



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Why a twin is not a child: symbols in Kapsiki birth rituals

Beek, W.E.A. van

### Citation

Beek, W. E. A. van. (2002). Why a twin is not a child: symbols in Kapsiki birth rituals. *Journal Des Africanistes*, 72(1), 119-147. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9505>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9505>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

- LABURTHE-TOLRA, Philippe, 1985, *Les seigneurs de la forêt, Essai sur le passé historique, l'organisation sociale et les normes éthiques des anciens Beti du Cameroun*, Paris, Public. Sorbonne, 490 p.
- LACROIX, Pierre-François, 1953, "Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire des Peuls de l'Adamawa", *Etudes Camerounaises*, n° 39-40, mai-juillet, pp. 3-40.
- MAYOR, Anne, 1995, "Jumeaux dogon : nouvelles enquêtes sur la mythologie et les cultes", *Des jumeaux et des autres*, Musée d'ethnographie, Genève, pp. 185-209.
- PISON, Gilles, 1987, *Les jumeaux en Afrique au sud du Sahara ; fréquence, statut social et mortalité*. INED, Dossiers et Recherches., n° 11, 47 p.
- SAND, George, rééd. 1967, *La petite fadette*, Paris, Flammarion, 248 p.
- SANTEN, José C. M. van, 1993, *They leave their jars behind. The conversion of Mafa women (North Cameroon)*, Leiden (Pays-Bas), 401 p.
- SAVARY Claude et Christophe GROS éd., 1995, *Des jumeaux et des autres*, Genève, Musée d'ethnographie.
- TARDITS, Claude, 1980, *Le royaume bamoum*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1078 p.
- VINCENT, Jeanne-Françoise, 1978, "Main gauche, main de l'homme; essai sur le symbolisme de la gauche et de la droite chez les Mofu (Cameroun du Nord)", in *Systèmes de signes*, Hommage à Germaine Diéterlen, Paris, Hermann, pp. 485-509.
- , 1991, *Princes montagnards Les Mofu-Diamaré et le pouvoir politique (Cameroun du nord)*, Paris, Ed. l'Harmattan, 2 t., 15 cart., 26 tabl., 64 phot., annexe, 744 p.
- , 1997, "Statut et puissance du 'Dieu-du-ciel' en Afrique de sahel", in A. de Surgy (éd.), *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, Paris, L'Harmattan, Paris, 362 p.
- ZAZZO, René, 1960, *Les jumeaux, le couple et la personne*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, Quadrige, 557 p.

Walter E.A. VAN BEEK\*

## Why a twin is not a child : symbols in Kapsiki birth rituals

### Abstract

Africa is the continent of twins, both in number of twin births and in the attention bestowed on them. The Kapsiki exemplify this situation. Birth rites for normal births gradually incorporate the infant into the kinship group, protecting the mother and the child against evil influences. Twin rites are quite different. Other symbolic objects and a specific discourse are used. Twins form a special society within Kapsiki villages, due to the danger they pose for their parents. The symbolic position of twins is related to male initiation. Thus, Kapsiki twins are symbolically positioned on the fringe of society.

### Keywords

North-Cameroon, Kapsiki, Higi, birth, twin, ritual, symbol, child.

### Résumé

#### Pourquoi un jumeau n'est pas un enfant : les symboles dans les rituels de naissance kapsiki

L'Afrique est le continent des jumeaux, par la fréquence des naissances multiples, et l'attention portée à cette double fécondité. Les Kapsiki en sont un exemple. Pour les naissances normales, les rites incorporent progressivement l'enfant dans le groupe familial, tout en protégeant la mère et le bébé des influences maléfiques. Les rites pour les jumeaux sont très différents. On emploie d'autres objets symboliques et un discours spécifique. Les jumeaux dans les villages kapsiki forment une société à part en raison de la menace qu'ils constituent pour leur parents. La position symbolique des jumeaux a un rapport direct avec l'initiation masculine. Ainsi les jumeaux kapsiki sont-ils maintenus aux marges de la société.

### Mots clés

Nord-Cameroun, Kapsiki, Higi, naissance, jumeaux, rite, symbole, enfant.

\* Utrecht University, Department of Cultural Anthropology

### TWINS : PEOPLE IN THE SAME TIME AND PLACE

Like any existential event, a birth is both a biological experience and a cultural construct. It is not only the coming into the world of a new human being, but also the continuation of society. So the crucial event of birth asks for cultural attention in rituals and specific symbolic displays. Societies do celebrate the rebirth of their future. A series of rituals gradually lead the future member from baby-hood towards a mature social identity, along lines established in the community. Thus, birth is surrounded by pre- and proscriptions, taboos, rituals and symbols. Conception, pregnancy and parturition are charged with meaning beyond the drama of life itself (Aijmer, 1992:3). In addition, the phenomenon of birth is in itself a powerful symbol that is used with great expressive force in other areas of life, such as death and initiation rites (Douglas, 1973). Maybe this is one reason why in Africa ritualisation of initiation and death is much more elaborate than that of birth (Bloch, 1992:71).

As birth is culturally constructed, the rituals and symbols associated with it highlight a number of cultural values and social identities. African societies are known for their kin-based structures, the intricacies of their marriage relations, and the importance of age and gender as structuring principles. So, one can expect the values and norms of societal interaction and the cultural definitions of what constitutes a person to come to the fore in rituals of birth. Though these rituals centre on the infant, they are not directed towards it; while the child may be assigned a status, this is more generally the case of the parents (Van Gennep, 1960 ; Turner, 1969). The group membership of the child will be the first to be expressed, then the indigenous conception of the person. A child has to become someone within a social structure, and what kind of someone in what social setting is mirrored in the rituals. African societies are kin-oriented and the start of a new life generates new relations, between the child and its elder kinsmen, and between those kinsmen. The rituals and symbols are signals of change with continuity : a new family composition, a completed marriage, the future of a lineage.

Among the many layers of meaning of these symbols (Turner, 1975), one fact is evident : the child is welcome, and has to receive its place. Africa welcomes children. However, birth is not always a simple matter. Not only is parturition fraught with risks such as stillbirth and death in infancy, but other cultural complications abound : pregnancies without menstruation, breech births, and above all, twins. Africa's attitude towards new life and personhood

shows best in its relation to the last, highly ambiguous, phenomenon : people who are born together. Twins are Africa's fascination, and it shows. The relative paucity of symbols relating to normal parturition stands in sharp contrast to the abundance of rules, norms, symbols and rituals surrounding twins (Savary & Gros, 1995). What do these twin rituals tell us about birth, relations and the definition of personhood in African societies ?

No continent has as many twins as Africa (Pison, 1989, 1999) and in no other area in Africa does the rate of twin births come near to that of West Africa. Especially in western Nigeria, Benin and Togo, the rate is over 2.5 twin births per 1000 (Pison, 1989:259 ; Pellegrini, 1995:56<sup>1</sup>). The Mega-Tchad area has an average of 1.5-2 per 1000, still considerable, especially with the probable underreporting of twins due to their high mortality (Pison, 1989:260). It is not so much identical twins that fascinate Africa; that particular fascination is for the scientific North with its deep curiosity regarding the balance between nature and nurture, genetics and education (Zazzo, 1986, 1992). In Africa it is the fact of being born together that is relevant, children born of the same mother at the same time whether identical or non-identical twins (Gros, 1995:30). Whereas the North wonders about two people without personal individual differences, Africa is obsessed with the notion of two people sharing the same social space and time, two people with identical relations.

The Mandara mountains form a propitious study area for these questions. In these lineage based societies a new baby implies a new member of a village, a ward, a lineage, a clan and – of course – a family. The villages usually have a clearly demarcated social structure and little traditional authority beyond the village perimeter (Vincent, 1991). Even if patrilineal and virilocal Mandara groups show considerable social fragmentation, a close connection between locality and descent forms a stable parameter for identity. On the other hand, marriage is brittle and women mobile (Richard, 1977 ; van Beek, 1987). Thus, the certainty of patrilineal affiliation contrasts with uncertainty about the actual presence of women and mothers. Yet, in typical African fashion, the structures remain in place even when people are absent. Just as clans and lineages survive their individual members, so, on an individual level, do relations grow independently of the people who generate them; for example, relations between male in-laws remain intact after the disappearance of the wife in question.

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Vincent, this volume.

Thus, in kin based societies where identity stems from relations with pre-existent groups, the existence of two people who occupy the same space at the same time is essentially problematic. How does a society deal with the definition of personhood for these kinsmen? How does this «overflow of fertility» affect the relations between their kinsmen, and how do the rituals and symbols address the problems of identity construction? This we shall explore through a comparison of the differences in cultural constructs of a normal and of a twin birth in Kapsiki/Higi<sup>2</sup> culture, and through an analysis of the symbols and rituals surrounding the various types of birth as these constitute expressions of and signals for the space to be allotted to each of these categories. The focus will be on a combination of the positional and exegetical meanings of the symbols (Turner, 1975), in which the meaning is not treated as a cryptography, but as an emergent reality, specific in time and setting (Sperber, 1975). In the Kapsiki case, as among the Sukur (Sterner<sup>3</sup>) and the Mafa (van Santen, 1993; 185 ff.), most symbols used are part and parcel of the general ritual corpus of collective *rites de passage*, and derive their meaning from their position within that corpus. Some symbols are highly specific for births or for twins, and these demand separate exegesis. Throughout, we shall use rituals and symbols as a «monitoring instrument» (van Beek & Blakely, 1994:11) to register continuity and change in cultural definitions. We start with the «standard», single birth and then proceed towards 'people born together', twins, that is those who occupy the same social space and share the same relations.

### BIRTH

Little ritual accompanies a Kapsiki pregnancy. People find it normal that the mother-to-be has different, even bizarre, food cravings, and that she will go on working until her delivery. A woman can give birth anywhere as long as it not in the house of her father; that would be a thorough negation of her marriage, and, evidently, of his receipt of the bride price. If she does happen to deliver in or near the walls of his compound, a small ritual to cleanse her, and especially him, is held afterwards. If she happens to be in her father's compound when the birth sets in – which is not at all impossible, as she has to

<sup>2</sup> The term "Kapsiki" is used throughout the paper to indicate both the Kapsiki group in Cameroon and the Higi in Nigeria. Research among the Kapsiki was carried out in 1971, 1972-3, 1979, 1984, 1988, 1994 and 1999, financed by Utrecht University, grants from WOTRO (Foundation for Tropical Research) and the Pieter Langerhuizen Lambertszoön Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Paper presented at the Mega-Tchad symposium, Leiden 1999.

come back to her parent's house quite regularly during her first year of marriage – people set her on a flat stone just outside the wall. After birth, she is taken inside where she will remain for a while, just as she would in her husband's home. On the fourth day after the delivery, the husband brings a goat for his father-in-law to slaughter at the place of birth: « Thank you, *shala* (god), thank you, *shala*, that my daughter has given birth, thank you *shala*. »

When the birth pangs start, the husband calls an old, experienced woman from the neighbourhood to help his wife. This is not an official function, but she has proved her experience. This « midwife » in fact only looks after the baby, and is hardly concerned at all with the mother. The latter is seated on a stone outside her hut, and has her clothes removed till she is wearing just a *cache-sexe*. Her bracelets are also removed. The husband, or another man from the neighbourhood who has many living children, supports the woman. He spits on her belly: « *Shala*, give him the way, open the way », and at a later stage gently beats the belly with *sesele* (*Indigofera sp.*).

Problems during delivery stem from marital problems, or problems the woman has with her older children, her father-in-law or the midwife. If the delivery is difficult, and if such problems are suspected to be the source of the problem, the persons involved are all called into the compound. The husband then takes his sacrificial jar (*melè*) from under the granary where it is stored. He takes some earth from under the jar, spits on it – « *Shala* (god), I did not make myself, but you have made me. Let the child come quickly » – and puts the mud on the *melè*. All concerned do the same: spit on some earth, speak similar words, and put the mud on the jar. If the quarrel is between the woman and her husband's children, the latter have to spit on her belly: « *Shala*, let the child descend quickly. »

Usually the woman sits on a stone before her own hut, where a male neighbour (not normally her own husband) supports her from behind. The midwife crouches between her legs, concerned with one major danger, that the newborn baby cries either too much or too little. Once born, the old woman sprinkles the baby with cold water to get it to cry, a little bit, but not too much lest the blood clots. Then, in a loud voice, the old woman announces the baby's sex to all present, usually the women from the neighbourhood. The umbilical cord is left intact till the placenta arrives. Another worry is that the placenta will come too quickly. The midwife takes measures against that; she puts a *sese*, the stick to stir the millet mush, at the mouth of the young mother who must either blow on it twice, or whistle. Once the placenta has arrived, the umbilical cord is

cut. If the baby is a boy the midwife uses the sharp end of the an arrow shaft, if a girl the edge of a cut millet stalk. The baby is then washed in cold water, and the remaining umbilical cord smeared with a mixture of ochre<sup>4</sup> and mahogany oil.

Subsequent proceedings depend on divination. A number of days before the delivery, the husband had consulted the « crab » diviner<sup>5</sup> in order to know what type of sacrifice would be called for in case of trouble. What for example should be the colour and sex of the chickens? Now that the most delicate period is over, the new father plucks the chicken's neck, the midwife holding its feet. In the washing place of his wife, the *mewehi*, he cuts its throat, lets blood flow onto the floor, and then swings the dying chicken by its legs, sprinkling the door posts and threshold of his wife's hut, while she looks on from the inside: « Let all be healthy, *shala*; do not let evil (*ndrimike*) enter, may I have no evil inside; thank you, *shala*, thank you *shala*. »

The midwife then takes the child into the mother's hut, joining the mother who has taken off her last garment. The midwife puts the millet stalk or arrow shaft used for cutting the umbilical cord in the roof of the hut for everybody to see. Outside the hut, a few women from the neighbourhood clean up the place of birth; they take a broken pot, put the placenta on some leaves within it, and bury it on the *mewehi*, leaving the rim of the pot just above the ground. The father has water heated and looks for the *kwantereza*<sup>6</sup> branches he had gathered during the days before. Hot water is needed, according to the midwife, to « let the blood flow. The bad blood has to come out. » At the *mewehi* the midwife sprinkles the hot water over the young mother, and finally pours it over her anus and genitals. The mother then finishes her washing inside the hut.

Meanwhile, the father starts a symbolic announcement of the birth to the village. In the forecourt of his compound, he puts a long, slender piece of *Euphorbia* at the male side if a boy, and if a girl a broad, squat piece on the female side.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, this customary umbilical care seems to be responsible for quite a number of tetanus infections, one of the major reasons for the high child mortality that has characterised Kapsiki demography for so long (Podlewski 1966).

<sup>5</sup> The Kapsiki use a fresh water crab as a divination instrument. The black smith reads the traces the crab makes in a pot with wet sand and calabash sherds with specific symbols (van Beek 1978).

<sup>6</sup> A tree associated with birth and fertility.

The placenta, as well as the umbilical cord that the baby will lose in about ten days, remain important for the mother, as part of her symbolic vulnerability. Anyone wishing her ill might use it for evil magic (*beshèngu*), rendering her barren for the rest of her life. She usually gives the part of the umbilical cord that falls from her child, to her mother to take care of. Thus, after her first child, a woman normally will not leave her husband before her second pregnancy, or else after a long stretch of infertility when the vulnerability of both the baby and its mother have diminished.

According to the Kapsiki, a mother's the first milk is harmful for the baby, so it is drawn out and thrown away. «Real food», water mixed with a little bit of ochre, is given to the baby by means of a small oblong calabash used only for this purpose. A young woman explained that she never fed her baby at night, meaning that she did not give him water but just the breast.

#### MAKING A PLACE FOR THE BABY

The second day after the birth, the real announcement to the village of its new member is made during the *ɔafa mndè* ceremony, called after the particular leaves used in the sauce used in that ceremony. The young father slaughters and butchers several chickens or a goat plus a chicken, the sex of the latter according to the baby's sex. About ten o'clock in the morning, when his lineage brothers and people from the neighbourhood are gathered in his forecourt, the father expresses his gratitude in a short speech, and everybody eats. The distribution of the meat – in this case the chicken – as always among the Kapsiki, marks the occasion: the wings and toes for the new mother, breast and feet for the baby's father and his father, and the rest for the midwife. Distribution of goat meat or the other chickens is less specific: one bowl of meat for the men of the neighbourhood gathered in the forecourt (or in the entrance hut during the rainy season), three bowls for the women and children in the various kitchens, and one bowl with choice meat (a little bit of everything) for the new mother. As usual, the sister's son distributes the meat.

Just after the *ɔafa mndè*, the mother of the new mother comes to instruct her daughter how to feed, how to lie on the mat with the baby, and how to sleep without harming the baby. Her son-in-law welcomes her with a huge calabash containing choice fine meats to feed her daughter. She herself brings a substantial gift of beer, *rhwempe* (a mixture of millet and peanuts, ground and flavoured) and ground roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*). She is absent during the first childbirth, but will assist in person in the future, sometimes acting as

midwife. Her husband will not show up at his daughter's compound, as she has first to present the new born baby to him at his house (see below). The grandmother stays till the umbilical cord drops off, some eight days; the Kapsiki observe that this may take longer for a boy than a girl. When it drops off, certain women of the family are warned; the wives of his father's clan if a boy, the women of her mother's clan if a girl. After an interval of three or four days they come with millet mush and *rhedle* sauce (made of beans and peanuts). The new father has bought meat and a large piece of salt which he distributes among the women who come and eat the food they brought.

Up till now, the baby has no name. This has to wait for the day that the new mother first leaves the compound. The length of time she remains within the compound depends on several factors; for the first child and for any type of special child – twins, breech birth, those born with a caul – she stays in the house longer. Besides, the crab diviner may indicate to the father a specific length of time she should remain inside. The time of the year is also important. During the rainy season, with lots of work to be done on the fields, her stay will be shorter, one or two weeks. But usually it is at least three weeks before she leaves the enclosing wall of the compound. This is the most characteristic of the birth rituals, called *kakele mewete shambe cè* (take the new mother out of the house) or simply, *shave*, to go out.

In the morning, the members of the ward and lineage of the new father gather in the compound of the newborn, this time not in the forecourt, but inside the wall. The father has slaughtered a goat and a chicken, just as for the *ɔafa mndè*, and follows the same distribution order. Before anyone starts eating, the midwife takes a bowl of meat and sauce to the *mewehi*, the place where the new mother washes herself, and pours some sauce on the earth, saying, « The child must be healthy, evil must be far away, and *shala* must not send the evil things here. » She then dips a piece of mush in the sauce and drops it on the earth. Finally she eats the rest of the mush and meat herself.

After she has finished, the men, women and children in the compound start eating, each in their respective huts and kitchens. It is during this meal that the young father names his child. The usual Kapsiki names follow birth order, such that each Kapsiki man and woman has one name that indicates the order of pregnancy of his/her mother. The first child of a woman, if a son, is called Tizhè, if a girl, Kuve. The second child is Zera (boy) or Masi (girl), independent of the sex of the firstborn. Thus pregnancies are counted. The names while used

as a noun in daily speech are not numbers, but proper names<sup>7</sup>: « This is my Zera » and « I also have a Deli » (cf. table p.147). The names have no specific meaning other than their order. People are often referred to by their own name plus that of their father or their mother (both ways are possible), such as Tizhè Sunu, Deli Zra or Zra Kwasonu, a kind of identifying genealogy. In daily practice this still amounts to a lot of people with the same name, Tizhè Zera, Deli Kwanyè, Zera Deli abound.

On the particular occasion of naming, the father gives an additional name based on the circumstances of the birth itself: Kwabake (« fanned », if, during the birth, people used branches to cool the mother), Kedra (« too late »), Lèwa (born close to the water outlet under the wall) and – as we shall see later – Dabala (born in the entrance hut). Something the mother ate just before the birth can also be used – the Mogodé village chief is called Wusuhwahwele (thing-in-the-water, as his mother ate a fish just before parturition). The father of the newborn may express some of his own feelings about the child, about himself and his place in society through the name. Names such as Mèkwele (at the mouth of the grave), Fama (does not listen), Mbekewa (where to go), Cewuve (like a cat in the field), express not so much ideas about the newborn, as about the father himself. Fama implies that the other clan members do not listen to him. Still, some pessimism about the chances for survival of the newborn shines through in these names, for Mèkwele both implies his belief in his own imminent death and the chances for his son to die young; the name then might increase his chances to escape that fate. One special occasion that has to enter the name, is a birth in the fifth month, Terimcè (after *mcife* « five »). A son born in that month has to be called Teri Mcè, a girl Kwateri Mcè; this month brings bad luck, and the only way to avoid this is to call the children after the month.

All these 'secondary' names, however, are considered fleeting, ephemeral, compared to the birth order names. The latter never change, are never altered. With the introduction of name registration at the canton offices in the central villages such as Mogodé, the baby's name is given officially very early in life; this means that the birth order names are becoming more prominent, and the secondary names secondary. One influence of the Christian missions, evidently, is to give Christian secondary names, which, like the others, may or may not be accepted socially (usually they are not) and always take second place to the

<sup>7</sup> A similar system exists among the Guddar, though with a total number of ten names (Collard 1977).

birth order names. Muslim names are adopted later in life, upon conversion to Islam, and encounter a similar fate to the Christian ones. Christian names are used only within the church, Muslim names among Muslims; between religions the birth order names will be used, as they give the "true identity" of the people concerned.

### REINTEGRATING THE MOTHER

After the naming ceremony, the meal finished, most men leave quickly. They should beware, upon leaving, neither to clean their hands on one of the house-poles, nor to wash their hands inside the compound, lest they bring bad luck upon the child. The final scene is now set for the women of the ward to help the mother really leave the compound with her baby for the first time. A crowd of women watches the mother come out of her hut with the midwife and stand in the opening of the wall, bending over. The other women rub oil and ochre over her back, and the midwife positions the young baby on the mother's back. Up side down! A loud chorus of *awu, awu* (« no, no! ») greets this 'mistake', so the midwife tries again. Again « no, no », wrong position. Four times the baby is put the wrong way on its mother's back; finally the midwife gets it right *ee, ee* (« yes, yes! »), all the women shout their acclaim. One of the sisters of the new mother then puts on the *hwetu*, the baby sling; twice wrong – *awu, awu* – and finally right – *ee, ee*. For the first time, with her baby upright and well tied up on her back, the new mother quickly walks through the wall opening, through the forecourt. Into the middle of this forecourt she throws some goat dung, and makes cultivating motions with the handle of a hoe she holds in her right hand. The other women, in a similar quick trot, follow her, sprinkling water on the dung and on the mother's buttocks. This is the actual *shave*, going out, and as such has its proper vulnerability. Only women from the immediate neighbourhood or women from her husband's lineage may be present; if too many women showed up, some of them might be witches and harm the baby.

The mother not only leaves her husband's compound for the first time, but usually heads straight for her father's house; only in the case of a Kuve or Tizhè (firstborn) does she wait one or two months. When she arrives at his compound, she presents him with some mush and *rhwempe*, a mixture of ground sorghum and peanuts, she has prepared. If the child is her first she also brings some jars of red beer, one for a Tizhè, two for a Kuve. The *rhwempe* is put on her father's usual seat in the forecourt. Her father welcomes his

grandchild and daughter with a fat goat; he slaughters the beast and gives her the four legs as meat. He prepares the skin of the animal for a baby sling, rubbing it with oil and ochre to take away the hairs and to render it supple, then meticulously fashions the sling that is to carry his *shi* (grandchild). Of course, the baby is shown to all people from that ward, and a blacksmith woman of that neighbourhood is called in to shave the baby's head for the first time, for « the hairs of the belly » have to go. The mother stays a few days at her father's compound; her mother may also be there, but due to the high marriage frequency of the Kapsiki, this is not always the case. The mother may have moved elsewhere. But the newborn's mother's visit is definitely to her father, in recognition of this « grandson of the clan ». As her father's clan will remain important for her child during its life, especially when it is a boy, this ceremonial instalment of a *wuzemakwa*, a sister's son, is of high social importance. She, as its mother, is now recognised as a « daughter of the clan » in the full significance of that term, a woman who has established a productive link between the two groups, two *kayita* (those of one father).

This visit, with its official showing of progeny, relates to bride price issues. Kapsiki society is dominated by a marriage-cum-bride price problematic (van Beek, 1987). The bride's father has gained considerably through his daughter's marriage, especially her first marriage. So, the arrival of the grandson is more than welcome in many ways, not least in that the baby secures the bride price as the legitimate and enduring property of her father. Now, he never will have to pay it back even if his daughter leaves her husband at some later date (which she will almost inevitably do). In the case of a miscarriage, the woman also makes this ceremonial visit. Though norms are changing, a miscarriage is also supposed to be a 'repayment' of the bride price. At least the traditional means of ensuring repayment, the *sekwa*, does not work after a miscarriage (van Beek, 1994).

According to the Kapsiki, sexual relations may start immediately following the coming out, but with one proviso. The first month after birth, the woman is considered especially fertile, and people like to avoid an immediate second pregnancy. The risk for the first child is well known; it will become a *matini*, a child without milk, as the lactation is interrupted too quickly, and its health will be jeopardized. If a *matini* survives, people reckon it will stay small, puny, and not grow up well. Still, examples of *matini* growing up well are known, and avoidance is not total. The curse of such an individual is feared, which gives these weak ones some power.

So, from the second month to the time the baby has two upper and two lower teeth, the mother is considered infertile. After that period, some abstinence is called for until the baby is about three years old, always bearing in mind the – diminishing – risk of *matini*, premature weaning.

One special little ritual later in life is worth mentioning here. During the child's first rainy season the little toddler acquires its first *leke*, a straw plaited rain cape. However, this cape is first put on the head of a dog which then runs off and loses the *leke*. Only then is the cape put on the child. To do otherwise would be an infringement of taboo and might harm the child.

#### TWINS AND OTHER SPECIAL BIRTHS

The Kapsiki distinguish four kinds of special babies : *dlave*, breech births, *ghi*, and twins – or other multiple births. The first refers to a child born with a caul : the birth membrane remains on its head. The Kapsiki call this *dlave*, as if the child has a piece of 'cloth' on its head. The *dlave* will be removed, dried and put in a medicine container, either a bracelet or a *mblaza* worn around the waist. These children are the ones that will be rich, and if male, marry a lot of women, beget a great number of children and gain a lot of money. They will be rich in both Kapsiki senses, in people and in material goods. Also their curse carries a lot of weight, as does the curse of all 'special people'.

A breech birth is considered mainly a problem during birth, as the reversed position will endanger the lives of mother and child. However, if the baby survives, it will still present some danger to both parents. To avoid problems, they will have a blacksmith make two specific bracelets which they will wear for the rest of their lives. The bracelet, *takase kwalerha*, consists of two parallel iron strips, one straight, one twisted (see illustration). Similar bracelets are made when a baby gets its first teeth in the upper jaw instead of in the lower (see illustration), *takase tlene pelè rhu*. This 'aberration' may also present a hazard for the parents, which they can stave off by wearing the smith's product.

A child conceived without prior menstruation of his mother, *ghi*, is a big hazard. Such a 'almost twin' presents an extreme danger for the father, for he runs a serious risk of dying before the child is initiated. However, there is no risk that cannot be combated. In case of a *ghi* baby, the father makes a hole in the straw roof of his own hut, and then pushes the baby through the hole. Then he removes part of the child's left earlobe. The risk is still there but reduced. Now the father may see this boy through initiation, or this daughter through *makwa*, her first marriage.

By far the most important, and the most complicated, special babies are twins, *kwalerha*. As so often in Africa, twins are a category *sui generis* ; they are the ones who share all relevant relations. The Kapsiki love them and fear them, are proud of them and shun them at the same time. They are not 'of this world'; « twins are like *gutuli*, spirits that roam the bush, children of *shala*. » They are not easy to live with. They tax those around them to the limit. Quick to take offence, and especially quick to take a liking to some beautiful object, they get angry on the spot, and then become dangerous. They have to have their way in all things; whenever they take a liking for some object, people have to hand it over to them. If they do not have their way, the Kapsiki say they will go into a trance, faint, and "die", in fact lose consciousness. In doing so the twins heap curses upon the unhappy owner of the object. This puts tremendous pressure on the twins' parents, especially the father. Tlakema, an adult twin described it to me :

Us twins, we are not normal people, we are from *shala*. If we « die », the fault is on the father; the mother has been chosen already by *shala*, but if the father does something wrong, the twin children will know it immediately. The heaviest responsibility is on the father.

Red things more than anything else kindle their desire and push them over the threshold of trance. Just as the spirits of the bush, the twins have a special liking for the colour red. Nobody can wear red<sup>8</sup> in their vicinity with an easy mind.

During the dance for a twin a young woman, Kwandè, herself a twin, suddenly faints on seeing a small boy with a slightly reddish shirt. People flock around her, rip the shirt off the boy, put it on her head and start dancing around her : « *Kwalerha* that came to dance, *kwalerha* to dance. » The father of the twin for which the festival was organised searches out some *sesele* (*Indigofera*) and *tere* (*Cymbopogon*) and calls her by her name, « Stand up, twin, stand up », and beats her with the twigs. After some time she starts trembling all over her body. People then help her stand on her feet and she slowly opens her eyes. Finally she walks away, unsure on leaden legs.

Kwandè described the event in her own words : « When I see something like that, everything becomes dark around me, and I hear the voices of everybody from very far away. Everything I really like – meat, red necklaces, red clothes, but also white clothes when they are beautiful – I should not look at

<sup>8</sup> The Kapsiki have a four lexeme basic colour terminology which includes red (van BEEK 1977). However, anything beautiful or striking is easily associated with the colour red.

them. It only happens when I fix my eyes upon it, when I keep on looking, but sometimes I cannot help it. To bring me around, another twin, or the father of a twin, has to beat me with *tere* grass. Once I did the same to another twin woman who had fainted, I beat her with the grass, but when she regained consciousness, I fainted myself. If something is really beautiful, two twins might faint at the same time. »

Not only do twins faint when people refuse them something, the thing that is refused will be spoilt as well. They have to taste the beer first, for if not it will not ferment properly; food will rot if their presence is not honoured with the first bite.

Scorpions form their most spectacular power base. They "command the scorpions", which means they may send the beasts to anyone who thwarts them. Not only consciously, but also unconsciously, they can harm anyone they do not really like. Scorpions cannot harm twins, as they seem to be immune to the scorpion's sting. All in all, having twins in the family is quite a challenge, almost a *mission impossible*. Twins like to boast a bit. According to Tlakem « People cannot, truly, keep us twins alive, as each time we want something, we get angry in our hearts. Only *shala* can keep us well, as everything spoils us. »

Twins, if both alive, stay close to each other in marriage, marrying close relatives if possible, and a twin sister will not leave the village if her twin brother is still there. Marrying a twin is considered hazardous indeed: "If a man is married to a *kwalerha*, he cannot even beat her without her dying on him." Still, I have not been able to find an example of a twin marrying another twin, the obvious way out of this dilemma. Overall twins live lives like most others; though they are respected, their wishes are seldom crossed and they always have the weapon of trance.

Parents of twins face a huge challenge. In order not to have the anger of the children descend too easily on their heads, the parents order four bracelets, *takase kwalerha*, from a blacksmith, for themselves and the twins. When wearing these *takase* the twins' powers will not be harmful. The beer will be right when the twins taste it, the sorghum will flourish when they touch it, and especially the sesame will ripen when they look at it. In daily life the twins also wear a band of *yanka* grass on their wrists, and carry some cowry shells and sesame in their pockets. Of all crops, sesame is theirs. They have to eat it often, they smell it from afar, and no one can pass them with sesame without their knowing it.

Twins are associated with rain; as an "overstatement of fertility," this is one of the obvious associations. So, during the birth of twins rains are expected to fall, and all informants testified that this usually happened.

In fact, I am among these informants. All three twin births I witnessed were accompanied by heavy rainstorms; they all happened in the rainy season.

Fundamentally, twins are not of this earth, but of heaven. More than anything else this shows in their dreams. They dream not of the « underworld » but of the « overworld »; their « shadow » does not descend into the earth when dreaming like those of normal people but ascends on high. In the words of Kwandè :

"We, as twins, we dream of heaven. There we drink white water and we find people like here; they are our *shala*. One particular white-haired woman I know very well, she is my *shala*, who has created me. An old woman, her hair all white. If I die, I will know such in advance. After my death, my *shinangkwe* (shadow) will not go down into the earth, but will return to heaven. When as a twin you do not dream of heaven, you will die.

When dreaming of heaven, we see other twins. We do not fight, only the *kelèngu* (clairvoyants) fight. We do nothing in secret, everything is public. It is our character (*mehele*); *shala* has made us so.

The Kapsiki recognise that twins occur more in some families than in others; in Kwandè's family she can count eight pairs of twins. On the other hand, twin births seldom come as the first children of a woman. The actual births of twins should be easy and fast, quick and unexpected, and twins often seem to be born outside the house.

Kwatre, Belama's wife, gave birth in another ward; she was not suspected to carry twins, but both little girls were born healthy and sound. Later, her husband consulted the crab diviner, and following instructions sacrificed two chickens and left indigenous vinegar with some ground millet soaked in water on the spot where she had given birth. He then closed off the spot with thorns and stones, all to prevent the *shala* of the place from following her home.

#### FEASTING A TWIN

Twins have different names, eschewing the normal birth order names. These names are to be freely chosen, usually following the instructions of a crab diviner. Boys are called Pimbi, Mara or Puhu, girls Kwandè or Kwalerha. But before the actual naming ceremony of the *shave*, a lot happens first.

The actual first rites for twins more or less conform to those for a single child, as described above. For the first announcement ceremony, the father butchers two chickens, whose sex corresponds to that of the twins, and has to

produce two identical calabashes, two halves of the same fruit, for the babies to drink from. Word of the birth of twins rapidly spreads through the village. When the baby turns out to be a pair of twins, the father immediately warns his clan brothers as they have to help him out. In the late evening after the actual birth, he calls his brothers from all over the village. They assemble in the hut of the *yitiya kwalerha* (twins' father), as he is now called, early the next morning. All come with their gift of chickens, and the younger ones bring a long band of white cloth which they string up between the huts of the father and mother of the twins, the latter now called *myakwalerha* (twins' mother). The two are one for the rest of time, both to be addressed in their new dignity. Early the same morning the twins' father had asked the chief blacksmith for some *hwèfè kwalerha*, the special strand of *Cissus quadrangularis* that is used to ward off evil from young children. Other measures may be taken following the instructions of the crab diviner.

Besides a chicken, each guest brings along, a small gift for the father, holding out to him a handful of sesame and sorrel. To the mother they present small coins and quartz pebbles, offering them at the same time held in different hands. The sesame and couch grass grains are cooked and eaten by the guests. After eating, some dancing and singing, they return home. That evening the father arranges the « interrogation » of his twins. He calls for an adult twin, another Pimbi or Kwalerha, to conduct the interview.

Tlakema Pimbi, a twin of some 45 years of age, does the « interview » for the twins of Zera Dabala, into whose clan I have been adopted. Before entering the hut of mother Kuve, he asks her to lie down facing the wall of the hut. He then enters, greeting the children with « Good afternoon my people. » The baby closest to the door began crying, and both babies thrashed their legs and arms, and turned upon their backs.

This, said Tlakema, meant that there would be dancing now. What would happen later at the naming feast, the crab diviner would tell. He explained that the crying, the thrashing and the babies' heartbeat gave him the answers to his questions. The interview lasted two hours. Afterwards Tlakema went straight to Zera Dabala's older clan-brother to report the interview ; the twins' father, in turn, gets his instructions from his older brother. In the case of Zera Dabala these were quite elaborate :

« You take a club and a shield, your wife Kuve takes the little mat she uses for the millet mush and the stick for stirring the mush, and both of you pretend to quarrel, really hard. Someone else should calm and separate you, and after that you two may never quarrel again.

Once the umbilical cord falls off, you have to sleep with the twins' mother once, lest she becomes infertile. Then you mix ground yellow and white sorghum in water and have the babies drink it. Do not put red clay on their navels, they do not like that, just a bit of oil is enough.

From then on, you always have to provide two bowls of sauce, two pieces of mush, two calabashes with water and two bowls of meat, all of it for their mother. The sesame I have given you, you apply with your left hand on the mother's vulva and with your right hand on your own penis, in order to have children again.

People coming to greet you have to present couch grass grains and sorghum in their two hands. What your clan brings you keep, and your wife keeps what her clan presents to her ; if this is not done, then 'simple people' (i.e. non-twins) cannot enter her hut. Pebbles have to be thrown before her door. Everything has to happen in twos, for example two chickens each day. Your wife has to tie a bell at her wrist to warn the babies each time she enters their hut (i.e. her own hut). It is not good to visit twins without warning.

The cloth between your two huts has to have a little bit of red on it to prevent the twins asking for red things from other people.

Now enter, Zera, I have put sesame on their mat. If they are real twins (i.e. if they behave as twins should) then they will have the sesame in their hands. »

Zera, upon entering the hut, found the sesame in the tiny fists of the twins, and followed the instructions to the letter. His wife, however, was too weak for the mock battle, and her sister replaced her. That evening the youngsters of the ward came for the all-important dance, and sang out loud :

<i>Kwalerha tangayé</i>	Our twins
<i>mblei nyi kesa ta rhwenme</i>	People from the heavens
<i>mberishi ngelé</i>	Black sesame
<i>Kwamdé ta rhweme</i>	Kwandé from heaven
<i>Kwalerha tewutse</i>	Twins for the dance
<i>Kwalerha rhéng"yé</i>	Our twins
<i>Mberishi rhweme</i>	Sesame of the heavens
<i>Sayé te rhweme</i>	Who has come down from heaven
<i>Kwawutsu</i>	To dance.
<i>Tawa sana?</i>	Why did you come
<i>Mberishi ngelé</i>	Black sesame
<i>Wushi shiabu</i>	Thing of our ancestors.
<i>Rhenké nde rhate we</i>	He did not start it
<i>Zhahale tekumbu na Kwamdé</i>	There is a lizard hidden, Kwandé
<i>Naké rhu teh wulu deh wu matsehwa</i>	I saw the house of the rat
<i>Kwandé</i>	But Kwandé had already seen it.

The children greet the twins the same way as the adults, with handfuls of millet and couch grass grains which they put into a bowl close to the children. Almost everybody asks : « Why did you come ? » Did you come « to dance or

to cry? », *i.e.* to live or to die? The twins' father cooks *zhazha*, a mixture of millet grains, beans and, in this case couch grass grains, a habitual ritual dish the visiting children have to partake from just a little bit: two grains of millet and two seeds of couch grass.

The period between this first naming and the ritual leaving of the compound is not an easy one for the father. As long as his wife remains inside the compound walls, he has to procure two chickens each day for her to eat. As she may stay inside from two to four months, this amounts to an astonishing number of fowl. If poor, he may restrict it a little, but a minimum of thirty chickens is still sizeable. But, again, his clansmen will help him. In these months Zera Dabala scoured the market, from start till night, dressed in his finest outfit, wearing a bracelet of *welle*<sup>9</sup>, the same grass his wife wears as a girdle, to indicate his status as *yitiyakwalerha*, asking all kin and visitors for a gift, a contribution, a chicken. Hard work, but well worth the trouble, as he easily collects a dozen chickens at the weekly market. Later markets again see him « beg » but less successfully.

Whenever there is beer to drink, his will be the first calabash to be filled, before that of the chief, as the thoughts of the twins' father, if bad, count as a curse for the village. Twins are like *hweteru*, the evil eye, and their parents share that power.

Then the time for the big festival nears, two months after birth in the wet season, four in the – less busy – dry season. Both father and mother of the twins separately consult the crab diviner to know the specifics for the feast, special sacrifices, special arrangements, special taboos.

Zera Dabala is told he should not dance during or after the feast, nor should he brew too much beer (« red beer » *tè*). His sacrifice is the following: a cockscorn, some sorghum from a man and some from a woman; the testicles of a billy goat and a few hairs from a small goat have to be mixed and some of it put on the *melè*, the sacrificial jar. The rest Zera has to throw outside the wall of the compound, with the words: « You children have to be in health and remain healthy. » For the twins to be well, his wife, has to grind pieces of meat from a nanny (female) goat and bones from a billy goat, spit a little bit of the mixture on the twins and their *melè* (two stones) and throw the rest away in a similar fashion. For herself she must cook porridge from sorghum sprouts and put a jar

<sup>9</sup> *Saccharum spontaneum*, L.

with the porridge on the road to Ldiri, her native village. The crab diviner warns her not to visit her father's home, contrary to custom.

The *shave* festival usually is a small thing, just for some neighbours. With twins, however, it is a large event that unites both clans, and the *hwelefwe* (matri- and bilateral kin) of both parents<sup>10</sup>. It is the father who sets the date, buys two goats and everything else for the feast.

At Zera Dabala's twin festival, his clansmen, the *kangacè*, flock into his compound early in the morning. The village chief, Wusuhwahwele, is also with them to advise the young father who has never conducted such a ceremony before, and feels quite insecure. Zera has brewed twelve jars of *tè*, red beer, and – having only one wife – has asked his brother's wife to brew twelve jars of « white beer » *mpedli*, as the twins are a boy and a girl. The old clansmen seat themselves in the place of honour in the forecourt, and gracefully accept their two jars of « red beer » *tè*. Zera, in the usual cryptic explanation the Kapsiki use on such occasions, says « This is not something common. I have made just two jars, and as you happen to be here, please taste a little bit. » The village chief comforts him, « No apology is needed for the paucity of the beer. You just do what you can do and what you have to do. May *shala* help you and give you health. »

When the clan elders have drunk, Zera's father's brother takes the lead in the sacrifice of the sheep, a ram and a ewe. Two of Zera's sister's sons perform their ritual duty and cut the throat of the sheep at the same time, one at the father's hut, the other at the mother's, on the signal of the older man. They carefully collect the blood in a bowl, later to be used for the sacrifice on the jar. Simultaneously they skin and butcher the animals. Their immediate reward is the pancreas, the neck and the colon of their beast, and they hand the third stomach to the boy who has herded the animals. The elders of both the mother's and the father's clans get the sheep heads. Zera then kills two chickens (a hen and a rooster), as is done each day for the mother of the twins. The women of Zera's lineage then cook one sheep, and the women of the mother's patrilineage cook the other for their kinswoman at her hut, at the same time as the sister's sons are spending time preparing the skins to be carrying slings for the twins. Some cowry shells are sown on the skins, two shells on each sling to symbolize a twin. The sister's sons carefully cut some strips of skin with hair from the

<sup>10</sup> The *hwelefwe* is a group with a complicated composition. Basically, it does contain all close bilateral kinsmen, but there is a definite recognition of a matrilineal group, the *hwelefe te male*, female *hwelefwe*, in fact a non-corporate small matrilineage (van Beek 1987:124).

slings. The twins will wear these, as will some of their matrilineal kinsmen. The strips with hair are called *mnta* and are a symbol of initiation (see below).

The sun is already high when the preparations are complete. The sister's sons have eaten, the slings are ready and decorated, and the babies, their mother, her close kin and the midwife wear the *mnta*, the strips of skin with hair, on their left wrists. Then the midwife performs the habitual sacrifice at the washing place of the mother (see above). The lineage of Kuve is gathered in her hut, the lineage of the father in his hut. The wives of both lineages are seated in the brewery, while a few guests from other clans and important elders such as the village chief are seated in the entrance hut, *dabala* (it still is the end of the rainy season), while curious visitors are scattered around the rest of the compound. Zera Dabala and his *hwelefwe* (matrilineal kinsmen) tie strips of *peha*<sup>11</sup> around their foreheads, the most visible sign of being connected with a twin. Then people drink and later eat. The *kangacè* in Zera's hut drink from his sacrificial jar.

After drinking and eating, the moment of *shave* has come. Yelling with delight, the clansmen take their respective twin-parents on their shoulders and carry them out of the compound. The other kinsmen, shouting and yelling, walk out of the compound and, on leaving take off the *peha* they are wearing. Zera and his wife quietly wait for the majority of the villagers to leave, and then walk back into the house with their *peha*. With their closest kin and some neighbours assisting, the ritual of the *shave* of the twins themselves starts, the same way as with normal births, only this time a young sister of Kuve plays the second mother for one of the babies. As there is to be no dancing – on the instructions of the crab diviner – the guests then leave. Also, Kuve will not visit her father for some time, as advised by the same crab diviner.

The rest of the year the twins are not shown much in the village. They remain a bit marginal, and the mother and father will demand special attention from anyone they may encounter. This period ends with the first cutting of their hair about a year after their birth. Then the *hwelefwe* of both parents gather in the compound early in the morning, each around the hut of their respective kin person. All kinsmen have their heads shaved while sipping the beer Zera has prepared, the *tè kwangsu rhu* (beer to shave the head). It is only now that the band of cloth uniting the huts of Zera and Kuve is removed. The actual feast is almost a re-enactment of the *shave* ritual: two goats, male and female, are

<sup>11</sup> *Albuca sudanica*, Al.Chev.

skinned, butchered, and boiled. People drink, eat and give blessings. The young girls of the wife's clan take care of cooking the mush. Before the meal, the *yityaberhe* of Kuve, a kind of second father who watches over her well being in her husband's compound, a kinsman living at close quarters, takes a bowl of sesame sauce, prepared by Kuve's mother's sister, and sprinkles the sauce over the two babies, who rest in the arms of two sisters: « You have to be healthy, to be healthy, to dance the *la*-festival (initiation) ». The mush, beer and meat are distributed, and people drink and eat. Finally, Zera's mother's brother addresses Zera's *melè* and pours a calabash of red beer over it: « *Shala, Jigelafte*<sup>12</sup>, everybody must be healthy, all must marry wives and have children in order to have the *hwelefwe* continue. Let him (addressing the boy) marry a good wife who will not run away, but be a good wife who stays. » He pours beer on the *melè*, spits on the posts of Zera's hut, on Zera himself, and drinks. Then Zera and his other kinsmen drink the beer as well.

The next morning Kuve and Zera plant two trees, *mekweða*<sup>13</sup>, in one of their fields. They put a hollow stone, an old grinding slab, close to the saplings, and water them regularly. Those trees will never be touched, nor will anyone ever cut their branches for firewood, as they directly represent the twins. Should anyone cut a branch, the corresponding twin will fall ill, while cutting the tree would cause the death of the twin.

Later, the twins will perform their sacrifices on those trees, using them as a kind of second *melè*. For instance, before a twin girl marries her first spouse, before performing her *makwa* rites, she will dress herself in her straw cape, her iron skirt, and wrap some cloths around her body. Then she takes two jars of *tè*, one sheep, and one goat to the trees. She cuts a branch from both trees, and then slaughters and butchers the animals on the spot, letting the blood run over the branches. She will use these branches to build the roof of the alcove of her hut.

The twins have now been introduced to their *hwelefwe*, their kinsmen, as well as to their clan and lineage. In all rituals pertaining to twins, individual rites for healing or sacrifice, as well as during their participation in collective rites, such as initiation and first marriage, the *hwelefwe* have to participate. All in all, their rituals are more complicated than those of 'normal' people; more kinsmen have to show up, all sacrifices are made in twos, the special symbols of *peha*, *mnta* and *wetle* are used, and there is an abundance of cowry shells and invocations.

<sup>12</sup> Another term for god, probably related to *jigilé*, the Mafa term for god (see van Santen 1993).

<sup>13</sup> *Phederbia* sp. The Kapsiki name means "my in-law".

## CHILDREN AND THEIR SYMBOLS

Both types of rituals, for 'simple children' and for twins (and other special children), are full of diverse symbols, minor as well as major. Most of the symbols are used elsewhere in Kapsiki religion, but some of the constellations are quite characteristic. The difference between single children and twins is especially well marked.

First, Kapsiki symbolism centres around a few essential fields: food, plants and trees and the division of sacrificial animals, all set inside a social-spatial symbolism pertaining to the village, ward and compound on the one hand, and to social groups such as clans, lineages, and general kin on the other.

Kapsiki villages form the social universe in which rituals are set. In the absence of a supra-village organisation, the village is the largest unity indicated by the symbols. Women do come from other villages, in fact habitually so, and that provenance has to be dealt with in the rituals. Kuve putting her offerings in the road leading to her native village offers a clear example. Here the main metaphor is the road, path or *hwenkwa*, the « place towards » as it is called in Kapsiki. Within this bounded universe, from which roads branch out to similar but often inimical social spaces, the divisions of clans, and – less relevant in this context – of wards, produce the second spatially coherent social unit, the compound, *rhè*. The bordered space of the village is reproduced in the microcosm of the *rhè*. An enclosing wall surrounds the sleeping and cooking huts, their isolation mediated by a structured entrance complex, a partitioned courtyard and entrance hut (van Beek, 1986), and by the many drains for the disposal of household waste. The enclosing wall is the prime symbolic structure. The entrance through that wall and in fact any opening into a building, are the symbolic areas for birth rituals. Sacrificial blood is sprinkled on door posts, lentils and thresholds, marking the place where the birth took place outside the wall, etc.

This focus on borders and mediations of borders reflects Kapsiki body symbolism (van Beek, 1994), which comes out in birth ritual. The placenta, and especially the umbilical cord, the essential bridges between the body of the mother and that of the child, are the centre of ritual attention. During birth they get almost as much attention as the baby itself; both are buried very carefully during the mother's washing, which is named after the midwife herself (*mewehi* and *mewete*), and watched closely lest someone ritually misuses them. The placenta and even more the umbilical cord signify, evidently, the bond between mother and child, but mainly the mortal, fragile side of that bond. They signify

the separation between the two that has led to the new human being. The umbilical cord is an entrance for evil after birth. The positive symbol of motherhood, usually milk in other African societies<sup>14</sup>, is the baby sling, the carry-all made for the child by her father (in the case of a non-twin). It is this *hweta* (skin) that links mother and child, close together but two separate persons.

Notions of fatherhood operate through the mother, as direct symbols of fatherhood are only present in the case of twins. The father of a 'normal' child stresses his relation to the new child in several ways: first, by hosting kinsmen and neighbours, and accepting their gifts; second, by his sharing of a sacrificial chicken with the midwife. In that ritual he is linked with the midwife through the chicken sacrificed over the place where the placenta with the umbilical cord are buried. Later his identity as a father is highlighted by his naming of the child; but the birth order names reflect his wife's progeny and not his. In other rituals also, fatherhood is mainly expressed as a relation to women (midwife and wife) as well as to his bride-givers, his in-laws, including his mother-in-law and her kin (van Beek, 1987:167). His wife's father, in fact, has a more direct link to the child, as it is he that makes the sling for his daughter's child, his *shi* (grandchild), a very close relationship among the Kapsiki, as often in West Africa.

The child links two clans and two lineages in many ways. Any child does. The father's closest lineage mates first express their acceptance of the new member by the presents they offer immediately after birth. The father's father is always included among these close patrilineal kinsmen, and never singled out. The less evident identity, the link with the mother's family, is much more ritualised than is usual in Kapsiki religion (van Beek, 1998). The new father offers his father-in-law another goat, in fact an addition to the bride price he paid already. The central moment is when the baby's mother makes her first visit to her father. Leaving the house she has first to learn (or relearn) her role as a mother (carrying the baby the right way) and as a cultivator (mimicking agricultural techniques in the entrance court). Then she goes, sometimes immediately, with gifts of food to her father, and puts the ritual food on the

<sup>14</sup> The mother's milk, in the form of her breast, may be used as a powerful symbol in cursing. When a mother chews on a nipple and speaks bad words, or even thinks "bad thoughts", the results for her child will be immediate. This *bedla* of the mother is the most potent curse of all, and - quite characteristically - operates through the direct bodily contact between mother and child (van Beek 1994).

place of honour in his house, the *pulu*, that is, a definite part of his male identity (van Beek, 1986). He reciprocates by making her baby sling, just as he gave her a rain cape before her *makwa* marriage. His token of full acceptance is the shaving of the baby's head, for it is the mother's father who cuts the "hairs of the womb". This has parallels with other rites of passage, initiation, marriage, and burial, when heads are ritually shaved. The grandfather ends the liminal period of the baby and of his daughter with the main integration of the two within her family of birth.

This visit is similar to the visits she makes to her father during her first marriage. When she leaves her husband's compound she heads for her father's. Though her mother is much closer, her father is part of her lasting identity, and, above all, of the lasting identity of the baby. A *wuzemakwa*, a daughter's son, is the most structural link between the two families that exchanged a bride price for a bride, both for the families concerned and for the lineages as a whole. Whenever a serious conflict threatens the relation between the two groups, the *wuzemakwa* steps in to mediate. Also for the father-in-law this is the seal upon the bride price payment; now the bride price has been « repaid » and will never be reclaimed. The journey of the new mother to her father's compound also reflects her own newly found mobility. She not only leaves her husband's abode for the first time since birth, but with a baby she will be free to choose wherever she may go, to stay with her husband or to leave him. Yet, a new baby will tie her to his village for at least some years. Thus, throughout, the rituals for a single birth are a continuation of the rituals for the first marriage: similar symbols and similar movements between relatives. The use of cultivation symbols in birth rites is a corollary of this; the marriage proceedings are neatly tied into the agricultural cycle, and the resumption of normal marital duties implies – and is symbolised by – the resumption of the work on the land (*ibidem*).

The food symbols used in birth rituals, the *rhwempe*, *mndè*, *rhedle*, and couch grass, are used in other rituals as well (*ibidem*). Their general meaning is one of strength and fertility (*rhwempe* and *rhedle*) and celebration (*mndè*). Couch grass is used in various dishes often having to do with rites of passage, but also is used in many sacrificial dishes. On the whole, the food used in birth rituals is the same used in the sacrifices for compound, lineage, ward and clan, a likeness which underscores the general message of the entry of the child into the patrilineal system.

Gender markers come in through several types of symbols, but mainly through plant symbols. Euphorbia and *kwantereza* are important in gender differentiation in other rituals, and are used as such in birth. The same holds for the arrow shaft and the stalk of sorghum, the immediate markers of gender, known also from initiation ritual. Similarly, the sex of the sacrificial animals, mostly chickens and some goats, constitutes a public expression of the baby's gender. Finally, the choice of white or red beer, products of male and female brewing (van Beek, 2000), is evidently symbolic.

The animals, more than anything else, serve as markers of relationships in birth as in other rituals. The typical Kapsiki sacrifice consists of a meal, with a sauce appropriate to the occasion, and a sacrificial animal that is distributed according to strict rules to lineages, sister's son, herding boy, wives of the clan and daughters of the clan. This pattern, of course, is what dominates public meals in birth rituals as well. The distribution of the meat stresses the relationship of the baby and of its parents with the rest of its kin and with the structures of the society. Stress is placed on the identity of the baby as a member of a group with long standing interests. All these gender related symbols have a certain directness as evident markers of sexual identity that render, in Turner's terms, the exegetical meaning very close to their signification (Turner, 1975). The positional meaning can be inferred from a relationship with other similar symbols in Kapsiki rituals, as when, for example some symbols used in initiation rituals are also found in birth rituals. This, however, is much stronger, even dominant, in twin rituals.

Symbols for twins breathe a different message. The most evident is the presence of another type of kinship group as one of the dominant players in the theatre of twin rituals. First, rituals for twins engage much larger patrilineages, in fact the whole clan is always involved<sup>15</sup>. But even more significant is the central place of the *hwelefwe*, in fact of both *hwelefwe*, of the new father and the new mother, though the one of the father dominates. The composition of this group is complex and includes ego's bilateral kinsmen (*hwelefwe te za*) plus a restricted matrilineal group (*hwelefwe te male*)(van Beek, 1978:154ff.). The group does not have a clear boundary, and is mainly important in the major rituals of passage, initiation and burial. The twin does not belong to the patrilineal system only, it is part of the cognatic stock of both parents. This not only involves the majority of the village with the *kwalerha*, it also gives the

<sup>15</sup> The clans are more pronounced in the identity construction in daily life anyway, as they are in the major sacrifices and rites de passage (van Beek 1998).

twins a much wider identity, a different kind of identity – they do not belong to one lineage only, linked with one other lineage only. They are not *wuzemakwa*, the peace makers, but they are a force on their own; they have a separate, powerful identity in their own right, and depend ultimately only on their peers, other twins, to solve the problems they create themselves. On the one hand their rituals demonstrate the eager but routine acceptance of new members of the group, but on the other hand, the twin rites are concerned with the well being of the whole village. Even while rejoicing in the excess of fertility there is worry about the viability of the twins. Will they die or dance, will the parents live up to their responsibilities, especially the father? Curiously, the *ghi*, the ‘almost twins’ as they may be considered elsewhere, meet a very different attitude; the child is a danger for it has not come into the family in the right way. It must pass through the roof of the hut, leaving some of its own skin and blood, before it can be accepted and no longer pose a danger for the father. But there is more to the presence of the *hwelefwe* than simply a larger circle of kinsmen involved.

Plant symbols give some clues to a further interpretation of these twin rituals. Sesame is associated with the twins and ‘*yanka* grass, *mentsehe* and *peha* with the parents. All of these plants figure in one other set of rituals only: initiation. The boy initiates, the *gewela*, dress in their traditional leather pants and adorn themselves with bronze objects (van Beek, 1984), but their identity as liminal warriors is marked by donning strips of *peha* on forehead and ankles, by ‘*yanka* or *mentsehe* bracelets, finishing off their attire with a long necklace of cowry shells. The girls initiates, the *makwa* entering their first marriage, distinguish themselves from their male counterparts by wearing an iron pubic apron instead of a brass one (*ibidem*), but also wear the same grasses in their *cache sexe* as the twins. A further, and even clearer, symbol of liminal adulthood is the *mnta*. For the twins these were the strips of goat skin with long hairs; the same word is used to describe the long hairs on a ram’s dewlap. These splendid shocks of hair form the crown of the *gewela* outfit; the initiate « wears » them on top of his lance during the final days of his initiation.

So, the positional message of the twins’ symbols seems clear: the twins are not children, they are grown ups. Their mature status is clear in their interrogation. They are always addressed as adults; the adult twin calls them « our people » and knocks on the door before he enters. Twins are never small, their power and danger preclude viewing them as children. Not only are they mature, their symbols designate them as young people during initiation; they ‘are’ *gewela* and *makwa*, initiates. It is during these rites of passage that the

*hwelefwe* are the most active. During the *gewela* for boys and the first entrance of the *makwa* bride, as well as during burial rites, the *hwelefwe* take centre stage. In a way, the twins are even more. Not only do they wear the outfit of the initiates during their rituals, but they continue to wear them throughout their lives. And so, to some degree, do their parents, always wearing their special bracelets, always addressed as « parent of the twin ». Sesame, as an important ritual food, points in the same direction. *Gewela* boys have to cultivate a lot of sesame during the wet season that forms part of their liminal period<sup>16</sup>. Twins are, from the very beginning, surrounded by sesame, and remain so. Whereas normal initiates are reintegrated into society as mature individuals without the paraphernalia of their initiation, the twins never leave their symbols of initiation behind. They are, throughout their lives, associated with the *gewela* and *makwa*. When they undergo the *gewela* and *makwa* rites, they do not change their apparel; they remain as they are. Thus the Kapsiki solve the problem of the co-existence of two people in the same time and place in a particular manner. Just as twins are in many societies ‘intolerable to think’ (Gros, 1995) as well as a confusion for anyone approaching them (Hamart-Frichet, 1995), such people with identical links in a society based on structural relations are not ‘of this world’. They are the archetype of ‘ambiguous symbols’ (Bell, 1992:182). For both the vaunted «autonomy» of the Kapsiki (van Beek, 1991) and the many echelons of social identity (van Beek, 1998), twins present a challenge. To assign them the status of a normal being would run counter to the cultural definitions of a person, of social relations, and of the relation between the individual and the supernatural world. So twins are never children, never adults, but forever liminals: they are born initiates, they remain so during their whole lives, forever in between, powerful but fragile, a dangerous blessing, people from on high, not from this middle earth.

### Références bibliographiques

- AIJMER, G., 1992, "Introduction: coming into existence", in G. AIJMER (ed.), *Coming into existence. Birth and metaphors of birth*, IASSA, Göteborg, pp.1-19.
- BAAL, J. van & W.E.A. VAN BEEK, 1984, *Symbols for Communication. Religion in Anthropological Theory*, 2nd rev ed., Assen van Gorcum.

<sup>16</sup> The initiation for boys usually starts in March, that of girls – first marriage – in April, and the following cultivation season is part of their initiation time. The rituals end with the la-festival in November-December (van Beek 1978).

- BEEK, W.E.A. van, 1977, "Color terms in Kapsiki", in P. NEWMAN & R. MA (eds.), *Papers in Chadie Linguistics*, Leiden, pp. 13-20.
- , 1978, *Bierbrouwers in de bergen; de Kapsiki and Higi van Noord-Kameroen en Noord-Oost Nigeria*, Utrecht, dissertatie, 461 p.
- , 1982, "Les savoirs Kapsiki", in SANTERRE, R. & C. MERCIER-TREMBLAY (eds.), *La quête du savoir. Essais pour une anthropologie de l'éducation au Cameroun*, Press Universitaire Laval, pp. 180-207.
- , 1986, "The ideology of building. The interpretation of compound patterns among the Kapsiki of North Cameroon", in H. FOKKENS, P. BANGA & T. CONSTANDSE (eds.), *Op zoek naar mens en materiële cultuur*, Festschrift J.D. van der Waals, Groningen, IPPH, pp. 142-162.
- , 1987, *The Kapsiki of the Mandara Hills*, Prospect Heights, Waveland Press.
- , 1991, "Harmony Versus Autonomy; Models of Agricultural Fertility among the Dogon and the Kapsiki", (with A. JAKOBSON-WIDDING), in A. JAKOBSON-WIDDING & W.E.A. VAN BEEK (eds.), *The Creative Communion; African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*, Uppsala: University Press, pp. 285-306.
- , 1992, "Becoming human in Dogon, Mali", in G. AJMER (ed.), *19+92. Birth and metaphors of birth*, IASSA, Götheborg, pp. 47-69.
- , 1994, "The Innocent Sorcerer; Coping with Evil in Two African Societies, Kapsiki and Dogon", in T. BLAKELY, W.E.A. VAN BEEK & D.L. THOMSON (eds.), *African Religion: Experience and Expression*, London, James Currey, pp.196-228.
- , "A granary in the earth: dynamics of mortuary rituals among the Kapsiki/Higi", in C.BAROIN, D. BARRETEAU & C. VON GRAFFENRIED (eds.), *Mort et Rites Funéraires dans le Bassin du Lac Tchad*, ORSTOM, Bondy, pp.137-152.
- , "Rain as a Discourse of Power: Rainmaking in Kapsiki". in H. JUNGRAITHMAYER, D. BARRETEAU & U. SEIBERT (eds.), *L'Homme et L'Eau dans le Bassin du Lac Tchad*, ORSTOM, Paris, pp. 285-297.
- , 1998, "Identity in African ritual", *Focaal*, 32, pp.119-140.
- BEEK, W.E.A. van & T.D. BLAKELY, 1994, "Introduction", in T. BLAKELY, W.E.A. VAN BEEK & D.L. THOMSON (eds.), *African Religion: Experience and Expression*, London: James Currey, pp. 1-20.
- BELL, C., 1992, *Ritual theory, ritual practice*, Oxford University Press.
- BLOCH, M., 1992, "Birth and the beginning of social life among the Zafimaniry of Madagascar", in G. AJMER (ed.), *Coming into existence. Birth and metaphors of birth*, IASSA, Götheborg, pp.70-90.
- COLLARD, C., *Organisation sociale des Guidar ou Baynawa*, EHESS, Paris.
- DOUGLAS, M., *Purity and danger*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- , 1973, *Natural symbols; explorations in cosmology*. Penguin.
- GENNEP, A. van, 1960, (1909), *Les rites de passage. Etude systématique des rites*, Paris, Nourry.
- GROS, C., 1995, "Inclassables jumeaux, et pourtant... Place et signification des jumeaux et anthropologie sociale", in SAVARY, C. & C. GROS (eds.), *Des Jumeaux et des autres*. Genève, Museum of Ethnography, pp. 25-50.

- HAMARD-FRICHET, C., 1995, "Vous avez dit jumeaux? Fragments autobiographiques d'une mère de jumelles", in SAVARY, C. & C. GROS (eds.), *Des Jumeaux et des autres*. Genève, Museum of Ethnography, pp. 27-276.
- PELLEGRINI, B., "Les jumeaux dans le monde: biologie et culture", in SAVARY, C. & C. GROS (eds.), *Des Jumeaux et des autres*. Genève, Museum of Ethnography, pp. 51-58.
- PISON, G. & al., *Mortalité et société en Afrique*, Paris, PUF.
- , 1999, "L'Afrique, continent des jumeaux", *Séminaire Anthropologie de l'enfance*, Paris.
- PODLEWSKI, A.M., 1966, *La dynamique des principales populations du Nord-Cameroun (entre Benoué et lac Tchad)*, Cahier Orstom, Sc. Hum. 3.
- RICHARD, M., 1977, *Traditions et coutumes matrimoniales chez les Mada et les Mouyeng Nord-Cameroun*, St. Augustin, Anthropos Institut, vol. 10.
- SANTEN, van J., C.M., *They leave their jars behind; the conversion of Mafa women to Islam (North Cameroon)*, Vena Leiden.
- SAVARY, C. & C. GROS, 1995, *Des Jumeaux et des autres*. Genève, Museum of Ethnography.
- SAVARY, C., 1995, "Introduction", in SAVARY, C. & C. GROS *Des Jumeaux et des autres*, Genève, Museum of Ethnography, pp. 11-24.
- SPERBER, D., 1975, *Rethinking symbolism*, Cambridge University Press.
- TURNER, V., 1969, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*, London, Routledge.
- , *Dramas, fields and metaphors, symbolic action in human society*, Ithaca, Cornell U.P.
- VINCENT, J.-F., 1991, *Princes montagnards du Nord-Cameroun*, Paris, L'Harmattan.
- ZAZZO, R., 1960, *Les jumeaux, le couple et la personne*, Paris, PUF-Quadrige.
- , *Reflets de miroir et autres doubles*, Paris, PUF.

### Kapsiki personal names

	son	daughter	son	daughter
1 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Tizhè</i>	<i>Kuve</i>	6 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Teri</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>Zra</i>	<i>Masi</i>	7 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Sunu</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Deli</i>	<i>Kwarumba</i>	8 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Kwada</i>
4 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Vandu</i>	<i>Kwanyè</i>	9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>'Yèngu</i>
5 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Kweji</i>	<i>Kweji</i>		<i>Kwayèngu</i>

Starting from the tenth pregnancy, one starts again, with the affix- *-meha* ("grand"): *Tizhèmeha* (usually rendered as *Tshimeha*), *Kuvemeha* etc. The birth order names do carry some additional associations, in the form of presumed character. *Tizhè* usually is considered a bit odd, "weak in the head" and not very bright. After all, he had to open his mother's birth canal, which does bring damage. *Zera* as well, is associated with dumbness, slow and not very quick-witted, but reliable, someone who "plods through". On the other hand, *Deli* and *Kwarumba* are deemed smart, quick, clever and full of ruses. In the many traditional stories *Deli*, or in older forms of *Temba* (in the Higi dialect) has to cope with the dumb but persevering leopard listening to the name of *Zera* (or *Zeremba*, in the Higi form).

## L'ENFANT DANS LE BASSIN DU LAC TCHAD

- Suzanne LALLEMAND *Histoire de l'anthropologie de l'enfance*  
Jean-Michel MIGNOT *Le sevrage chez les Masa Bugudum*  
Paulette ROULON-DOKO *Les jeux d'enfants chez les Gbaya*  
Suzanne RUELLAND *Paroles sur l'enfance chez les Tupuri*  
Françoise DUMAS-CHAMPION *La place de l'enfant dans la vie rituelle des Masa*  
Jeanne-Françoise VINCENT *Les jumeaux dans les montagnes mofu-Diamaré*  
Walter E.A. VAN BEEK *Symbols in Kapsika birth rituals*  
Jean-Charles CLANET *La dure école des petits chameliers*  
Jean BOUTRAIS *Nderkaaku : la folle jeunesse chez les Foulbé*  
Anselme WAKPONOU *L'enfant masa et la riziculture irriguée*  
Daniel BARRETEAU *Parcours et paroles de jeunes analphabètes*  
Abel DJIMBAYE et Dominique SIMON-CALAFURI *Des alternatives à l'exclusion de la jeunesse*

## ETUDES ET RECHERCHES

- Christophe MUNIHIRWA *Pouvoir royal et idéologie au royaume de Kabaré (Zaïre)*

IN MEMORIAM

COMPTE-RENDUS

INFORMATIONS