of the original language (Kiboko 2017:32–36; Thomas 1990:161).

Since Nida’s translations, some changes have taken place in the form of improvement in translation theory. A shift from source-text to target-text oriented theories and a shift, which includes cultural and linguistic factors in translation theory, took place (Gentzler 2001:70). By 1965, J.C. Catford went further than Nida by borrowing the ideas and terminologies from linguistics, because he (Catford 1965:19) believed that ‘the theory of translation is essentially a theory of applied linguistics’. According to Catford (1965:1), the definition of translation is ‘a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another’. He introduced two major categories to translation, namely ‘rank-bound’ and ‘unbounded’ translations (Cheung 2011:56). Catford (1965:27) also introduced a distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence.

By 1970, translation theorists started moving away from linguistic approaches to a wider view of translation of social and political perspectives. This development came at a time of

.....
5. It was mentioned above that such translation is inappropriate.

‘cultural turn’ with the rise of ‘interdisciplinary development in the humanities and social sciences’ (Cheung 2011:57).

George Steiner (1975:378), who championed the development of functionalist approaches, was best known for his ‘Hermeneutic Motion’. He thought that translation ranged widely across philosophy, literature and hermeneutics. His (Steiner 1975:312) key contribution to translation theory is his form of four-step hermeneutic motion called ‘The act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning’. The four motions by which he set forth his description, are trust, aggression, incorporation and restitution (Steiner 1975:296–303).

The year 1980 was the period of change from a formalist and linguistic approach to the emphasis on extra-textual factors and cross-cultural interaction (Cheung 2011:60). ‘Cultural turn’ has to do with a ‘movement across the social science to incorporate matters of socio-cultural convention, history and context’ (Cheung 2011:60; Snell-Hornby 2006:47). Gentzler (2001:70) advocated for ‘target-text oriented theories’ by which he meant functionalist approaches such as the *skopos* theory.

The best known functionalist approach is the *skopos* theory developed by Hans Vermeer. According to Reiss and Vermeer (1984:119), the overriding rule for *skopos* is that the target text should be determined by its function, and what is most important is whether it is fit for the purpose or not. According to this theory, ‘[t]he primary aim of the translator is to fashion a target text that is functional in the target audience community’ (Cheung 2011:60). As far as functional approaches are concerned, what makes a translated text good is whether it is fit for a purpose or not, and in the words of Christiane Nord (1997:29), ‘the ends justify the means’.

In 1991, Ernst-August Gutt developed a translation and relevance theory with a cognitive approach to translation. According to Gutt, communication is dependent on inferential processes (Cheung 2011:64). The central claim of the relevance theory is that human communication creates an expectation of optimal relevance that there are ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ translations. While the ‘direct’ translation ‘purports to interpretively resemble the original completely’ (Gutt 1991:163), the ‘indirect translation yields the intended interpretation without causing the audience unnecessary processing effort’ (Cheung 2011:67; Gutt 1991:42).

Foreign translation was advocated by Lawrence Venuti. Observing that literary works were almost universally domesticated, Venuti (1998:12) argued that target cultures would be better served with foreign translations.

Rasiah Sugirtharajah (2002:135–148) is one of the specialists in postcolonial translation theory. Postcolonial translation theory deals with the examination of how the translation was practiced in the former colonial cultures; how the works of the writers from former colonies were translated into other languages; and the actual historical role played by translation

in the process of colonisation. In a way, postcolonial translation overlaps with the foreign theory in the area of resistance and power balancing (Cheung 2011:73–74).

It is impossible to survey all the various translation theories in this article. However, it is important to mention that none of the above theories is perfect and the use of a combination of some of them can be important and helpful. In this case, both the equivalence, *skopos* and postcolonial theories, which overlap with African biblical hermeneutics and not only takes the language of the people very seriously, but also their culture and religion, are useful for this article.

The translation of Yahweh to *Oluwa* in the Yoruba Bible

In most current editions of the Yoruba Bible, the name יהוה is translated to *Oluwa* with the exception of *Bibeli Yoruba Atoka* (1980) which transliterates the name to *Jehofa*. It is not acceptable, because it is meaningless to Yoruba Christians. When we consider the meaning of *Oluwa* in Yoruba, it is equally not acceptable even though it was translated as such and are in use in almost all the Yoruba Bibles. There are some reasons why I object to the translation of Yahweh to *Oluwa*. Despite the universal acceptance of *Oluwa* by the Yoruba people, as translated in the Yoruba Bible, I strongly believe that such word cannot be appropriate for Yahweh according to the meaning in the Hebrew language. As discussed above, the name יהוה means a unique and incomparable God, whereas *Oluwa* is not a name, but a title. This title literally means 'master'. The title *Oluwa*, as the word 'Lord', can be given to any person in a higher position such as a military officer, teacher or any helper, mother or father. It can be used as a description of any god. In other words, the divine element is absent from the title *Oluwa*.

Despite the disagreement among scholars concerning the meaning and origin of the name Yahweh, there is some universal agreement among scholars that it originated from the revelation in Exodus 3 and that the root of the Hebrew word יהוה is יהה or הוה. As discussed above, there seems to be a general agreement among scholars that the term יהה is the first person imperfect of the verb הוה which means 'I was', 'I am' and 'I will be', and may also mean 'that', 'what' and 'who' (Hamilton 2011:64). From the above meanings, *Oluwa* is not appropriate for *Yahweh* in the Yoruba Bible.

According to the Yoruba creation myths, there were four primordial beings or divinities who originally contended for superiority with the supreme Being, *Olodumare*. *Olodumare*, however, eventually demonstrated his superiority to the divinities (Oduyoye 2008:17–20). The result is that the Yoruba people, especially Christians, see *Olodumare* alone as the supreme Being and all other beings or gods are non-existing. *Olodumare* is unique. Because of the supremacy and the uniqueness of *Olodumare*, the name '*Olodumare*' is never applied to any human being or to any other god. No *Orisa* or divinity is called *Olodumare*. Whereas the divine element is

absent in the title '*Oluwa*', it is part and parcel of *Olodumare*, who is unique. From the above principles of translation, I believe that the most appropriate translation of יהוה is *Olodumare* which is a name, instead of *Oluwa*, which is a title.

There are many Yoruba names that can be used for the supreme Being, but two of them are more prominent: *Olorun* and *Olodumare* (Yahweh Elohim).⁶ The translators of the Yoruba Bible and Yoruba Christians accepted the above translation to *Oluwa* instead of *Olodumare* as the equivalent of Yahweh. Considering the above, it is difficult to understand why the translators of the Yoruba Bible prefer *Oluwa* to *Olodumare* as the correct translation of יהוה. Perhaps one of the reasons is, that the Europeans who were the supervisors of the Yoruba translators were not native speakers of Yoruba and so did not understand the Yoruba language as thoroughly as they claimed to. It is also possible that the translators followed the idea of latter Judaism of not pronouncing the holy name of יהוה in order not to profane his holy name. Another possible reason is the practice of copying the English version of the Bible verbatim which copied the Greek (LXX) translation verbatim in translating YHWH to 'Lord', which means *Oluwa* in the Yoruba language.

I prefer the translation of יהוה to *Olodumare* instead of *Oluwa* in the Yoruba Bible because of the meaning and the attributes of *Olodumare*. While *Oluwa* simply and literally means 'master' or 'Lord', *Olodumare* has a deeper meaning, similar to Yahweh in his attributes and nature, יהוה. The word *Olodumare* has three words joined together, *Ol-Odu-mare*. While the *Ol* is a prefix, which means 'owner of' or 'lord of', *Odu* literally means 'very large', 'very extensive', 'very full', 'of superlative quality and worth,' or 'superlative in greatness, size, quality and worth' (Adamo 2017:13–16; Idowu 1960:34). The two together, 'Oodu' means someone who is a supreme head, one who possesses the sceptre of authority, or one who 'contains' the fullness of excellent attributes, or one who is superlative and perfect in greatness, size, quality and worth (Idowu 1960:34). *Mare* is a descriptive adjective meaning 'that does not go', 'that does not move or wander', 'that remains', and it has the implication of the fact that *Olodumare*, the supreme Deity who possesses superlative qualities, also has the 'attribute of remaining stable, far unchanging, constant, permanent and reliable' (Adamo 2017:15–16; Idowu 1960:34). According to Idowu, *Olodumare* means 'splendour, majesty-light and glory which God wears as king' (1960:36). Thus, the meaning of *Olodumare* is 'one who is supreme, superlatively great, incomparable and unsurpassable in majesty, excellent in attributes, stable, unchanging constant, reliable' (Adamo 2017:15–16; Gbadegesin 2018:45).⁷ *Olodumare*, the Yoruba name for God (YHWH) is considered the hidden and yet relevant God (Gbadegesin 2018:44).

6. As far as I am concerned, the translation of the name of God, *El*, *Elohim* to *Olorun* has no contention.

7. *Olorun* is another name for *Olodumare* and is self-explanatory. It has *Ol*, which is the prefix that means 'owner of' or 'lord of', as said above. The other part is *Orun* which literally means 'heaven'. *Olorun* therefore, means the owner or Lord of heaven (Idowu 1960:38–47).

Lucas (1948) also defines the word *Olodumare* as:

... *Olodu* is its intensive form, indicating completeness (e.g. *biro* 'woman'; *lobar* 'a woman in the full bloom of womanhood'). *Mare* means 'I shall go or I must go'. The meaning of *Olodumare* then is 'the Chief or the Exalted One to whom I must go or return'. (p. 40; Adamo 2017:16)

Modupe Oduyoye (2008:31) sees the variant of this same name as *Edumore* which he describes as 'the splendid, the glorious, full and whole'. *Olodumare* is 'the one who has wholeness of splendour – the Lord clothed in glorious light'. He (Oduyoye 2008:32) goes further to say that *Olodumare* is not a name: it is shown by the *Ol-* prefix to be a title ('owner of ...'), just as *Ol-* prefix in *Olorun* shows it to be a title ('the owner of heaven'). *Olodumare* is a name and not a title in the Yoruba language.

However, Ayo Bamigbose dismissed Idowu's and Oduyoye's definition and explains the meaning of *Olodumare* as *odu*. Part of the word *Olodumare* means 'bigness, vastness' (cited by Oduyoye 2008:34). Bamigbose continues to declare that the first part of *Ol-* (oni) should not be interpreted as a prefix of ownership: '*Olodumare* is merely an intensive variant of *Edumare* or *Odumare* just as *onimale* is not the owner of *imole*' (cited by Oduyoye 2008:34). According to Bamigbose, *Olodumare* means 'The immensity of heaven' and not the 'Lord or owner of the immensity of heaven' (cited by Oduyoye 2008:34). The name that 'stands above every other name, that is, *Olodumare*, is the owner of the Deity' (Idowu 1960:32).

Some Western biblical scholars who may not be very familiar with Yoruba religion and tradition may have problems accepting the fact that *Olodumare* refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel just as one Western scholar and anthropologist, Emil Ludwig, was so perplexed and puzzled when he was told that missionaries were teaching Africans about God. Ludwig asked, 'How can the untutored African conceive God? ... How can this be? Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing' (quoted by Adamo 2017:15–17; Idowu 1960:30). The names and attributes of *Olodumare* may further convince some Western scholars that the translation of יהה to *Olodumare* in the Yoruba Bible is more appropriate than *Oluwa*.

According to the Yoruba religion and tradition, the following are the names of *Olodumare*, the supreme Being (Adamo 2017:15–16; Awolalu 1979:vii, 10–12):

1. *Olorun* which literally means the owner of heaven;
2. *Eleda* which means the Creator;
3. *Alaaye* which means the owner of the earth;
4. *Eleme* which means the owner of Life;
5. *Olojooni* which means the owner of the day;
6. *OgaOgo* which means Lord of glory;
7. *Atererekariaiye* which means the one who spreads across the entire universe.

Of all these names, *Olodumare* is the most appropriate translation of יהה.

The attributes of *Olodumare* are the following (Awolalu 1979:vii, 12–18; Gehman 1989:189–194; Idowu 1960:38–47; Mbiti 1970:31–41):⁸

1. omnipotent;
2. omniscient;
3. transcendence;
4. king and judge;
5. uniqueness;
6. immortality;
7. holiness;
8. mercy;
9. goodness;
10. faithfulness.

It is important to note that the majority of scholars of African religion and the majority of African Christians have no doubt that *Olodumare* is the supreme Being and the same as the God of Israel who has not left himself without a witness all over the world (Gehman 1989; Idowu 1960; Mbiti 1970; Oduyoye 2008:17–20; Parrinder 1962; 1961).

Conclusion

I have discussed the various scholarly opinions about the origin and meaning of YHWH and have accepted the majority opinion that the word YHWH originated from the verb *to be*, יהה in Exodus 3:13–15. It means the ever-active God who was, who is and who will be. From my analysis of the translation of the Hebrew Bible to Greek, English and the Yoruba language of Nigeria, I believe that the translation to Kurios by the LXX and to LORD by the English version is not the best in light of the meaning of LORD in the Yoruba language. Unfortunately, the translators of the Yoruba Bible followed the LXX and English translation verbatim and translated the word YHWH to *Oluwa* which I consider to be inappropriate.

On this basis, and in regard of the great similarity of meaning and attributes of יהה and *Olodumare* in the Yoruba religion and tradition, Yahweh should be translated to *Olodumare* in the Yoruba Bible instead of *Oluwa*. Even though some human names can be insulting, no name of God in the Bible and Yoruba culture represents an insult. Therefore, no name of God in the Yoruba Bible should be transliterated. There is no name of God in the Bible and African culture that cannot be captured in the Yoruba language when translated, as these names have meanings in both the Hebrew and Yoruba traditions. Translation of God's name into the Yoruba language has several advantages. Firstly, the indigenous people will be more familiar with the Bible; secondly, the indigenous society understands the Bible better; thirdly, while names of God in the Bible and in the Yoruba language have meanings and most of the time represent the nature of God, the translation of God's name into the Yoruba language will help Yoruba readers to understand the nature of God; and fourthly, consequently Christianity will be more indigenised in Africa. It will reduce the anti-colonial opinion that the Bible is a foreign book and Christianity a foreign religion.

8. For further names and attributes of *Olodumare*, see Samuel Osunbuyide (2014:37, 40) in *Oríkinile Yoruba*.

Finally, having briefly discussed the history of translation from Hebrew to Greek and to English and Yoruba, I suggest that the Old Testament in the Yoruba Bible should be retranslated from the original languages by scholars who understand not only the original languages, but also the Yoruba language. It is my hope that such a retranslation of the Bible into the Yoruba language will be a continual process and that such translations will not only increase the understanding of the Scriptures, but also contribute to the health and growth of the churches and communities who read or engage in the worship life of the church.

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