

Twinsip among Babukusu of Bungoma District, Western Kenya: A Misfortune or Blessing?

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Introduction

Existing colonial ethnographies indicate that at the time of contact, many societies in sub-Saharan Africa regarded the bearing of twins as a misfortune while others regarded it as a blessing. Some of these societies would put to death one or both twins while others did not carry out such acts of infanticide at the time of the birth of twins. Turner (1969) states that the bearing of twins among the matrilineal Ndembu of Zambia constituted a paradox, at least, in the minds of Westerners because such a birth in and by itself conflicted with 'preconceived notions of what is reasonable or possible' (Turner 1969:44). This paradox, according to Turner, is manifest in three salient ways. First, twins represent an exuberance of fertility that may result in physiological and economic stress. Second, the birth of twins maybe a source of classificatory embarrassment in societies where 'kinship is structurally significant, and provides a frame for corporate relationships and social status' (p.45). Third, twins complicate the significance of sibling order because 'twinsip represents the paradoxes that what is physically double is structurally single and what is mystically one is empirically two' (p.45)

The Thonga of Southern Africa believe that there is an intimate relationship between natural and cosmic heat as well as fire and birth (Heusch 1987). These people also believe that excessive heat, which leads to drought and death, is significantly related to the birth of twins. According to these people, then, a one child birth is normally a result of moderate and proper firing. Symbolically, this type of birth is mostly associated with, and provides, proper order in the Thonga

social life and universe. For the Thonga, this model of birth, therefore, represents good health, blessings, rainfall, fertility and prosperity. On the other hand, twins are thought to be an outcome of overheating or 'excessive intrauterine firing placed under the sign of heavenly fire' (Heusch 1987:32). This intimates that in the belief system of the Thonga, twins bring droughts, malignant ailments, misfortunes and death. In fact, twins are ritually dangerous not only to themselves but also to the entire cosmos. However, this dangerous impurity can be more or less ameliorated by taking certain ritual precautions. According to Heusch (1987), one such precaution in the past was to kill the frail twin.

In Bukusu society, the concept of twinsip has not been given its due erudite attention by social scientists. The only exception is Wagner (1970) was only concerned with the concept of twinsip as an aspect of magico-religious beliefs. This paper is, therefore, concerned with an analysis of the social and structural status of twins in Bukusu society. It strives to describe and analyse cultural beliefs relating to the issue of twins among Babukusu. In light of the conclusions of Turner, the three questions below are addressed in this paper: Are twins a source of classificatory embarrassment? Do twins complicate the significance of sibling order? Lastly, are twins a misfortune or blessing in Bukusu society? It is hoped that answers to the above questions will help us to fully apprehend the social and structural status of twins among Babakusu. This paper will specifically focus on those rituals that are performed for the twins at the time of their birth, circumcision and death.

The Social Setting

Babukusu are a subgroup of the larger Abaluyia supracommunity who today inhabit the Western Province of Kenya. Babukusu have a distinct language, *Lubukusu* which is related to the other dialectical branches that the Abaluyia speak. The dialects do not, however, form variants of a single language cluster because in each of the Luyia subgroups there exist many internal and unique speech nuances which constitute highly distinct dialectical idioms (Heine and Mohlig 1978; Were 1967a, 1967b). In each of these subgroups there exist certain specific ritual observations, cultural beliefs, economic activities and social organisations which tend to separate these Luyia groups into discrete socio-cultural and economic entities. Babukusu are also closely allied to Bagisu (Bamasaba) who inhabit the present eastern and north-eastern regions of the neighbouring Republic of Uganda. In fact, the language, myths, traditions, beliefs and history of Babukusu are more akin to those of Bagisu than to those of other Luyia subgroups.

A majority of Babukusu today grow subsistence crops such as hybrid maize, finger millet, sorghum, bananas, cassava as well as a variety of grams and vegetables. All these subsistence crops play a very vital part in the rites of the twins as they provide vegetable relishes, food and beer which are used to feed and entertain visitors who come to witness these rites. The cash crops which are grown consist of maize, coffee, tobacco, sunflower, cotton and sugarcane. These cash crops provide the much needed incomes which are, in turn, boosted further by wage labour and various off-farm activities. The money is a necessity if the rites have to succeed. This community keeps cattle and goats which are similarly important during the rites as these are slaughtered to provide milk, chyme, blood and meat. All these elements are essential and they stand for different symbolic fields in the rites of the twins (Turner 1967, 1969).

The Birth of Twins

Birth is the first significant rite of passage for all individuals in Bukusu society. It stands for the initial step which an individual, unknowingly, takes towards achieving, later on in life, a social and physical self and identity. It is, therefore, a great occasion which interweaves and brings together diverse socio-cultural relationships including those of the kins, affines, friends and neighbours, and how these become directed at an infant in a joyous celebration of a new life. Lastly, it is a time for people to individually and collectively, construct, reproduce and reinforce their own socio-cultural relationships with others. These are the relationships which give meanings and significations to the socio-cultural and economic world in which Babukusu understand and live.

The celebrations for the birth of twins are even more tumultuous. They are full of hustle and bustle for one and all alike. This is because twins are believed to be a great and special gift from *Wele Khakaba*, the Supreme Being of Babukusu. Twins bring fertility, prosperity, well-being, good luck and strength to their home, lineage, clan as well as the entire Bukusu society. Most significantly, twins elevate and reinforce the status of their mother in the eyes of her relatives-in-law (Wagner 1970). However, the celebrations for the birth of twins do not take place immediately after birth. This is because there are culturally specified ritual precautions and ceremonies which have to be undertaken first. These ritual cautions are usually divided into discrete phases which are discussed below in the way Babukusu themselves arrange, perform and apprehend them.

The first phase take place the same day the twins are born. It entails the application of ritual herbs (*kamanyasi*) on the breasts of the mother of the twins. This is primarily because in the Bukusu belief system milk from such breasts is ritually harmful to the infant twins. Therefore, they may

not start suckling until they have been ritually and properly protected. The herbs also have the symbolic efficacy of warding off evil powers, deeds and thoughts from envious people as well as malevolent spirits, *bisieno* (sing. *sisieno*), who may be ill-disposed against the twins and their parents. After the herbs are applied the mother may then start suckling the twins. Traditionally, she is required to give the right breast to the first born twin and left breast to the second-born.

The ritual herbs which are applied on the breasts of the mother of twins are usually prepared by a traditional specialist known as *omubiti*. For the medicine to be efficacious, *omubiti* comes very early in the morning before sunrise. This is a time when Babukusu believe that the 'country is clean' (Wagner 1991:51). It is also a time when beneficent ancestors, *bakuka* (sing. *omukuka*), endow human beings with their supernatural blessings.

In the past, after the application of this medicine, a special drum was beaten. This drum usually conveyed two important messages. The first was to inform, and at the same time remind, other people that when they come visiting they should have a present for each twin. This is because no visitor was supposed to see the twins until presenting gifts for each one. The second message was a warning. This warning was a necessity because among Babukusu a person needs to take particular ritual precautions before seeing the twins for the first time. Today, this special drum is no longer beaten but the ritual precautions concerning seeing the twins for the first time still apply. Specifically, before being allowed to see new-born twins, a person is decorated. To adorn, a maternal or paternal relative of the twins dips any object shaped like a chicken leg (Wagner 1970) into finger-millet flour mixed with water and proceeds to stamp various parts of the visitor's body. Informants clarified that the other common objects which may be used in stamping the adornment marks include the stalk of a pumpkin vegetable

(*Cucurbita moschata*), *kamachungwali* (*Ampelocissus africana*), *libono* and *makoe* (*bidens pilosa*). The parts of the body usually covered by the circular impressions are the forehead, temple, cheeks, breasts, back of the neck, hands and legs. It is believed that if this adornment is not carried out a person would be 'burned'. This 'burning' is construed to be brought about by a mystical heat known as *bukhwana* which is also ritually dangerous to the twins themselves, their parents and other people. Babukusu believe that *bukhwana* attacks people by making their eyelashes fall off as well as causing other eye complications such as bleary eyes. The entire skin of the victim is said to develop alternate white and yellow patches as if a person had been scorched by intense fire. In some other victims, the mystical burning of *bukhwana* manifests itself as a transformation of the skin which comes to resemble that of an overripe banana (Wagner 1970). The mystical heat of *bukhwana* is not simply limited to the twins. Specifically, any object which has come into direct contact with the twins is infected with this same dangerous mystical heat. Therefore, things such as rubbish, dirt and even faeces of the twins and that of their parents are to be avoided because they are as equally polluting and dangerous to other people as the twins themselves are. In fact, according to Wagner (1970), it can take up to six years before the mystical heat of *bukhwana* loses its polluting and burning powers.

After the birth of twins special messages are sent to the relatives of the wife and husband. Traditionally, the messenger to the relatives of the wife is required to carry a hoe. When this person reaches the natal home of the wife he or she drops the hoe on the courtyard and runs back. He or she should not exchange greetings with anybody at this homestead. A spear is also sent to the brother of the husband as a symbol of the information about the twins. Traditional beer is then brewed at the home of the brother who received the spear and at the natal home of the wife.

The second phase is the confinement period. Although, it is regarded as the second phase in this paper, in reality the confinement of the twins and their parents begins the moment the twins are born. During this confinement period, the house is not swept. The dirt, rubbish and ashes from the hearth are not thrown out of the confinement house but are instead all piled up in a corner of the house; or if they are swept then they are taken out at night and buried in a secluded place where people do not frequently pass. This is because if such dirt was thrown out and a person unwittingly stepped on it, the mystical heat of *bukhwana* would 'burn their eyes' (Wagner 1970). The twins and their parents remain confined until a close relative brings a present, such as a bullock. Other gifts which can be brought along include grain, flour and beer. Informants clarified that the issue of sending gifts upon the birth of twins is normally characterized by intense competition between the kin and affines who always compete to out-do each other. It becomes a matter of great shame to the group of relatives who do not bring adequate gifts. This is because the relatives are supposed to show equal joy at the birth of the twins. According to Wagner (1970:326):

If the relatives of the father of the twins have sent a bull and those of the mother have not, the mother will lean on her husband's shoulder while they are being led out. However, if the husband's relatives are poor and cannot afford a bull, the wife goes in front and the husband follows leaning on her back.

The length of the confinement period depends on whether they are girl-or boy-twins, although, one informant stated that it could be longer if relatives are poor and do not provide a bullock immediately after the birth of the twins. For girl-twins the period is usually two days while for boy-twins it is three days. At the end of the culturally specified confinement period, the brother of the father of the twins (or any elderly paternal relative) is supposed to conduct a ceremony known as

'opening the twins' (*khukhwikula bakhwana*). In this ceremony, a sheep is strangled in front of the confinement house. After skinning, some chyme (*buse*) is sprinkled in the homestead as an offering to the ancestors, after which the brother of the father of the twins forces the door of the confinement house open. Once inside, he catches the father of the twins by force and puts the moist sheep-skin over his body. Next, a garment made from a creeping plant, *libombwe*, is put on the body of the mother of the twins by one of her relatives. The couple are then led outside but the twins still remain secluded in the house. On the courtyard, a piece of meat from the stomach of the sheep is cut and tied on the right wrists of the mother and father of the twins. Later on at night a piece of meat is also tied on the right wrists of the twins. Another piece of meat is placed on top of the heads of the twins and it is not supposed to be removed until the next morning. Lastly, the same creeping plant, *libombwe*, is tied round the necks of the twins. According to Wagner (1970), the skin wristlet is put on the right hand to signify good luck and it is usually worn for four days.

The rest of the meat is roasted in order to feed the visitors who come to witness this ceremony. The mother of the twins is the first one to be offered the roast meat. According to Wagner (1970:329), she must pick the piece of meat 'from a tray with her mouth without touching it.' The rest of the people can then eat the meat and after which they start drinking, singing and dancing. This marks the third phase of these rituals.

Dancing the Twinship (*Khukhina Bukhwana*)

This dance is the central feature of all the phases concerning the birth of twins in Bukusu society. For the parents of the twins it marks an end to the seclusion period. After the dance they can again resume their respective roles and responsibilities in the homestead and the entire community. For the kin, affines, friends and neighbours it is a time

for eating, drinking, dancing and flirting. The dance takes place all night and can continue into the next day. The father and mother of the twins as well as their respective in-laws, children, men and women participate. All avoidance in-law rules, embarrassments and shyness are suspended during the duration of the dance. In the traditional past, and up until recently, all the dancers were usually stark naked but custom tabooed any males to have an erection. In fact, a man who nurtures and sustains an erection during this sexual creativity and erotic performances is fined one bull. An early colonial source described this dance as 'a very peculiar sort of dance where sexual songs are sung and sexual acts are imitated by the dancers' (Kenya National Archives, File No. DC/EN/3/3/2, 1954-56).

Wagner (1970: 326-27) provides the following description of this dance.

Most of the songs sung on this occasion are said to have their own tunes, but the texts are improvised by the song leaders, who are mostly women. Standing in the middle of the dancers, they sing the leading words, often in a high-pitched and shrill voice, at the same time moving their limbs and bodies to the rhythm of the dance... As the feast gets into full swing, several groups dance at once till eventually the whole yard is crowded with dancers. Occasionally, a man and a woman dance together, acting the movements of copulation, or two, the one acting as husband and the other, wife. While single couples perform these dances, the onlookers interrupt them by shouting obscene jokes at them which are accompanied by bursts of laughter.

A number of significant and central themes clearly emerge from this dance. This is the symbolic equation of human sexuality with plant fertility (Barley 1983, 1989). Specifically, it is culturally constructed that human sexuality is finely attuned to the pulses of the staple crops of Babukusu. However, this attunement is always under constant threat from ritual pollutions in society. The most common and dangerous pollutions are those ones which derive from the menses, copulation and pregnancies. And, unless ritual precautions are taken as well as prohibitions observed, the harmony between human beings, plants, and indeed, the

entire cosmos is upset. As observed by Barley (1986:99) 'precautions not taken, prohibitions ignored all have their effects on the community'. Therefore, a menstruating woman may not step into finger-millet, sorghum and vegetable fields. Also, after planting finger-millet a couple should not have sexual intercourse that same night. This is because the smell of copulation as well as the heat emanating from the menstrual flow have the power of 'burning' (*khukhwosia*) plants (cf. Richards 1956; Wagner 1970; Heusch 1987; Douglas 1988; Barley 1986).

On the other hand, it is believed that the life cycles of finger-millet and sorghum can also affect the fertility and procreative powers of women. Mature finger-millet and sorghum are construed to be particularly dangerous to menarche women. In the agrarian past, therefore, such women could only assist the men in carrying the produce home for storage. Harvesting the two crops could only endanger their fertility (Nangendo 1994a)

The theme of pairing off human sexuality and plant fertility is also vividly invoked and culturally elaborated on in the actual harvests of finger-millet and sorghum crops. As I have argued elsewhere (Nangendo 1994b), in the past Babukusu used to associate fields of finger-millet and sorghum with a pregnant woman. It was always hoped and held that such a pregnancy should climax in the birth of twins. And if such a birth occurred it became a time of rejoicing; a time for drinking, singing, dancing and flirting. For the parents, the twins represented fertility, prosperity, well-being and status-enhancement. A real good harvest of finger-millet and sorghum was similarly associated with the same things. The two crops provided Babukusu with both food and beer which were the most essential elements in the socio-economic relationships and ritual lives of the people. As such the harvesting of the two crops was always intimately linked to that of the imminent birth of twins. People would, therefore, always dance everyday in the evenings until the two crops

had been harvested from the fields. In fact, it has been reported by an early colonial source that:

They have harvest dances, which seem to be seasons of rejoicing while gathering the grain. They work in daytime and dance by the light of the moon at night. Men, women and children dance about a central orchestra of drums and shields which are beaten in unison to some songs (Kenya National Archives, File No. PC/NZA/1/1. Annual Report, Nyanza Province, 1905-6).

A majority of these harvest dances were also an explicit recreation of copulation. Indeed, they were a complete replicate of the ones done during *khukhina bukhwana*. The men and women who participated in these harvest dances were always stark naked and any male erection was tabooed through a fine of one bull.

The behaviours displayed on this occasion are similar to those performed during the keening of corpses. Some individuals usually perform comical, clownish and, sometimes narcissistic, sexual acts beside a laid out corpse. Symbolically, one can suggest that harvest dances are used to ritually link birth to fertility to finger-millet to illness and, finally, death. The connotation of illness finds its cultural and symbolic expression in the relationship between men, twins and finger-millet. For instance, only male twins and men who have given birth to twins are forbidden from eating the new finger-millet crop until it is completely dry (Wagner 1970). When they eat the first meal from the new finger-millet crop they are expected to make a fertility sacrifice. A sheep or goat is slaughtered and chyme sprinkled in the homestead as well as towards all the four cardinal points. Nearby Kin, friends and neighbours are then invited to consume the food and meat. After this, it is taken that male twins and men who have given birth to twins can also safely consume the food. An infringement of these ritual prohibitions and precautions are believed to make male twins and/or their fathers sick.

After two to three months another ceremony allowing the twins to come out of their parent's

house takes place at the home of the wife's parents. On this occasion people who come to the ceremony again bring many gifts to the twins. The twins can now be taken out but their hair cannot be shaved until a special ceremony of shaving the hair is performed later on.

The Naming System

Wembah-Rashid (1992-93) observes that among the Wamakua of Tanzania, each child is given either an indigenous name, a foreign one and/or a combination of both. It is culturally constructed that names are an important reflection of the passage of an individual through social time until the final attainment of humanity and personhood (Beidelman 1986). In other words, names are not simply valueless cultural tags; they invoke and encode specific meanings in a particular social context. Among Babukusu, the naming system is, broadly speaking, similar to that of the Wamakua. Each individual in Bukusu society has one, two or more local names as well as foreign ones. Except for the case of twins which is discussed below, a local name in Bukusu culture is given to a child three days after birth. This name can be that of an ancestor and this is what constitutes a lineage or clan name. Usually, a female child is given the name of a female ancestor and vice versa. Lastly, the name of a child could be derived from the seasons of the year. These seasons are themselves usually named on the basis of the rains. For instance, a male child born during the long rains (*Kumunane*) as well as the short rains (*efula ye lirome*) is called *Wafula* while a girl is named *Nafula*. On the other hand, a female child who is born during the dry season (*simiyu*) is called *Nasimiyu* and a male child is named *Simiyu*.

The above naming system, however, only applies to those children who are not twins because names denoting seasons of the year are never applied to twins. This is because the naming system of the twins as well as four of the children

who are born after the twins is different. In Bukusu society, although twins are considered to be a special, fortunate and worthy gift from the supreme being, they are still also perceived as being 'unusual children' (Bianco 1991). Their names, therefore, and naming system are also unusual and different from single-born children. It is important to note that this naming system of the twins is meant to remove classificatory confusion and at the same time place the twins in a proper order relative to their siblings. Once twins are born they are automatically referred to by a generic term which denotes the concept of twinship, and of course, later on, they may or may not be given a foreign name also. The generic term used when referring, describing and defining a twin is *omukhwana* (plur. *bakhwana*). Literally, this term itself means a pair or two. The elder child of any set of twins is called *Mukhwana* while the younger one is known as *Mulongo*. The first single child who is born immediately after the twins is called *Khisa*; the one born after that is *Khonokha* while the third single child is called *Khamala*. The name given to the fourth single child after the birth of twins is *Nabangi*. These names are given to the twins and their followers irrespective of their sex. If twins should be born again after *Nabangi*, the naming system starts all over again beginning with *Mukhwana* and *Mulongo*.

Taboos about the Birth of Twins

Besides the ritual precautions already mentioned, twins are sometimes viewed as being a curse in some isolated cases. For instance, if a wife gives birth to first-born twins, it is considered to be very bad luck. In the traditional past, such a wife and the twins were normally chased away after the confinement period was over. However, should such twins die from natural causes immediately after birth; the mother was never chased away. This is because it was believed that the curse

which she had brought to the homestead of the husband by giving birth to first-born twins had been annulled with their death. If the wife was not chased away, for one reason or another, then one of the twins was always killed in secret. The twin which was killed was normally the younger twin, *Mulongo*. The reason for killing one of the twins is because of the belief that first-born twins are a symbol of bad luck, and constituted a curse, to their father, and unless one of the twins was killed then the father of the twins himself would die.

Circumcision of Twins

Today, Babukusu only carry out male circumcision rites. However, there is suggestive evidence to show that these people used to excise the clitoris of their women in the past (Nangendo 1994a). The present male circumcision rites usually take place in the month of August of every even year. And, the circumcision of twins differs only in minute details from those of other children. One such difference is that male twins have to be circumcised on the same day, although in normal cases followers should never be circumcised together or the same year. The second difference is that twins are circumcised in the predawn hours after the Morning Star, *Ya sulwe*, has risen in the east.

Culturally, these rites are divided into distinct phases. Phase one is known as *khulanga* (literally, to call or invite). The term *khulanga*, therefore, defines a situation whereby an initiate, *omusinde* (plur. *basinde*), tours neighbouring villages and formally invites (calls) other people to come and witness his circumcision. However, before *bakhwana* can start making these formal invitations two ritual precautions are carried out.

First, the mother of the twins has to prepare ritual beer which should be ready on the circumcision day. This beer is normally prepared under the central pillar, *enjeko*, of the main house in a ritual pot known as *namunwaebili* (Nangendo 1994a). This term literally means 'two mouths'

and, therefore, the pot is a symbol of the fused nature and souls of the twins. After the twins are circumcised this ritual beer is taken by old women who are past their menarche. Each woman is required to come with a special present for each twin which are deposited at the central pillar of the house before partaking of the beer.

Second, the twins have to be adorned before they start inviting relatives. This adornment (*khurona*) is a replica of the one which was subjected to the visitors who came to see the twins for the first time when they were born. The twins are decorated on the face, hands, legs, chest, back, neck and stomach. Lastly, some of the moist finger-millet flour is rubbed all over their hair. In addition, the creeping plant, *libombwe*, is put round the necks of the twins and in cases where the male twin has a twin-sister, she is also adorned in the same manner.

In each homestead visited during the process of *khulanga*, people are required to give a present to each twin. These presents could be honey, maize, beans, sorghum, cassava and finger millet. Other gifts could also include sheep and goats. In the pre-colonial past, according to the account of an 81 year-old female informant, relatives would also spit and smear mucus on the initiate. In addition, the relatives would smear *kamafura* (ghee), *kamamela* (yeast) as well as pour simsim seeds over the bodies of the initiates (cf. Wagner 1970). This gift-giving process is known as *khufua omusinde* (literally, blessing, or to bless, an initiate).

The second phase is known as *khuchukhila* (pouring) and it takes place on the third morning before the actual operation. On this occasion, each twin carries a pot to a nearby river, stream or well. Once the water is fetched, the twin carries the water home and pours it into a larger pot containing 'fried beer' (*kamalwa kamakhalange*).

The third phase is known as *khucha wa khocha* (literally, going to the maternal uncle). It takes place on the eve of the circumcision day. The mother's brother (*khocha*) or mother's father (*kuka*)

slaughters a bullock in celebration of the event. Each twin is then smeared with *buse*, the greenish undigested chyme from the stomach of the bull. The chyme is smeared on the face, chest stomach, hands, legs and hair. Next, a piece of special meat called *luliki* is also liberally smeared with the chyme. It is then cut into two parts, one representing each twin, and then put round the necks of the twins. If one of the twins is a girl, she is also smeared with the chyme, sometimes cowdung is used, in the same manner as the boy twin, however, no meat is put round her neck. If the home is well-off, the girl -twin can be given a goat or its monetary equivalency these days.

Phase four involves nocturnal singing and dancing which lasts until the time of circumcision early next morning in the pre-dawn hours. This nocturnal singing and dancing is called *khuminya*. At four o'clock in the morning, the twins are taken to the river or a swampy place (*sietosi or esitosi*). The time is always earlier than the time normal children are taken to the river. Babukusu believe that a twin should never be circumcised when the sun has risen. At this swampy place, the twins are stripped naked and every part of their bodies, except the eyes and genitals, is smeared (*khulonga*) with mud (*liloba*). On top of their heads, a lump of clay is placed forming a crest and a blade of special stalk known as *kkwaututu* is inserted. During the mud smearing process, *Mukhwana* comes first. Therefore, if the twin-sister is the elder one, she is smeared on her face, arms and feet only. Then, a banana fibre (*llikhora*) or leaf (*lliru*) is tied round her waist to symbolize the male phallus. Later on at home, this banana leaf or fibre is symbolically cut before the real circumcision of the younger twin, who may be a male, takes place. After circumcision, the parents of the twins are required to pay the circumciser (*omukhebi*) a sheep and the head (*kumurwe*) of a cow or bull.

The last phase of these rites is known as *khukhwiyalula* or *khukhwalukha*. It usually takes place four months after the circumcision

operation. During this phase, the mother's brother comes with a spear (*lifumo*), sword (*embalu*) and shield (*engabo*). He hands these weapons to the male twin and gives instructions on how they should be properly used. Next, the father's sister (*senge*) gives a cooking ladle (*kumukango*) and hoe (*embako*) to a girl twin. Similarly, she demonstrates how to use these items as well as advising the girl on how to properly conduct herself in marriage.

In all these circumcision rites sibling order is insisted on and twins are regarded as being sex-neutral. The elder twin, even if it is a girl in an all-male ritual, always comes first.

Death of Twins

Traditional beliefs concerning death and its aftermath in Bukusu society clearly indicate a number of salient issues. First, death is regarded as being inevitable and timeless. It afflicts and affects all people at one time or another. Second, death is taken as a departure for *emakombe*; a place in the netherworld which is principally occupied by beneficent and malevolent ancestors. In fact, Babukusu have a saying: *omundu yuno walotile* (literally, this person has gone back home). This saying clearly expresses the idea of *emakombe* as a 'real', albeit spiritual, world and home where everybody is destined to return after passing. Third, in the netherworld all the ancestors are immortalized and by transcending social reproduction (Foster 1989) they transmigrate and are later reincarnated in their living descendants. One redeeming quality about death, therefore, is that it does not necessarily destroy the tissue of human possibilities and aspirations because Babukusu possess a strong belief in immortality (Malinowski 1939; Onwuanibe 1984). Fourth, although death is the last rite of passage as it signifies a 'going home' to the world beyond it is only the last transition in a long chain of transitions' (Metcalf and Huntington 1991:108). (Onwuanibe 1984),

Nonetheless, in Bukusu society death is associated with a number of negative connotations. For instance, it ruins the last identity of a physical person. It also makes the deceased cease having a social self and identity, that is, it leads to the extinction of the social person (Metcalf and Huntington 1991). According to Goodale (1985), the social activities in life which are classed as human, constructive and productive are directly reflective of the social identity (self) of the person. Lastly, death instills fear in the minds of human beings in regard to their relations with the corpse, afterlife, ancestors, and Supreme Being (Onwuanibe 1984; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). This fear of death and the afterlife makes Babukusu ensure that mortuary rites, especially for deceased twins, are properly carried out. When the death of one of the twins occurs, the remaining twin is quickly taken away to another homestead and can only come back after the burial of the deceased twin is over. The surviving twin should not view and keen over the cadaver of the deceased twin. If that happened he/she would also die immediately.

The body of the deceased twin is laid out in the living room of the main house. As the keening tempo picks up, kin, friends and neighbours who live nearby rush to the homestead. However, news is sent to the kin who live far away. In the evening a sheep or bull is slaughtered and later on the meat is consumed by the visiting kin and other mourners. After burial some of the meat is distributed to kin of different types who have a claim to particular parts of the meat. On the second day (for females) and third day (for males) after death, a grave, *silindwa* (plur. *bilindwa*) is dug. This grave could measure anything between 2 metres long, 4 metres wide and 2 metres deep. The corpse is carried out of the house by male relatives, neighbours and friends. It is taboo for the body to be put down on the ground so that the bearers can rest awhile. When the body is lowered into the grave, it rests on its left side on a layer of grasses known as *sifwamolu* and *nabonga*. The hide of the bull, slaughtered

earlier, is cut into two halves and placed on either side so that the corpse is sandwiched between the two hides (Wagner 1970). A layer of switches from the *kumulaa* tree is piled on top of the cadaver. These sticks are once again covered by the *sifwamolu* and *nabonga* grasses. The grave is then filled with the soil. The mourners disperse to their homes. However, close kin, friends and neighbours of the deceased twin keep vigil near the grave for at least two days for a female twin and three days for a male twin. At the end of such a period the close kin can also disperse.

Conclusion

The major concern of this paper has been the social and structural status of twins in the patrilineal Bukusu society. A number of salient beliefs revolving around the rituals of birth, circumcision and death leads one to the conclusion that twinship is not a misfortune in this society. Twins may rather, justifiably, be described as unusual children (Bianco 1991) because mystically they are one but empirically two (Turner 1969). This mystical nature of the twins instills in the people both joy for their birth as well as fear of the supernatural world. For Babukusu the mystical nature signifies that twins have more special, intimate links with the supernatural world than ordinary people. To communicate this combined feelings of fear and joy to the Supreme Being twins, more so than other people, are shrouded by a network of prohibitions (Barley 1986). The other purpose of the ritual precautions is to extenuate the dangerous mystical heat, *bukhwana*, of the twins. After the stipulated confinement period is over the dance of twinship is carried out. This is a public function which involves men, women, children and, even, the lame and halt. The songs and dance movements on this occasion intimate more than just the hilarious, sometimes narcissistic, copulation acts overtly displayed. The dance brings, and links, together various strands of beliefs and thoughts which give

meaning to the cultural world Babukusu live in. For instance, the dance shows that Babukusu symbolically relate human fertility and procreation to the various cycles of their staple crops.

In Bukusu society, sibling order and kinship network are very significant. Kinship may be conceptualized as a form of daily behaviour which orients relationships and activities. Therefore, the kinship network 'provides a frame for corporate relationships and social status' (Turner 1969:45). On the other hand, kinship terms are used as key labels for defining the status of a particular kin type or for simply acknowledging that a relationship exists between two or more persons (Cattell 1989; McHugh 1989; Nangendo 1994a). Most kinship terms are used to widen 'egos rights and obligation horizontally to a wide spectrum of individuals in Bukusu society. These terms are non-transferable and describe specific and special relationships to ego' (Nangendo 1994a: 119). Therefore, in Bukusu society twins do not constitute confusion in the naming system nor do they dilute the significance of sibling order. This is because Babukusu have developed a culturally unique naming system which is used specifically to situate twins in their proper order in the family and society as a whole. The first-born twin, *Mukhwana*, always takes precedence over the second born twin *Mulongo*; and such twins have precedence over their followers be they single-born children or twins. Babukusu recognize that despite their conjoined nature, *Mukhwana* is always the elder child. This belief applies not only to rituals and activities of life but also to mortuary rites. Therefore, should both twins die together on the same day, for example, the elder twin, even if it is a girl, has to be buried first.

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