

right hand, he pushes the head of the child three times under it.⁴⁰ This done he takes the *tsə* horn and blows it three times next to both ears of the child. The second twin is treated in the same way. When he has finished, he takes the calabash bowl of water and empties it over the foot-end of the bed. He takes a fowl feather and dips it in the pool of water on the floor. With the moistened feather he touches the sternum and the back of each twins.

Informants stress that several things in this episode are important:

- the action must take place at the foot-end of the bed;
- the twins must be turned upside down;
- the cocoyam (or *mbəmbuəm*) leaf must have no hole in it, and
- the calabash bowl must be filled to the brim with water.

The fact that the rite *fo' mven* takes place at the foot-end of the bed and that the child is turned upside down corresponds to the Yamba notion that second sight (*lis baa*) is the opposite or inversion of normal sight and must be dealt with in an opposite, inverse way. As to the why the calabash bowl has to be filled to the brim nobody came forward with a satisfactory answer. Somebody suggested that half a bowl of water would mean that the treatment would only be half effective. More important in this connection is the cooling effect of water. The 'power' of second sight had to be cooled down.

As for the drinking of palm wine from the *tsə* horn, Pa Njikwi explained to me that it was done to join the twin parents and the twins 'for one place', to

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38. In Lower Yamba, one informant told me that the specialist crushes some seeds of 'malagueta' pepper (*suco*, *swi co*) in his mouth, then mixing it with palm wine sprays it in the eyes of the child.
39. Instead of a cocoyam leaf, ritual specialists in Lower Yamba use another leaf called *mbəmbuəm*. The *mbəmbuəm* leaf is commonly used in Lower Yamba in the production of palm oil. The drums, heaped with palm nuts, are covered with a tight layer of *mbəmbuəm* leaves to prevent the heat from escaping when the nuts are boiled. Besides this practical use, we find the *mbəmbuəm* also in other ritual contexts. For example, when small boys have seen the *so*' juju or any other juju without having been initiated, the lineage head will perform a rite called *ncarum* to counteract the evil effect, which might harm the children for having seen the juju. A *mbəmbuəm* leaf is placed over the child's face and the lineage head of the child says three times, 'The juju will catch me, not you. Do you hear?'
40. The turning of the child upside down has an interesting parallel in Nso' tradition (Mzeka 1993: 29). A child who is believed to possess malignant witchcraft (*virim*) had to be 'exorcised which in the Nso' context did not amount to driving out an evil spirit but turning or upsetting the bad witchcraft (*binir tseetseng*) and converting it into a good one or rendering it impotent. The *nggaa shiv* took the child by its feet, turned it upside down and whipped its buttocks with either broomstick or *kikeng* (*Dracaena* sp.).'

make them one. It seems that this episode addresses the rivalry theme. The twins' lips are touched with the *tsə* horn and moistened, in other words, they 'drink' from the same horn. Drinking from the same cup is part of the rite of reconciliation.

When the specialist blows the *tsə* horn next to the ears of the twins he says, 'yu fo te' yo, yu fo me yo!' (Be obedient to your father, be obedient to your mother!). Pa Njikwi informed me that the twins are told not to listen to 'voices coming from outside' (i.e., the calls of witches), but to be obedient to their parents.⁴¹

Illustration 6: *Fo' mven*: the specialist blows the *tsə* horn close to the twin's ear while covering its face with a cocoyam leaf



That the cocoyam or *mbəmbuəm* leaf had to be without a hole is self-evident. A hole in the leaf would defeat the purpose of the rite, which was to 'lock' the eyes of the twins.

41. Mzeka (1993: 28) reports a similar practice in Nso' where the ritual specialist 'rattled a small calabash containing some hard seeds by each ear of the child, at the same time blowing into the ear (*feesi kituu ke wan*) while saying: "Ayua? Ayu vinyo vi," which means "Have you heard? Be obedient."

In the third part of *fo' mven* a strengthening medicine is administered to the twins and their parents. The ritual specialist opens his medicine bag and removes the pieces of bone, hooves, and wood. With a knife he scrapes off some particles from each piece onto a flat stone. The resulting powder he mixes with palm oil and salt. Then he takes a plant called *re'* (*rua'*) and with a small round grinding stone, he mashes it into pulp. He adds the pulp to the mixture of powder and oil. Now he dips his finger into the concoction and licks it before giving some to the twins and their parents to lick. This done, he rubs the arms, legs, and the body of the twins with the mixture. The rest is put in a small calabash container and the mother is told to rub the twins with it any time she bathes them.

Illustration 7: Preparing the 'twin medicine': the specialist scrapes the pieces of wood, bone and hooves which he has taken from his medicine bag and placed on a mat



The bone, hoof, and wood scrapings are meant to strengthen the twins and their parents. They should become as strong as the lion, the leopard, the elephant, and other 'strong' animals. They should run as fast as the bushcow and the antelope. The limbs and joints should become as strong as the ironwood tree and other hardwood trees. As to the *re'* plant one informant told me that it is meant to 'cool' their hearts. The *re'* plant is a small, soft creeper with small round leaves which grows near water.

An omen-taking ritual follows. The specialist is given a fowl, which he brushes three times over the head of each twin. He accompanies this action with an invocation, saying that as he is about to kill this fowl, it is the fowl that should die rather than the twins. All their sickness should enter the fowl. After this he breaks the legs and wings of the fowl over the head of the twins and the twin mother. Then he tears open the beak of the fowl. He goes to the door and holding the fowl upside down so that the blood runs along the inside of the upper beak, he lets the blood flow down the door post. If the blood flows in a single line, all is well. Should it divide into two lines, it means that there is something wrong. ‘It speaks with two mouths’, as one informant put it. It may be that the parents are not living in amity. Should that be the case they have to resolve their differences. Strife in the family is not good for the healthy development of twins.

The drinking of the worm-cast (*nose ndu*) concludes *fo’ mven*. Taking a large heartshaped *mbambuəm* leaf, the specialist puts some riverine worm-cast on it. He pours water and palm wine on the worm-cast and mixes everything thoroughly. Then he first drinks some of the liquid himself before handing the leaf to the twin parents, who also drink. With his finger he smears some of the mixture on the lips of the twins, or alternately, he applies some to the nipples of the mother. The mother then breast-feeds the twins. He also rubs the *ndu* on their sternum and back. Finally, he takes the leaf with the rest of the worm-cast and slaps it down on the threshold. This ends *fo’ mven*. Riverine worm-cast symbolizes ‘coolness’. The twins and their parents are treated internally and externally with *ndu* to cool their heart; the house is made cool also.

4.8. Payment (*taŋse bum* and *jum nwi*)

Having finished his work for the day, the ritual specialist will ask the *taabi* to pay him (*taŋse bum*). He takes a bundle of small tally sticks from his bag. Each stick stands for a certain item for which the *taabi* has to pay. One stick, for example, stands for the spears (of the spears given he will take only one back to his house, the others are ‘converted’ to money). Other sticks stand for the knife with which he scraped the bones and pieces of wood, the stone he used to grind the *re’* plant with, the twin pot the *mabi* will keep in her house from now on, and so on. It is interesting to note that the specialist also counts any stream he had to cross when coming from his compound. The *taabi* is charged for that too. When he has finished enumerating all the items, he counts the sticks and tells the *taabi* the amount he has to pay. The actual payment (*taŋse bum*) will take place only after the final episode of the twin ritual,

which is the breaking down of the fence (*sa' fe*). What the taabi has to give at the end of *fo' mven*, and later, after any other rite, which is still to follow, is *jum nwi* (literally 'drive god'). A few hundred francs is all that has to be given. I was told that *jum nwi* is given in order to pacify the god who is believed to have shown this 'medicine' originally to mankind. If the specialist were to leave without *jum nwi*, the god would be angry and molest the twins. They would be crying continuously and give a lot of trouble. Informants told me that the reason why the specialist has to count the streams he crosses has also to do with *jum nwi*. Streams are believed to be dwelling places of god. If the specialist were to cross these streams on his way home without having been given *jum nwi*, the god would be annoyed and could even spoil the 'medicine' which he had made. Here I still have to add that *jum nwi* is not specific to the twin ritual. It has to be given for any other ritual performed if the money to pay *taŋse bum* is not given.

4.9. Additional Rituals

There are three rites belonging to the Yamba twin ritual, which are performed after *fo' mven*. These are the erection of the fence (*fe*) in front of the mother's house, the planting of the *dzoŋ* shrine, and the treatment of the twin parents so that they can eat newly harvested crops (*bəŋse bum*).

The Erection of the Fence

As Jeffreys (1963: 85) and Buinda (1987: 76) mention the twin mother's house is fenced in by a bamboo fence. This is done at the direction of the *ŋga ncəp fəs*. No special ceremony takes place. Informants give several reasons for the erection of the fence. The twins and their mother have to be protected from adverse outside influences. For example, the fence prevents people, who have eaten food of a kind which is taboo for the twin mother, from inadvertently entering the house of the twins. People with 'strong medicine on their bodies', like leaders of the *ŋwantap* society or 'medicine men' (*ŋga ncəp*), may not come into close contact with the twins. The fence reminds them to stay away so as not to harm the twins. But they themselves also avoid coming into close contact with twins out of fear that they may 'spoil their medicine'. Secondly, twins may not leave the security of the fence till it is broken down. The world outside is believed to be hostile and dangerous. The twin mother is more free in her movements, but she, too, may not go to the market or to the farm.

Nowadays the fence is no longer erected. In some places the ritual specialist sticks a bamboo pole in the ground in front of the twin mother's house as *pars pro toto*.

The Planting of the *dzon* Shrine

On the day of the first new moon after *fo' mven* (or it may be on another day) the twin father calls the ritual specialist to come and plant the *dzon* shrine. The fee is four fowls (or a goat) and a 'jug' of palm wine. The specialist comes with a sod of special grass called *nzə*. This grass can often be seen on footpaths. When the paths are cleared it is left standing, the tuft tied into a knot. The specialist, in the presence of the twin mother and the twins, digs a shallow hole in the ground near her house. Then he takes the sod of grass, puts it in the hole and lifts it up again three times before pressing it into the ground and filling earth around it. He sprays a mouthful of palm wine over it saying that no person with evil intent should pass this way. He also takes a bit of food from the twin pot and throws it on the *dzon*. Now he holds the first-born twin up in the air showing its naked buttocks three times to the new moon pleading, 'New moon, look the buttocks of this child and do not refuse the child'. He does the same with the second twin. The twin mother is then instructed to perform this same ritual at the sight of every new moon. She will bring out the twin pot with a small quantity of meat or a certain type of mushroom cooked in palm oil. After having thrown some of the food on the *dzon*, she will sprinkle palm oil over it. Then she will hold the twins, buttocks first, in the air towards the new moon saying the same prayer. The words of the invocation vary from place to place. In Bom, for example, the mother prays saying that her child's bottom should be dry and that of the moon's child wet instead. Informants told me that the ritual is performed to prevent the child from getting diarrhoea. (Diarrhoea with the resulting dehydration is the cause of many deaths among Yamba children in infancy). The mother performs the ritual at the sight of every new moon till the children begin to walk. I have to point out again that this ritual is not specific to twins only. Single children receive the same treatment.

Treatment of Twin Parents Before They May Eat New Crops (*bəŋse bum*)

Following the birth of twins the parents may not eat of any new crops. This concerns all newly harvested crops such as maize, cocoyams, groundnuts, - formerly also guinea corn, and even vegetables. The ritual specialist has to perform the rite *bəŋse bum* (*bəŋse* means to lick; *bum* is tradition, country fashion) before they may taste the new food lest the twins should get adversely affected. It would make them weak, I was told. Here we have again the theme of 'weak food' which is taboo for the twins and their mother. Newly harvested crops are believed to be soft and 'weak'.

At the time of the maize harvest, for example, the *ŋga ncəp fɛs* is called. After having roasted some cobs of maize, he holds one to the twin mother's mouth. She blows on it and then takes a bite. The first bite she spits out to her left, the second to her right, and the third in front of her. Then she takes the maize cob in her hand and eats. The father does the same. Most often the ritual is combined for all the newly harvested crops.

4.10. Breaking Down the Fence (*sa' fɛ*)

The breaking down of the fence is the final part of the Yamba twin ritual. This is sometimes also referred to as “coming out” or ‘moving out’ ritual corresponding to the ‘moving out’ of single children (*fike mven*) after the umbilical cord has fallen off. The ritual consists of a number of episodes and is followed by feasting and dancing. As already mentioned, it takes place about a year after the birth of twins when they start to walk. Let us look at the different phases in more detail.

Invitation to the *mabi*'s Father

In the morning the twin father and his family proceed to the compound of the twin mother's father (the bride-giver) singing and dancing (*sam, samdə*). At their arrival they are given two dishes of meat, two baskets of fufu, and two calabashes of palm wine. This is followed by more singing and dancing. Before they leave they are given a cock. In Lower Yamba, I was told, the bride-giver takes the cock and while people dance he throws it high in the air. The cock must be caught before it touches the ground. Then the bride-giver's family follows the *taabi* back to his compound where they are entertained in exactly the same way and are also given a cock.

Treatment of Twin Parents Present at the Ritual (*sirə'*)

When the specialist arrives, accompanied by his people, he will break down the fence. He does this symbolically by breaking one bamboo pole. In the meantime a great number of people have also arrived. First of all, there are the parents of other twins in the village, the parents of children who cut the upper teeth first and of breech deliveries (who, as we have seen, are also considered as twins). They are not specially invited but come of their own accord. Secondly, there are the members of the *ŋwantap* society, the leading Yamba secret society. Then there is the ritual specialist with his party, and finally, the rest of the people including the relatives of the twin father and the twin mother.

The ritual specialist is given a spear, which he sticks into the ground. Then he calls the twin parents and other parents mentioned above. They line up in front of him in a single file. One assistant holds a calabash bowl of water while another is given a calabash of palm wine and a cup. The *nga ncəp fəs* takes the bundle of herbs (*fu ncəp*) which he has collected in the morning consisting of the following ten plants: *sa'*, *kokop*, *kuŋɛ*, *ŋku*, *njum*, *ŋkɛŋ*, *mbolo*, *mbarŋkwɛn*, *maŋkɔp*, and *susuŋ*. All these plants must be cut in pairs. The first three are the names of hardwood trees of which he cuts the soft shoots. The rest are plants or shrubs. The *maŋkɔp* and the *susuŋ* (elephant grass, *Pennisetum purpureum*) are the two dominant plants used in the *sirə'* ritual.

The specialist takes the bundle of herbs and a cock in his right hand. He holds the cock by its legs so that it hangs head down along the herbs. The first person to be treated places his right foot in such a way that the spear-shaft, stuck in the ground, is held between his first and second toe. He holds the spear with his right hand. First, the specialist sprays a mouthful of water, then a mouthful of palm wine on the person's chest. Then he knocks the bundle of herbs and the cock against all his joints starting from the ankles up to the shoulder. While doing so he says, '*Ka gwo, caŋ kwa-kwa-kwa, ka guru!*' (Don't get tired, run fast, don't get slack!). The cock should flap its wings, but if it doesn't the specialist makes a noise imitating the flapping of wings. Finally, he holds the herbs and the cock against the forehead of the person in front of him and turning his head towards the west he blows sharply into the air.

This done, the *nga ncəp fəs* hands the cock to one of his assistants. Separating one *maŋkɔp* and one *susuŋ* plant from the bundle without removing them, he breaks them over all the joints of the twin parent. Lastly, he takes the spear and touches the person's joints and his forehead with it. Then he takes the right hand of the twin parent and places it on the blade of the spear. He gets hold of his middle finger and jerks it sharply to make the knuckles crack, at the same time pulling him forward and so dismissing him. After this, the twin parent runs to the nearest stone and slaps his hand on it. He flexes his arms and legs saying that today he has received strength. All the twin parents and those of 'special children' are treated in the same way.

The last persons to be treated are the *mabi*, and the twins.⁴² For this purpose they enter the twin mother's house again. The procedure is the same except that at the end the specialist breaks the legs and wings of the fowl over

42. In the twin ritual I witnessed in Mfe the child preceding the twins, a girl about three years old, was also treated together with the parents and the twins.

the twins' heads. When he has finished, he hangs the bundle of herbs over the door of the *mabi*'s house.

The knocking of the bundle of 'medicine' and the cock against the twin parents' joints is a kind of 'exorcism'. The specialist symbolically expels or drives out (note the cock flapping its wings) pain and weakness from the joints 'blowing' them away towards the west, the side of the 'bad satan'. He then proceeds to restore strength to the joints by breaking the *maŋkup* and *susuŋ* plants and by touching them with the iron point of the spear. I was told that the crushing of the *maŋkup* plant with its square, hollow stem imparts strength to the joints. Of the elephant grass only the soft topmost section is used. As the soft part of the elephant grass develops and grows into a strong, tough stalk, so the joints of the people should become strong and tough. The question may be asked why all the twin parents and the parents of 'special children' are included in the ritual. All of them have had the twin ritual performed for their children and in the process have spent a lot of money and resources. Now they benefit by being treated free of charge and by being feasted. But this does not mean that they form a cult membership of this twin ritual: no evidence could be found for this.

Illustration. 8: Treatment of twin parents (*sirə*)



Feeding of All Participants with ‘Medicated’ Food

The *ŋga ncəp fɛs* removes from his bag a small pile of leaves tied with a fibre strand. The leaves are the same as the ones used in the *sirə*’ ritual mentioned above. Holding the pile of leaves in his left hand and a knife in his right hand, he stands up and makes a ritual statement. He calls the name of the man (usually his father) from whom he has inherited the medicine: ‘N., you have shown me these leaves to make this medicine. If you now say, why I do it and why I eat fowls and drink palm wine — although it was you who have shown me — if you want to spoil it, take this bad one!’ (Facing towards the west he whittles off some bits from the pile of leaves). ‘You eat it and may bad luck follow you. Now, as I’m alive and I do this work, we look towards the sun. May God bless these leaves so that the medicine will be fine.’ He then whittles off some bits again towards the east.

After this ritual statement the specialist is given a small pot. The fowl which he used to treat the *mabi*, the *taabi*, and the twins inside the house and whose legs and wings he broke is killed, cut up, and put in the pot. He adds water and salt. A fire is made and the food cooked over it. He chops up the pile of leaves, puts them in the pot and adds oil. When the meat is done, the *taabi* brings out the food, which has been prepared for all the people present. The specialist pours the content of his pot into the large pot containing cooked meat (usually a goat) and vegetables and mixes everything well. The food is then shared out to the different groups, starting with the members of the *ŋwantap* society. Each group is also given a basin of *fufu* (loaves of mashed cocoyams) and a ‘jug’ of palm wine. When the specialist gives the palm wine to the members of the *ŋwantap* society, he tells them to ‘do their own thing’. They will make a ritual statement threatening any witch who should dare to harm the twins, with the sanctions which *ŋwantap* inflicts on such transgressions. The medicated food is eaten by everybody present. I have not been able to elicit the symbolic properties of the plants used in the food except that the leaves of the hardwood trees should make the people as strong and tough as the trees themselves. But it seems clear that the plants are used for their ‘magical’ rather than any medicinal properties.

Omen-taking Ritual (*mbu*)

When everybody has eaten, the ritual specialist goes to the centre of the yard. There he digs a hole (*mbu*) in the ground and pours water in it. Addressing *ŋgam* (divination), he says, ‘This medicine, which I have come to perform, is it successful? Have the people who are assembled here come with good heart? Tell me!’ Then he dips his finger into a small container with palm oil and lets

one drop of oil fall on the surface of the water. If the drop stays in one place without dispersing, it is a good omen. Next he takes an ant called *mangas* and puts it on top of the drop of oil. If the ant stays there without running away, it is a further good sign. The specialist calls those nearby to come and see for themselves that the ritual has been a success. To finish the omen-taking he tells the twin mother to cover the hole with soil. Nobody, not even the ritual specialist, is allowed to watch her doing it. All people cover or avert their eyes till the *mabi* announces that she has finished. To see the *mabi* cover the hole is believed to bring bad luck. Hunters especially are very vulnerable. Their traps would stay empty and their spears or guns miss their aim.

The Twin Mother's Song

After this the specialist tells the women, led by the twin mothers, to sing the twin mother's song. This is not a twin praise-song as we find, for example, in Bangoua (Pradelles de Latour 1991: 57). The women dance in a circle while singing a melancholy song in which they tell of the twin mother's plight.

Bwen am bε-o, Taku-o (Gonfes-o), bwen am-o, ha-yi-ya;

Bwen am bε-o, Bibi-o (Kuku-o), bwen am-o, ha-yi-ya;

Bwen am-o, mə gi fəfə, mə ko mbei, fa bwen am-o, ha-yi-ya.

Waŋ mu hum-o, ŋgebe-o, waŋ mu hum-o, ha-yi-ya.

Waŋ mu hum, mə ni nda kati-o, waŋ mu hum, ha-yi-ya.

Ha-ha, ha-yi-ya; ha-ha, ha-yi-ya, ha-ha, ha-ha.

My two children, Taku (Gonfes), my children, ha-yi-ya.

My two children, Bibi (Kuku), my children, ha-yi-ya.

My children, I go softly, I catch insects to give to my children, ha-yi-ya.

Cry for me while I'm still alive, sisters, cry for me while I'm still alive, ha-yi-ya.

Cry for me while I'm still alive (as) I enter the house of trouble, cry for me while I'm still alive, ha-yi-ya.

Ha-ha, ha-yi-ya, ha-ha, ha-yi-ya, ha-ha, ha-ha.

The *ŋga ncəp fəs* has to watch his time. Between two and three o'clock in the afternoon he has to stop. Anything, which he has not yet done by then, he must postpone to the following morning. Pa Njikwi of Mfe told me, 'I have to stop when the sun goes down. One does not make medicine at night.'

Reintroducing the *mabi* to Farmwork (*lo'se ηgoη, gwese fak*)

After the birth of a child the mother is not allowed to go to the farm. This prohibition applies to twin mothers as well as to mothers of single children. For twin mothers it is the *ηga ncəp fes* who will perform the ritual called *lo'se ηgoη (gwese fak)* after which she may resume farmwork. Some food, a hoe, and a mat are put in the twin mother's carrying basket. Then the ritual specialist leads her to the nearest farm, usually just behind the compound. Before reaching the farm they stop. The specialist takes his drinking cup, fills it with palm wine, and places the horn of a red duiker (*ndo tsə*) in it. He then pours the palm wine in three lines across the footpath saying, '*Lo'se ya? Lo'se ηgoη.*' (Lock what? Lock the ground?) The *mabi* repeats the action. In Lower Yamba, the *mabi* is given a spear when she is taken to the farm. On the way she is instructed to trace three lines across the footpath with the spear saying, '*Sa'se ya? Sa'se ηges.*' (Scatter what? Scatter driver ants). Having done this, the party continues. When they arrive at the farm, the specialist takes the basket off the mother's back and they eat the food they have brought along. Next he places a plant called *ηghu dzoη* on the ground and three times sprays palm wine over it. Then both of them holding the hoe take it up and swiftly bring it down cutting the *ηghu dzoη* plant in two. If the blade of the hoe cuts clean through the plant it is a good omen.

There are several points of interest here. First of all, *ηgoη* (ground) is short for *nwi ηgoη*, the 'god of the earth'. The 'god of the earth' is the 'evil god', as opposed to *nwi lak*, the 'god of the settlement' who is the 'good god'. In the ritual *lo'se ηgoη* the specialist 'locks' the paths from the farm to the compound so that the 'evil god' may not pass and harm the twins. Secondly, the driver ants (*ηges*), mentioned in the ritual statement of Lower Yamba, are synonymous with the 'evil god'. Informants told me that if *lo'se ηgoη* is not made and the mother would go to the farm and, when hoeing, cut an earthworm the twins would be harmed. They would cry continuously as if bitten by driver ants. By tracing three lines across the footpath with palm wine or with the spear the *mabi* symbolically 'locks' it against the 'evil god'. Finally, in order to cut the earth with impunity, the ritual specialist has to help the mother to make the first cut. With *lo'se ηgoη* ends the twin ritual. The ritual specialist will take back the twin pot (*kηη fes*) which has been in *mabi*'s keeping. He will also be paid his fee (*taηse bum*).

There is one final point. It will have been noticed that no mention was made of the so-called 'peace plant' *ηkəη (Dracaena spp.)* in the twin ritual described above. This is surprising since its connection with twins has been widely reported in other Grassfields chiefdoms. The simple reason is that

ηkəη did not feature in the twin rites I observed in Mfe. However, on 18 November 1997, I witnessed a twin ritual in Bom where the *ηkəη* plant was used. I have also seen the *ηkəη* plant in two twin compounds in Ngang, a subchiefdom of Rom, but the ritual specialist who was called in to perform the ritual there was a man from Wimum area and not a Yamba man.

Additional Exegesis of the Symbolism of the Yamba Twin Ritual

Having described the different episodes of the Yamba twin ritual and having given the interpretations offered by specialists, twin parents, and laymen, we may now ask the question whether the beliefs and notions about twinship consciously expressed by the Yamba are borne out by the symbolism of the ritual.

It is true that some beliefs are clearly addressed in the ritual. For example, we are told that twins are born with ‘two eyes’ (*lis baa*). It is one of the first tasks of the ritual specialist to ‘cover’ the twins, to lock their second sight. Again, we are told that twins are given to rivalry. According to one informant the ritual is performed to ‘bring the twins together in unity’. Several ritual actions and symbols deal with the theme of rivalry. The twins are made to ‘drink’ palm wine from the *tsə* horn. Drinking from one cup is part of the rite of reconciliation. The initial gifts of two spears, two calabashes of palm wine, two dishes of food given to the specialist on his arrival point in the same direction. Further evidence can be seen in the twin pot (*kuηfes*) and the herbs of which the specialist has to cut two of each kind. The twins are treated indentially to eliminate rivalry between them.

On the other hand, there are also discrepancies between what Yamba say about twins and their behaviour towards them, and the symbolic actions one can observe in the ritual. Firstly, we are given the impression that the birth of twins is an occasion for rejoicing and celebration, that all is joy and happiness. The drums are brought out and people dance any dance known to Yamba and sing the songs associated with them. This is most unusual and one suspects that there is more to it. These dances, which all have their proper season when they are performed, are sung at the birth of twins, out of season. It is tempting to suggest that this reflects a not consciously expressed notion that the birth of twins is something out of the ordinary, an event not following the familiar pattern of the known course of events.

Secondly, we are told that twins are respected and honoured like kings and even ‘gods’. They are considered a gift from God (*fa nwi*). Yet we find no trace of this in the symbolism of the ritual. Instead, twins are seen to be fragile and weak and have to be surrounded by all kinds of protection. Thus, they

are given strengthening medicine internally and externally so that they may get strong. In addition we find different kinds of apotropaic devices which are set up to protect the twins. All this underlines the notion that twins are vulnerable and have to be protected. From children who are like kings and even like 'gods' one would expect just the opposite.

At first sight, the erection of the fence seems to serve the same purpose. We are told that the fence is put up to protect the twins from evil outside influences and to keep them secure within. But this interpretation fails to take into account the three stages connected with the fence: (1) the erection of the fence. The twins are separated from the rest of the family; (2) a period of seclusion. The twins are confined to the enclosed area for a period of up to one year; (3) the breaking down of the fence. In short, we have here the three stages of a rite of passage, viz. separation, seclusion, and integration. If this is true, then the question may be asked: a rite of passage from which status to which status? From a wider context I would propose the following: the birth of twins, their first coming into the world, is seen as something out of the ordinary, even a contradiction. Their social status is confused. Two human beings are born of the same womb at the same time. The erection of the fence secluding the mother and the twins suggests that the twins must undergo another 'period of gestation', this time strengthened by the medicine given them by the ritual specialist. The breaking down of the fence (*sa'fε*) is the 'second coming into the world'. The names of the twins which the ritual specialist has given them privately at the rite of *fo'mven* are now publicly announced. The twins have become new social personalities. They have passed from a confused status at their 'first coming in to the world' to a new acceptable status at their 'second coming into the world'.

Lastly, there is still the treatment of twin parents and parents of breech deliveries and of children who cut the upper teeth first. Why are they included in the final episode of the twin ritual? Informants state that these parents join in order to get strength from the treatment. What is not made explicit is that according to Yamba belief the birth of twins has weakened the parents. This loss of strength has to be restored by the breaking of the *maŋkɔr* and *susuŋ* plants and the eating of 'medicated' food. This theme of being weakened by the birth of children we find also in another context. After the delivery of several children the husband has to call a ritual specialist to perform the rite *ntyε mven* (spittle of child) on the mother and her parents (see Chapter Two), a rite which is believed to restore their strength.⁴³

Conclusion

One of the aims in this chapter has been to come to a deeper understanding of Yamba perception of twinship. I have tried to do this in three stages. Firstly, I related the consciously expressed beliefs of the Yamba about twins and their behaviour towards them. Secondly, describing the different episodes of the Yamba twin ritual, I have given the interpretations offered by specialists and laymen, which resulted in further insights. Finally, by examining the twin ritual from an outsider's point of view and by placing it in a wider context I arrived at some concepts of which Yamba seem to be unaware but which are nevertheless present.

By way of summary we can say that Yamba notions of twins are ambivalent. On the one hand twins are considered like kings and even 'gods' and therefore feared and respected. On the other hand the ritual portrays them as weak and fragile. Twins have to be protected from all angles and strengthened with powerful medicine. Again, the birth of twins is an occasion for celebration and expression of happiness. Yet this first impression that everything is joy and happiness belies people's behaviour towards them. Beneath this outward show of happiness there is an attitude of caution and even fear. 'Twins are very "dangerous" children'. Twins are considered as gifts of God, but their first 'coming into the world' leaves the Yamba confused and uncertain about their social status. Twins have to undergo a rite of passage before they are accepted as social personalities in the community. It is the unusualness of the event of their birth, an event out of the ordinary that makes Yamba see twins in an ambivalent light.

43. It is interesting in this connection to note that one ritual specialist, who is a Christian, when making the ritual statement before the treatment of the twin parents and the parents of 'special children' with the bundle of herbs and the cock prays that 'God may put his own spittle into the "leaves" so that the medicine may be effective.'