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A Semiotic Study of Totemistic, Panegyrics and Prorairesis Codes Relations between Ifá and Ìbejì

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Abstract

Differences in cultural pattern account for the differences among human societies generally. The understanding of cultural dynamics of a society is an important way of understanding the value system. Essentially, Ifá is believed to be the springboard of Yorùbá culture because virtually every aspect of Yorùbá religious and cultural life has a link or the other with Ifá. Previous works on Yorùbá religion and culture have neither related Ifá semiotic symbols nor elements with Ìbejì-nor established any connection between the two. However, till date, the association of the Yorùbá people with the highest number of twin birth especially, dizygotic twins (a male and a female) throughout the world, has been subject of research for long. This gap is filled by this study. The study examines the totemistic, panegyrics and prorairesis codes of Ifá with Ìbejì. This work relies substantially on Yorùbá oral literary texts, especially Ifá literary corpus, panegyrics and proverbs. Semiotics, which is the science of signs, is adopted for the analysis of the data, because, symbolism underlies Ifá divination system. It is found out that, there are links in totemistic, panegyrics and prorairesis codes of Ifá with Ìbejì. The work concludes that, influence and values of Ifá are felt on Ìbejì in totemistic, panegyrics and prorairesis codes, which is believed in this work to be one of the reasons for the associations of the Yorùbá people with the highest number of twin birth around the globe.

Introduction

Ifá has been defined by scholars in different ways. This is as a result of unlimited scope of its knowledge. Indeed, Ifá is regarded as the bedrock of other aspects of the Yorùbá life. Therefore, to simply define Ifá as a religion, without exploring its social and cultural links with other aspects of Yorùbá life will be inadequate. For example, Ifá is “the philosophy or wisdom divinely revealed to the Yorùbá deity,

Òrúnmìlà.”¹ Ifá is the greatest Yorùbá oracle that is “consulted on all important occasions.”² Ifá is regarded as the spokesperson not only for the gods but also for the living, indeed, Ifá is regarded as the living foundation of Yorùbá culture.³

Ifá's scope is believed to extend beyond the Yorùbá cultural society. For instance, “Ifá is the most universal divinity among the Yorùbá and other West African people.”⁴ Ifá is known to different people by different names throughout the world. For example, Ifá is known as Fa among the Fon of the Republic of Benin, Eva to Nupes, Ifa in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam and Togo. Ifá is referred to by the Ewe as Afá, Ephod by Jews, Geomancy by Europeans and Magasy.⁵ With this different nomenclature across the nations of the world, the prominence of Ifá is not in doubt.

In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed Ifá as one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity.⁶ By this proclamation, Ifá joined the league of heritages threatened by extinction and therefore requires urgent preservation. Ifá, as a religion, science or literary text, has over time been of great interest to scholars in different areas of human endeavor, like medicine, philosophy, religion, art and culture.

Semiotic Approach as a Theoretical Framework

Semiotics, which is the science of signs is adopted for this study. This is because, Ifá that is the central element communicates with symbols. Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. According to Saussure, semiology is the study of signs as part of social life. He focuses on the functions of social and cultural phenomenon within semiotic system. Saussure classifies signs into two entities: “signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning.”⁷ He refers to the signified, mostly in form of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Saussure is credited with structuralism approach. To him, language is formed by signs which are related in multiple ways. A sign or a word consists of two parts: one part is its form; the other part is its meaning. The association between form and meaning of a sign is fixed by conventions of language use. The link between the form and meaning are inseparable.

¹A. Akintólá. Yorùbá Ethics and Metaphysics, Ògbomòsò, Yaloy Publishers, 1999, 1.

²S. Farrow. Faith, Fancies and Fetish, or Yorùbá Paganism. London, Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1926, 36.

³W. Abimbólá, Ifá divination poetry. New York: Nok Publishers, 1977, 14.

⁴L. Munoz. A Living Tradition: Studies in Yorùbá civilization. Ibadan. Sayster Press, 2003, 179.

⁵O. Odéyemi. 'Ifa and Orisha Temple'. oyekuofun.com/what-is-ifa/, 2013, 5.

⁶B. Robinson. 'Ifa; the religion of the Yorùbá people', <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>, 2008, 1.

⁷F. de Saussure. Course in General Linguistics. London: Collins, 1974, 60.

Semiotics is an abstract entity. Sign is something which stands to somebody or something in some respects or capacity. This relation of 'standing for' is mediated by an interpretant. "A sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way the interpretant becoming in turn a sign."⁸ This means, anything can be adopted as a sign.

Three modes of significations are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. These are icon, symbol and index. In an iconic mode, the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified in one way or the other. According to Peirce, one can perceive a direct resemblance between the signifier and the signified. For instance, a picture of an individual is an iconic symbol.

In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. In Yorùbá tradition, it can be realized in form of *Àrokò*,⁹ as such an object or something stands for something or somebody in real life. For instance, the Yorùbá believe that "fish" stands for negative and 'crab' for positive or to determine the 'yes' or 'no' of an interrogative statement such as 'ẹja n bákàn?' (fish or crab?). It is culturally accepted that 'fish' symbolizes (stands for) no or negative and 'crab' symbolizes (stands for) yes or positive.¹⁰ In an indexical mode, the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (physically or casually) to the signified. For instance, 'odour' is an index for the presence of a he-goat around. This makes Yorùbá to say "òrúko dé oòrùn dé."¹¹ (a he-goat is around with odor) or in a statement such as "bíná bá jó lóko mọjàlà ni yóó ọ́fọ́fọ́."¹² (mọjàlà is the tell-tale of the bush burning).

The link rule of signs and their meanings are made known by a code. A code is "a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication."¹³ This may be realized in a multi-level coding. Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Codes are realized in different forms: behavioral, verbal, gnomic, poetic, mythic codes and so on. However, there is no total or complete separation between these semiotic descriptions.

The knowledge of semiotics covers different aspects of life. This work adopts the cultural semiotics, which is concerned with the use of cultural objects or signs associated with cultural meanings. A sign can create multiple meanings, depending

⁸S. Peirce. 'Semiotics,' <http://www.singnosemio.com/peirce/semiotics.asp>, 1931, 35.

⁹This is a traditional form of non-verbal communication inform if symbol or object.

¹⁰This is established Yorùbá cultural form of communication.

¹¹A he-goat that has grown to a certain stage.

¹²F. I. Ọtundé. *Yorùbá Proverbs and Philosophy with 2,500 Proverbs Translated*. Abeokuta, Damsan Nig. Company, 2009, 178.

¹³L. Geoffery and M. Short. *Style in fiction: Linguistic introduction to English fiction prose*. New York; Longman, 1981, p. 124.

on the culture in which it exists. The application of the cultural categories depends on the individual or personal knowledge. "But we are all some ways apart from commanding all cultural knowledge, as we all have little experience in many areas of everyday life."¹⁴ The distinction between the semantic knowledge and world knowledge is a doctrine of cultural semiotics. Proper interpretation of literary piece cannot be undertaken outside the cultural components of the text. This is because, "cultural knowledge defines what can be called cultural categories, the categories which are tacitly accepted by the community as an identity...personal knowledge usually includes the greater part of cultural knowledge, depending on the range of the experience of the individual."¹⁵ In analyzing any oral material, it is important that cultural background knowledge is adopted for adequate and accurate analysis to be arrived at.¹⁶

If semiotics involves associating meaning to a given cultural sign and symbol, then it is appropriate that the analyst be adequately acquainted with the culture within which the signs and symbols originated. Therefore, analyses of cultural symbols require cultural knowledge and cultural meaning. Individual knowledge usually includes the greater part of cultural knowledge, depending on the range of experience of the individual. "Personal knowledge usually includes the greater part of cultural knowledge, depending on the range of experience of the individual, but we are all some way apart from commanding all cultural knowledge, as we all have little experience in many areas of everyday life."¹⁷ The distinction between semantic knowledge and 'world knowledge' is a doctrine of traditional semantics.

This work explores use of Ifá literary poetry, the Yorùbá *oríkì*¹⁸ (panegyrics) *orílẹ̀* (totem) and proverbs. These sources provided a reliable database, free from human manipulations. The available written materials, especially on Ifá, are enough to conduct research. "But what still survives in oral tradition and oral literature, particularly in the Ifá corpus is a good indication of the intellectual achievement of the Yorùbá."¹⁹ They are free from the constraints of authorship, this means, these materials are the properties of the Yorùbá community.²⁰ The information through these media is therefore dependable. The materials are "preserved undisturbed as they have been for generations and handed down intact by each succeeding generation."²¹

¹⁴S. Lonner, *Understanding Semantics*. London, Hodder Arnold Publishers, 2002, 201.

¹⁵Lonner, 201.

¹⁶W. Abimbola, 'Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline,' *Journal of Culture and Idea*. 1/1(1983): 13.

¹⁷Lonner, 201.

¹⁸*Oríkì* poems encapsulate all that relates or associated with individual or family.

¹⁹J. Atanda, *Yorùbá History*. Ibadan: University Press, 1980, 29.

²⁰O. Olajubu, 'Yorùbá oral poetry: Composition and performance,' U. Abalogo, G. Ashiwaju and R. Amadi-Tshiwala (eds), *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*, 1981, p. 102.

²¹A. Olabintan. *Akojopo Ewi abalaye ati Ewi Apileko*. Ibadan; Paperback Publishers, 1988, p. 13.

Justification for our approach to data collection is based on the fact that the data are sourced mostly from Ifá corpora sources. In Yorùbá tradition, the earliest forms of communication were oral stories and histories that were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Ifá corpus epistle is therefore believed to be preserved in preliterate societies. It is a medium which, "could develop, preserve and disseminate bodies of academic knowledge even without knowing the act of writing."²² Ifá's corpus materials remain intact till date "...the most reliable genre of the Yorùbá oral literature."²³

Despite the fact that the Ifá text is a culture bound genre, the data is translated into English for the benefit of a wider audience. Some cultural terms or names are not translated to preserve the local or cultural flavor, color and values of African oral arts; this is to avoid misinterpretation and low comprehension "since the indigenous language is more conducive to the interpretation of an indigenous genre."²⁴ However such are explained as may be necessary to ensure their understanding.

The methodology adopted in this work-semiotics, is descriptive. The objects of Ifá/Ọ̀rúnmilá's totem, panegyrics as well as in prorairesis are compared with each other so as to account for their relationship in these contexts. "The basic strategy in using a symbol as a cue is to pair something with the thing that it is to cue. Depending on the particular person, if this pairing is done often enough, with enough intensity, over a long duration the person will come to associate the two things with each other. Such a symbolic association allows one thing to be used as a cue for the other."²⁵

Objective of Research

The main objective of this research is to establish that, there exist relationships between Ifá and Ìbejì in totemic, panegyrics and prorairesis codes. These codes are interwoven as there is no parallel distinction between one and another; as a result of this, they all serve as trace elements that demonstrate the links between Ifá and Ìbejì. Therefore, the study is aimed to examine, describe and establish the perceived links in codes between the two elements.

Semiotics, Religion and Culture

The links between objects of Ifá divination with the human world are based on Yorùbá culture. Culture is "transmitted by symbols" from one generation to another.²⁶ In Yorùbá tradition, everything within nature on earth possesses

²² Abimbola, Ifa as a body of knowledge, 10.

²³ Abimbola, Ifa as a body of knowledge, 10.

²⁴ T. M. Ilesanmi. Yorùbá Orature and Literature: A cultural analysis, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2004, 111.

²⁵ S. Combs, & J. Freedman. Symbol, story, and ceremony: Using metaphor in individual and family therapy. New York: Norton and Company, 1990, 126.

²⁶ B. Kroeber, & C. Khickholm. "Culture" A critical review of concepts and definition Paper of the Peabody museum of American Archeology and etymology, Havard University, 1952, p. 181.

aconsciousness: plants, animal, mineral and man.²⁷ The early forms of communication were not by writings, but only 'strips' of pictures representing some kind of a story or events.²⁸ Visual symbols are used in writing as like spoken words in speech. "The fundamental role of the inscription system in Ifá divination distinguishes it as a "literate" learned means of inquiry-Ifá is commonly called 'alákòwé', the scribe or literate one."²⁹ The writing systems of Ifá are coded in *odu*. Yule stresses further that such codes are used "in the reconstruction of ancient writing systems comes from inscriptions on stone or tablets..."³⁰ This suggests that there are communications, usually in signs, symbols in religion, especially, Ifá. Ifá communicates in signs and symbols; which are learned and understood before consultation with the oracle is established. This informs the reason for formal and rigorous training associated with Ifá. Without acquiring the basic knowledge of Ifá divination, no trainee will be initiated to practice. Identification or recognition and interpretation of signs and symbols of Ifá, coded in *Odu* is paramount the understanding of Ifá message. Ifá's scope of knowledge touches on almost every aspect of Yorùbá cultural life. Therefore, the understanding of Ifá symbols and its relationship with other religious and cultural life of the Yorùbá people is desirable, as in this study with Ìbejì.

Barnett³¹ and Ilésanmi³² buttress on this by noting that art works are expected to perform certain functions in Yorùbá culture. They are not designs of beautification alone "merely to be admired", but their "functional relevance" must be considered. "Religious art objects perform specific functions and these functions should be seen in the context of the entire Yorùbá culture." It is noted here that some Ifá and Ìbejì symbols or paraphernalia are realized as objects such as *ère-ìbejì* (*ìbejì* figure), Ifá priest walking stick or staff, which are recognized and discussed as totemic objects in this study.

Hammerstingl observes that the scope of semiotics "reaches far beyond the area of cultural phenomena, and involves the activity of orientation and perception of all living things the stimulus and response processes of animals and plants and even the metabolism of organisms and information processes by machines."³³ Information obtained through animals, plants and information processes in machines are thus within the scope of cultural semiotics. However, Ifá and Ìbejì totems- bird and snake, fall within this scope of semiotics to be examined in this study. When we are ignorant of semiotic representation of information; we are left with no rationale for

²⁷ O. Soyínká. 'West African's Orisa and Astrology.' From relijournal.com/paganism/west-african-orisha-and-astrology/. 2008, 5.

²⁸ I. B. Roy. *Anthropology: The study of man*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Limited. 2003, 55

²⁹ A. Adekōkò "Writing and reference" in Ifá divination chants in oral tradition. [Journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/2511/03-25.2.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/2511/03-25.2.pdf) 2010, 287.

³⁰ G. Yule. *The study of language*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 9

³¹ J. H. Barnett, *Yoruba-ìbejì*. <http://www.afrosculptures250X.com/ìbejìxt.htm>. 1982.

³² T. M. Ilésanmi. *Yorùbá Orature and Literature: A Cultural analysis*. Ilé-Ife: Obafemi Awolówò University Press Ltd. 2004, 45.

³³ W. Hammerstingl. *semiotics*. <http://www.onlinda.com/vc/lectures/semiotics/semiotics.htm>, 2011, 7.

the related events in our society. As earlier noted, Ifá is the foundation on which the Yorùbá culture is based. These cultural materials are 'historical' in nature since the relevant activities and events associated with those cultural materials relate to the past.

The need for African scholars to constantly strive to establish the origins of African symbols and cultural artifacts has also been stated in other contexts. For example, the Aláàfin of Òyó, Ọba Làmidì Adéyẹmí III noted that literacy existed in apparently non literate societies as revealed by Ifá corpus. He says:

It is difficult to determine whether oral societies were totally non-literate. Some form of literacy must have existed as shown by the Corpus of Ifá in Yorùbá societies...Ancient cultures of African peoples as shown through archaeological excavations and some of the items in museums exhibitions show that these are products of fertile and highly intelligent people who had some knowledge however crude...³⁴

Èṣẹ-ifá can be traced to prehistoric period of development. "All human behaviors originate in the use of symbols. Symbols transformed our prehistoric ancestors into organized human beings within the context of cultural livelihoods and institutions."³⁵ Generally, every cultural system and the Yorùbá cultural system in particular are codified in objects and symbols. In other words, the Yorùbá cultural system can be studied and properly understood in the use of cultural objects and symbols, and this is reflected in all aspects of Yorùbá life. Some of the beliefs of the Yorùbá people rest on symbols; which are accorded physical and spiritual references. Such physical objects, either is worn by human or not, possess the invisible or spiritual power. In this regard, "...symbols can be seen as the basis of any religion, political or economic understanding."³⁶ In African societies and beliefs, symbols are recipe for proper understanding of their religions as well as other aspects of their living.

Although, Africans generally and Yorùbá in particular are historically associated with 'illiterate societies.' However, there abounds historical documents in oral forms, especially in Ifá, symbols, objects and artifacts among others that are historical materials with which the culture and beliefs of the Africans in general and Yorùbá in particular can be established.

Discussion

Codes of Totems, Panegyrics and Proairesis of Ifá in Relation with Ìbejì

³⁴The Nation of June, 5th 2013, 38.

³⁵S. Madubuike. The role of language in socialization and culture. In A. Àjàyí (Ed.) African culture and civilization. Ìbàdàn: Atlantis Books, 2005, 330.

³⁶O. A. Akintan, 'Spirituality in Female-Oriented Cults in Ìjẹbú, Ògùn State, Nigeria.' In C. Àkàngbè (ed.) Yorùbá: Journal of Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria, 2015, 78.

Preamble

To the Africans in general and Yorùbá in particular, there are totemic objects and symbols which may be living or non-living things represented, regarded and respected to be the ancestral image and symbol. "A totem is generally an animal, more rarely a plant, still more rarely a cosmic body or force like sun or wind, which gives its name to a clan and may be otherwise associated with it. A totem is, therefore significant, especially for the clan."³⁷ To this effect, totem is what represents and considered the first image of ancestors of every group, therefore, "disrespect towards the totemic object signifies disrespect to the forefathers and an injury to it indicates impairing of one's own relatives..."³⁸

As earlier argued, there is no parallel lines of difference between the three elements- *oríkì*, *orílẹ̀* and lineage. For example, before an oral Yorùbá artist can be proficient in his performance, s/he must learn and master *oríkì* and *orílẹ̀* including the history of individual, family or group lineage (which is coded in *prorairetis*). The artist "has to learn the *oríkì* (descriptive names) of various individuals, and things and the (*orílẹ̀*) descriptive poems of major lineages in the community in his immediate environment in which he practices his art."³⁹ The knowledge of one of these elements is implied in one other. This means, there is no Yorùbá oral performance without these three elements under consideration.

Some people make such symbols, animals or plant their totems-symbols of worship. Thus, evolved totemism a form of religions based on the worshiping of animals, plants, objects or phenomena believed to be ancestral roots of a group of people living in a definite society. On one hand, totem of a family or clan is sometimes contained in panegyrics of the individual, family or clan. On the other hand, *prorairetis* has to do with lineage with which a clan, family or individual is associated.⁴⁰ Every African individual generally and Yorùbá in particular hails from a family in relation to the line of the ancestors. Before now, different scholars have explained the use of totem, panegyrics and *prorairetis* of *Ọ̀runmìlàn* and *Ìbejì* independently. However, attempt is made in this study to advance our knowledge, by relating the interdependence of these codes with one another, so as to demonstrate the relationship of *Ọ̀runmìlàn* to *Ìbejì*.

Oríkì (panegyrics) has to do with individuals, group, family or town historical collections of praise names and equally evince activities of individual wrongs and shortcoming among other things relating to an individual, group, family or town. *Prorairetis* is basically on the lineage of an individual or a group. The object of a totem is respected because of what it symbolizes. *Proairetic* code is "the code of

³⁷ I. B. Roy, *Anthropology: The study of man*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Limited. 2003, 546.

³⁸ Roy, 642.

³⁹ O. Olájubú. "Yorùbá Oral Poetry: Composition and Performance." In U. N. Abalogu et. al (ed) *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*. Lagos: Enecomprint, 79.

⁴⁰ Roy, 46.

actions where the lineal arrangement is fully considered.”⁴¹ Line tracing is very important, without which Ifá divination can be realized.

“Totems are closely-tied up with relationship.”⁴² Some people make such symbols, animals or plant their totems—symbols of worship. “Many have in the process linked their people's origin to specific animals, plants or any other living organism. Thus, evolved totemism a form of religions based on the worshiping of animals, plants, objects or phenomena believed to be ancestral roots of a group of people living in a definite community.”⁴³

The adoption of totemic symbols further established the belief on the interdependence and interrelationship of object, plant, animal and human-beings. “This belief centres on the awareness that man, animals and plants coexists in the universe and share such attributes as power, vivacity and health.”⁴⁴ The implication of this is that the present human world derives their attributes from these totemic objects or organisms of the past to live a meaningful life. Totem, is a symbol that connects the present with the past. A loss of totemic symbol is a loss of identity. Furthermore, it is through shared Oriki/Oriḽẹ⁴⁵ (panegyrics or totems), that relationship between Yorùbá people is traced and identified. “It is through their shared Oriki/Oriḽẹ that the scattered groups recognise a relationship.”⁴⁶ This is why totemic images are respected as they are regarded as a 'sacred edge.' Respect is accorded to those objects as they represent the images of ancestors. A loss of it is a disconnection from the past. They are referenced and unchanging. Barber (in author's translation) says:

Bí ò sí orilẹ̀ a ò mọ̀wẹ
Bí ò sí orilẹ̀ a ò mòwẹ⁴⁷

If there were no orilẹ̀ we would not know itching—bean.
If there were no orilẹ̀ we would not know bean—sprouts.

Therefore, Oriki/Oriḽẹ (praise epitaphs or totem) is used as 'trace element'. Oriki is praise epithet of individual lineage and divinities, and are very important to the study of Yorùbá religion. It is a means by which someone is remembered “within the history of his family clan and tribe.”⁴⁸ It serves as a means of identification.⁴⁹ It is descriptive in nature⁵⁰, while Lasebikan⁵¹ says it connects an individual with the

⁴¹P. Ògúndéjì. A Semiotic Study of Dúró Ladípò's mytho-historical plays. PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1988, 75.

⁴²J. O. Káyódé. Understanding African Traditional Religion. Ilé-Ifẹ: University Press, 1984, 11.

⁴³K. Ògúndowólẹ. Nature of man history and philosophy of science. Lagos: Correct Counsel Limited, 2005, 8.

⁴⁴Ògúndowólẹ, 8.

⁴⁵These two Yorùbá genres are related, as they both talk on history of individual group or community.

⁴⁶K. Barber, I could speak until tomorrow. Edinburgh: University Press, 1991, 135.

⁴⁷Barber, 135.

⁴⁸M. Oduyoye. Yorùbá Names: Their structure and their meanings. Ibadan: Dayster Press, 1972, 72.

⁴⁹A. Olabimtan, ed. Akójopọ Ewì Àbáláyẹ àti Ewì Àpílẹ̀kọ. Ibadan: Paperback Publishers, 1988, 169.

⁵⁰A. Babalola. Awọn oriki orilẹ̀ mètadinlógbon. Lagos: Longman, 2000, 9-11

⁵¹E. I. Lasebikan. Ijiniḽẹ ohùn ẹnu Yorùbá. Akójọ kinni. Ibadan: Government Printers, 1958, 31.

ancestors.⁵² This means that the past is connected with the present by Oríkì. Barber⁵³ asserts that Oríkì is based on history, and is concerned with "origin, custom, religion and taboos." "Oríkì are essentially historical in the sense that they are one of the ways in which the relationship of the present with the past is constituted.

The adoption of totemic symbols or images is not only identifiable with the Yorùbá people but some other cultures as well. For instance, Gerhard says that the Step penomads believe "that their ancestors had been animals. They therefore carry images of them as totems or coat of arms."⁵⁴ The totems have cultural denotational values. They denote the image of the ancestors. This is why such an animal is regarded, respected and honoured as it represents the ancestors. People of different families are able to trace their relationships through their totems. The identified totems that link Òrúnmílà to Ìbèjì are:

- (a) Totem of Snake
- (b) Totem of Bird

Totem of snake

Òrúnmílà's Orílẹ̀ (totem) has been traced to 'èdú' symbolized by 'snake.' Ládélé, Mustapha, Awóríndé, Oyèríndé and Oládàpò linked èdú with Onígàyí's lineage.⁵⁵ In Ìwòrì Mèjì, Òrúnmílà is referred to as "omọ ejò méjì" (Son of two snakes), which is a totemic symbol for the èdú lineage.⁵⁶ In other words, the totemic symbol for the Èdú lineage is snake of different kinds-green anaconda (the longest snake type in the world), Cobra (the longest venomous snake), Viper, known with poison, seakraits and rattle snakes, as contained in the Encyclopedia.⁵⁷ The association of snakes with Òrúnmílà (Ifá progenitor) is contained in Babalọlá⁵⁸ that:

Şèbè inu ọgán tí í Ş'ode l'ofò ọfà... Omọ ọlọkà-mèrindínlógún
Omọ eléré mẹfà-tòtò ... Òòşà t'ó f'inú ejò gbòkò l'Ápà ...⁵⁹

Black snake in a termite heap that waste hunters' arrows
Son of sixteen snakes. Sons of different cobra.
A deity that with snake nature relates to Alapa's lineage

This is further demonstrated with divinations process of snakes as known with Òrúnmílà

⁵² Lásẹbikan, 31.

⁵³ Barber, 25.

⁵⁴ H. Gerhard. Celts: The people who came out of the darkness. New-York: St. Martin's Press, 1977, 106.

⁵⁵ T. Ládélé., O. Mustapha., I. Awóríndé, O. Oyèríndé., & O. Oládàpò, Akójopò iwádíí àşà Yorùbá. Ìbàdàn: Macmillan Nig. Limited, 1986, 180-181.

⁵⁶ W. Abimbọlá. Ìjìnlẹ̀ ohùn ẹnu Ifá Apá keji. Ìbàdàn: Oxford University Press, 1969, 38-39.

⁵⁷ Encyclopedia of plants and animal world, 2012, 112.

⁵⁸ A. Babalọlá. Awọn oríkì Bọròkinní, Ìbàdàn: Nigeria Publishers Services Limited, 1981, 249.

⁵⁹ Babalọlá, Awọn oríkì Bọròkinní, 249.

... ẹni t'ó bá kọjá l'óde ọra yóo bá erè níbi erè gbé n' dífá.
 Bógánjò bá lọ gán dódò; ọba ìgbò.
 B'ẹẹyàn bá kọjá l'óde ọra yóo bá erè níbi erè gbé n' dìbò,
 yóo bá paamólẹ tí n's'Àbọrúbọyè bọ síse ...⁶⁰

Whoever passes by on the street of Ọra will meet erè where it is divining in the late mid-night, king of ìgbò.

If one passes by on the Ọra street one will meet erè casting lots, will meet paramólẹ saying àbọrúbọyè.

Snakes are Ifá oracle diviner as revealed above. Ọrúnmilà is known as Ọmọ-Erè-lápà (son of a snake of Alápá's lineage as explained by Adeoye⁶¹ and Akintola.⁶² Snake is symbolized as one of the totems on the Ifá divination tray. "The trays are textured with zigzag and criss-crossing lines on the animals ... Also the zig-zag texture on the snake gives an appearance of movement..."⁶³ Giving the interpretation of the snake in relation to Ifá. "The Yorùbá belief that the source of poisonous powers of the snake is gotten from Ifá is a strong testimony of the potency of Ifá divination to solve any problem."⁶⁴

This is an interpretation in relation to the poisonous nature of snakes; another possible interpretation being considered here is the length of snakes. Being the longest animal on ground could as well connote the scope of Ifá/Ọrúnmilà's knowledge and wisdom. Its body flexibility could as well imply power to turn things around just as the body could. Snake is reported by Encyclopedia⁶⁵ to belong to the group of animals that changes with their environment. "Their body temperature increases and decreases with the temperature of the surrounding environment ..."⁶⁶. Snake could also connote danger as in "a kì í fejó sọríòrulé sùn"⁶⁷ (it is not done to leave a snake on the roof and sleep). Different types of snake could as well connote different meanings. 'Şèbè' (a black type snake) is temperamental in nature. Thus it is used metaphorically that "ó n' bínú bí i Şèbè." (He/she is temperamental as 'Şèbè'). Another type of snake known as 'Paramólẹ' is associated with 'cunning' and 'poison'. Thus, the Yorùbá will say "ó n' kà nínú bí i paramólẹ." (He is as wicked as Paramólẹ). Green snake under green grass also connotes a dangerous environment. Ọkà species of snake also has metaphorical use in Yorùbá discourse. "Ibi ọkà bá ba sí, igba ẹranko ni í ba nìbẹ tí í jẹ"⁶⁸ (Where ọkà stays, is

⁶⁰ A. Babalola, *Àwọn oríkì orílẹ̀ mètadinlógbòn*, Lagos: Longman, 2000, 256.

⁶¹ C. L. Adeoye, *Igbagbọ̀ àti Èsìn Yorùbá*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigeria Publishers Ltd. 1985, 174.

⁶² A. Akintola, *Yorùbá Ethics and Metaphysics. Ògbómòsọ̀*: YALOYN Publishing Ventures. 1999, 194.

⁶³ O. I. Pogson, & A. O. Akandé. 'Ifa divination trays from Isale-Oyo', *cea-revues.org*/196, 2011, 14.

⁶⁴ Pogson, 15.

⁶⁵ Encyclopedia, 36.

⁶⁶ Encyclopedia, 36.

⁶⁷ This is one of the Yorùbá proverbs that shows the wildness of snakes of any type

⁶⁸ M. A. Fábunmi, *Àyàjọ̀ jìnlẹ̀ohùn ẹ̀nu Ifẹ̀*. Ibadan: Oníḃon-òjẹ Press. 1972, 13.

where two hundred animals come to it as prey). This symbolizes Ọ̀rúnmìlà source of livelihood and (food/sacrifice), for other deities and supernatural beings. Likewise, Èrè or Ọ̀jọ̀lá Cobra species type of snake in Yorùbá beliefs, symbolizes supernatural power of provision as “ìfà èrè kì í jẹ kẹ́bíkó p'èrè”⁶⁹ (power of a cobra will disallow it from hunger usually). Their metaphorical usages in discourse are so potent to the extent that they surface most in ọ̀fọ̀ (incantation) (àwísẹ/bíítírí, máyẹ, ọ̀gèdè, àásán and so on). These are incantations of commands, authority, directives and declaration.

Animals are used in one way or the other with different human situation. Sometimes the animals' use have an association in some instances with human past ancestors. “Animals are used to represent ancestors as totems. The ones mostly used are those that are most like these ancestors in aggressiveness, restlessness, vivacity and soon.”⁷⁰ The character as well as behaviour of these totemic animals reflects on the character and behaviour of the ancestors they represent.

In Ìbejì, the totemic image of snake known with Ọ̀rúnmìlà, as explained above is also regarded and represented. Through Ọ̀ríkì/Ọ̀rílẹ̀, we are able to locate the origin of Ìbejì with Ọ̀kín Alápà. Ìbejì is referred to as 'Èjìrẹ̀ Ọ̀kín.' For Alápà lineage, which connects Ọ̀rúnmìlà with Ìbejì, it is forbidden for them to eat or kill snakes. For instance, “...ọ̀mọ tí a bí ní ìdílẹ̀ alápà kì í jẹ ejò.”⁷¹ They are referred to as “Èyìn l'ọ̀mọ ejò tẹ̀rẹ̀ nako jákò.”⁷² (You are the sons of snakes that move long on the ground). The form commonly associated with snake is identified or described as being “zig-zag”, “The zig-zag pattern is often associated with the path of the ancestors and or serpent.”⁷³ Likewise, the symbol of the beads across the chest of the èrè-ìbejì above shows the zig-zag form of movement of the “ancestors and or the serpent”⁷⁴ Prorairesis code associated with Ìbejì is at play here. It will be recalled that Ọ̀rúnmìlà association with snake has earlier been explained in this study.

Furthermore, the zig-zag form of marking Ifá symbols is likewise engraved on the divination board. This zig-zag marking on the Ifá divination board shows that the process of movement is as well represented in the divination system. The totemic image (snake) is employed to indicate the line of the movement of the ancestors; both on the divination board (Ọ̀pọ̀n Ifá) and on the èrè-ìbejì as well.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Fábunmi, 13.

⁷⁰ J. O. Káyódé. *Understanding African Traditional Religion*. Ilé-Ife: University Press, 1984, p. 5

⁷¹ A child born into Alapa's family must not eat snake

⁷² C. L. Adéoyè. *Oriukọ Yoruba*. Ibadan: University Press, 1982, 42-3.

⁷³ J. Curry, Materials used in the creation of Èrè-ìbejì. In seminar papers on Yoruba twins, spring, 2010, university of iowa, <http://www.iowa.edu/2aficat/8bej7/%20for%20web/web/list%20of%20research%20paper.html>, 2010, 21.

⁷⁴ Curry, 21.

⁷⁵ O. T. Ọ̀kẹwándé. A semiotic investigation of links between Ifá, Ìbejì and Ayo Ọ̀lópọ̀n, 2017.

Totem of a Bird

As noted above, Ìbejì totem is Òkín (peacock). This is evinced in their oríkì. “⁷⁶ Èjìrẹ Òkín ará Ìsokùn.”⁷⁷ (Èjìrẹ Òkín' that lives in Ìsokùn). Òkín bird is believed by the Yorubá people as the king of birds. “Òkín ní í ṣolórí gbogbo ẹyẹ.”⁷⁸ (Òkín is the king of all the birds). In the human world, Ìbejì is equally regarded and respected with the quality or attributes of king among the children. This is why twins are regarded as olú ọmọ (chiefs among children), ọrọ ọmọ (children loaded with meaning) and ọba ọmọ⁷⁹ (kings among all the children).

The image of the bird known with Ìbejì is observed on the symbol of Ifá authority as well. For example, the engraved image of a bird is the authority staff of Awo-Ifá. This has to do with the recognition of the totemic code of Ìbejì as related to Ifá. The symbol of a bird stands on the top of babaláwo (Ifá priest) walking stick. Because of written evidence or record, the bird has been interpreted to mean pigeon by scholars like Abiódún says “the implementation of Òrúnmìlà's orders, the bird(s) on the top of the staff represent(s) ẹyẹ kan (one bird)... Ẹyẹ kan represents a more constructive and positive power of implementation...”⁸⁰ Pogosome and Àkandé⁸¹ assumed the bird to be ẹgà. However, the exact bird that represents Ìbejì totem is subject to further research, but the presence of the image of a bird on the Ifá paraphernalia is incontestable. In this work, Òkín is suggested to be the totem of Ìbejì engraved on the staff of Ifá priest.⁸² The relationship of Òrúnmìlà with Ìbejì, is identified with Òkín (a totem for Ìbejì). Just as the totem of Òrúnmìlà (snake), complements the totem for Ìbejì (Òkín), so also does the totem of Ìbejì (Òkín) complement the totem of Òrúnmìlà (snake).

Abimbólá⁸³ refers to the staff of Ifá priest as ọpá ọrẹrẹ and Osùn (Ifá ritual walking-stick): He says “This ritual walking stick used by Ifá priests carries the image of ẹyẹ kan (a bird) on its top part...”⁸⁴ The walking stick must not be laid flat on the ground. For instance, Abimbólá says “Òoró gangan là á bósùn.”⁸⁵ (Osùn must always be found in an erect position). The uncertainty of the species of this bird is rendered by Pogosome and Àkandé by saying that “... This species is unknown...”⁸⁶ Contrary to their oral findings that the bird could suggest 'ẹgà' (ẹgà bird), Ẹgà cannot be anything close to the image above. Although, we only know through Yorubá poetry⁸⁷ that “Ẹdun ò gbọdò jẹran Ẹgà.” (Ẹdun is forbidden to eat ẹgà flesh), the taboo is

⁷⁶ P. Fagbohùn 'Ejire Ara Isokun.' from <http://ejirecladi.wetpaint.com/page/ibejì+oro.2011.2>

⁷⁷ O. Daramólá, and A. Jẹjẹ. *Awon asa ati orisa ile Yorubá*. Ibadan: Onibon-oje, 1967, 282

⁷⁸ Fabunmi, 39.

⁷⁹ Adéoyé, 345.

⁸⁰ R. Abiódún, Ifá art objects: An Interpretation based on oral traditions. In W. Abimbólá (Ed.) *Yorubá Oral Tradition*. Ifé African Languages and Literatures Series, 1975, 450.

⁸¹ Pogosome and. Àkandé, 49.

⁸² Abimbólá, 6.

⁸³ Abimbólá, 6.

⁸⁴ W. Abimbola IFÁ: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976, 31.

⁸⁵ Abimbola IFÁ, 31.

⁸⁶ Pogosome and Akande, 11.

⁸⁷ O. Fadiya, *Jojoló akéwí (Iwé kejí)*. Ibadan: Feather & Cap Books, 2007, 52

related to other historical or cultural beliefs and does not symbolize Ìbejì's totem. The totemistic code used in Ìbejì deity is assumed to be Ọ́kín bird. It is Ọ́kín (peacock) that describes the above opinion by Pogosome and Àkàndé. For instance, Chambers mini dictionary (Kirkpatrick) (ed.) put the description of a peacock bird to be "a type of large bird, noted for its splendid feathers, esp. in its tails."⁸⁸ This description is close to Ọ́kín than Ègà.

Both snake and bird are known with the attribute power of break-through on their ways. For instance, snake and bird occur in invocative statements. Fabunmi says:

Eyẹ̀ kì í fò k'ó f' orí s'ogì;
ìkọ̀ kì í k'ẹ̀yẹ̀ l'ẹ̀sẹ̀ l'ọ̀jù ọ̀run;
ìkọ̀ kì í k'ẹ̀jọ̀ l'ẹ̀sẹ̀ l'ọ̀nà...⁸⁹

A bird never flies and hit a wood no obstruction
for a bird to fly on the sky no obstruction on
snake way on the ground

This also relates to the power of birds unhindered on the sky and the fearful manner of the movement of snakes on the ground. The presence of a bird in the totem of both Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Ìbejì are symbols associated with these two divinities.

Conclusion

One of the ways in which the Yorùbá people establish relationship is by oríkì, orílẹ̀ and lineage either of an individual, family or town. It is found out that, the history, religion and culture of Africans are closely associated with symbols. In other words, culture and religion of the Yorùbá people, in particular and among Africans in general cannot be separated from each other. These symbolic objects are referenced because of the cultural and religious beliefs the Yorùbá associate with them. The relationship of the people can also be established with those symbols as the relationship of Ìbejì with Ifá in this study, especially in oríkì (panegyrics) orílẹ̀ (totem) and proraireisis codes are demonstrated. This established connection between Ifá and Ìbejì, suggest and account for one of the reasons why the Yorùbá is associated with dizygotic twin birth throughout the globe. However, the semiotic links between Ifá and Ìbejì have further been established around other codes such as mythical, gender, binary, odu, linguistic codes among others, symbols, icons and indices.⁹⁰ In other words, the connections between Ifá and Ìbejì are not limited to panegyrics, totemistic and proraireisis codes examined in this study.

⁸⁸E.M. Kirk Patrick, (ed.). Chamber Universal Learners's Dictionary. Ìbàdàn: Spectrum Books Limited, 1980.

⁸⁹Fabunmi, 41.

⁹⁰O. T. Òkèwándé. Semiotic Investigation of Links between Ifá, Ìbejì and Ayọ̀ Ọ̀lópón. Ph.D. thesis, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, 2017.