

TWIN PHOBIA: A HARD NUT TO CRACK AMONG HAYA COMMUNITIES?

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INTRODUCTION

In many parts of Africa, twin births were generally and are still events believed to be of extraordinary importance. Traditional African beliefs tend to give twins a special position as sacred monsters and subject them to a variety of ritual celebrations. The different versions of the *dogon* myth of the creation of the world tell about the symbolic events that led to the separation of the Heaven and the Earth, of gods and the first men on earth, of female and men of religious leaders and other inhabitants. In Achebe's book, *Things Fall Apart* that he published in 1958 that has become a staple in literary, history, anthropological and sociology studies, the Earth goddess decreed that the twins were an abomination among the Igbo of Nigeria and, hence, required destruction; otherwise, the community risked suffering the wrath of the goddess should the twins be allowed to live. Consequently, when twins were born among the Igbo, members of the community put them in pots who abandoned them in the 'evil forest' to shiver and cry to death.

TWINS AMONG THE HAYA

Similarly, for the Haya communities in Tanzania's Kagera region, twins have historically attracted and continue to attract in some measure negative perceptions, for example, as alleged bringers of evils such as disease and catastrophes such as drought, famine, strong winds and poverty. Such beliefs have roots in the cultural milieu and cosmology of the Haya. This negative perception leads to their segregation in society, and subjection to hatred, as member of the community would treat them as people that deserve avoidance in every aspect. Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twin>) defines twins as two offspring produced by the same pregnancy. They can either be identical, meaning that they develop from one zygote, which splits and forms two embryos, or fraternal, meaning that they develop from two different eggs. Most of the illiterate Buhaya (Haya) communities' rarely defined twins using such a scientific-based description, a situation that made them abide by questionable social norms. According to the ancient Haya definition, twins were a taboo, a curse, devilish and a great misfortune, hence the name as *Maano* in the plural or *Eihano* in the singular in their vernacular.

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In the old days, women who happened to give birth to twins had their necks fastened with a heavy stone and cast into a pool of a river or lake to plunge to their death. For those communities that lived far from the rivers they were thrown down steep rocky hilly slopes with their twins purportedly to relieve society of the curse they embodied. However, the definition and treatment of twins in the Haya community evolved with time and, eventually, the twins were no longer terminated soon after being born, along with their mother. Instead, they subsequently received treatment as kings and queens worshipped alongside the chief, known as *Omukama* in their local language.

According to Mamerita Rwiza (78) a resident of Ruzinga ward in Missenyi district of Kagera region, twins were to be worshipped from the time they were born and after their death for the good of the community. She says there were always two bowls for giving offerings to twins in their families. "Songs of praise were to be chanted at set periods so as to maintain the blessing. It was also believed that angering the twins would lead to calamities," Mrs. Rwiza says adding that the indigenous people of Kagera region are duty-bound to adhere to these norms otherwise catastrophes would continue befalling them. She says respecting the elders and worshipping twins is vital, otherwise every evil will find its way to the community. She goes on referring to Jesus' vow in the Bible, in the book of Matthew, 5: 17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them". She adds that elders must be respected and twins pleased, "so they do not to turn their anger on the people, as their real true colours would affect people, and that some people, including twins themselves are forced to run into exile to avoid spirits and torture."

Jasson Kamala, a resident of Ruzinga village, Missenyi district, a retired vocational education instructor at Kashasha Lutheran College is a father of twins. He says he was forced to baptise them immediately after they were born and take them away so that they could grow up unaffected psychologically, physically and emotionally. Although he is a committed Christian, he views catastrophes, including the September 10, 2016 earthquake that hit Kagera region, which took lives and destroyed much property as a punishment for the Haya people for turning their backs on the tradition of listening to the gods and praising twins. He questions why these catastrophes were mainly occurring in the Kagera region. According to him, there is a connection between traditions and the environment; he insists that this was not the first time an earthquake had hit Kagera region. The argument amongst some of the local inhabitants is that, there used to be minimal magnitudes in the past, as a proof of the earth's internal movement, as explained by geographers. However, the 2016 earthquake was particularly powerful, which some people in the area translated as punishment from the gods, and anger on why twins were not praised and given offerings.

Kamala recalls that in the far past the practice of executing twins alongside their mother was also performed for crops that bore abnormal fruits which would be described as twins. The plant was to be uprooted, thrown far away from people's residence. This mentality persists among some of the Haya descendants' minds, to some extent. As a result, being a twin amidst those people was not considered safe. Kamala asserts that twins have a bitter tongue, a tongue that always speaks of bad luck, misfortune and curses; as such, people are supposed to be careful in dealing with them. Parents who give birth to twins are addressed specifically "so as to" to make it easy for people to identify them and deal with them cautiously. A father of the twins is known as *Ishabarongo* whereas their mother is *Nyinababrongo* so that everyone would identify them and not argue with or create trouble for them for they were believed to be immune to catastrophes. Under this set-up and belief system, the people who were most affected by catastrophes were those who did not obey the traditions and did not praise twins.

Jackson Mukwenda (56), a farmer in Kangoma village located on the outskirts of Bukoba town in Kagera region reminds others to keep on following traditional ways of life along with new ones. He says that twins must be praised and their places of worship maintained by the whole society. He narrates that in the past there were special huts reserved for practising rituals for twins, with big trees called *ebigabiro* specially designated for this purpose. Mukwenda contends that mistreating twins is actually akin to sodomising the Haya community, which explains why the Earth was overheating and stones were crumbling and killing people. He insists that in the Bible it is written that give God what belongs to God, and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and not giving God what belongs to him and denying Caesar what belongs to him.

Sebastian Rwebangira (52) resides near the Kabale chiefdom in Bukoba Rural district, almost the only remaining chiefdom with traceable heritage. He is the only saviour from hardships including catastrophes is a specific spirit for each clan has one to protect it. If twins are angry, then gods are angry as well, which might unleash natural calamities to affect not only the crops but also humanity just like the earthquake did in Kagera. He warns those who opt to hate torture or kill twins as a safe haven for sufferings that even Europeans have never betrayed their cultures and praising of gods. He cites the United Kingdom for praising their Queen who is all-powerful and that all religions respect that as opposed to the Haya and other Africans who betray and forsake their culture, hence courting misfortunes.

Rwebangira warns that if people fail to respect and obey "our norms" and values, then more catastrophes may afflict them and that the Haya might be struck by floods. He suggests that elders must meet and do as was the practice in the past, discuss the matter and come out with the solution on⁴³

what rituals should be conducted to avoid more catastrophes. He suggests that, twins should run away to other safe cultures to avoid harassment and mutilations even though he warns that those who harass them would not be left safe at home for twin-hoods would still haunt them regardless of the distance.

DISEASES

In some pre-modernity traditional African cultures, twins were believed to be the cause of various diseases that people who angered them suffered. Among the Haya, some still associate some diseases with twins. One of the common diseases the twins allegedly inflicted on those who upset them was one commonly known as *vitiligo*, a condition in which black pigment is lost from areas of the skin, hence causing whitish patches. According to Rwebangira, irate twins would label one's skin with whitish colours from which they would never recover. Therefore, one must deal with twins cautiously.

Adela Ninsiimomukama, 48, a resident of Kamashwa village in Izigo ward in Muleba district is one of those suffering from *vitiligo*; her skin is whitish in some parts of her body. She claims to have attended medical treatment at different hospitals but to no avail. Neither could traditional healers find her a remedy. She claims that she is segregated because of the changed skin and that she is uncomfortable to socialise in her society for some people, especially children are afraid of her while parents think she can infect other children. Adela does not like twins anymore; she would have banned giving birth to twins if that was in her control. She believes her life is in danger just like that of twins for bandits who mutilate body parts of people with albinism because of the beliefs of striking it rich are also interested in Adela's kind of skin colour even though no such case has been reported so far, she must make sure to protect herself.

Thabit Shadidu, 11, is a Standard IV pupil at Izigo primary school in Itoju village, Muleba district. His skin is coloured from the face to the hands. He is afraid of the twins for his parents told him that they were the cause of his disease. He dislikes twins so much that he cannot share any item with them. Neither can he share desk with them in a classroom nor collaborate with them in any way. "I wish to recover soon if and only if I learn to get rid of these bad luck bringers," he says.

Besides traditional taboos on skin disease that changes colour to whitish, there is a scientific proof, which nullifies these false beliefs. Dr. Kabibi Byabato, a paediatrician at Ndolage hospital in Muleba district, explains that the skin condition called *vitiligo* results from a failure of the skin cells to make or produce its own normal colour, whether black or white, and that it is easily noticeable on a black than white skins. According to Dr. Kabibi, a society needs sensitisation on avoiding taboos that are jeopardising twins' lives. Otherwise, it would take a long time for twins to have relief for no one had⁴⁴

actually planned to carry out sensitisation, as all seems well despite twins facing a hard time in some cases.

TWINS AND THEIR MOTHERS' EXPERIENCE

Mediah Choli a resident of Birabo ward was forced to perform traditional rituals immediately after she gave birth of twins in a bid to save her society from misfortunes. No neighbour paid her a visit to see the twins or help the mother in the first seven days, as was the traditional practice in the area, for fear of acquiring misfortunes and diseases. Yet, Choli believes that twins are safe because they serve as shields against evil spirits to themselves and to their parents while affecting and killing others in the same regard. She says that one of the aged women in her village was hospitalised and died two weeks later after she had paid a visit to see baby twins; suspicions are that she had a secret intention towards the Choli twins. The mother of the twins is happy that her children are now buoyant and growing up but she is uncomfortable that they are suspected to have caused the death of a neighbour. However, she fears for their future; she is not sure about the course of actions of relatives of the dead and whether they plan to take revenge over the death. In fact, the whole society was murmuring that her twins killed one of them. As such, the twins were not safe; they were not at peace in that home village that some people might be thinking of killing them or affecting them.

Ester Nyakato Majura (48) is a twin resident of Kishoju village in Nshamba ward of Muleba district irritated by the forceful performance twin rituals and the state of allegedly 'burning' people's skin. She feels very bad to see those people and worse still as she is part of the problem. She recalls an incident when her aunt fell sick; she had to perform rituals so that her aunt could recover. Ester believes that no one can affect her for, as a twin, she is immune to all spirits though she is subjected to segregation and physical torture at the hands of people who consider a nearby twin to cause problems. As such, she believes it was not safe to be in her position in the community. She claims that religion also seems to side with traditional beliefs on twins. Although twins are being baptised in church after birth, the believers still cling to old beliefs and perform rituals outside the church building. Charles Kasilima is also an identical twin who was once uncomfortable with a priest in church rebuking twins as part of the evil spirits. Richard believes that he would have suffered from physical torture had he gone to church with his identical twin brother from fellow believers. A sense of stigmatisation has never gone away from his mind.

CONCLUSION

Overall, twins in Kagera region or Haya communities are not safe. Investigation has to be done on their death and ailments for it is suspected that some might be manmade than natural ones. Kagera regional social

welfare officer, Rebecca Gwamasa, says community members are wary of tortures of twins in her region for they are done in secrecy. It is akin to mutilating body parts of people with albinism, which also took time to be exposed. Twins are in greater danger. Rebecca agrees that twins have been tortured in other parts of Tanzania and East Africa. She promises to carry out an assessment to get more enlightenment on the malady.