
TWIN CARVINGS AS A MEANS OF CONNECTING EARTH AND HEAVEN

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Abstract: This study examines two contradictory attitudes towards twins in African culture and endeavours to find the common denominator that has induced a positive change in the perception of this extraordinary phenomenon. The motive to write this paper was not to idealise or demonise traditional African societies, but rather to understand some of their rough practices in the context of their respect for fertility and children.

Keywords: child, twin, archetype, reincarnation, blessing, curse, humanising inversion, tempest, Yoruba, Igbo, Kalabari Ijaw, ere ibeji, kukla

Since time immemorial, twins have been connected with inexplicable phenomena even though there have been a lot of attempts to explain their conception in a “rational” way. According to Hippocrates, twins were the result of two ejaculations happening in quick succession, and when twins were born the father was to be congratulated on his virility. Although this explanation is scientifically incorrect, it has had a positive impact on twins in practice.

However, in Africa there were different interpretations of twins which led to the elimination of such offspring. In some regions, people believed that twins were the offspring of two fathers and evidence of the mother’s infidelity:

Some births were forbidden and giving birth to twins was considered a terrible tragedy. The mother was isolated and the children were liquidated. The umbilical cords were not cut. It was believed that human beings were born one at a time and that a woman who gave birth to more than one child degraded people to animals.¹

There have been a lot of explanations for “being cursed with twins”, but all of them are negative. Some women would secretly abandon one of their children in order to prevent their elimination. Otherwise, somebody else would kill both children and probably also their mother. At the best of times, mothers and their twins were forced to leave their village communities and live in remote settlements. Such situations still occurred among the Igbo as late as the second half of the 20th century.

Although such deeds were not motivated by brutality, they were still rough and barbaric practices. Nevertheless, traditional African societies must have had reasons for these actions. This was surely as a result of experience wherein the arrival of twins posed a high risk of mortality during childbirth for both mother and offspring. The

¹ Cole, Herbert – Aniakor, Chike Cyril. Igbo Arts. Los Angeles: Community and Cosmos, 1984. Print. p. 58.

fact that the placenta was separated from the mother's body during the birth of the first child meant that the second child was in danger.

According to Stoll, among the Yoruba people, 4.5% of all maternities involve twins, essentially meaning that every eleventh Yoruba child is a twin. The Yoruba twinning rate among the total number of born children is one of the highest in the world, and it is highly probable that this percentage is the same with neighbouring ethnic groups.

However, mortality should be taken into account (which was definitely higher for twins than for other children) as well as the birth rate, especially in relation to the past. This may help us understand why African societies considered twins to be such a curse that they sought to get rid of them. Although they were usually only abandoned, the fact that healthy newborns died definitely caused their families psychological trauma. It was especially traumatizing for those women who had already lost a number of children or could not have any more.

Myth and history

The Yoruba oral tradition brings us two interesting explanations on how their attitudes towards twins changed. According to a legend, this change occurred because of King Ajaka, who introduced the cult of twin carvings (*ere ibeji*). When this legendary king became the father of twins, he had a personal reason to stop the custom of having them killed. According to another legend, people were filled with extreme sadness in the distant past, which they were not able to explain. The Ifa oracle ordered them to stop killing twins and show respect to them instead. When the people did this, their happiness returned.

In my opinion, both explanations are most likely to be a part of one myth: the kingdom was filled with sadness because, according to tradition, the king's children were meant to be killed because they were twins. It is known that at some point at the turn of the 18th century the attitude towards twins among the Yoruba changed for the better. On account of this change, carvings of twins started to be made. The sanctity and inviolability attributed to twins totally contrasts with having them killed as something cursed. It is well-known that the attitude of the Yoruba people towards twins was originally the same as the attitude of other ethnic groups, and it is claimed that this change must have been caused by a significant shift in their religious beliefs. For the most part, this shift is hidden from us. However, it did cause a striking separation of this West African ethnic group from other groups, which did not undergo such a transformation.

While a certain type of religious syncretism of original beliefs with the expansion of Christianity cannot be excluded from this process, it cannot be proven either. It is possible to speculate about this because it is hard to imagine that societies based on nature worship would undergo a significant change without an outer impulse. This inertia is not to be understood in a negative way – it can sometimes simply be a defence mechanism against unknown cultures. Even though time is perceived linearly and cyclically in all cultures, in traditional African societies the emphasis is put on the cyclical dimension of the time perception. There are several testimonies of various ethnic groups about the approach of missionaries, whose faith strictly opposed the elimination of twins. The recognition of Christian impulse does not mean to dimin-

ish the indigenous Yoruba culture, while the decision about what to do with twins remained in the hands of *babalawo*, the local priest.

The described transformation of the traditional Yoruba culture is to be admired. It indicates a certain syncretic adaptability and dynamism in their traditional cosmogony. At the same time, it is a reason why indigenous religious practices remained in existence among Yoruba people, which was Christianised from the south and Islamised from the north. In many other ethnic groups, monotheism only induced the shift in their attitude towards twins after it was embraced.

Old practices were radically rejected and forgotten under the influence of Christianisation in places where a similar transformation did not take place. In 1958 the great writer Chinua Achebe, who came from the Igbo ethnic group, described similar processes of changes in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. He did this from the position of an artist, but the phenomena of traditional culture he described were identical to those discovered by anthropologists. This proves that Achebe's prose has a great cognitive value for learning about Sub-Saharan Africa.

It seems that in places where the elite was not initially Christianised, the first Christian communities were formed from outcasts, including twins and their mothers; missionaries took in children left to their fate at burial grounds in the bush or in places that were believed to contain evil forces. In fact, these exact places were often given to missionaries. As white men survived on this "evil ground" and gradually proved that twins were not wicked, the mothers of some of the saved children joined them as well. This is what took place with the Igbo and the Ijaw.

It was different among the Yoruba, at least after the humanising inversion, and the cult of twins was a widespread phenomenon until the middle of the 20th century, when infant mortality was notably reduced. Nowadays, this phenomenon and many other practices of traditional religions are in retreat, especially when it comes to sculpture and rituals. But traces of this tradition can still be seen in the relationship of the Yoruba people to twins – they pay special attention to such children and show respect to their mothers.

Collecting twin figures – *ere ibeji*

Africans are usually not interested in twin figures that are not connected to their own family, regardless of their artistic value. European collectors who try to find works of talented woodcarvers are only interested in identical pairs of figures with the same patina. They do not collect pairs of carvings where several years have passed between the deaths of the twins: this is another example of a reductionist attitude towards African art.

While the interest of the Yoruba in twin figures is falling, the interest of collectors from overseas is rising. Africans traders are trying to suit the market to the requirements of these customers. They have acquired a number of figures due to the conversion of many families to Islam and Christianity. Traditional priests have also adapted to the demand for these figures in their offer to transfer souls from old and valuable figures to new substitute ones so that the old figures can then be sold on the international market. Yoruba ritual specialists and woodcarvers encourage this transfer because they can get more work and payment as a result. A collector obtains the desired beautiful specimens, and the culture that created them now considers them

just a piece of wood. For several decades, *ere ibeji* have been popular wooden figures on the global market of African art. However, the phenomenon is almost unknown for a lot of collectors. They usually only know that the carvings are connected with the birth of twins, which prove the fertility of their parents.

The insufficient knowledge of this phenomenon is also manifested in the terminology. Collectors introduced the term *ibeji* for the figures, although this term denotes "living twins". When a collector enters an antique shop looking for *ibeji*, it is as if he is talking about living merchandise from the period of slavery. Using this term to denote figures of triplets and children in general, is not suitable either. Even though a figure is supposed to represent a person, so that society will remain undivided after his or her death, we should not speak about *ibeji* but rather about *ibeji* figures or sculptures of twins. Therefore, the Yoruba refer to them as *ere ibeji*, meaning "sacred twin images".

Twin images are small sculptures with the characteristic features for a given ethnic group. A carver is obliged to preserve a child's gender, but is otherwise completely free to carve as he pleases; he is not expected to preserve a child's individual features. The combination of a child's size and the adult body elements shows the final identity of a soul as it is settled in the figure. A child honoured with such a sculpture is deemed to join his ancestors protecting the family's line.

As a cultural phenomenon, these puppet-size dolls are somewhere between an idol and a mask. They are closer to masks – or rather to masquerade – because they express an active attitude towards reality. In Slavic languages, the link between *ere ibeji* and masks would probably be the term *kukla*, which can mean "balaclava", "doll" or "chrysalis". In the cocoon there is something waiting to be revealed, some dreaming definite form – therefore, the figurativeness of this term is its big advantage. However, it would be useless to introduce a new term when considering that world languages are now adopting the original Yoruba term.

In the monograph *Twin Figures of the Yoruba* by Maredi and Gert Stoll, there are many photos of these beautiful figures with data about the birth rate and twin mortality in West Africa.² It is interesting to note that estimations of population size were directly linked with the rate of the occurrence of these figures. The importance of plastic art among the Yoruba is demonstrated by this fact. It is nearly impossible to gain any similar statistics from the occurrence of sculptures in Europe: this could probably only be done hypothetically from archaeology, using, for instance, archaic Cycladic figurative art.

European collectors of African art make decisions on the basis of aesthetics, and the cultural phenomenon of twin figures remains reduced to artefacts. A complex explanation of *ere ibeji* is still missing. Therefore, in this study I am trying to describe the psychological effects of this sculptural and ritual phenomenon and attempt to explain the change of social attitudes towards twins. This is a starting point for further reflections of an ethical character.

² Stoll, Maredi – Stoll, Gert. *Twin Figures of the Yoruba*. Munich, 1980. Print.

Emotional care

The Yoruba people are aware of twins' physical and psychological fragility. They take magical precautions on the level of the individual, the family line and the ethnic group. Their form of caring for a twin who has lost his sibling is remarkably inventive, as it is for the mother. The Yoruba believe that twins are inseparably connected. After the death of one twin, the soul of the living sibling is drawn to both heaven and earth, meaning that his life is in danger. If parents do not want to lose their child, they try to attract the soul of the dead twin to earth. The disturbed balance is evened out when a figure is carved and the soul of the dead child is transferred into it by a local *babalawo*.

Mothers talk with the figures and do not want to part with them. A figure is placed near the mother's bed and then near the place for worshipping their ancestors. The figure is clothed, painted, adorned with jewellery and fed along with the living child by the mother. If the living child is a girl, she takes responsibility for caring for the abode of her twin's soul. Her mother gives her this role when she reaches the age of being able to take care of her younger siblings.

A soul dwells in the figure, keeps in touch with the supernatural world and provides this contact to the living twin. Living twins and their figures are treated very well and are even spoiled because it is believed that they are a blessing for the family. Through the provision of exceptional care, families attempt to prevent twins from injury as they are afraid that twins could use their supernatural powers for evil. They believe that if they do not carry out all measures connected with caring for twin carvings, there could be negative effects for the whole family, including misfortune, illnesses and infertility.

If both twins die, it would not be necessary to carve figures for them in order to maintain the parallelism of their lives. But since stronger supernatural powers are ascribed to twins than to family ancestors, families offer their souls dwellings in these figures so that they can be close to the family and a blessing for them.

If the second twin dies later on, a figure similar to the first one is carved. But this ritual is carried out only to a certain age of the child. If a twin lives on for several years after the death of his sibling, it is not necessary to carve a figure for him.

Among societies that consider fertility an important human quality, it is important not to hide the birth of twins even if they die. This fact actually improves a woman's social status; she is acquitted and praised. For instance, in his first name (which is in Pidgin English) the Nigerian artist Twin Seven Seven thus indicates that his mother gave birth to twins several times before he was born.

A supportive society has been created inside the traditional society. All mothers with similar destinies are invited to the celebration of the birth of other twins. Mothers who have lost their children join a dance with their wooden figures to bring a blessing to the newborn twins.

The definition of a man and "double" as a ludic term

Additional contemplations would seem to be a digression from the topic. The question is what a mask can have in common with twins. Contrary to idolatry (cults of worshipping gods bound to shrines), the Yoruba do not worship their child fig-

ures. In this sense, *ere ibeji* are similar to masks through which an active relationship to reality going beyond ordinariness is expressed.

Ere ibeji constitute the same ludic principle for the Yoruba women as the masks which are exclusively intended for adult men. Thus, from the ludic point of view, the polarisation of this society is not discriminative but diversified.

It is now appropriate to try and define a theatre performance with the help of the term "double" as Antonine Artaud did in *Le théâtre et son double* and as Claude Lévi-Strauss did in *Des symboles et leurs doubles*. In this concept, the real world is strictly separated from the world of representations, which includes masquerade. The present article is interested in this dividing line between culture and nature, and the fact that African societies hold on to this line so much.

In the context of traditional cosmogony, the birth of twins seems to be the repeated birth of a human being and therefore the creation of the same person's image inside the same reality. Alongside the questioning of the natural law that a human being is born one by one, the concept of theatre performance and sculptural interpretation is also changed. A natural copy of a human's appearance ousts both traditional priest and artist; nature pushes out a double in the form of a twin. It is as if nature has interfered in cultural competencies and deprived it of its right to create images.

The societies analysed in the present article understood this mixing of levels as chaos – the result of a dispute between twins over primacy, which started in the mother's womb. If the dispute of cosmic powers was considered to have moved to the womb, the final attitude of a society resulted in elimination (e.g. among the Igbo and the Ijaw).

In the same way that the invention of photography and film motivated the redefinition of painting and theatre, it became impossible to view the existence of twins negatively for an indefinite time. Integration, however difficult, had to be achieved. The culture had to cope with it and break the curse that was believed to lie in twins. The primary interest herein is to explain this transformation because it definitely required a complex solution. Mental operations resulting in perceiving twins as a blessing are accompanied by an expression of material culture. Further considerations in the present work will be based on the wooden twin carvings.

For a better understanding, the phenomenon of twins needs to be put into the context of being a human being in a West African ethnic group. Its members know their relatives and origin very well, even without written sources. I was surprised by an educated young Kalabari woman who thus explained her motivation to live: "I want to live long enough to explain my children who is who in the family."

The main factor that adds an objective importance to the knowledge of genealogy in Africa is polygamy. It multiplies bonds as well as prohibitions. The same Kalabari woman evaluated her situation as follows: "My grandfather had forty wives, my father had three, so there is hardly a man I can marry within my tribe."

In a society that believes in the transience of life, continuity is secured by reincarnation. Among certain African ethnic groups, people can be named after the deceased. The first name can mirror the circumstances at the hour of their birth (e.g. night, cold, a difficult childbirth, a resemblance or birthright) or the fact that the mother has had twins before. If a newborn girl resembles her grandmother that recently died, Europeans may state, "She is really like her grandmother." In Western Africa, she could

actually be named "Grandma". This expresses the grandmother's return in the context of traditional religious notions.

This way of thinking is transmitted to every part of life. Even the descendant of a chieftain and successor to the role could say of his ancestor that he was "me [one] hundred years ago," as if he "was" his own ancestor. In this sort of definition, horizontal relationships, marriage and sexual partnerships are considered less important than the family line. The most essential thing is to have ancestors, and children and everything else submit to this goal. Thus, a man who knows his ancestors and has a family is not lonely. A man without this knowledge is abandoned, an orphan – nobody is there to pass on the knowledge of his ancestry to him. Nobody would start a family with such a person for the fear of patricide or incest – two situations that all societies strive to avoid. When relating this to European culture, proof of this can be seen in the Greek myth about Oedipus.

A big family is a source of social and psychological certainties, but polygamy complicates the structure of family relationships. Therefore, identity is thoroughly determined as a divergence of unity: "We are the children of one father, but our mothers divide us".

The definition of a person is that he or she is different from all other people. Twins, however, break this rule. And this is the heart of the matter – twins are alike in appearance and the circumstances of their birth are similar. It is important to remember that the Yoruba are definitely aware of the different appearances of children, but they do not differentiate between identical and fraternal twins in rituals.

Every ethnic group interprets a phenomenon that unsettles their perception of the world as a result of supernatural powers. The fate of twins is based on the type of supernatural powers. Even groups with similar opinions diverge on this matter and twins are perceived as either a blessing or a curse. Twins are considered to be a curse when society understands them as a shift from humanity to a lower form of life: e.g. to animals. The argument for this is the fact that animals have more offspring at once, but people are born one at a time. Twins are regarded as a blessing when they are understood as a shift to the divine.

The figure as a dwelling for the soul of the deceased

The Yoruba, who still consider twins as a blessing, believe that the soul of the deceased returns to the reincarnation cycle and that twins exist together forever. Therefore, they lock the soul of a deceased twin in a wooden figure so that it remains present throughout the life of the living twin. Then they can come back to the world together.

The difference between the African understanding of the transience of life and the endless reincarnation of Hinduism is that the Africans try to direct the reincarnation cycle within the family line. Hinduism implies vegetarianism, which is obviously a clever solution to the need of feeding the large population of India. The religious concepts of which reincarnation is a part are very different. It is very interesting to see how a particular culture explains food prohibitions and ritual measures – the primary interest herein is in the operation of intellect.

In Western Africa, certain rituals narrow down the reincarnation cycle so that a man is always born to be a man. This precaution widens the food chain because in

this case killing animals and eating their meat does not bring the risks of eating an animal that could be considered a human being.

Ritual measures involving twins are based on the locking of the soul of a dead twin in a figure so that it does not settle in the body of an animal, usually in a monkey. It is believed that otherwise the soul would do this while waiting to be born again because of its mother's indifference. The rudiments of this concern centre on the superstition that twins cannot eat monkey meat. The families often keep a monkey for the same reason – as a form of sympathy for unhappy twins whose souls have not found eternal rest in wooden figures.

The morphology of figures

Thanks to the creativity of the Yoruba, African sculptors invented twin carvings that are functioning as sarcophagi. *Ere ibeji* are directly related to a broad understanding of the sacrality of human life.

Twin carvings have spread also to other ethnic groups, such as the Fon in Benin and the Ewe in Togo, which border with the Yoruba. The origin of figurative carving is not connected with twin carvings. In African culture there are also other situations when the figures of children are carved. Ghana is famous for this and the carvings there are not limited to twin figures. One of the purposes of all carvings of children is to narrow down the reincarnation cycle and abolish ontological and psychological arguments for food prohibitions.

The child born after twins is called *idowu* and is also very important. It is perceived as the mother's transition to normal pregnancies and her return to giving birth to only one child at a time. This child is, therefore, dedicated to Eshu – the god of instability and change. Mothers who give birth to twins hasten to have another pregnancy, and their next child represents the transition to a normal state. A carving should protect the child from instability as a consequence of the previous situation.

Ibeji and *idowu* are often called *abiku*, meaning "ungrateful little people", because "they do not stay; they are born only to keep dying". Such behaviour is regarded as ungrateful to mothers that only have trouble with such children – they leave her before paying her back for her caregiving. There is an archaic custom with a more passive attitude towards reality – a sign on the body of an *abiku* was made so that it would be recognised when it came back in the course of the reincarnation cycle. Apparently this custom is no longer adhered to. After twins and an *abiku* are born, the Yoruba act quickly. They preventively take the described ritual measures linked to the phenomenon of *ere ibeji*.

At the top of the head of some figures, there is a double-bitted axe or a thin little tail which is called a "pig tail". This tail is an attribute of Eshu, the sly god of instability. The double-bitted axe is an archetypal attribute of Shango, the Yoruba god of tempest. The authors of the monograph *Twin Figures of the Yoruba* claim that these attributes are the sign of the distinctive worshipping of a god by a family line with twins. However, this explanation is not satisfactory as the family lines also worship other gods whose attributes are not carved in *ere ibeji*. Robert Farris Thompson assumes that the relationship between twins and the god of tempest is a close one. This is stated in *Twin Figures of the Yoruba*, but the authors do not connect this assumption to twin figures.

In my opinion, only figures with a double-bitted axe are connected to twins as this is when the doubling is expressed. The attributes of the god Eshu should be reserved for carvings of *idowu* – the child born after twins. The role of *idowu* is to confuse Eshu, the sly god of instability and fraud, and stay alive. Saying that Eshu is the patron of twins is a remnant of the archaic understanding of twins as a dangerous deviation from the norm. Even if it was admitted that some figures with a tail were really carved for twins, all other cultural phenomena connected with twins prove that the patron of Yoruba twins was the god of tempest.

The end of the killing of twins thanks to legendary King Ajaka has already been mentioned. Emphasising the connection between the king and the god of tempest formed the development of this ethnic group – those highest in the world want to be connected to those highest in heaven. Creating their family relationship is linked to his protection of the *dada* children, who are born with “Rastafari hair”. As a matter of fact, Shango’s priests have long hair, which symbolically integrates the feminine attribute into the personification of the tempest.

The practices of natural religions are varied, and the Yoruba is a large ethnic group, so the existence of similar schemes is limited. However, it is reasonable to claim that there is a connection between figures with a double-bitted axe and the god of tempest. It is possible to find a certain inner logic in this despite the fact that such “pure schemes” are being destroyed as the population of West Africa grows and delineations between ethnic groups are blurred.

Twins and tempest masks

Revealing the context is even more interesting than the exact classification of the objects and phenomena of African culture. What attracts attention is the fact that around the world twins are connected to atmospheric perturbations. The complementarity of twins is similar to that of thunder and lightning. In this case, twins are discussed in relation to the personified structures of tempest. This analogy can be understood as an invariant, an archetype with universal validity. In a culture that connects doubling with tempest, twins are transgressors of the established order and can become subject to elimination. This is how such a culture defends itself against pleonasm – the duplication of structures of sacred phenomena.

When there is only one god of tempest, there is no rivalry with twins, which meant twins were understood as bearers of dynamism and civilisational heroes with an origin that was always somehow unclear. When speaking of the presented African material, it would be now appropriate to compare them to the myth of the founder of Rome. However, the material from West African neighbouring ethnic groups has to suffice.³

A study of this phenomenon among the traditional Ijaw societies (although they are not the primary interest in this article) provides outstanding material for their comparison with the Yoruba. The killing of twins among the Ijaw was stopped by Christianity. Therefore, the statement can be made that where there is not one masquerader for both thunder and lightning – i.e. where the idea of one god of tempest

³ For more on this, see my study about tempest masquerades in the present volume.

does not prevail – there are also no twin carvings, and twins are considered to be a curse. When a single masquerader personifies tempest, there are twin carvings and twins are considered to be a blessing.

The Ijaw masks of thunder and lightning can be a test of the correctness of the analysis of twin carvings. This analysis makes it possible to claim that the humanising inversion is related to the centralisation of Yoruba pantheon and most likely also to the process of uniting Yoruba people. This specifically means that twins are considered to be a curse where the aristocratic principle – the power of masquerade societies – prevails and the elements of tempest are personified in two gods. Twins are considered to be a blessing where the royal principle prevails – thunder and lightning is personified in one god. This blessing is guaranteed by the god of tempest, who is the heavenly patron of twins and of the king. In both cases, ethnic groups are aware of this having something in common with the god of tempest while the duplication of the expression of this phenomenon is excluded. Integrating twins into a society indicates the reconciliation of powers that are understood to be personified by twins.

An interesting fact is that the first of the twins to be born – the quick and nonchalant *Taiwo* – is considered to be the younger one and the second to be born is the clever and careful *Kehinde*. This name etymologically means “the second to arrive”. Kehinde leaves the safe mother’s body only after Taiwo calls him when he checks whether everything outside is in order. In this context, exegesis concerning primogeniture is viewed in a different way: “After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob” (Gen. 25:26). The Yoruba would consider Jacob’s heirship as justified.

The Yoruba attitude towards twins is similar to the Ijaw personification of thunder and lightning – the cool-headed thunder comes after the quick lightning and quells its anger. This comparison proves that African carvings visualise the past (in masquerade) and the future (in carvings of children), thus enabling grandparents to symbolically meet their grandchildren. The gods, who personify the original powers in the cosmos, are also seen as some kind of ancestors. Therefore, the analysis of complex religious notions affirms that ancestral personifications are not in total contrast to environmental ones. God of thunder and of lightening represents someone from a different world and its masquerades reveal through their wood carvings their bond with twins, who are born in a different way than other children as if they were not from this world.

Psychological impulses and ethical conclusions

Carvings are a form of ritual game for mother to cope with the loss of her children and indicate her social status. In societies with a high infant mortality rate (which is even higher for twins), there are phenomena which are similar to toys. Similar cultural phenomena changed into children’s games in other parts of the world long ago or never developed to a comparable extent.

From the psychological point of view, one must cope with the loss of a relative in all cultures and this can be achieved by a playful return to the position of a child. Some of the Yoruba traditional practices could be adopted for treating traumatic situations to current individual or group therapies.

For Western culture, the value of an individual’s independence is perceived from

all other values, meaning it considers everything that is determining as hostile. It is inspiring for Western culture that Africans, including monotheists, have preserved from their original religion respect for ancestors as well as the belief that they can change determining factors by winning their ancestors' favour.

The reason for the revalorisation of some aspects of African religious systems is a presupposition that they could have a healing impact on civilisation affected by technocracy which depersonifies genetic information and makes genetic manipulations possible.

If nature ever cloned in the past, people were opposed to it because their instinct for self-preservation perceived it as a violation of natural law. The humanising inversion together with Christianisation saved twins after broadening the concept of a human being to include "different people".

Nowadays, the development of technology has got ahead of the humanities. The sense of technology is not always obvious – from prenatal diagnosis, which imposes on parents a burden of responsibility they did not have to bear beforehand, right up to cloning. Therefore, it is not a worthless task to reflect cultures other than ours in order to challenge the technocratic approach to life.

The transformation of a curse into a blessing through the sculptural medium which has been described above in the case of the Yoruba is a very positive change. But should be everything technologically possible seen as a progress? Should the phenomenon of twins not remain an extraordinary expression of the divine power of nature? These questions are provocative but not pointless. They show how easy it is to stir up a public debate on our civilisation and times with cogent arguments about such seemingly segregated exotic subjects. The above work has been undertaken in the hope that the concept of the human individual will remain a central part of global civilisation.

Translated by Kristína Čárnecká

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