Reincarnation in the Yoruba Ontology: Abiku

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Abstract: This study will present an argument on reincarnation beliefs among the Yoruba people in Nigeria, focusing on the born-to-die phenomenon, Abiku. According to the Yoruba tradition, the Abikus were once spiritual creatures before evolving into humans. But the Yoruba people's reincarnation beliefs concerning Abiku may be a myth. With the lack of medical technology in Yorubaland and other pre-colonial African nations to ascertain couples' genotype compatibility, sickle cell anemia, and other illnesses may have been the underlying cause of child mortality. Although previous scholars have attempted an explanation of the phenomenon, most scholarly works are premised on the medical perspective of child mortality, lack of adequate healthcare, folktales, and religious beliefs. A typical phenomenon among the Yoruba is the mutilation of body parts of the children assumed to be an Abiku. They do this to easily recognize the child if he returns to the family as a new child. When newborn babies are born with mutilation marks like the ones that died, it confirms the belief that he is an Abiku. However, it is hard to determine if the Abiku phenomenon is a myth or reality. To explain and establish this, I will explore research and documented stories of reincarnation experiences of people who have been caught on this web. This will also uncover parallels in the reincarnated individuals' experiences, the consequences for these people, and the impact of reincarnation belief systems and rituals on Yoruba society.

Keywords: Abiku, Yoruba, myth, reality, reincarnation

I. Introduction

Everyone eventually succumbs to death, irrespective of factors such as race, colour, gender, age, or nationality. Numerous individuals are of the opinion that the moment a person's physical body expires on this planet, existence does not come to an end but rather that life lives on in some other form. The concept of reincarnation is one that has generated debate for a very long time within the realms of philosophy, science, and even some religious subfields (Osanyinbi & Adedeji, 2016). The concept behind this belief is that after a person dies, their immortal soul is freed and then reborn into another physical body. In addition to that, it discusses rebirth in a number of different ways.

According to the beliefs of the Yoruba people, who are indigenous to the western region of Nigeria, the only portion of the human body that continues to exist after death is the soul. From their point of view, it is representative of the more ethereal qualities that humans possess (Kuponu & Talabi, 2021). The ancient Yoruba had a profound belief in the immortality of the soul as a direct result of this. ipadawaye, which means "ancestor's rebirth," akudaaya, which means "die and reappear," and Abiku, which means "born to die," are the three occurrences that the Yorubas think help to comprehend reincarnation (Osanyinbi & Falana, 2016). On the other hand, for the sake of our investigation, we shall be concentrating on Abiku.

As part of the Yoruba metaphysical tradition, the Abikus are said to have originated as spiritual beings prior to the time when humans evolved from them. In the reincarnation belief system of this society, the children that pass away before the age of five are referred to as "abiku." These parents leave their imprint on the kid who has passed away, and when they
subsequently conceive and birth further children, they commonly see that the newborn has
the same marks as the child who has passed away in the past (Kuponu & Talabi, 2021). For
instance, the child's fingers could be sliced in a way that ranges from minor to serious,
depending on the circumstances. It is assumed that this process will prevent the departed child
from passing away while they were still a young and then coming back to reunite with their
family (Kuponu & Talabi, 2021). However, despite the fact that the literature has shown the
presence of Abiku in our world, other literature has portrayed the notion of Abiku as nothing
more than the psychological manipulation of a culture that exploited the ignorance of a
community for a considerable amount of time (Ebhomienlen, 2015).

As a result, the purpose of this research is to determine whether or not the Yoruba
idea of Abiku is a myth or a fact. These will include documented reincarnation experiences of
people, explanations causing the lower incidence of the Abiku children, and the influence
these beliefs have had on the greater Yoruba contemporary culture.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Reincarnation Cases in the International system

In some documented cases of the reincarnation type, the individual appears to have been reborn in a country different than the one in which his or her previous life ended. For example, the cases of boy Vít who seemed to remember a past life in Prague, Czechoslovakia
and that of girl Jarmila from Czechoslovakia, who remembered a past life in Germany
(Cockell, 1998).

The parents of Yvonne Ehrlich were born in Austria in the 1920s and immigrated to
Brazil in the 1940s. In late 1952 or early 1953, Yvonne's mother fell pregnant. Her
grandmother had a dream at the end of August 1953 in which she saw Martha Demmer, who
had been killed in Vienna in 1944 by Allied bombing, bending over her son-in-law. As a result,
she made the prophecy that her daughter would give birth to a girl, Martha's reincarnation.
When she was seven years old, Yvonne said to her grandmother, "You are my sister!" and
displayed behaviours that were uncharacteristic of her immediate family and more like those of
Martha. She also had two birthmarks on her head that roughly matched the fatal head injury
(Karlen, 2000).

According to British author Vicki Mackenzie's two books on the subject, the three
cases to which Matlock attributes the goal of disseminating information about Tibetan
Buddhism involve Tibetan lamas who have assumed Western identities in their previous lives.
They appear to realise a Tibetan saint's prediction from the eighth century that "the Buddha
dharma will spread throughout the world when boats fly and iron horses run on wheels." The
aforementioned Lama Thubten Yeshe, a highly accomplished lama, left Tibet when the
Chinese invaded in his early 20s. Together with Rachevsky, he established the network of
centres because he felt strongly that he should teach Tibetan spiritual practice in the West. In
1984, eleven months after his passing from heart disease (Cockell, 2017).

The Druze sect of Islam, whose members reside in Lebanon and neighbouring
countries, holds the belief that Druze are always reborn as Druze. Reincarnation is one of its
core doctrines. The two cases that follow show that this theory is true. Wael Kiwan, a Druze
man from Batir, Lebanon, started claiming to be Rabih at the age of four and to have lived in
a seaside neighbourhood in Beirut. He claimed to have two homes, one of which required an
aeroplane to reach. He recognised "Assaf" when his parents went over a list of popular
Lebanese surnames with him, and his father eventually located a family whose son Rabih
Assaf had passed away in his 20s, early in the same year (Andrade, 2002).

James Leininger demonstrated as a boy extensive knowledge of the life of an
American fighter pilot, James Huston Jr., who was killed in action near Iwo Jima during World
War II. Born 53 years later in San Francisco, James had apparently travelled as a spirit from Japan back to mainland America via Hawaii, as he accurately recalled details about a hotel where his parents stayed for a Hawaiian vacation prior to his birth (Cockell, 2008). The case of Adnan Kelleçi is mentioned briefly in a later work by Stevenson. He recalled the life of a Turkish soldier killed in action in Korea during the Korean War, whom Stevenson identified.

He was reborn back home in Turkey, in the city of Adana. Since Anne Frank is believed to have died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and Barbro Karlen was born in Gothenburg, Sweden, if her claim that she is the renowned Holocaust diarist Anne Frank is true, her case would be considered an international one. In her past and present life autobiography, Yael Shahar writes about being a young Jewish Greek man who was kept as a slave, tortured, and then killed in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

However, she has not yet been able to locate him in old records, possibly because the file connecting the name and the number tattooed on his arm was lost. Shahar wrote the book as part of a healing process after being plagued by survivor guilt and guilt for helping the Nazis slaughter her own people (Cockell, 2019).

International cases, such as Yvonne Ehrlich and a number of unsolved cases where the previous incarnation had lived in Europe, are widely represented in Brazilian reincarnation research literature. This, according to Matlock, is an illustration of how movement between lives tends to coincide with patterns of human migration within the same life. Andrade also looked into the intriguing case of Patricia, who not only had memories, actions, and birthmarks from a previous life but also had a crisis-like perception of her previous hometown. She was born in Araraquara in 1939, had a strong preference for French cuisine, learned the language remarkably quickly, and disliked everything German. She claimed that a German soldier had entered her home in the city of Vichy and killed her (Cockell, 1998).

Born in the northern Indian town of Bareilly in (approximately) 1918, Bajrang Bahadur Saxena had fair skin, hazel eyes, and blond hair that he felt compelled to dye black in order to blend in. His birthmarks on his head and neck resembled entrance and exit wounds, and he claimed to have been shot dead as a British soldier in World War I. His preferences for attire, cuisine, eating habits, weather, and architectural styles were all reminiscent of those of an Englishman. He also enjoyed acting out the role of a soldier by issuing orders in English, which he picked up unusually quickly. Bajrang claimed that he and his younger brother, Brij Bahadur Saxena, had been brothers in a previous life. Brij was also blond and preferred some English-style clothing. Stevenson makes a hunch (Andrade, 1988).

The American "Will" (not his real name) case and his previous life as a non-commissioned Nazi officer tasked with helping oversee the mass executions at the Auschwitz death camp are discussed in a 2019 paper by reincarnation researcher KM Wehrstein. Between his time as a Nazi and his present life, Will remembers living in America. He claims that he left Germany between lives because he felt it had betrayed him because he had wanted to be a soldier rather than a murderer of innocents (Cockell, 2008). This suggests that some Holocaust perpetrators may have done the same, leaving Germany for their new lives if they believed they were both victims and perpetrators. He remembers being murdered as a child in a German life that came before his Nazi German life (Karlen, 2000).

### III. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Abiku phenomenon in Yoruba culture

In Yoruba tradition, an Abiku is any newborn who passes away and is continually reincarnated into the same family. As a consequence of this, an Abiku’s life expectancy is often rather short (Osanyinbi & Falana, 2016). Because of the impermanence of its existence, it was hypothesised in research conducted by Mobolade (2022) that an Abiku passes through
several iterations of its life cycle while maintaining its connection to the same mother. Because of the Abiku's innate occultic talents, the parents' efforts to prevent the Abiku from passing away are fruitless, and as a result, the parents are left feeling frustrated and angry.

Mobolade (2022) went on to explain that even if the Abiku child is a mother's first child, it is not unusual or impossible for her to go on to have additional children later in life, even if the Abiku displays the peculiar quality of being implacable. This was further elaborated upon in the context of the Abiku child being the first child of the mother. There is a school of thought that holds that the same soul may reincarnate as a baby several times. When the initial mother eventually approaches menopause, the child is passed on to another woman to continue the cycle. This continues until the kid is an adult. There are some who make it to the age of five, but there are also those who pass away as neonates. Since the names simply change according to tribe, the Abiku phenomenon has been present in the Yoruba culture as well as in other significant civilizations in Nigeria for hundreds of years. They are referred to as "Abiku" in Yorùbáland, which can be translated as either "Born to die" or "Predestined to die." They are referred to as Ogbanje within the Igbo culture (Ebhomienlen, 2015).

Children are an integral part of the African way of life since they serve as the tying thread that brings a married couple's family unit full circle. Because of this, the recurrence of the Abiku children in a family is a sign that the family is in a state of perpetual grief. This is because the Abiku children come with a deadline for their departure from the family, in addition to the anguish and pain that they bring with them when they join the family. According to Osanyinbi and Adedeji (2016), the Yoruba give these children names that are one of a kind. Some of these names are Kokumo (which means "Do not die again"), Kasimaawo (which means "Let us watch this one"), Malomo (which means "Do not go again"), Ayedun (which means "Life or the earth is sweet"), and Durojaiye (Wait and enjoy life). The names themselves make an implicit request for the children to remain, as suggested by their literal meaning. On the other side, Kuponu and Talabi (2021) report that some of these names are deliberately given to the kid in order to tease them and make them aware that they have been recognised as an Abiku. The hope is that the child will either remain or die and never return to his abiku community. Petirin and Arinka are two examples of them; Arinka is an unsteady walker (he has been walking for a long time).

This little girl is said to have come into the earth for a specific purpose, and after that purpose has been accomplished, the Yoruba believe that she will return to her spiritual realm (Mobolade, 2022). The fact that the Abiku kid is born in the material world raises the unanswered issue of why this occurs. In her research, Chauhan offered an answer to this topic by stating that the Abiku spirits in question go to Earth in order to vent their rage on human beings. These spirits could have families in the spiritual realm, but no one provides food for them or makes sacrifices on their behalf. They are infuriated, and as a result, they descend to Earth in the form of infants. When the kid is born on Earth, the people of Earth celebrate and throw a party for the people of the planet. They serve a joyous feast. On days like these, the Spirits are invited to the feast that is held in honour of the birth celebration. These terrestrial spirits feed among the people of the earth without fear of being detected in order to soothe their hunger.

According to Kuponu and Talabi (2021), the Abiku mothers provide nourishment for their ancestors and other spirits when they give birth to their children on Earth. These spirits are known as "partner spirits" due to the fact that they accompany them when they go to the world of the living. These spirits help to lead and steer the activities that the Abiku youngsters participate in. They act in a certain manner and make particular demands of their parents, who, happily, want to do all they can to make their children happy. Sanynb and Falana (2016) explained in their research that the beginning of their journey into the spirit realm is marked by a violent bout of strange sickness followed by convulsions. The Babalawo, a traditional
medicine man, recognises these symptoms as undeniable signs of Abiku. Sanynb and Falana (2016) After suffering from a severe fever and spasms for many days, they eventually let go of their human bond to the earth and went back to be with their comrades in the spirit realm.

When the happiness of the family reaches its pinnacle, Chauhan (2020) states that the Abiku approaches the unfortunate parents in an accusatory manner, stating that they are unable to stop them from experiencing the world's cycle of coming into being and fading away. This choice is not made solely by the Abiku child; rather, the spirits command them to go back to the spiritual world, where they are pampered and honoured as if they were kings and queens. The death of the Abiku creates excruciating grief and anguish for the earthly parents, especially the mother, who takes the brunt of the suffering since she is the primary caregiver.

McCabe (2013) argues that Chauhan (2020) makes assertions in his research concerning the existence of an Abiku universe. Chauhan's work was published in 2020. According to the findings of this research, one of the most unsettling characteristics of Abikus is their profound connection to the spiritual realm. He argues that they are present in the visible world as well as the unseen realm, and that they are simultaneously a part of both of these realities. In addition, he describes several symptoms that may be used to recognise these children: they have recurring nightmares; some of them sleep with their eyes open the whole night; others sleepwalk; some of them get up many times during the night to drink water; and so on.

According to Kuponu and Talabi (2021), a prolonged sickness is the most important identifying feature of the Abiku youngsters. Their parents have psychological difficulties as a result of the Abiku’s prolonged condition. They are of the opinion that parents will do all in their power to protect their children from harm, even if it means rendering them powerless.

The Yoruba believe that an influential Babalawo (spiritualist) has the ability to assist in breaking the cycle of death. It is essential to point out, however, that there are parallels between the Yorùbá belief in egbere (a phenomenon of familiar spirits who are thought to visit the planet for a brief time to play and then return when they get tired) and the Yorùbá belief in the Abiku (born to die), which is a doctrine that states that humans are doomed to die. The Abiku is a real-life human kid, but the Egbere is a child that lives in the spirit world.

According to Kuponu and Talabi (2021), the Abiku reincarnation voyage is like a dream; however, the Abiku are no longer dreaming at this point; rather, they have moved to a new region where they have met their travelling companions. When someone is reincarnated and awakened to this human realm, they often have some memories of their previous lifetimes, however this is not always the case. In his research, McCabe (2013) reveals that the Abiku have the ability to anticipate whether or not they would break their limbs or legs in the future. Additionally, the Abiku have the ability to foretell accidents before they take place.

They are also aware of when they will pass away, and some of them can even predict the precise day of their passing. They each possess unique qualities that make it possible for them to have a constructive effect on the lives of other people. Some people try to make up for the fact that they have a short life by packing a lot into a small amount of time, as if they were living their lives too rapidly. As a consequence of this, the argument for the Abiku phenomena being a reincarnation belief among the Yoruba people has been the exclusive emphasis of this study up to this point.

As humans perceive their social environment in a narrative mode and make choices and act within this narrative framework, the narrative paradigm, which was postulated in 1984 by Walter Fisher, proposes a universal style of communication (Fisher, 1984). Narratives (the art of telling stories) gleaned from one's own life experiences may provide light on the circumstances surrounding any given event. Culture has a significant role in reincarnation beliefs, which are founded on assumptions about prior knowledge of what has been learnt,
and this must be taken into account while attempting to grasp myth and truth, such as the reincarnation belief from an intercultural viewpoint. Because culture is an illustration of the way that a group of people live their lives, the distinctiveness of these "ways" is a direct result of the principles that its members uphold. Knowing how a person makes sense of the world around them requires knowing their culture and where they come from (Osadola and Adeleye, 2020). One of the universal ways to depict human events is via narratives, which makes sense given that narratives are used to lead practically all activities.

A narrative that is based on real events but is retold and sometimes exaggerated to promote a point of view is called a tale (Eisenberg et al., 2007, p. 174). These are narratives of the past that are spoken verbally and then repeated. Our identities are shaped by the significant moments and individuals that are highlighted in the stories we tell. In addition, Eisenberg et al. (2007) noted that tales are a universal way of portraying the happenings of human life. They are the fundamental ways by which people see and communicate about the world, and they are what provide human civilization with order and purpose. These narratives communicate with one another via straightforward performance, explaining occurrences by establishing distinct causal linkages (p.175).

Rather than real measurements of earnings or outputs, an experience that is portrayed via tales provides stronger support for claims. We do not just depend on case studies, surveys, and questionnaires to collect meaningful data in order to make sense of people, relationships, and culture; rather, we use narrative concepts. An alternative method is the narrative analysis, which focuses largely on gaining an understanding of the assumptions, perspectives, and worldviews of the subject. As the basis for its research and understanding of the process by which individuals imbue their lives with meaning, it employs as its units of analysis field texts such as narratives, autobiographies, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, family tales, photographs (and other artefacts), and life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 53). As a result, narratives, also known as storytelling, give a truthful and honest picture for the purpose of comprehending cultural undertones that may not have been understood before. In light of the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the problem at hand; the narrative analysis could be the most effective method for comprehending the Abiku phenomena. After all, nothing can compare to the actual situation.

3.2 Criticism

Leonard Angel, a sceptical philosopher, asserts that Stevenson and other researchers "have not even tried to prove that there is anything that needs to be explained" in the reincarnation instances that they have investigated. Angel makes this claim in reference to the cases that have been studied (Angel, 2015: 578.). "One ought to make an effort to determine whether the kinds of correspondences found between a living person's verbal memory claims and the facts about a purportedly reincarnated deceased person defy chance expectations," which translates to "one ought to try to figure out whether these sorts of correspondences are significant." In the event that they do, there is a question that has to be answered. If they don't, though, there is no longer anything that needs to be clarified (Angel, 2015:575-76). Angel is interested in "controlled experimental work" that is conducted with the intention of disproving what he refers to as the "subjective illusion of importance."

Angel provides an illustration of the subjective illusion of significance by noting that he discovered no less than twenty one (21) facts about Stevenson's life mentioned in his obituary in the New York Times that are true for him as well as for Stevenson. These facts include the fact that both Angel and Stevenson were born in Montreal, both attended McGill as undergraduates, both were married twice, and so on. Angel also notes that these facts are true for Stevenson. Angel envisions a 'controlled experimental study' that would compare the outcomes of this kind of comparison with the outcomes of comparisons made between a
subject's remarks and the dead person recognised as his precursor. Only in the event that blind judges rated the correspondences of the former group as "at least as good as" the correspondences of the latter group and in the event that the judges had a tendency "to ask for special explanations of the correspondences" in the latter group more often than in the former group would it have been possible to demonstrate that there was something that needed to be explained.

A significant portion of what people, particularly those who are not from the Yoruba ethnic group, know about the Abiku phenomenon is always related to what has been preserved in art, most notably stories and folklore. Unfortunately, this often leads to a confusion between what can be explained by myth and what can be described by reality.

One of these tales concerns a guy who was born with just two fingers—the thumb and the pinky finger—on each hand. He claimed to be an Abiku and that his mother had given birth to him several times during his lifetime. Following the third birth and subsequent death, it was recommended to his mother that she chop off three of his five fingers. After that, the woman conceived and gave birth to a kid who, just like the deceased child, was missing all three of the middle fingers on both hands. However, this time he managed to remain alive, and he was informed that his potential partners in the spirit realm had turned their backs on him since he was missing portions of his body. He is presently a professor of economics at a university in Nigeria and possesses a doctoral degree in the field.

This narrative throws important new light on these by showing genuine human experiences and comparing them with other studies that refute the Abiku phenomena in some form, whether it be as a religious belief, a health concern, or a folktale. The Yoruba people have a strong believe in reincarnation, and by carryin

IV. Conclusion

According to Ilechukwu (2007), the belief in Abiku has decreased in recent years as a result of the development of conventional medicine. He says that there has been a significant decline in the rates of newborn mortality and sickle cell anaemia in Abiku, which has been made possible by an increasing knowledge of the importance of environmental health. This has contributed to a diminished emphasis on the reincarnation concept. Children are losing their lives to preventable causes such as jaundice, sickle cell anaemia, and a lack of access to medical treatment due of a lack of preventative health measures. One of the participants in the researcher's study on Abiku described how a woman thought she had Abiku, but in reality she only had children that suffered from sickle cell anaemia. The mother's last kid, who did not pass away, did not have Abiku. The AS genotype was present in both the woman and her husband. The infants were sickle cell trait carriers, however the sickle cell illness did not take the life of the final kid who was not a carrier.

This study offered a clear implication of the belief in society, as well as the influence on people's acceptance of death as a result of the government instituting legislation to prevent children from being abused. Therefore, parents are not permitted to physically damage their children in the same manner as they did in the past. Additionally, the spread of the Christian faith has resulted in a decreased dependence on spiritual healers, which in turn has led to a decrease in the notion that reincarnation tales are true. In spite of the fact that this is a feasible explanation for the Abiku phenomena, the purpose of this paper is to try to explain the facts about its actuality and put an end to the age-old discussion.
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