

## The Twin Context in Yoruba Ontology: A Sociological Discourse

Gbadamosi, Stephen Gbenga<sup>1</sup>, Adeyemi Oluwadare Fatoki<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of the Social Sciences, Department of Sociology.

### ABSTRACT

The paper examined the contributions of the twins to the philosophy and sociology of the Yoruba society. It further investigated the Yoruba mentality and twin spiritual and physical roles within the Society.

The paper relied on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources would be based on oral interviews and archival materials. Secondary sources on the other hand, were included in literatures such as books and newspapers. The oral interviews would be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The documentary data would be subjected to internal and external criticism for authentication and then to textual and contextual analysis

The paper insight into ontology, sociology, and Philosophy deepened knowledge of Yoruba culture and sociology in the context of existing visibility towards spiritual and physical power.

**KEYWORDS:** Twins, Ontology, Culture, Sociology.

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### INTRODUCTION

Ontology is the study of what exists or what is real. The etymology of the word ontology goes back to the Greeks. The Greek word *Onto*, meaning being. Ontology, as a branch of philosophy is the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects. Ontology seeks the classification and explanation of entities. At its core, ontology is the study of what is. To define appropriately, ontology means what is real and does exist. The Supernatural in this sense becomes a subject of discourse. The entity man must see, hear, and feel the structure occupying space for it to be considered a reality. In the case of twins, they are reality but the supernatural powers attached to the twin as being a subject of argument among nationalities around the world. The Yoruba consider Twin Power a reality. This is the core of study for this research.

### THE SACREDNESS OF THE TWIN IN YORUBA ONTOLOGICAL-SOCIO CULTURE

Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria see twins (Ibeji) as more than biological occurrences. Rather, Ìbejì are believed to have special spiritual powers and are thought to hold a great celestial meaning. In traditional Yoruba society, having twins is thought to be a special gift from the gods (in fact twins are considered gods) and requires ceremonial respect, gift-giving and spiritual rituals (B.Lawal, 2011). Unlike several African cultures like the Efik that connect twins to bad luck, the Yoruba greatly respect twins and view these siblings as representations of good fortune and blessing to the home they came into and a link to their ancestors. As noted by Badmus Lawal "For Yoruba people, twins show a strong link between the physical and spiritual worlds, with twins connecting the two (B.Lawal, 2011). Some kind of connection in thought process between the spiritual world and the physical world. Yoruba sociology, philosophy, and mythology regards twins as sacred beings with a unique and powerful ontological status rooted in their duality and interconnectedness. However, sociological discourse on twins moves beyond the biological or psychological perspective; which primarily use twins for 'nature versus nurture studies, to examine twin ship as an irreducibly social and cultural phenomenon. In the womb, the formation of twins in the womb is a fascinating process (Jazeera, 2025). We have two types of Twins namely: Fraternal, and Identical. Fraternal Twins are formed when two disconnected eggs are fertilized by two different sperm (Jazeera, 2025). These twins are like normal siblings, sharing about half of their genes while on the other hand, Identical Twins are as a result of when a single fertilized egg (zygote) splits and develops into two separate embryos. These twins share almost one hundred percent of each other's genetics (Olarinoye & Alogba, 2022). There are processes of twin formation. For the Fraternal Twins, we have Hyper-ovulation, meaning the mother releases two eggs instead of one during ovulation. Fertilization also means that each egg is fertilized by a different sperm, whilst the term implantation means that both fertilized eggs implant separately in the uterus, developing into two embryos. In the case for the Identical twins, the processes are

splitting of the Zygote and the Timing of splitting. In this case the membrane arrangements are also split into two which are Early Split-Twins may have separate placentas; later Split would mean Twins often share a placenta. According to Galton, he concluded that nature has a larger effect than nurture on development.

The average belief of the Yoruba people that the Onibejì (Yoruba name for the god in care of Twins), is the spiritual force behind Twin power. In the past twins had always inspired fears and mystics. The ontology of the Yoruba twin mythology correlates on how they preview the soul. It is the soul of the twin that the Yoruba see as the uniqueness of the twin. The correlation of the soul that is one in a twin body defines the complexity of the socio-mythological belief. To the Yoruba there is one soul between the two twins: A case of one soul, two bodies. This negates the biological explanation for identical twins. Identical twins aren't exact copies. Studies show that up to 15% of identical twins have genetic variations due to a tiny number of mutations that happens after the zygote splits. The Yoruba belief that the soul is divided into three entities: which are, Emi, Eledaa, and Ojiji. For the Yoruba the Emi is the first type of soul. To the Yoruba mind, the Emi is considered to be the breath, heart, something that exists throughout the body. The Emi is the spirit of man to the Yoruba. The Ori is the Second type of soul. The Ori is invisible or intangible. The ori is associated with destiny. The Yoruba believe that destiny is connected to the term Ori. To the Yoruba, there is a connection between the spiritual Ori and the Physical head. Ori is the figurative head hence described as destiny. The Third entity of soul is the Ojiji (Shadow). It has no physical nor spiritual connection with happenings of man destiny but to follow the body around. The Ojiji is a spiritual CCTV that testifies for or against the body. The Soul is the cord between the spiritual and the physical. To the spiritual context, in the Yoruba state of mind, two bodies having one soul. The twin context in this sense is seen in the Yoruba oriki for twins. The Yoruba oriki associates spiritual power to twin hood. For the Yoruba, a mother of twins is indeed doubly blessed. With the birth of her twins, comes the family ability to attain a better life through the aid of these special children who are considered close to the gods. The Yoruba believe that special ceremonies must be performed, praise song sung, and special food be served to Twins.

The pose of twins in Yoruba cosmology is fused into sacred objects; the birth of the twins is seen of ontological spiritual alertness. The mythical narrations that are twins are the harbingers of luck, favour and power (Akinburo, 2008). According to Olajubu, the power to twins is ambivalent: on one hand, it brings wealth and security, on the other hand, brings evil and fear when it is not fed as per the ritual needs (Olajubu, 2003). This is probably the reason while Yorubas worship the Ere Ìbejì (carved twin figures), to define and demonstrate the link between the spiritual and the physical. The Yoruba twin worship is defined in the bend to the Ìbejì Orisha. It is important to note that a religious and cultural linkage had preserved the spiritual ties of the living and spiritual. The "Orisha Ìbejì god does not only protect the Yoruba people but also "The rite method that the Yoruba devote to Ìbejì involves the kind of intricate ceremony performed under the direction of the cult priest and other rite leaders which involves the use of the twin idols (Olarinoye & Alogba, 2022)." These items are not actually considered being pieces of art but are considered to be holders of the departed soul of the twins hence retaining the twins in the ancestral chain. The Yoruba believed that the Ere Ìbejì is a provider of food for the twin, clothing and offering ritual prayers- an action that is an authentication of the Yoruba belief of the unending of the connection between the living people and the dead people (Oyinloye & al, 2022). The figurative understandings of twins, therefore, reflect death and life as interrelated, and the spiritual world has a strong influence on the corporeal realm (B.Lawal, 2011). The Yoruba belief could also be linked to biblical assertions where the spiritual directs the physical. Ontologically, twins are considered a doorsill between what is visible and what is invisible, and they must be given due attention which will sustain social well-being. Hence, creating that sociological discourse to twin sociology relations in the society; it is important that the twins be respected since they are powerful intermediaries between man and God; when not heeded or respected they will bring havoc and misfortune (Olupona, 2014). Therefore, the high position in social chain of command of twins and their families can be fully explained by the common sense of the Yoruba culture where they are even greeted by enduring respect and love. Twins in their turn in Yoruba culture correspond to the principle of their Yoruba culture based on duality that prevails in this culture and tradition and is embodied in the Yoruba ontology and religion (Oyinloye & al, 2022). Twin births are thought of as balancing gifts that attain synchronization between the course of the living and that of the dead too. This imagery is vocalized cogent in the oral traditions and folklores where twins tend to be described as supernatural entities with paranormal powers.

The historical relationship of the Yoruba populations with twins can be seen as a mingling between trepidation and horror, since it follows an African ontological and mythological outlook dominated by the threat to the natural order (Jazeera, 2025). The birth of twins, in some instances, was seen as something abnormal, as an event that was supernatural that contradicted normal human conception process, so this resulted into feelings of reverence and suspicion. Through generations, twins gained the status of consecrated creatures, the personalities between the layers of the human and divine worlds. Indeed, as the ethnographic description of Bascom emphasizes, "The Yoruba people regarded twins as possessing protective and beneficent qualities, capable of influencing fortune and misfortune within the family and community (Bascom, 1969)." This is not only seen in the process of rite but also in the superior social standing given to families who gave birth to twins. The twin births are respected and in studies carried out by Oruene where he reported one of the highest rates of twins among the entire population of the world in Yorubaland (Oruene, 1983). "The prevalence of twins in Yoruba land is not merely a biological nosiness but a defining feature of the

community's distinctiveness and religious life. (Oruene, 1983)" Spiritual obligations are not the only community expectations when it comes to twins these are coupled with expected sociological responsibilities and roles played by twins and their families. The mothers of twins are given special attention during shared events and other communal festivals and ceremonies and the mothers of twins will have certain social advantages attached to them due to their position that is closest to the divine in the community (Oruene, 1983). Moreover, twins are supposed to instill the principles of mergence and unity that transcend individual identity, positioning them as exemplars of social cohesion and celestial balance. (Idowu, 1962)" This also correlates to hereditary factors in the Yoruba genetics included in environmental dietary habits found in food such as okra leaves and amala, being meals of the traditional meal composed of yam or cassava flour, are routinely consumed by Yoruba women as a means of helping them to be fertile and to raise the chances of fraternal twins. Estrogens in the local food diets have been identified as a substance that will induce hyper ovulation, but this has not proved conclusively through empirical research especially in University of Lagos Teaching Hospital (Oruene, 1983).

In the Yoruba anthropology, the twins play a role of sharp prestige that goes way beyond the limit that is attached to them due to being twins and are infused with various cultural filaments of representation and sacred implications and social reinventions. This raising is closely allied with the widespread ideas of fertility, wealth, and spiritual power thus making the twins the main symbols of Yoruba shared identity. Twins are not ordinary children born of a mother, but celestial gifts and spiritual power, the hopes of a Yoruba families for future sustenance and prosperity. Therefore, the reproduction of twins in a family is not just a biological but indeed spiritual. It is the sign of heavenly favors and spiritual power. Reverence of twins is a cosmic derivation that human reproduction and social expansion are inseparably bound to spiritual favors and social omniscience.

### CONCLUSION

According to one of the Yoruba proverbs, which have remained prominent over time, the Yoruba people hold certain beliefs with regards to twins as evidenced by, Ibeji ki pa ara won -twins do not kill each other- about their inseparability, and coexistence together (Geertz, 2017). The twin rite and cultural identity in Yoruba ontology is a relevant interface of faith, science, culture and social connotation. Therefore it should be added that this concept is consistent with the philosophical concept of duality and balance of the Yoruba people that crosses over most elements of their world. There is no doubt that the Yoruba had a rich history. The depth of knowledge had always been deep in terms of its philosophy and, sociology. The colonial influence however had downplayed this knowledge for a more racist attitude that seems to upgrade Hermitic tendencies which portray the African as unknowledgeable. According to Duyile William Abiodun, the colonial impact on infrastructure must be seen to be exploitative (Duyile, Ediagbonya, Buhari, & Nwachukwu, 2020)) but in most cases the culture of the people remained intact. He further buttressed his views through the prism of migration, politics and culture; (Duyile, William Abiodun, 2021 (Duyile, Economic Integration in West Africa, 1960-1975: An Enquiry into the Past, 2021)) and he took cognizance that Nigeria is a mono-economy state (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 'Japa' Phenomenon and Nigerian Students in the Mix of a Proxy war in Ukraine, 2023). Despite the anti colonial push by the colonial masters. The sociological discourse demonstrates that Nigeria is rich in culture and a study of twins proves this.

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