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Historicising the Twinship Institution in Oyo-Yoruba Society

Funmilola Adedayo Ogunbunmi, PhD
Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan.

Introduction

Historians are obsessed with the question of origin because it unravels mysteries and answer questions such as how, why and when of issues and events. The origin of twins attracted many questions from different scholars, traditional historians, anthropologists, sociologist and academic historians. Chappel¹ asserted that “the question of the origin of twins’ cult is probably thought as involving a number of obscure myths while Lucas”² regarded twinship institution as a survival of twin gods in ancient Egypt. Parrinder³ in his earlier assertion, wrote that Yoruba formerly disposed twins at birth and that cult of twin was subsequently adopted from Fon neighbours. Johnson⁴ maintained that Alaafin Ajaka felt loth to kill his twins,

therefore, banished the royal twins from the palace. The banished royal twins eventually rose to become the founder of Ode-Ondo town. According to Johnson’s account, the banished royal twins eventually rose to become the founder of Ode Ondo town. Another oral source added that one of the oldest ancient kings of Ondo, Oba Pupupu, was a woman and a twin. Before going further, there is a need to make some clarifications.

To historicise is to render historic, making use of historical materials to explain actions and issues. Institution has to do with custom or system of a particular group of people or society that had existed for a long time. In this study, twinship is a kind of sacred institution, which involves series of paraphernalia such as sacrifices, festivals, rituals,

composition of praise songs, establishment of statuettes, and so on. Twins are sacred from birth and throughout their life-time people accord them due respect as in the kingship institution.

A number of traditional accounts dealing with the question of twins' origin were recorded by Chappel⁵. There was a period when Yoruba did not welcome twins because they believed it is inhuman to have two children at a time and the second version explained when the twins were accepted. The latter account was traced to Porto-Novo, Ajashe when Isokun relation from Oyo had twins. The account was further confirmed by the *Alajashe* of Port-Novo, Oba AbdulYekini Yusuff Saani, Abesan⁵⁶ (Plate 1).

From the two accounts given by Chappel, coupled with evasive action of Alafin Ajaka (as recorded by Johnson) not to destroy his twins, it could be inferred that the first Yoruba twins were born at a place called Isokun in Porto-Novo now Republic of Benin. The parents of the first surviving twins were Yoruba traders from the metropolis of Isokun Oyo. This eventually lends credence to the epithet of twins:

Ejire ara Isokun
(Twins, the one from Isokun)

In Yorubaland, twins are called and addressed as Taiwo and Kehinde. Taiwo or Taye is the first child that comes out of twin-birth. The name depict – the one sent by the other to sample the world (*to aye wo*). Kehinde

is the second child that comes out at twin-birth. The name means the child that comes after. Yoruba people believed that Kehinde is the senior among the two because he was the one who sent out Taiwo on assignment. Though this is contrary to the social-order of family hierarchy, the mystery could not be literarily explained.

The turn around brought about appeasement to the twins' cult. The efficacies of sacrifice to the twins ushered in fortunes, good health and riches. The turn around from twin infanticide to twin acceptance brought about appeasement to the twin's cult. There are varieties in the historical pattern of documenting twinship institution in Yorubaland. Among the earlier writers are traditional historians such as Oguntuyi⁷, Ayorinde⁸ and Johnson⁹. These authors narrated the twinship institution as it was reported to them without thorough investigation and analysis. According to Atanda¹⁰, traditional historians are ignorant of the art of writing history, his memory is the repository of the society's history. The thinking of traditional historian is dominated by superstition. Others are non-historians such as anthropologists, sociologist, linguists and archaeologists and art historians. Their interest was to document twinship in line with sociological issues thus capturing what depict their interest. Among such are Orueme¹¹ Meyerowitz¹², Thompson¹³, Mobolade¹⁴, Morton Williams¹⁵, Schapera¹⁶, Davidson¹⁷, Turner¹⁸, Aremu¹⁹ and so on. One of these authors, Johnson was well situated in Oyo and had a brief critique of his work on twinship. He was out to document the

twinship institution so that the culture might not become extinct. Oguntuyi centred his work on twinship in Ekiti while Ayorinde generalised his work on twins in Yorubaland, Olayemi was interested in documenting *orin- ibeji*²⁰, and he does not engage indepth analysis and interpretation as a trained historian would have done. Some art-historians such as Thompson²¹ and Houlberg²² were interested in revealing the artistic features of *ere ibeji* from various ethnic groups in Yorubaland.

Academic historians such as Renne²³, Awe²⁴, Ade-Ajayi² Afigbo²⁶, have through various oral genres, such as praise poem, make submissions on historical evidence on the origin and development of twinship in Yorubaland. Their findings revealed that variation exist in the modeling of twin's effigy. The statuettes revealed the belief and culture of various ethnic groups in Yorubaland. Academic historians are schooled in historiography which informed their knowledge of historical method. They can distinguish facts from opinion. Scott²⁷ opines that facts are sacred, opinion is free. Facts cannot be changed but opinion can be modified and adjusted. This marks out academic historians' from the traditional historians. Academic historians have an indepth interpretation of facts relating to sacred twinship institution. This actually guided their facts about twinship institution and also allowed them to critically examine the holistic ideas about the institution. Renne analysed twinship in Ekiti-Yoruba towns. His work only covers Ekiti areas without extending its tentacles to other Yoruba towns.

Fundamentally, both traditional and academic historians have over-emphasised the

idea of the existence of twins cult which have gained ground for a while. This paper digresses from the old order of perception extending a little more further to argue, that the existence of twinship institution, culminated in belief in the twins cult. As earlier mentioned, institution entails an important system of organisation in the society that has existed for a long time such as social institution, cultural institution, family and religion while cult means a system of belief and ritual connected with the worship of a deity, it also means 'the rites, ceremonies and practices of a religion or great or excessive devotion or dedication to a deity. In both definitions, it is so glaringly clear, that institution has the social engineering [for which twinship is associated and cult carried the symbol of religion]. Twinship institution is, therefore, more of social history than the religiousity of twins' cult.

This paper, therefore, tilts towards regarding twinship as a social phenomenon with religious undertone. This is why it has taken the stand on the social engineering dynamism with which twinship is associated. Indeed, this is the core of the contribution of this study to knowledge, especially tuning to a new explanation on twinship phenomenon in Oyo-Yoruba society.

This study becomes imperative to reveal that there is continuity of the past in the present with emphasis on some elements of the past which are more enduring. Nevertheless, the submission by the famous Yoruba traditional historian, Rev. S. Johnson³¹ and other academic historians such as Awe, Renne and Atanda had served as useful source-material for historians who were finding satisfactory

solution to the origin of twinship institution in Oyo-Yoruba society. Other oral source included *Ifa*-divination poems as analysed by Wande Abimbola³². Ayandele³³ advocated for historical scholarship which concentrates on Nigerian social and cultural life. He also advocated for conscientious upholding of cultural heritage that revealed our tradition, events, ideas and functions of traditional institutions such as twinship institution.

The works of academic historians revealed that they were not interested in historicising twinship institution in Yorubaland especially among the Oyo with the exception of Renne²⁸ who studied twins cult in Ekiti. Others preferred works that are integral of the whole. Awe²⁹ works on *oriki* as historical evidence; she gave a general view of *oriki* especially as related to warfare a preferred theme on 19th century civil wars in Yoruba society. Ade-Ajayi examined the themes preferred by historians and the neglected area. His work has been a challenge to the historians - making a clarion call to socio-cultural themes.

Historical Analysis of Twinship Institution and Periodisation

In the remote past, twins were not acceptable among the Yoruba. It was an abomination for a woman to give birth to twins. Hence twin infanticide was practised. Davidson³⁴ agrees that *Ibeji* can be dated from the age of the surviving twin. Johnson³⁵ and Chappel³⁶ record the evasive action of King Ajaka, who felt loathed to dispose his royal twins around 12th and 15th century. He banished them and they eventually founded Ode-Ondo. The account

coincided with the Chappel account of Isokun-Oyo relations who lived in Porto-Novo. The Oyo parents allowed his twins to live according to *Ifa* dictation. The twin later brought fortune and riches to the parents. The news reached Oyo kingdom and this in turn facilitated wide acceptance of twins among the people. The *Alaafin* decreed to put a total stop to twin infanticide though not all Yoruba-speaking people acceded to the order until the early 19th century. Oguntuyi¹⁷ records that the tradition existed for some time in Ekitiland.

By the end of the 19th century, with the untireless effort of the European missionaries, twin infanticide was totally eradicated. Twin parents were encouraged; the Governor-General through the District Officers gave the Queen's bounty for the birth of twins and triplets³⁸. Modern social and health facilities were introduced to reduce twin's mortality rate while children were exposed to western education. These factors ushered in a new era in twinship institution.

The new era brought about change in the perception of the twinship institution in the society. Twin's cult became a general phenomenon and was widely accepted among the people. Civilisation, scientific discoveries and innovations began to have effect on the belief system of the Yoruba people on twin's institution.

Twinship Institution in Yoruba Society after 1890s

By the 1890s, the activities of the missionaries had become visible and pronounced in Yorubaland. Hinderer³⁹ had established that the mission work extended into the interior

of Yorubaland and has opened schools and vocational centres. The European missionaries strongly opposed all rituals intent on controlling the powers of the twins. The Yoruba people upheld the belief that the twins are supernatural beings, who should be worshipped and adored. The missionaries upheld the twins as special gift from God to be revered. The converts were taught to renounce their old belief and prohibited all cultural practices with regard to twins. As a result, large number of converts ceased to perform rituals, the rituals simply went underground and their dimensions were eclipsed. By the 1920s, ritual practices on behalf of the twins came under strong censure. The missionaries impinged on African traditional culture through various means. The most effective weapon used by Christian missionaries to disrupt the Yoruba belief on the twins was western education. All new converts were taught in the mission houses and were encouraged to jettison idea of dancing for twins at the market square or begging for alms on behalf of the twins. Parents were encouraged to send their wards to school. The twin shrines were rebuilt and converted into modern houses. With the introduction of western education, the scientific explanation of how twins are formed in the womb gradually eroded the traditional belief which encouraged twin ritual.

Awolalu⁴⁰ remarks that there were collaborators among the European traders, the administrators (colonial masters) and the missionaries to suppress the indigenous

religion and belief of the people and successfully imposed Christianity. They also used force to introduce higher standard of morality and a purer form of religion (since they adjudged their religion to be the best). Schools were opened in towns and many people became literate. Modern social amenities such as hospitals and health centres were established. This brought about conflict between the old practices and the new belief.

Madam Ajike⁴¹ (who resides in Oko) complained about the attitude of the Christian converts. According to her, the converts were taught to renounce their old belief. The missionaries also worked tirelessly to abolish human sacrifices as well as killing of twins. Mary Slessor and Mary Ellim⁴² made tremendous landmark in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

Ade Ajayi⁴³ reports that the problem encountered by the missionaries in Yorubaland could be as a result of lack of understanding of Yoruba indigenous religion. The missionaries concentrated only on the aspect of personal belief and forms of worship and consequently paid inadequate attention to education. For the same reason, they failed to understand the society they were dealing with. Both Baptist Mission and Christian Missionary Society (CMS) prohibited all cultural practices regarding the twins. As a consequence, large numbers of converts ceased performing rituals. The performance of rituals, in other cases, simply went underground. In the 1930s, ritual practices on behalf of the twins came under strong censure. The European missionaries did

not often visit the chiefdoms but when they did, they inadvertently censured Christian involvement in the twin rituals. The easiest Christian adherents stopped performing the twin rituals. Ade Ajayi⁴⁴ records the ineffectiveness of the missionaries in Benin Palace. The missionaries looked like ghost by their skin and that make Yoruba people to look at them with disdain, to the degree that at one point in time, a Yoruba king (the *Awujale*)⁴⁵ refused to shake hand with a missionary. Nevertheless, the missionary tried to impose their ideas and belief which was accepted by some and rejected by others.

Twinship Institution in the 20th Century Yoruba Society

Every functionally, interacting and progressive society experiences a form of change, from one level or another during this period. This is also the case with twinship institution in the 20th century Yoruba society. While this is so, certain features and practices might no longer be relevant to the contemporary society. Some were discarded while others had been maintained. The period has been classified by scholars, scientists, astronomers, historians and many others. Some tagged it as jet age era of scientific revolution or technological advancement. Today, the birth of twin is no longer news; it has become a general phenomenon. Nearly all over the world, twins are found everywhere in Africa, America, Europe, Asia and other continents.

The attitude of the present generation to indigenous religion in Yorubaland is discouraging. Hardly can a twin mother

recite few lines of the twins praise song. Traditional rites for the twin are reducing significantly while most shrines have disappeared. Despite this, the adherents of the new religion (Christian and Islam) found it difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate them from the traditional practices into which they were born, hence they revert to it from time to time. Categories of such people were interviewed. A middle aged woman, Agbeke Oladipupo was one of such. She sang thus⁴⁶:

Awa o soro ile wa o /eee
igbagbo o pe ka 'wa ma soro o
Awa o soro ile wa o

We shall observe our traditional rites/2ce
The new faith does not hinder us this
We shall observe our traditional rite

The above song shows that inspite of the changes expressed in twin beliefs, there has been a clear understanding of the resurgence of twin rituals in Oyo, Igboora, Oko, Ajashe, Porto-Novo in the Republic of Benin⁴⁷. Besides, some families continue to observe feasts for their twins without necessarily practising divination conducted by a ritual specialist. In other cases, the twins are simply honoured by the parents through preparation of beans meal for their friends and well wishers. This is referred to as *ewa-ibeji*⁴⁸ among the Igboora and Oko people. In some families, the entire ritual is compressed. People could still afford to organise feast for the twins but most often in a low-key. Various aspects of secularisation of belief, a sort of enchantment regarding twins and accompanying diminution of ritual practices for them are becoming less significant. This diminution is often

attributed to widespread conversion of Christianity and Islam. Many converts (Christians and Muslims) no longer believe in the necessity of twin ritual and in the carving of twin effigy (*ere ibeji*)⁴⁹.

Changing cosmological belief and everyday routine placed less emphasis on efficacy of the twin rituals. Children getting ill and taken to the hospital, children going to school, buying of school uniforms and books, children eating imported foods, exposure to internet exploration, new technological discoveries and many more contributed to the de-evaluation.

The abandonment of traditional values notwithstanding, a certain re-adjustment is now taking place. In Igboora, (Plate 2) modern annual twin festival has been introduced. The programme was initiated by an elder statesman of the town by the name Pa Simeon Ojelabi⁵⁰. The first festival took place in 2008. Twins and triplets, their parents and well wishers were invited. The programme attracted many people from various places of the world who graced the occasion.

The festival was accompanied with pomp and pageantry, winning and dinning. The traditional chiefs were in attendance and the local government chairmen of the area were present. The programme served as modern way to promote the twins' world. Similar programme was organised by Ogunyode's twin on 20th November 2009 and 15th September, 2010, at Cultural Centre, Mokola - Ibadan.

The adherents of the new religions, find it difficult if not impossible, to dissociate themselves from the traditional practices into which they were born. African Christians do not only

participate in the traditional festivals but have also introduced this element into the church such as harvest festival, father's day, mother's day, and children's day and so on. Various modern organisation and associations were organised to expose the various activities of the twins. Conferences and seminars were organised and initiated by the twins. Among such are Twins World Creation by Taiwo and Kehinde Ogunyode⁵¹. Twin Foundation, Twins Magazine are some of the non-government organisation established to support twins' world. The leading teams of some of these foundations made deliberate effort to promote twins' initiatives, talents and skills. Twins from various geographical zones in Nigeria have been encouraged to register and participate. Funds were raised to help the needy while the less privileged, twins' parents were commercially empowered. The programme encouraged and promoted twins' world.

Sourcing Data for the Reconstruction of Twinship Institution among the Oyo-Yoruba Society

The availability of literature on twins is scanty. However, some art historians such as Davidson⁵², Houlberg⁵³ Thompson⁵⁴ and scholars such as Davidson⁵⁵, Awe⁵⁶, Renne⁵⁷. Wande Abimbola⁵⁸, concentrated their writings on oral genres, which included praise poem (*oriki*), *Ifa* oral literature, songs, proverbs, folklores and folktales while historians dwelt on *ibeji* statuettes. Praise poem and songs as used by Awe makes the historical explanation a lot easier. Awe and Ayorinde⁵⁹ made extensive exposition into praise poem and

songs as historical evidence while Abimbola addresses *Ifa* oral literature. Val Olayemi⁶⁰ advanced our knowledge on twins' praise song titled '*orin ibeji*'. Bolanle Awe explains aesthetic value of praise songs. Awe and Ayorinde have been able to re-engineer Yoruba history for effective change and continuity. Atanda and Smith⁶¹ strongly advocated for historical progression of Yoruba myth. The historical explanation enshrined in myth is difficult to unravel but Atanda⁶² observed that historians work towards giving a satisfactory explanation.

Oriki (praise poem) acts as historical information to issues and stories. Much information of historical value is elicited which is not available in other traditional oral source. It constitutes significant source material for the reconstruction of the Yoruba past. *Oriki* as an expression of public opinion yet constituted a fruitful source for the interpretation of historical values. In a world of changing value, information derived from *oriki* can be used to corroborate or disprove evidence from other sources. It further reflects the values of the particular period during which it is composed, highlights what is acceptable behaviour and the qualities that are praiseworthy. It is possible to get direct historical information that could provide significant economic and social information, which is often absent from the essentially political histories and received traditions of the Yoruba country. In the twin praise poem, the traditional origin of twins, the value attached to the institution, the dietary of

the twins and the reason twins are attached to the species of monkey are often embedded. Hence the following praise poem of the twins:

E jire
 Ara Isokun
 Edunjobi
 Edun a gbe ori igi ta referefe
 Ateteji onigbale
 O sonu ko b'ejire
 Oninuure ni m bi edun
 O so alakiisa di onigba aso
 Wowo loju orogun
 Ejiworo loju emi iya e
 Okan nba bi, eji lo wole to mi⁶³

Twins, the relation of Isokun
 Relation of monkey descendent
 Monkey who climbs treetop with ease
 Early riser to sweep his portion
 The taciturn do not give birth to twins
 Only pleasant people give birth to twins
 The one that visits the impoverished and
 Endows him with immeasurable wealth
 He is scorned by step mothers
 But cherished by mothers
 While I would be contented with
 It was two that choose to visit me
 Twins jump into the home of ragged man
 Clothed the ragged with riches

Ruffled in the face of the step mother
 Pleasant rose in the face of the mother
 I would have given birth to one
 (But twins have come my way)

It has been revealed that the twin's poem varies from one community to another. The variation could be as a result of different traditions, customs or idea, but twins praise

song pointed towards the same belief. Atanda⁶⁴ explains how historian deals with origin. Historical explanation of twinship is such that they definitely have origin which is spiritual and mythical. But for the documentation of twins praise songs, festival and enduring cultic functionaries, twinship institution would have gone into oblivion. Praise-poem, however, has limitations. Unlike other oral traditions, it does not tell stories, it only delineates a portrait which is often an incomplete one. It sometimes provides highly figurative and compressed language that often presents a problem and hints from other historical sources.

Ifa Divination Poem as Source of Historical Evidence

In a typical Yoruba traditional setting, *Ifa* divination acts as an intermediary between man and the gods. The belief of God's exalted nature, therefore, necessitates the presence of intermediaries in the form of divinities as well as ancestral spirit. These divinities occupy a prime position in the Yoruba traditional belief. In fact, the Yoruba regarded the worship of *Orisa* (deities) as a natural obligation. Such deities were believed to set the societal norms, law and moral values that regulated the lives of the people. These were observed through the consultation of *Ifa* divination which dictates, instructs and guides the people. Chappel⁶⁵ explained the role played by *Ifa* divination in Porto-Novu to put a total stop to twin infanticide. Wande Abimbola explained on the aesthetic value of *Ifa* oracle. He hinted on a particular *Ifa* corpus which addresses

twins in his book, *Oju Odu Mererindinlogun*⁶⁶ thus:

eji o gbe
 eji, eji ni mo gbe
 No gbenikan soso mo
 A difa fun Taiwo oun oyinbo
 Won kaaki mole
 Ebo won niki won se
 Won gbo riru ebo
 Won ruu
 Won gbo tutu etutu
 Won tu
 Laye ba ye Taiwo
 Aye situn Yebo
 Ohun gbogbo ni se e yedun

I support two
 Two, Two is what I support
 I will not support single person anymore
 This is the story of Taiwo and Oyinbo
 They prepared themselves
 They were told to make sacrifice
 They obeyed
 And offered sacrifices
 They also made pleas
 They pleaded
 Life became pleasant for Taiwo
 And for Ebo

According to Abimbola⁶⁷, *ifa* corpus falls into two broad divisions. The first part is *Odu*. The *Odu* are 256 in number and they are believed to be deities in their own right. Based on this, the twins, as one of the deities, had been recognised by *ifa* and two passages of *Odu* are set in praise of twins. The greater part of *ese ifa* is rendered in poetic form. The subject matter of *ese-ifa* is to reveal the historical thought and belief of the Yoruba on twins, myths and histories of Yorubaland. *Ese ifa* is, however,

presented as historical poem. Each *ese* is believed to be an accurate account of what once happened or what has once been observed in the past.

Furthermore, the past event is presented as an accurate record of a past divination involving a priest of *ifa* and his clients as shown in the above - *aji-ogbe* that revealed what transpired between a particular twin (*Tayewo*) and a white man. This could have happened around 16th century when the Europeans came or later in the 18th century. Another historical evidence from *Ifa* corpus further reveals twins praise poem thus:

Ejigbese, gbigbe ni o gbe mi
A difa fun oju oro
Ti n lo isale abata
Ti n lo reek-an rile pmp ni bibi
Ejigbede, eyele o sako o sabo
Won a jumo jpra won
A difa fun Ejigbemi
Tii se omo lya moyamoya
Ejeeji ni mo gbe⁶⁸

Ejigbese support me
Who made divination for Oju oro
That was going to Isale abata
Who was going to see to child bearing?
Ejigbese, the pigeon is neither male nor female
They will resemble each other
Who made divination for Ejigbemi
Who is the sibling of Moyamoya
The two are what I support.

Another *Ifa* corpus called *Orutupon* also discusses twins as thus:

Ewe igba ni so ni yo lojo
Ewe emi ni seesan die
A difa fotuuru

Ti o o to'ko pon beji wale
Ebo wonni ki o se
O gbebo nile o rubo
O gbe etutu o pe, o tu
O ni igba oturu ppp meji
La to bimo⁶⁹

Igba's leaf springs and keeps
Emi's leaf keeps coconut's shell
Who made divination for Otuuru
Who do back twins from farm
He was asked to make sacrifice
He made the sacrifice
He also made the pleading
The owner of Igbo Oturu backs twins
Then we gave birth.

The two *Ifa* poems show the potent power of twins to bring forth children to the barren. Nevertheless, Abimbola identified the great problem with the use of *Ifa* as sources for historical evidence. Myth is what one wants to believe about the past and is based on belief and emotion. Dating is another problem confronting the user of oral traditions, but facts are facts whether you ascribe dates to them or not. One can hardly find direct information from the *ifa* divination that can help in dating any historical events. However, the identified problem does not preclude the historian from using *Ifa* divination poems for historical information. Researcher can take the historical evidence revealed by *Ifa* verse as hints or opinion, which may be taken seriously and subjected to further revelation from other sources⁷⁰.

Twin Festival as Sources of Data on Twinship Institution

Festival is one of the socio-cultural phenomena that reveal the historical identities

of twinship tradition in historical parlance. According to Nketia⁷¹, festival reveals the value that operate in the relationship between man and the unseen or between man and his environment, which influence the scope, form, content and intensity of his religious behaviour. Festival usually strengthens the social bonds that bind the twin with the family members and it affirms the spiritual values that inspire a people's way of life.

The origin of twin's festival was associated with Alaafin Ajaka's decision to allow his twins to live and the relation of Isokun-Oyo in Porto-Novo that gave birth to twins, as *Ifa's* instruction allow the twin to live. Their decision brought a dramatic turn around for the parents. This is a symbolic feature of twin festival as it is now celebrated, worshipped and revered. Awolalu⁷² recognised such worship as recognition of worth. Ulli Beier⁷³ observes that religious rites frequently commemorate historical events and they are important for several reasons. They are the chief media of the religious expression of the people. Secondly, the institution of the festival is in itself a cultural establishment. In practice, therefore, the festival often achieves more than mere religious expression.

The principal celebrants of the festival belongs to twinship institution, the twin-parents (plate 3), the priests (plate 4), twin adherents and the well-wishers. Twin festival grew out of religious psyche and it is usually accompanied by songs, praise poem and dance. It is a kind of re-enactment which helps to do a bit of documentation of *Odun Ibeji* (twin festival) as being recorded during the field work. In a

typical traditional Yoruba society, at the birth of the twins, shrines are made near a corner in the house. Palm oil is poured regularly (libation) in honour of *Orisa Ibeji* and offering and feasts are observed frequently by cooking beans, bean's cake (*ekuru*) for friends⁷⁴.

In twinship institution, traditional festival has shown a remarkable capacity for survival, inspite of the social and cultural changes that have taken place as a result of the impact of western culture, technology and education. The social and artistic roles of festivals have assumed new importance in contemporary life and many continue to be the mainstay or basis of patronage in the public aspects of festivals for people in all walks of life. Traditional festival now provides one of the vital links of the changing contemporary world with the past and a major channel for the expression and renewal of cultural identity. Ogunba⁷⁵ defines traditional festivals as indigenous cultural institution and has thrived till today.

Songs as Historical Data in Twinship Institution

Each divinity has its own set songs which are connected with twinship institution. These are sung as occasion demands. Songs are paramount to the twins and they are essentially composed rhythmically, ritualistic and liturgical. Rites performed during the twins' festival are accompanied with different songs specially composed for the twins. These songs are historical in nature and often revealed the mind of the adherents towards the twins. Among such songs are:

Epo mbe ewa mbe o/eee
 Aya mi o ja o o ye
 Aya mi o ja lati be, ibeji
 Epo mbe ewa mbe o

Palm oil is available, beans are available
 I am not therefore afraid o e
 I am not therefore afraid of giving birth to
 twins
 Palm oil is available, beans are available.⁷⁶

Edun lo ni'jo
 Emi ko ma so pe n'o'jo
 Edun lo ni n jo
 Eyi la, bibe ledun l be
 Edun pelenge ori igi

Monkey (Twins) compels me to dance
 I can not refuse to dance
 Monkey compels me to dance
 Monkey leaps about on the treetops
 A lean monkey that resides on the treetops

This song depicts the character of
 monkey on the treetops and it metaphorically
 shows that twins are equated or regarded
 as having monkey spirit.

iya beji n ki yin o
 oni e lowo e lowo o
 ejire n ki yin o
 oni e lowo e lowo o

The mother of twins greet you
 He prophesies that you shall have money
 Twins greet you
 He prophecy that you shall have money

The above songs show that Oyo-Yoruba
 people believed that twins have power to
 change people's destiny misfortunes to

fortune, poverty to riches once you can
 dance for them and wish them good. The
 above songs are common among the
 adherents of twins in Oyo and Igboora.

Historical Relevance of Various Songs

Epo n be èwà n be, is a song that depicts
 the diet of the twins. In the song, it is
 apparent that adequate preparation for the
 arrival of the twins has been made especially
 their best food which are beans and red
 oil. So the parents of the twins are not afraid
 to give birth to twins.

Eni ma bi beji shares similarity with the
 previous song, in that it is whoever needs
 the twins should be ready to provide for
 their diet i.e. beans.

Taye, Kehinde ijo lese; is a song that is
 both ritualistic and admonishing. In those
 days, it was traditional to observe certain
 rites especially during the naming ceremony,
 where ritual objects such as cooked beans
 enmeshed with red oil, cooked pupkin
 (*elegede*), sugar cane (*ireke*) honey (*oyin
 igan*), maize flour [*adun*] and colanuts were
 made available before a priest. The priest
 inquires about their chosen trades. If they
 choose, begging, for example, the mother
 must comply and starts it immediately. They
 will be carried about singing and dancing.
 If she could not appoint a drummer to
 accompany her singing and dancing, she
 could buy a local tambourine for the
 accompaniment. This song is rendered often
 as the mother sings and dances about to
 collect offering from the people.

The next song *edun lo ni n jo* aptly captures the aforesaid more vividly. *Edun* here refers to the twins mythically but literally *edun* is a monkey like creature. Monkey species often give birth to two more than any other animal.

Iya Ibeji n ki yin - Twins in those days were equated to the spirits or a kind of deity that are not ordinary beings. This explains why if one of them passes on, a carver is required to carve image of the dead one. The image is taken care of as the living. Whenever the mother (Plate 5) of the twins prophesises, it is always taken serious hence the mother of the twins is adjudged, blessing them.

Ejire e yi la ki, is a panegyric song extolling the virtues of the twins. The cognomen (praise names) of the twins is here recited. It is more recitative than any plain song. It employs free rhythm. The syllabic division in prosodic form reveals irregular beat structure.

Conclusion

It has been established in the paper that the Oyo-Yoruba accord twin births special consideration. The paper also expounded the origin of twins' institution among the Yoruba. This was done by identifying trends in the perception of twins, the factors affecting the change and the interface of both old and new perceptions about twin's institution.

The paper further examined the trends of changes experienced in the twins' world in historical perspectives. The historians of twinship institution have intensified efforts to record the

position of the twins in the society. Some of them are traditional historians who merely approached their study from micro-level of analysis. Some academic historians such as Aw e⁷⁸, Renne⁷⁹ and Atanda⁸⁰ have used oral genres like *oriki* (praise poem) and songs, to interpret the cultural approach to certain related issues bearing on twinship institution. Indeed, Wande Abimbola⁸¹ used the *ifa* corpus as derivatives of twinship institution.

Changes have taken place in the twinship institution with western education and civilisation influencing the people's attitude, thus eradicating the negative practices such as the twin infanticide, twin mortality rate and promoting healthy living relationship in the twin's world. This promoted new ideas, innovations and inventions culminating in twin's seminars and workshops, geared towards empowering the twins. Indeed, the twins now have enduring sense of history and avowed interest in social engineering.

Endnotes

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 37. A. Oguntuyi, op. cit p. 4.
 38. The Information was accessed from the National Archives Owo, Owo Division. 1/1 1381. Bounty for the Birth of Triplets. This bounty was usually given to the parents of triplets to encourage and support them.
 39. A. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in Yoruba Country*, London: UPS, 1887, p. 81.
 40. Awolalu, op cit p. 191.
 41. Oral interview granted madam Ajike Age: 52 Occupation: Traditional pharmacist (Lekuleja), Place of interview: Isokun-Oyo on 210/4/2009.
 42. Catherine Domenico, "Many Slessor's Letters: Images and Reflections", *The Nigerian Field*, 65: 2000, pp. 115 - 118.
 43. Ade-Ajayi, J.F. op. cit p. 35.
 44. Ibid p. 36.
 45. *The Awujale* is the paramount ruler of Ijebuland. He was held in high esteem among his people.
 46. Oral interview granted madam Agbeke. Age:70, Occupation - None, Place: Oyo on 20 - 4-2009.
 47. Igboora, Oko, Oyo and Porto-Novo in Republic of Benin are the understudied area.
 48. *Ewa-Ibeji* is the traditional diet for twins in Yorubaland.
 49. *Ere-Ibeji* is the twin effigy carved to commemorate dead twins in Yorubaland.
 50. Oral interview granted Pa. Simeon Ojelabi Age: 74; on 24/5/2008.
 51. Taiwo and Kehinde Ogunyode are the initiators of Twins' Foundation.
 52. N. Davidson, op. cit p. 27.
 53. M.H. Houlberg, op. cit pp. 26.
 54. R.F. Thompson, op. cit p. 13.
 55. N. Davidson, op. cit p. 26.
 56. B. Awe, op cit. pp. 351.
 57. E.P. Renne, op cit. 42.
 58. Wande Abimbola, *'Awon Odu Merindinlogun'*, Ibadan University Press, p. 18.
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78. B, Awe, op cit p. 191.
79. P, Renne, op cit p. 43.
80. J.A Atanda, op cit p. 64.
81. Wande Abimbola, op cit p. 18.

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