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Original Research Article

Preserving Culture and Heritage of the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria: An Ethnographic Study of the Twin Figure (*Ere Ibeji*)

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Abstract

Ere Ibeji is the carved wooden figure used to commemorate the death of twin(s) among the Yoruba people of Southwest, Nigeria. Existing literature focuses on myth, sacred and artistic values of this traditional wood carving while issues of protection and preservation of its tangible as well as intangible belief system are gradually fading out. This study aimed at sustaining the twin's figuring carving tradition, which seems to be winding out due to civilization. The study examined available data surrounding twins' birth, thereby advocating the preservation of the surviving *ere ibejis*. The findings of the study show a reasonable number of *ere ibejis* that have been taken outside Nigeria while others are in the national museums. The study recommends the retrieval of the ones taken abroad, the use of improved conservation methods in the museums as well as the promotion of cultural heritage management in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Ere Ibeji*, twins, Yoruba, preservation, cultural heritage

Introduction

The Yoruba are people occupying the Southwest region of Nigeria. Over the years, they have spread to Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana (Massa 50). They represent one of the largest groups in the African continent. They are also said to represent the highest twins' birth ratio in the world (Leroy 30). The high prenatal mortality rate among the Yorubas is attached to the concept of a supreme deity called Olodumare or Olorun, assisted by other secondary gods (*orisa*). The Yoruba religion's belief system involves immortality and reincarnation of the soul of ancestors which may as well contribute to their high ratio of twin birth (Bascom 33). Patrick Nylander's study carried out between 1972 and 1982 discovered that there was an average of 45 to 50 sets of

twins per 1,000 times birth in the southwest of Nigeria (224). Further study revealed that there is about 30 times more in Igbo-Ora than that of the whole of Europe (Nwanne 7). Igbo-Ora town in Oyo State, Nigeria, has the history of twins' birth and other multiple births in nearly every home. This claim has been attributed to a particular Yoruba meal: *Amala* and *Ilasa*, *amala* is made of yam powder (*elubo*) while *ilasa* soup is made with okra leave (*ewe ila*) a delicacy of the Yoruba people. It has been noted that yam contains gonadotropins, a chemical that helps increase fertility in women (Nylander 225; Nwanne 7), which might perhaps be responsible for the high rate of multiple birth among Yoruba women.

In the same vein, Patrick Nylander earlier mentioned that, high number of twins among Yoruba might be dependent on dietary factors; such as the consumption of special yam containing estrogenic substances (222). Ferdinand Leroy also observed perinatal mortality of twins to be very high, just as we have high rate of death of infants, especially of twins. This may not be unconnected with the number of *ere ibeji* produced by the Yoruba from different families in southwest, Nigeria. It is in the same vein, *ere ibejis* serve as photographs, reminding Yoruba parents of how to cope emotionally with the loss of their twin babies in the unlettered period.

The carving of twin figure (*ere ibeji*) is perhaps the most prestigious artistic wooden objects of many elaborate and classical African arts. According to William Bascom, *ere ibeji* stands out among other known Yoruba traditional carvings which are being produced from the people's traditional belief (50). No wonder, majority of them have disappeared to Europe and other countries of the world. Perhaps the world's largest collection of *ere ibeji* is at the British Museum, London (Mobolade 14). It is against the backdrop that this study observes the need for adequate preservation of a great number of the twin wooden figures kept by National Museums in Nigeria as well as calls for the retrieval of those kept by foreigners and individuals to be brought into the museums for proper preservation and documentation. Preserving them will give us an opportunity of referring to the traditional methods of art apprenticeship, customs and belief system in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study has adopted the ethnographic research method. Therefore, the data for this study was collected through the field investigation. In-depth interviews were conducted with traditional wood carvers, curators, families with twins and twins; they served as key informants. Oral, but the interactive format of unstructured questions and answers was used because structured interview does not allow flexibility to explore interesting issues that arise during the interviews. The interview was conducted in the studio of wood carvers, museums and private homes of individuals who have access to *ere ibeji*, and are knowledgeable about them. Field notes and photographs of *ere ibeji* as well as carving tools were taken to substantiate our findings. The secondary data were also cited from textbooks and journal publications as well as internet sources. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive approach of art historical study.

Beginning of Worship and Sacrifice to Twin Figure

The traditional Yoruba and Africans at large believe in the role of ancestors among human beings. They believe that an ancestor will return to provide and protect the living, if proper sacrifices and appeasements are made to the spirit of the dead from time to time (Polo 150). According to oral tradition, the deification and worship of *ibeji* spirit started in a community near Badagry town. It was in this town, *ere ibeji* shrine was first built to commemorate the worships, and sacrifices to the god of *ibeji*. According to

Timothy Mobolade, the community used to hold annual convergence of *ibejis'* parents in the past (15). This annual celebration involved offering of sacrifices, songs and dance performances to the *orisa ibeji*. But of course, the activities of worship have long ceased to exist as a result of civilization as well as proliferation of Islam and Christian religions.

However, in recent times, at Igbo-Ora, Ibarapa Central Local Government Area of Oyo State, there was the celebration of world Twins Festival Day held on the 13 October 2018. The State Government, through the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism in conjunction with Ibarapa Central Local Government, Igbo-Ora Progressive Union, presented the multifunctional promotion of twins' cultural heritage. The Chairman Honourable Ibrahim Adegoke mentions that, twins born in Igbo-Ora are more than any other part of the world (7). The occasion was graced by Alafin of Oyo, Oba Dr. Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi III, the entire Oyo *Mesi* and traditional Chiefs from Oyo, *Eleruwa of Eruwa* and other prominent personalities. *Alafin* of Oyo mentioned that Yoruba twins are special gift from God because they are the harbinger of good things as they possessed what other children do not have. To preserve the nation's cultural heritage, twins' festival in Igbo-Ora was marked as a beginning of renaissance in Nigeria. The study observed that twins are known to be celebrated all over the world and can become a tourism event in Ibarapa land as well as other parts of Nigeria. The festival started ten years ago as 'Naija Twins' festival, it is hoped to be used as boost to the economy of Nigeria. The festival has been identified as one of the measures to preserve the traditional belief attached to twins' birth as part of the ways to promote traditional values of our culture (7).

This study upholds the importance of presenting the nation's cultural values, especially of the belief system that are fast fading away. In respect to this, Ola Olodi laments the gradual degradation of Africans' lifestyles caused by careless adaptation of Europeans' culture (68-69). Initially, it started by embracing the missionary and western lifestyle copied by Nigerians and Africans at large. He reiterated the negative influences of western lifestyle on the traditional African arts and culture as nothing but backwardness to us as a people. He, therefore, decried the adverse effect of foreign religions in Nigeria to have led to distrust, and lack of faith in the minds of the people towards traditional belief, especially in the potentiality of *ere ibeji* supernatural powers.

It is noteworthy to observe that modernity and civilization have contributed immensely to eroded values of African cultural beliefs, especially of the Yoruba people (Mobolade 14). However, this study observes there are still faithful worshippers of traditional deities such as Ogun, Oya, Osun and Sango among others in the twenty first century because it is the indigenous religion inherited from the forebears. It is also not surprising to observe deification of *ere ibejis* as far and wide across the globe where Yoruba are resident. Research shows that we have them among the Caribbean, Latin American, Haiti, Brazil, Trinidad and recently the Asians people that are tapping into the traditional belief of Africans, especially the Yoruba culture (Polo 200).

Supposed Mystical Power of *Ibeji*

Twins are known as *Ibeji* ('two children born at birth'). The oral tradition has it that *ibeji* is the name of an *Orisa* ('deity') representing a pair of twins in the traditional religion of Yoruba people (Adugbologe). The first born of the twins is known as "Taiye – *to aiye wo* ('first to taste the world')" while the second born is called "Kehinde – *omo kehinde* ('the second born at same birth')". By the interpretation of these names, the traditional Yoruba culture assigns the role of elder among the twins to Kehinde because it believed that Taiye is sent by Kehinde as mere forerunner to come first and ascertain if

the world is lively as well as suitable to live-in (Mobolade 15). By this premonition, as soon as Taiye is born and Kehinde hears the cry, he or she comes thereafter to the world.

The *ibejis* are said to be mysterious children. They possess a supernatural power that is beyond human comprehension. It is believed that the auras of the twins bring prosperity unto the parents (Adugbologe). In this regard, the *ibejis* are usually well catered for and deified by their parents. The Yoruba believe sacred spiritual beings (*orisa*); they are capable of bringing wealth and prosperity to their parents; at the same time evoke suffering if neglected. Twins are believed to have a supernatural power to ascend and descend at any time into the world. By this construct, they are also said to have power to choose where to be reborn or not to be born. They are also believed to have one single soul shared by both twins. By this superstitious belief, they are said to influence each other's behaviours and happenings around themselves. It is common when Taiye is sick, within few minutes one finds Kehinde pick-up the same illness. In the traditional African societies, twins are believed to be from the preternatural origin as they are raised emotionally from fear, to hope and to joy (Leroy 20).

In the Yoruba culture and spirituality, twins are believed to be endowed with special magical powers to bless their parents with good fortune. They are believed to be constantly being protected against calamity and tragedy by *Orisa Sango* (deity of thunder). It is also believed that the death of either of the twins at infancy spells doom for the family and community to which they belong. In the case of death, the parents therefore go to *ifa* priest (*babalawo*) whose oracle's instructs the parents to carve a surrogate wooden figure known as *ere ibeji* in Yoruba language to represent the deceased twin. Rafiu Adugbologe says whenever this is done, the parents take care of the figure as if it were a living person. He stressed further that, in respect to the instruction of *Ifa* priest, the usual trade of *Iya ibeji* (twins' mother) usually are hawking of palm oil, salt and beans among other petty trades. At the same time, the *Iya Ibeji* may be compelled to beg for alms with dancing and singing around streets and market places within the community. In such a situation, the *ibeji* is termed as *ibeji onijo* (dancers). The informant also affirms that if such instruction comes from *Babalawo* to the parents as they failed to carry it out; it may result in sickness or other bad situations in the family. According to Rafiu Adugbologe, the *ibeji* parents should offer sacrifice of beans and vegetable soup on regular basis in order to keep the twins alive until the mother gives birth to another baby after the *ibeji*. The baby that is born after *ibeji* is known as Idowu; he/she eulogies as "*esu lehin Ibeji*" (trickster behind twins), which affirms the usual nature of Idowus as the troublesome children. Any rowdy behavior or character in the Yoruba land is usually associated with *esu* (trickster). Alaba is the name given to the child born after Idowu. In the case of Alaba, he/she by nature is the child that brings normalcy to the family thereafter (Miller 65).

Rafiu Adugbologe also mentioned that if any parent refuses to carve the twin figure after the demise of either of the twins, it may spell out doom, calamity and tragedy in the life of the surviving twin. It had therefore become mandatory in those days to seek for a traditional wood carver to make a surrogate twin figure for the family. In the case of barrenness in the life of a surviving twin, he or she will need to consult an *ifa* priest who will consult oracle to know the way out. If after the death of a twin, the other begins to fall sick. *Babalawo* is consulted who makes *ero*, prepared inside *kolobo* (clay container) with the following items: *ogede omini*, *ogedeagbagba*, *ogedeparanta*, *epa*, *epo pupa* and *ewe ero* pounded inside the mortal. By the time it is applied on the sick twin, he/she gets better immediately.

When a twin died and the one alive is getting married; the parents must also marry for the deceased one the same day, if the family wants to experience peace in the

home of the living one. The parents must find a woman that gets married in the name of the deceased twin. In this case, the spirit of the dead twin is appeased so that the surviving twin may have a happy home. It is faith in the traditional belief system that makes all these principles and traditional guidelines work for the people in those days.

Artistic Expression of *Ere Ibeji*

The literary record has it that the Yoruba traditional wood carvers have track record of dexterity when it comes to woodcarving, especially in the craft of *ere ibeji* carvings (Abiodun 23). Thus, the Yoruba twin wooden figures were carefully carved. In most cases, they are aesthetically appealing to the eyes. The forms of the carved twin figures usually suggest the gender of the deceased twin. In most cases, the tribal marks are indicated, to show the lineage and community of the deceased figure (fig 1 and 2). Usually, the living *ibeji* does not need a carved figure because he/she is still alive to accomplish all its spiritual endowment (Mobolade 15). Therefore, it is the death of either of the twins that warrants the carving of an *ere ibeji* image which represents the deceased among the living. Thus, the surrogate figure is given maximum care as if it was a living being.

The *Ibeji* wooden figures are admired, cherished and cared for by the parents. In terms of aesthetics, the *ibeji* wooden figures are objects of beautification going by their physical appearance; they provoke emotional feelings of African and foreign art collectors. This might be the reason why they are much sought-after as object of aesthetic appraisal. Meanwhile, the primary assignment of *ere ibeji* is to serve as a link-figure between the soul of the dead twin and the parents (fig. 3).



Fig. 1 *Ibeji* wooden figure with decorated cowrie, shells, cord, beads, bronze bells.
Source: The Diana Wolman Memorial Collection (1973).



Fig 2: *Ere Ibeji* wooden figure with decorated waist beads, National Museum, Onikan, Lagos.
Source: Authors Fieldwork (2015).

The researches reveal many *ibeji* figures that have been collected by art lovers and collectors around the world because of their artistic face value (fig. 1). As mentioned above, many *ibeji* figures have found their ways into the hands of western art collectors because of their aesthetic appearance (Famoroti 58). Other collectors collected them because of the story behind their makings while others want to collect African arts, which are termed as curio by the Westerners. Most collection of African arts was transferred to Europe through an undue process, which is termed as an illegal act. The study observes the illegal possession of *ere ibeji* that was made possible through the European expedition to the Southwest during the colonial days. In fact, most twin figures in foreign lands were lost to the Europeans during this period. They developed love for the symbolic spiritual reality in aesthetics, which they termed as curio objects. However, a reasonable number of *ibeji* arts still survived the illegal exportation as they are being preserved as well as cared for by the National Museums nationwide (National Commission for Museums and Monuments 9). The study implores the cultural agencies of the nation to intensify an effort to retrieve the stolen ones as well as proper preservation and survival of these objects for the coming generations.

Ere ibeji is the symbol of representation of the departed twin(s) and its production is part of the ritual to prevent future death of twins in the family. The spiritual wholeness is attached to the belief that twins should always be together and never to be separated, even by death. It is on the basis of this assertion, Rowland Abiodun reiterates these Yoruba sayings:

Bi a ba seji rajo - When two people go on a journey

Ti a se okan bo - And only one returns

Oju nii da ti ni - Disgrace and shame sets in. (124)

It is in respect to this that the carving of *ere ibeji* is a plea to the departed twin to return and bless the family. According to Abiodun, the death of twin in a proverbial statement by the Yoruba is referred to as: “travelled” and never as being “dead” (56). This is said with the notion that his/her spirit only travelled, and as a result could be consulted from time to time through the carved *ere ibeji* (fig. 3 and 4). This probably is why the head of *ere ibeji* receives the most detailed artistic treatment and embellishment. The carved *ere ibeji* is usually rendered in the standing posture, which signifies a full figural image. Abiodun observes the cold, stance, unfeeling and forward gazing in the eyes of *ere ibejis* that assures their parents that the spirit of *ibeji* is paying attention to requests being made when caring for them (123).



Fig 3: *Ere Ibeji* wooden figure with decorated beads and bangles.
Source: Gabriela Brown, Tel Aviv (1990).

The study also observes that *ere ibejis* are carved with African craftsmanship ideas of human proportion, which defied the European art of classical proportion. The study observation shows the twins' figures as contrary to the proportional accuracy of European or contemporary African arts. Usually, the *ibeji* figures are carved between the heights of 8 to 10 inches' full figure. The average height of *ibeji* carved figure as observed by Curry is 9 to 10 inches. This was also verified during the field investigation at the National Museum Onikan, Lagos where over six hundred *ere ibejis* are currently preserved (Oyinloye 90). This finding is a testimonial to the claim of James Curry that *ere ibejis* are carved between 9 to 10 inches. This length is an approximation of one-foot-high, which contradicts the normal human height. When one takes a critical look at *ere ibejis*, it suggests the representation of a childlike image (fig. 2). This may not be unconnected to the reason for the dwarflike height of a carved twin figure. In addition, most death of twin(s) occurred at infancy as such must be represented as a child. Nevertheless, most scholars observed that an inaccurate proportion of the *ere ibejis* borders on the purpose it was meant to serve, that is to encase the spirit of the dead twin(s).

Interestingly, *ere ibejis* look pleasant to the eyes. This is what Abiodun called *ona* (173). The meaning of *ona* in Yoruba language is the skillfulness or great wood carving skill. A careful study of *ibeji* figure suggests a well-designed upper body region, especially the head, which signifies human destiny according to the Yoruba traditional belief system. The head is given detailed-design attention among other body structures. He opines that the head is the symbol of destiny according to Yoruba mythology (123). Thus, the hallmark of Yoruba figurative sculpture emphasizes vertical movement, detailed frontal movement and active facial expression in the presentation of their aesthetics quality. He further explains that the head is the supposed seat of reasoning, which is usually rendered larger than life size and technically elaborated. The head is also believed to be psychologically and spiritually ruling the entire body. Thus, the artist tends to devote more attention to the expression of the head by combining his intelligent, creative accuracy and artistic skill to achieve all necessary details. The head of *ere ibejis* are particularly catered for and are well designed by the wood carvers. Invariably, this is to show that the carver possesses creative eyes (*oju ona*).

Actually, the carver's ability to transform log to an essential lively object speaks volume about his creative ability and experience. *Ona sise*, or *finfin* is the skillful creation of forms that are created from formless wood into new forms of *ere ibejis*. The study from surviving *ere ibejis* from different parts of Yoruba communities analyses the aforementioned statement better. This could be determined when one takes a careful look at some of the twin figures preserved in the museum. They suggest the dexterity of different carvers' skills as well as their experiences over the times. It should be noted that the experience as well as wages offered unto the carver may sometimes determine the quality output of *ibeji* figural design. This means that wages paid to the carver to produce *ere ibejis* might serve as a motivational factor for enhancing good finesse of *ere ibejis*.

However, the informant sounded a caution that apart from experiences and skills, the carver must also understand the ritual behind the carving of *ere ibejis*, or else, his product will not work the spirituality expected by the parents requesting the carved figure. He also gives insight to the fact that *ibeji* wooden figures are usually carved on demand by the traditional wood carvers. He mentions that it is not every wood carver that can carve *ere ibejis*. It is those carvers who are experienced and understand the ritual behind the carving of *ere ibejis* that are usually commissioned for the job.

Parental Care and Maintenance of *Ere Ibeji*

The study informed that the primary conservation of *ere ibeji* starts with the parents, especially the mother. The decoration given to *ere ibeji* occurs after the figure has been finally handed over to the parents who in-turn adds value to the carved figure. Such additional values are created out of decorative indigenous colourants and other ethnographic materials. However, the colourants and materials connote the indigenous belief of the people. For instance, the accessories for the decoration include cowries, beads, clothings, bangles, necklaces and other items that meant to take care of a living person. The field investigation at the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos gives us opportunity to view different *ere ibeji* collected from the within the Yoruba country in Southwest, Nigeria. It is not surprising to find most *ere ibeji* with impressive adornment consisting of brass, beads and cowries on the ankles, wrist, neck, waist as well as cowries-embroidered vests. The ethnographic adornment represents the usual format a man would be dressed with.



Fig 4: *Ere Ibeji* pair decorated with woven fabric and beads; Yoruba peoples of Igbuke, Oyo, Nigeria.

Source: Mottas Collection (1990).

To keep *ere ibeji* in the house requires making an altar in the room where the mother sleeps. Sometimes, the *ibeji* figures (if one of the twins is died) are mounted on the family shrine of the gods in which the parents worship e.g. Sango shrine.

The *Ibeji* figures are not usually painted by the wood carvers. The study also observes that it is the end-users (parents), who would apply colours and other ethnographic materials in the cause of caring for the twin wooden figures if so desired. Thus, dark blue is used to paint the figure's head as a symbol of destiny. The colour is usually derived from indigo-*elu* leaves, mainly of the family of *indigofera* (Perberton, Picton and Fakeye 102). The use of beads for adorning the neck and waist of *ere ibeji* symbolizes the patron god (*orisa*) of the mother or family which is usually Sango; its usual colours are red and white (Chemeche 311). This symbolizes the balance of violence and calm credited to Sango and the twins. The dark blue is often used to balance red, standing for calm, serenity and depth of wisdom or mystery (Chemeche 147).

During the *ibeji* festival, the mother baths *ere ibeji* and cloth it in order to appear neat and beautiful. Abiodun also mentions that one of the amazing characteristics of the twins is cleanliness (143). By this standard, the *ibejis* are considered to be *afinju-omo*

that means “Lover of fashion, and cleanliness” (144). The *ibejis* are always kept neat and good looking at all times. The physical environment of *ibeji* is always made clean.

The care and conversation with of *ere ibeji*s usually on the altar inside a room, where the *iya ibeji* (twins’ mother) feeds it with *epa* (groundnut), *akara* (bean cake), *isu dindin* (fried yam), *obi* (kolanut), *ireke* (sugarcane), *ogede wewe* (banana) and other food items eaten by human beings. *Ewa* (beans) and *epo pupa* (palm oil) are usually the twins’ favourite food. *Ewa* is believed to calm the twins down whenever he is angry. The care for the twin figure includes adornment with ethnographic materials to make it look attractive.

The mother to the *ibeji* usually applies *irosun* (camwood), *adin* or *adin agbon* (palm kernel or coconut oil) on the carved figure to keep shining. The use of camwood powder also applies to Sango worship in some families in the Yoruba land. Camwood is derived from the tree called *Baphia nitida* and like indigo, which is soluble in alkali solution. It is also suitable for application on the wooden sculpture (Chemeche 203). Besides this, the bronze, brass or iron rings worn on the wrist and ankle of an *ibeji* figure is also for a purpose. This symbolically restrains the restless twin’s spirit from flying away. Metal bands are actually meant to serve as a reminder that *ere ibeji* has a surviving twin. Brass bracelets represent river goddess (*Osun*) whose function is to bring fertility while special metal tied around the anklets are believed to ward-off *Abiku* (familiar spirit) (Chemeche 125).



Fig. 5: Images of *Ibeji* figures, decorated with cowries, shells and cords. Yoruba peoples of Kisi, Oyo, Nigeria Source: Private Collection, New York (1990).

The informant stressed further that, at times, *ere ibeji* is painted with indigo dye (a locally produced, deep blue vegetable dye pigments). Sometimes, the torso and other parts of *ere ibeji* are painted brown, red-*irosun* (camwood) powder or white *efun* (white chalk powder).

The Practice of *Ere Ibeji* Carving among Yoruba

The study showed that wood carving is a family craft or career in the traditional Yoruba culture. Thus, it is a trade handed down to the male-child in the family; and it runs in the lineage from generation to generations. Rafiu Adugbologe mentions that when a male-child is grown enough to learn a trade, he is usually co-opted into the apprenticeship training under the father in a gradual learning process. The techniques of training involve learning the skill of the trade through observation, practice by trial and

error, until perfection is gained (Coleman 373). In this trade, the term of reference requires a child to serve the father in the wood carving trade until he becomes skillful. The child will not quit the family business until the demise of the father. It is after the death of the father, that he can carry-on as leader in the family business.

The carving of *ere ibeji* starts with cutting of the log into approximate sizes between nine and twelve inches (*igi sisa*). The type of wood used for carving twin figure is called *ire* tree in Yoruba; it is durable and easy to carve. There are three types of *ire* tree in West Africa: the *ire basabasa*, or *ire* rubber; the *ire odan*, or *iredan*; and the *ire ona*, or *irena* (Curry 38). However, the actual wood for carving *ere ibeji* is the *irena*, because of its ability to react positively to sacrifices offered for the twin (Curry 43).

Sacrifice called *adiye ilagbe* has to be performed before cutting down the tree for carving *ere ibeji* while after the fall of the tree, several *ere ibeji* could be carved from it (Perberton, Picton and Fakeye 130). Before carving *ere ibeji* with the fallen *ire* tree, the tree is usually soaked in water in order to allow easy carving. On the other hand, the extracted juice from the soaked *ire* tree is effective concoction for curing pile (*jedi-jedi*) and fever (*iba*)

Traditional Carving Tools

According to Rafiu Adugbologe, different adzes are used by traditional wood carvers for producing *ere ibeji*. For example, *iso-alabere* (needle point) and other gouges of different sizes and nibs are also used for carving, gouging and scooping wood which is known as subtractive method in sculpture. The traditional wood carvers do not use chisel to carve *ere-ibeji*. The carving tools used by the traditional wood carvers were made by the blacksmith. The blacksmith made different gouges and knives suitable for carving, scooping, patterning, design, hollowing, scraping, smoothing and filling of the carved figure (fig. 6-9).



Fig. 6: Scooper.

Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2018)



Fig.7: Knife and Iron-beater

Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2018)



Fig. 8: Flat axe
Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2018)



Fig 9: Sizes of adzes and file
Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2018)

The adze and other traditional carving tools are used to define the body structures such as head, torso and legs (*ona lile*). Thereafter, the body structure is refined (*ale tunle*). In addition, the rough carving patterns are smoothed (*didan igi*). The aesthetic patterns are added to the body, which is known as *finfin* (burnishing). The carver also includes other intricacies like identification marks or scarification of the family line. On the arrival of *ere-ibeji* in a particular home, the twins' mother will no longer use *ire* tree as fire wood to cook again (Perberton, Picton and Fakeye 123). It has now become a taboo or forbidden act for such a woman to use *ire* tree as firewood.

Remuneration Paid for Carved *Ere Ibeji*

The study suggested that commissioning of *ere ibeji* is a lucrative opportunity for the wood carvers in those days. This is because the initial payment includes two dried fish, two snails, two dried rats, two kola nuts, two alligator peppers, four kegs of palm wine, sixteen pieces of big yam, four calabashes full of beans, four calabashes full of corn, four tins of palm oil and two cocks or hens, which is suggested by the gender of deceased twin(s). In addition, the parents bring food and drink to the carver on daily basis until the successful completion of *ere ibeji* is achieved (Perberton, Picton and Fakeye 203). By this standard, there is no doubt that traditional wood carving was a lucrative career in the past. The study observed that the ability of twins' parents to meet the aforementioned conditions is the result of aesthetically pleasing *ere ibeji*. This is further proved in attached ethnographic accessories used to decorate the carved figure after it might have been delivered to the parents (fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5).

It was mentioned above that the twins' wooden figure is usually carved where either of the twins is dead. *Ere ibeji* (twin figure) cannot be bought in the market; it has

to be specially produced by the carver through the instruction of the *ifa* priest to the twins' parents. Therefore, carving of *ibeji* figure requires the carver to perform certain ritual before the carved *ere ibeji* can work for the family. Initially, the carver will get bark of *ire* tree (*epo ire*), spinach (*tete abalaiye*), *ewe odundun*, banana (*ogede omini*) and shea butter (*ori*). All these items will be pounded inside mortar and put inside *kolobo* (small clay container) and palm oil to be added to the concoction as a reactive agent whenever it is meant to be used.

Disappearance of *Ere Ibeji*

Ere ibeji is a classical artistic African wooden object. It stands out among other African art objects. The aesthetic values and the traditional Yoruba belief attached to it made it irresistible for foreign art collectors not willing to be able to part with it wherever and whenever the opportunity avails them. Timothy Mobolade reported that there are quite a number of them at the British museum while many other individuals have them in their private collections (15). *Ere ibeji* is an aesthetically pleasing object to art lovers. It is an object of beautification in the houses. The sight of *ere ibeji* is thought provoking. It keeps man wondering how the carving technique was achieved.

Some of the reasons why *ere ibeji* have disappeared include the fact that it stands out as a unique object of aesthetics among other Yoruba traditional carvings (Famoroti 57). The appearances are fascinating to art collectors. The Europeans see them as an art of curiosity that raises a lot of questions. Majority of them have disappeared to Europe and America because of their aesthetic values while most of them are currently preserved in the British museum (Mobolade 15). Modernization and foreign religious faith also have adverse effect on the practice of carving *ere ibeji* in the contemporary times. The advent of Islam and Christianity might have also brought about doubt in the traditional faith, which resulted to the discontinuing of the traditional belief system and the potentiality of *ere ibeji*'s power among the people.

Preservation of *Ere Ibeji*

The preservation of *ere ibeji* is imperative because every wood type is susceptible to deterioration as a result of environmental impact (humidity, dampness, heat and light) as well as insect attack (woodworms and pests) and human factors (vandal, theft and neglect). It is on this note that the study recommends a proper scientific method of the preservation for *ere ibejis* in the nation's museum and other places. The *ere ibejis* are better preserved in museum's environment where relative humidity can be regulated, and ultra violet light are properly controlled. This is because these objects are heritage that are rooted in the fabric of the Yoruba's culture. They speak a lot about the traditional beliefs. ; Therefore, they should not be allowed to suffer loss, ageing or distortion.

Preserving *ere ibeji* amounts to preserving the nation's cultural assets whereby contemporary artists can draw inspirations to recreate new artistic concepts and products. Especially as observed in this study, there is a gradual winding out of the *ibeji* carving tradition among the Yoruba. The society in the past used wood carving as the most viable means of recording times, events and other socio-cultural values.

This study observes wood carving among the Yoruba as not just for decorations, but it meant to serve physical and spiritual purposes. It is in this respect the surviving ones need a proper preservation for reference purpose for the future generations. Therefore, the messages that are conveyed by wooden objects must be preserved without alteration. The *ere ibeji* carving tradition should be sustained for tourism and preservation of cultural heritage as testimony to the coming generations. The

preservation of traditional belief attached to the twin's birth will make a lot of people visit museum to attest to facts and ideas in written documents.

The preservation of *ere ibeji* has also become a thing of concern because the wood carving is gradually being discouraged. Almost all indigenous wood carvers are dead while their children are not willing to practice the trade. Some of the carvers have also left the villages for the cities in search of greener pastures and they are not willing to endure the slow and meticulous tradition of apprenticeship to master carvers.

The example of twins' festival at Igbo-Ora in conjunction with the world twins' day is capable of boosting Nigerian tourism and economic gains (Sanusi 9) as well as reviving the *ere ibeji* carving tradition among the Yoruba. It can also be a medium of promoting Nigerian cultural heritage, thereby helping to preserve the traditional values attached to the belief system of twins' birth. The study implores the government to give their support in sustaining the tradition. The need to keep, maintain and protect the *ibeji* wooden objects from damage, theft and smuggling will further safeguard the values of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the people. It will also show or portray a sense of shared national identity and cultural history.

Conclusion

The traditional belief system and myth of a people is the resultant effect that produced great number of twin figurines as an art tradition among the Yoruba. However, the advent of foreign religions, civilization and advanced medicine among other factors contributed to the gradual reduction in the production of *ere ibeji* in the southwest, Nigeria. Apart from the traditional value attached to *ere ibeji*, it is also a lucrative livelihood for the traditional wood carvers. The *Ere ibeji* possesses aesthetic attributes that is fancied and cherished by foreign tourists, which led to disappearance of a great number to foreign lands. The twin figure is regarded as one of the best African art traditions. In spite of many twin figures taken away from the country, a reasonable number is still being preserved in the National Museums across the nation. In this regard, the paper recommends a proper scientific method of preservation for the remaining *ere ibeji* kept in the museums so that the coming generation may learn aspect of Yoruba mythology and creative ingenuity. In addition, the teaching of Yoruba traditional wood carving method should be encouraged in the nation's universities offering the courses in fine and applied arts. This is with view of aiding preservation of Nigerian art and cultural values that are constantly being eroded away.

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