

# Twin Rites among the Pygmies of the Congo and their Historical Progress<sup>1</sup>

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## I Introduction

The population of the Republic of the Congo (hereafter Congo) is estimated at around 3,551,000 inhabitants. Geographically, the Congolese population is unevenly distributed over the national territory. Figures show that youth make up about 45% of the population, while women account for the majority at 51%.<sup>2</sup>

The Congolese population includes two distinct groups: the Bantu (the majority) and the Pygmies (the minority). Estimated at roughly 300,000 individuals, the Pygmies are widely considered as the indigenous peoples of the Congo. They represent about 10% of the entire Congolese population and today live mainly in remote forests and grasslands. These are evidently the poorest and most vulnerable communities, which are characterized by, among other things, high infant and maternal mortality rates.<sup>3</sup> Three large groups are dominant among the Pygmy populations, concentrated in Lékoumou, Likouala, Niari, and Sangha departments [four of the Congo's twelve departments (formerly called régions), which are in turn subdivided into districts and communes]. The destruction of their living environment pushed them to settle either in villages or

camp around the large villages, where they mingled with the Bantu populations. Pygmies live in small egalitarian groups and their way of life depends on hunting and gathering. They reproduce quite quickly and give on average 10% of twins per couple. Among the Pygmies the birth of twins has long stood out from many other births due largely to the various religious aspects involved. In a sense, the birth of twins is distinguished from other births by its religiosity, it becomes a nativity. That is the reason why there are evocations about them, including their names, their birth order, sacredness, veneration, but mostly their infanticide, which have implications on their social, demographic, and economic spheres. Infanticide raises not only concerns but primarily a certain curiosity, given the acknowledgement that the human being is always sacred [and inviolable, in any situation and at any stage of his or her development]. But what is the extent and nature of these ritual practices associated with twins? From where do they really derive their mystical character? What impact do these ritual practices have on both the lives of twins and the dynamics of their respective communities? Why are these ritual practices so life-threatening? How do Pygmies really perceive the quintessence of death? What is the

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† For the sake of sound reading, the translator has inserted his own words into the text, indicated by square brackets ([...]).

<sup>1</sup> MASSALA, Ngoma & MAFOUMBOU MOODY, Armand. 2008. « Les rites gémellaires chez les Pygmées du Congo et leur évolution historique ». In *Annales de l'Université Marien Ngouabi et Direction Générale de la Population, Congo-Brazzaville*, sd, pp. 853–871.

<sup>2</sup> Centre National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (CNSEE), in « L'enquête Congolaise auprès des Ménages » (ECOM, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Enquête CAP des peuples autochtones en matière de prévention du VIH/SIDA et leur accès aux services sociaux de base, Brazzaville, novembre 2006.

topicality of these twin rites in Pygmy society? Are these twin rites impervious to the effects of modernization? What is the understanding of the Bantu and those who govern the practice of these twin rituals today?

To address these crucial questions as directly as possible, in addition to our investigation which forced us to negotiate our relative inclusion into the Pygmy environment by participatory integration, we specifically relied on the results from the following three main sources: the survey on the *Rites of Twins in Niari Bongo Foresters* (Master's Thesis, FLSH 2003), the KAP [Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices] Surveys on *Indigenous Peoples in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Access to basic social services* (UNICEF, 2006), and the National Consultation Workshop on “*Improving the quality of life of the Indigenous Peoples of the Congo*” (UNICEF, 2007).

However, we encountered several challenges in conducting our research with individual Pygmy communities. The major challenges include the isolation of the Pygmy villages and their mobility, the lack of monographs about Pygmies, the indeterminacy of the age of Pygmies (approximately 11. 2% of the Pygmy population has a civil status document compared with 81% of the total Congolese population), and the existence of taboos that prevented us from accessing certain sources of information.

Our study will focus first on a brief description of the origins and ecological environment of the Pygmies. Then I will present the twin rites and their consequences on the Pygmy society. Finally, I will highlight the appreciation of these ritual practices by the different social groups.

## II The Origins and Ecological Environment of the Pygmies

The orthodox view advocated by Victor BISSENGUE<sup>4</sup> is that Pygmies are historically direct descendants of the Paleolithic peoples found specifically in the present-day Great Lakes region comprising Rwanda, Burundi,

Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Archeological, ethnographic, and historical evidence shows that all Pygmies of this region descend from the same ancestor whose prototype would be typified by early *Homo sapiens*, a specimen commonly known as OMO I, who himself dates back more than 130,000 years. It is certain, however, that the existence of Pygmies has been evidenced from the most ancient times. For the Egyptians of the Pharaonic period, for example, Pygmies were not considered as legendary creatures, but rather as full-fledged human beings whom they took great care to depict, in many respects, with all their origins and their defining ethnic characteristics.

It is essential to understand, however, that the history of the Pygmies fascinates and confuses both experts and people who are physically quite different from the Pygmies as well as those who only approach the Pygmies out of curiosity in order to verify the validity of many claims extant since time immemorial. Nonetheless, there are those with unquestioning minds who tend to regard Pygmies as imaginary or supernatural beings, animals, dwarves, etc. [This is a completely unfounded perspective]. Others, perhaps captives of the concepts, still go so far as to deny the very existence of Pygmies. Pygmies appear to many observers as a possible indicator of the existence of the Paleolithic Primitive, or the so-called, “missing link,” [a metaphoric concept coined by the British geologist Charles Lyell in 1851 to denote a kind of “gap in evolution” or “*scala naturae*” in Latin]. Whereas Pygmies are human beings endowed with all the capacities that raise humans above the animal kingdom. In fact, the knowledge that Pygmies demonstrate in the fields of biomedicine, zoology, cosmogony, and artefacts, significantly place them among the best experts in their own environment. Long ago, the Pygmies were also leading economic players who in fact played a significant role in trans-Nilotic trade with their neighboring Bantu peoples. Today, Pygmies are encountering new lifestyles that result in various problems pertaining to education, training, work, health, urbanization, and evangelization, which in effect jeopard-

<sup>4</sup> BISSENGUE (V) : Contribution à l'histoire ancienne des Pygmées, disponible sur le site [www.sangonet.com/hist/FischHistoire/Pygm/ContribHAPygm-VB\\_dspeg](http://www.sangonet.com/hist/FischHistoire/Pygm/ContribHAPygm-VB_dspeg).

dize their identity and survival.

Furthermore, it must be reiterated that Pygmies are nomadic peoples who settled in the rainforests of Central Africa. Nevertheless, the Pygmies are reportedly the earliest inhabitants of the Congo, though the country was later affected by a great migration of Bantu who came from the north along the coast and rivers. Before the colonization of the Congo [by the French], the Pygmies and the Bantu reportedly lived together fraternally in a common environment and shared the same ecology, lifestyles, customs, and beliefs. The Pygmies and the Bantu were all bound together by various economic relationships, including barter. The Pygmies often provided the Bantu with forest products in exchange for cloth, kitchen utensils, salt, and soap. However, the direct colonization of the region disrupted the Bantu culture and ways of living, which were lost for a time. Thereafter the Bantu managed to return to their own cultural traditions through a series of initiation rites. The Pygmies are essentially recognized as the repositories of a great deal of knowledge that evidences a rare mastery of the constituent elements of nature and the universe.

The Bantu and the Pygmies currently maintain a kind of master-slave relationship. The Pygmies work in the plantations of the master (Bantu), performing basic labor as a simple productive apparatus. Nevertheless, the emotional attachment between the Bantu and the Pygmies is remarkable but one-sided. In some instances, the Bantu maintain sexual relations with Pygmy women (sometimes even raping them), but the reverse [i.e. a sexual relationship between a Bantu woman and a Pygmy man] is not accepted readily.

Being aware of the evolution of their current situation [in the Congo], the Pygmies [nevertheless] dread more than anything else the negation of their Congolese citizenship and the tendency to infantilize them.

Traditionally, the Pygmies live in small egalitarian groups and their lifestyle is dominated by prehension and hence depends mainly upon hunting and gathering. They are characterized by their mobility over a vast territory and they move from a center of resources to

another when necessary. For Pygmies, the forest thus constitutes the natural environment, which is in fact an ecology compatible with their morals because of their ability to adapt and hide. Equally important, the life of the individual Pygmy is very dependent on the forest from which he or she gets most of its food (wild fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms) and medicinal plants throughout the year. In essence, the climate that largely determines the rhythms of nomadism also regulates the Pygmies' procreative habits. Indeed, the heavy rain season is usually a season with a high birth rate. Almost all Pygmies are born during this season because it is the season which has an abundance of forest fruits, mushrooms, vegetables, meat, and tubers.

The Pygmies are apparently more or less stable during the heavy rain season. This is partly attributable to the performance of initiation rites in this season that ultimately paves the way for the religious ceremonies of the dry season. During the dry season, other types of desires nevertheless appear and motivate Pygmies to make more effort in their daily activities since they find themselves in an outdoor life in which they work with great fortitude. To that end, women and men must be willing to chase elephants, buffaloes, and wild boars in addition to collecting honey.

### III The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Pygmies

Doctor POUTRIN, in his contribution to the study of the Pygmies of Africa (1911–1912), cogently describes them in the following way: “They are dwarfed, with a height of 1.20 m to 1.50 m (...), and a potentially very obvious muscular build (...) gives them a stocky and particularly robust appearance (...). Morphologically, Pygmies are light in color and covered with hair, and their torso is very long.”<sup>5</sup> [Initially, the nomenclature of the name “Pygmy” is derived from the Greek “*Pygmaios*” (Pygme), which means “a cubit in height”]. Pygmies are characterized not only by their small stature, but also by their mobility and light skin tone. They are also distinguished from other communities by

<sup>5</sup> Poutrin (Dr) : Contribution à l'étude des Pygmées d'Afrique, Paris, 1912.

their cultural identity, customs, and traditions.

Pygmies live in hemispherically shaped round huts made of perishable materials, mainly leaves (*frignum*), bark, schooners, creepers (rattans), and clay, arranged in a circle. [The poles are bent so they come together at the top and are then tied and covered with leaves]. This group of shelters is built in a space that can be considered the socio-economic unit that ensures the continued existence of the human species and promotes community activities such as the sharing of meat, honey, and sacred initiations. One observes in these community gatherings a relatively high number of individuals, with an average of about 20 households with a total of about 40 adults. Each individual is linked to the others by a clan and hereditary consanguinity, if not through a contracted alliance. According to Doctor Bienvenu MAKANGA, the life expectancy of the Pygmies is around 30 years.<sup>6</sup>

The Pygmy population [in the Congo] is dominated by modern unemployment (i.e. 33% of boys and 29% of girl [are unemployed]) and remains a farming population (i.e. 36% of boys and 41% of girls [are involved in farming]).

In addition, individual Pygmies are collectively engaged in agricultural work and responsible for the food production, safety, harmony, moral authority, and strength of their [respective forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer] groups. Because of their mobility, Pygmies do not accumulate either property or material goods. Instead, their complex cultural practices and rituals are directly associated with the forest, its respect and sound management.

Pygmies live in small-scale matrilineal groups. Their lineage or clan organization is underpinned by a “totem”, that is, a specific animal that symbolizes virtues such as audacity, bravery, daring, recklessness, dynamism, hard work, ingenuity, mobility, subtlety, and many other predispositions.

As for their appellations, some studies<sup>7</sup> distinctly

referred to the Pygmies as “Bakas” or “Mbendjele” in the north, “Twa” and “Babinga” in the center, and “Babongo” in the south. Today, however, the term “Pygmy” has a pejorative connotation due to its etymology, which reveals its origin from the Greek *pygmaios*, literally meaning “high due bent” or “of small stature”. Pygmies prefer themselves to be called indigenous peoples.

However, the demographic weight of the Pygmies maintains a certain opacity. Indeed, the 1984 *General Census of Population and Housing* counted more than 20,000 Pygmies, or 1.14% of the total Congolese population. Today, however, some people believe that the Pygmies of the Congo represent about 10% (300,000 individuals) of the total Congolese population.<sup>8</sup> The general opacity surrounding their numbers remains an undeniable problem.

The geographical distribution of Pygmies is both diverse and ambivalent. In effect, although they can be found throughout the Congolese territory, the peculiar fact remains that a high concentration of Pygmies is found in the departments of Lekoumou and Niari in the south, and in Sangha in the north.

In the absence of a general census of the Pygmy population, the scarce available quantitative data are for adolescent boys and girls, women of childbearing age, and heads of households. The data outlined in the following Table 1 is based on a sample of 2,000 individuals spread over a range of status and genders.

[As Table 1 below illustrates], the majority of Pygmy households are headed by men (i.e., 89.55% compared to 10.45% for women). Female-headed households exist either because of the lack of men in the family or because women are priestesses. Similarly, adolescent girls (ages 10–18) are in the majority 51.19%, as is the case in the national data. Each camp is made up of 20 households, each with an average of five individuals. Women of childbearing age (ages 15–49) are widely represented (25% of the sample). One can also find here

6 Entretiens avec le Docteur MAKANGA, Médecin épidémiologiste, ayant soigné les Pygmées de la Sangha en 2006.

7 Robert Cornevin, *Histoire des peuples de l’Afrique noire*, Ed. Berger Levrault, Paris 1962.

8 UNICEF, Rapport final UNICEF, donateur du projet d’amélioration des conditions d’accès aux services de base de la minorité pygmée en République du Congo, p. 4, août 2004.

**Table 1. Distribution of Surveyed Populations by Status and Gender**

Target Population \ Gender	Male		Female		Total
	Individuals	Percentage	Individuals	Percentage	
Heads of household	420	89.55	49	10.45	469
Women of childbearing age	–	–	501	100	501
Adolescents	493	48.81	517	51.81	1010

[\* The percentage of female adolescents (51.81) given in the original article is apparently a typing mistake. It should be 51.19%.]

Source: UNICEF, CAP Survey on Indigenous Peoples in HIV/AIDS Prevention and their access to basic social services, November 2006.

**Table 2. Distribution of Adolescents by Matrimonial Status and Gender**

Matrimonial Status \ Gender	Male		Female		Total	
	Individuals	Percentage	Individuals	Percentage	Individuals	Percentage
Single	409	82.96	330	70.21	739	76.74
Married or Free union	68	13.79	117	24.89	185	19.21
Divorced Widowed Separated	2	0.41	13	2.77	15	1.56
Undecided	14	2.84	10	2.13	24	2.49
Total	493	100%	470	100%	963	100%

Source: UNICEF, CAP Survey on Indigenous Peoples in HIV/AIDS Prevention and their access to basic social services, November 2006.

and there some marginalized people who were forced out due to ostracism and excommunicated after transgressing the customary law.

[It must be noted, from the findings outlined in the Table 2 above, that] the marital status of the populations surveyed are characterized by a high proportion of single persons, 83% among men and 70% among women. A non-negligible fringe is married (14% of men and 25% of women). The breakup of unions is rare because marriages are highly regarded as divine in character. However, in the event of a break-up due to the death of the spouse, Pygmies resort to the practice of a levirate union. Moreover, we found that Pygmies who are exclusively monogamous, endogamous, and faithful, yet who have little interaction with other ethnic groups, seem to have a very low rate of seropositivity (0.9% compared to the national average of 5.4%). However, the high prevalence of yaws, leprosy, and tuberculosis in Pygmy foraging society explains the frequent immunological scars. Pygmies can contaminate themselves, but their lifestyle and isolation are protective factors.

The parameters related to fertility [in the Pygmy society] are, on average, close to those observed at a national level. The onset of menstruation occurs between 12 and 13 years of age on average, and sexual intercourse typically begins after 13 years of age. The first birth occurs around the age of 15 and the number of children is about 4 children per household, while it is about 3.6 children among women in childbearing age. The number of desired offspring is between 5 and 6 children on average. The low number of children living in households indicates either early marriages or a high rate of infant mortality, but also the very fact that Pygmies prefer to mate during menstruation. Some teenage girls indicate that they have had sex early because of the need for money to meet their daily needs. In addition, one head of the household aptly reports “having children very early in his youth so that these children become like his brothers or sisters capable of sustaining the household in return for old age.”

Finally, with regard to schooling, 40% of men and 29% of women among the observed adolescents declared themselves as students.

**Table 3. Indicators and Determinants of Fertility**

Indicators Target Population	Age of appearance of the first menstruation	Age of the beginning of sexual intercourse	Age of the birth of first infant	Number of living children	Number of desired offspring
Heads of households	–	–	21.3	4	6
Women in childbearing age	–	–	17	3.6	5.4
Male adolescents	–	13.3	15	2.1	5,7
Female Adolescents	12.8	13.1	15.1	1.9	4.6

Source: UNICEF, CAP Survey on Indigenous Peoples in HIV/AIDS Prevention and their access to basic social services, November 2006.

#### IV The Main Twin Rites and their Impacts on the Lives of Twins and their Communities

##### 1. Objects of Twin Rites and their Usefulness

These are rustic objects, made of small gourds with their original contents. They are decorated with red and white longitudinal paints and are intended for religious practices and to honor the gemelliparous mothers. A list

of the rustic objects is found in Table 4 below.

##### 2. Twin Rites and their Impact on the Lives of Twins and their Communities

Five initiatory rites accompany the birth of a Pygmy twin, namely the so-called *mungala*, *mabeka*, *mitsindila*, *mihunga*, and the medicinal and divinatory arts. The role of these religious practices in twin achievement is outlined in Table 5 below.

**Table 4. Objects of the Twin Rites and their Usefulness**

N	Objects	Use
1	Shellfish of all sizes and various colors from the marine coasts	Pygmy mythology considers these objects to be scales of mermaids or goddesses.
2	Kaolin	Kaolin is indispensable for aesthetic purposes in ordinary make-up. It is also used as a make-up in the sacred rite by the initiating priest involving the twins and the gemelliparous progenitors.
3	A powder derived from the rubbing of two large redwood shavings.	This cellulose is only made by a gemelliparous older woman, who is in menopause and is no longer having sexual relations with men. This is simply because she must be chaste and pure. The type of make-up often determines the rank and status of each gemelliparous older woman, but also eliminates body odor.
4	Two baskets made of sticks, decorated with motifs supposedly inspired and dictated by genius.	They are used to collect the gifts that are brought to the twins, but also as an altar meant to receive future offerings.
5	The rhizome, a plant often found around a spring.	It has a purifying perfume. The plant is deemed important to motherhood as it reduces odors. It is also used to cast out evil spirits.
6	The seeds of a corossol-like fruit	They are thought to embody magical and medicinal virtues.
7	Red cola nuts	They are intimately connected to the life of the twins, which itself is entirely religious. These seeds are used as a flavoring and a building block of healing. At each sunrise, the priest chews the cola nut, combines it with other substances, which he spits first on the head, then on the neck and chest of the children at the level of the sternum before laying them down on a mattress of sour-tasting wild plants. They are said to have special enriching properties.

8	A stool made from a part of a tree trunk and cut and trimmed to four feet	The priest initiators mix all the essential components for the daily massage and care of twins. This mixture is composed of palm oil, spit (taken from the elders, and other issue from the grandfathers and grandmothers of the twins, as well as from the priests initiators), powdered bark, and finally chopped leaves and grains. Their secret is kept by the priest.
9	The tam-tams	They are usually very short in size. They bear specific motifs in the form of a particular handwriting meant to solemnly glorify and praise the twins.
10	The miniature dugout canoe	It is often used to store the bulk of the precious goods belonging to the twins. It is also considered as a potent means of transportation which spirits often use to pay visits to the twins on earth. It is surmised that the tradition of the divine boat dates back to ancient Egypt.

Source: The Twin Rite among the Bongo of Forest Niari, Master's thesis, FLSH, 2003.

**Table 5. Twin Rites and their Impact on the Lives of the Twins and their Communities**

Variant Rites	Content	Objective	Impacts on the Lives of Twins and Communities
<i>Mungala</i> denotes both a deity and an initiation rite	It is a lodge that brings together twins, fathers and mothers, twins and many other members of the community. However, it also signifies an invisible spirit embodied into an initiate possessing supernatural powers which manifest themselves as a rainbow. As such, it takes a form of a fire and a heavenly snake, and to the omnipotent god of the waters who dwells in a spring.	It aims to guarantee the education, initiation and introduction of the twins into their band society. It also allows practitioners to worship, praise, and meet the <i>mungala</i> in order to receive lifelong, essential training from the <i>mungala</i> for the survival of the community.	This rite breaks the bond of consanguinity. It places the twins above the matrimonial relationship and conceals all paternity. The father is made a stranger to his children if he is not himself a twin. During this ritual practice, the twins are initiated into magic, and given the powers of the sirens of the waters, premonitory visions, and the spider's protective powers. It finally helps them to acquire the ability to speak with the spirits that give them absolute power and sovereignty.
<i>Mabeka</i>	It is the set of gods of boldness, cunning, bravery, combativeness, temerity, fidelity, and wisdom.	It is the rite of the knowledge of good and evil through which Pygmies (animists) consider that the ancestors, in the image of God, are invisible spirits who guarantee social order, peace, and prosperity. Its purpose is to forge the character and personality of a man who is supposed to transcend the biological and psychic determinism of human being.	This rite is only open to men who have moved beyond the human condition and who exercise the function of intermediaries between the spirits and the community of the living. Suffice it to note here that only twins, their young brothers and sisters, and the priests may be lawfully initiated. The other (circumcised) members of the community can participate in this cult, but are not required to suffer the hardships of initiations. This ritual practice is strictly reserved to men, and it imposes laws, regulations and requirements for initiates who must scrupulously observe them as a moral and ethical code.
<i>Mitsindila</i>	It is a set of red feathers from the tail of a parrot that the <i>mungala</i> places on the frontal hair of the new-born twins.	It confers a kind of sovereignty and political power on twins who are non-hereditary priests. These red feathers from the tail of a parrot are symbols of mermaids who affirm that these twins are themselves anointed by the gods and are therefore genies incarnate.	It is a rite of consecration that allows the twins to cross time and transcend the physical world in order to assume the status of savior and protector.

<i>Mihuanga</i>	It includes two small emptied gourds.	It is used for the rite of praise and bliss in honor of the gemelliparous mothers.	It is performed at each appearance of the moon and lasts until the twins are weaned.
<i>The medicine or divinatory art</i>	This single art is practiced by herbalists and traditional medical doctors/healers	It is a discrete initiation rite that often takes place between priest initiators, and the male twins. This is partly because twins are highly regarded as supernatural beings who crossed over time and transcended the human condition. Female twins are excluded from this initiation. The effectiveness of twin healers, who are consulted only as a last resort, therefore surpasses that of the ordinary healers.	Twins are initiated into traditional medicine in order to discretely treat themselves alone and to treat members of the community affected by evil spirits. For them, all misfortunes like famine, death, and disease originate from the discontent of the gods, the consternation of the genies of the earth, and the sadness of the ancestors. Equally important, the magical powers of twin sovereigns appear to be a last resort to unveil the origin of evil and hence propose the effective solution. This initiation rite structures the education and training of the divinized twins, starting from pregnancy (or the time they were in the womb of their mother) to their adulthood.

Source: Twin rites among the Bongo of forestry Niari, Master Thesis, FLSH, 2003.

## V The Practice of the Twin Rites and their Historical Evolution

### 1. The Twin Nativity

The Pygmies think that the human being is the highest expression that testifies to the divine generosity and that only gods shape the children in the womb of their mothers. They first believe in the divine order as being the creator of humanity, the universe, and nature. [This leads them to the second and associate idea that] gods set the destiny of their creatures. Equally, the Pygmies think that before coming to this world of the living [through birth], twins first pass through the court of the gods, a place where they receive the premonition of its activities and attributes they will be expected to achieve in this world. The court of the gods also serves as a place there where the gods ultimately set the course of the twins' lives, the duration of their mission, thereby ensuring the paths of their earthly lives. This thought is illustrated by the following maxim: "If God serves you yams in a basket, do not wish to eat the honey in the pot."

#### 1.1. The Premonitory Signs of the Twin Nativity

The cosmology of the pygmies is essentially

mystical, so a dream is the first potent means by which gods, genies and ancestors speak to men [and women] to guide their lives and the daily steps of the living. A Pygmy woman must not neglect any detail of her dreams, especially when she is expecting a child. She must also protect herself from any defilement that may affect the nature of the expected child. Four main premonitory and echographic signs of a twin nativity can be discerned among the Pygmies: (1) When a woman dreams recurrently that she is on fishing trips or expeditions; (2) when she finds herself either in a lakeside life or on the edge of a pond; (3) when she dreams that she is permanently picking up especially the parrot feathers and a species of mushrooms in inappropriate places; and (4) when she finds herself in the presence of parrots and doves around the camp, or in the harvest perimeters. A pregnant Pygmy woman carefully discerns all these crucial signs and hence subjects them to the analysis of the other female priestesses.

The husband, who frequently meets animal couples during his hunting expeditions, scrutinizes it a sign auguring the birth of twins. By receiving these different messages from the gods and later observing properly the required discipline, a single community is therefore thought of as understandably paving the way for the

coming of the twins who are highly regarded as supernatural beings or messengers of the gods.

During pregnancy, a Pygmy woman therefore keeps a supply of water on her doorstep before going to bed. This is intentionally meant to allow the gods to bring the barque with the genies to shore. Heredity is an equally important reality in understanding this phenomenon, since nearly 15% of Pygmy couples have given birth to twins more than twice.

## 1.2. The Nativity of Twins

In Pygmy custom, a single normal childbirth is highly regarded as a sacred event. However, the case of a twin birth is mysteriously experienced [conceptualized and understood]. The parents are subjected to the community ethic of respecting taboos, such as not eating meat lest the newborn be affected by scabies and ringworm. The parents should also refrain from eating animal livers in order to protect newborns from diseases of the spleen. Finally, the parents should not eat the brain or spinal cord of animals in order to protect the babies from ear infections. However, it is difficult to closely assess the degree of prohibition of sexual intercourse in this community, which is well-known for respecting fidelity.

For an ordinary person and observer, there is no distinctive signs between an ordinary birth and a twin birth. The conduct of a [pregnant] woman depends upon the interpretation of the dreams and of other external signs [she experienced to a high degree before giving birth]. She should make sure to not sleep on her belly out of fear of a possible miscarriage.

With regard to the dreams, the gemelliparous women are often assisted by a group of women, who are [qualified and] useful for customary education. Twins are not considered as children whom parents genuinely intend to have in their respective families but rather as beings who come by themselves on a dugout canoe. Pygmies highly regard twins as priests or messengers of the gods whose birth is accompanied by premonitory signs.

A Pygmy woman in labor is immediately taken to the edge of a spring source. This is simply because the spring source is, in this specific context, claimed to be the refuge of the god of water, which is the inspiration of

the twins who must themselves lead his spirit incarnate to humans. When the area is devoid of water, a small pond is improvised for the situation and is intended for the first rite of cutting the umbilical cord. The woman in labor pains is lying her back on fresh banana leaves spread out on the ground by the gemelliparous women. The place is decorated with enclosed fences and rings made of reeds. The birth of twins thus takes place against the backdrop of a welcome song rhythmically sung by the gemelliparous women, who alone are lawfully allowed to attend this double event. This is merely because of the common assumption that, apart from the arrival of the twins or the return of the ancestors, there is [also the notion of] the ultimate exit of the god of the waters.

[The ritual practice requires] gemelliparous mothers to take off all clothing as they form a circle around the selected spring source and take turns by passing the two twins between their legs. This short ritual action symbolizes the cutting of the umbilical cords before the solemn blessing of the beneficent spirits. This blessing shows the community that these children who are given to it, or rather these spirits that are sent to it, come from the gods to serve it [accordingly]. Hence, the twins are regarded as the breath of the gods which not only grants fertility, prosperity, authority, and blessings, but also punishes [whenever it is necessary].

After this first blessing, the head of the gemelliparous mothers deposits the two children in the spring source and later the youngest gemelliparous mother takes them back. This ritual action will be repeated three times if the children are female. In the case of twin boys, the ritual action will instead continue until the newborn twins' crying stops. Meanwhile, the gemelliparous mother is groomed by the other gemelliparous mothers who ritually make her wear a cross-strap made of a creeper plant and its leaves.

[As the ritual action proceeds in the middle of the forest, Pygmies strongly believe that] the god of the waters takes a root, chews it and spits it on the heads of children and their mother, who are then taken to a prepared house, which is surrounded by the dried leaves of a banana tree together with the creeping gourd leaves. The mother and twins remain in this enclosure until the

break becomes complete between the mother and these spirits (i.e. the new born children). This is followed by a period when the new born twins ritually experience a kind of bipedalism. A welcoming ceremony is organized after each stage during which dancing, eating, drinking, and playing take place throughout the night. The next day, the new-born twins join the group of twins at a specifically decided place. It is a kind of altar where the twins ultimately receive their first veneration [as sacred persons]. It is precisely at this moment that the first sacrifice is offered to the gods, including the burning of a sleeping red antelope. On this occasion, members of the community bring donations of all kinds. At the end of this veneration ceremony, these messengers of the gods [or newborn twins] go to neighboring communities to bring the wonderful news [from the invisible world].

In the meantime, the father of the twins goes into the bush to cut down a liana plant having an abundant and portable sap instead of water. The new borns then quench their thirst with this sap.

During the first twin rite, the god of water places a red parrot feather above the foreheads of the two children and lets it stand in their hair, following which, he gives each twin a white bird. The congratulation gifts are simultaneously exchanged between the twins and the mother.

### 1.2.1. Same-Sex Twin Nativity

When same sex twins are born, the mother must formally repent before asking for forgiveness. Such a birth is indeed seen as a source of rivalry and antagonism. These interpretations are however relativized.

The birth of female twins is perceived or interpreted as follows: the one who is born first is regarded as the younger one. She thus guarantees the economic prosperity of the community and brings good luck to the uterine family. While the twin baby girl who comes second is considered as the older sister. She receives the attributes of the birth mother and the goddess of fertility. She therefore guarantees procreation.

However, when male twins are born, their reception in both the family and community is instead less enthusiastic based on the application of the rule of “two bodies with the same nature repel each other.” Given

men are considered as the guarantors of authority, both born male twins are seen [here] as treasures of the opposing powers whose misdeeds create disasters in the Pygmy community. This is why there is a deep-felt need for a special rite to break the spell on the community. [This is simply because] the two male twins are thought to disrupt the pre-established order by embodying significant supernatural and political powers, and hence capable of directing the will of the gods. The choice between one of the two born male twins is nevertheless a real dilemma [among the Pygmies studied].

In some cases, single-sex twins are avidly regarded as strengthening the mystical and providential abilities and as a harbinger of a third child, who is also considered as powerful as the previous two children, even though his whims have no impact on the entire community. However, the third child is believed to be incarnated with a political authority. [It is important to emphasize here that] the case of the same-sex twins is quite rare and less desired by Pygmies to ensure harmony, balance, and order in the community. In the past, the other members of the community excommunicated the biological parents of the same-sex twins if they did not abandon them in this camp.

### 1.2.2. Opposite-Sex Nativity

The Pygmies celebrate [the birth of] the opposite-sex twins as a true glory because it is the most desired case. Indeed, the birth of this pair of male-female twins is regarded as a sign of [socio-religious/spiritual] balance, a source of prosperity, fertility, and community vitality.

[Most interestingly,] the twin boy is highly regarded as being the radiance of the heavenly body whose flickering illuminates the life of the community and reflects the presence of the gods among the living. This twin boy is considered as the brightness of the sun that appears every day, the source of life and of abundance. He particularly symbolizes the benevolence of the providential gods. On the contrary, the twin girl is always called “little girl”. She is particularly regarded as the rain that fertilizes, germinates and nourishes. [Suffice it to say that] rain is always welcome as a blessing, and any attempt to encourage its falling therefore justifies the intimate relationship that this newborn twin girl has

with the gods who sent her to this world.

[There is a view widely prevalent among the Pygmies that] opposite-sex twins hold the welfare of their community in their hands. Due to the fact that opposite-sex twins disrupt the established social order, the community must constantly remain attentive to their desires, wishes, and needs. The prosperity of the community [thus] depends on these opposite-sex twins [and any attempt] to displease them may [naturally] attract the lightning of the gods.

The person who is born just after the twins is intimately linked to them. He [or she] is also considered as anointed by the gods, very powerful, and hence religiously committed to the well-being of the community. It is, however, plain that his [or her] whims have no impact on the community, even though such whims may negatively affect the twins. His [or her] powers are quite independent from those of the twins. He [or she] intervenes under the [following] appropriate circumstances:—When there is a common fear of sclerosing rivalries and antagonisms between the twins sent by the gods in a mono-sex twins, he [or she] understandably exercises his or her political authority. He is also indispensable to cure a sick male twin. The [healing] remedies come from his [or her] dreams.

—In the case of opposite-sex twins, the child who is born just after the twins can only exercise his [or her] power to affect the twin boys. He [or she] can play with the twin boys' moods by narrowing the reach impact of their powers. Considering the threatening [capacity of such a child over the twin boys' powers], the community in turn does not really reveal him [or her] these [embedded] potentialities in order to keep him [or her] ignorant of his [or her] powers, [and] therefore less harmful [in all respects].

## 2. The Rite of Social Integration and its Historical Development

The life cycle of Pygmy twins can be divided into three distinct stages. Childhood is marked by the rite of identification through the imposition of the name; adulthood involves the rite of maturation during which the man is initiated into customary principles and assumes marriage and clan management. Old age finally

ends with the rite of fulfilment during the funeral. The deceased thus passes from the adult to the ancestor and his spirit integrates eternity and remains omnipotent. These rites of integration are privileged moments when the forebears transmit to their descendants the principles of humanity at each stages of the twins' lives: childhood, adulthood, marriage and dowry, and the rite of fulfillment or death.

### 2.1. Childhood

Pygmy humanity is acquired at the cost of multiple difficulties and trials pertaining to the rites of passage. Childhood is served at the end of the [aforementioned] three stages. The adult male stage is a perpetual quest for affirmation, as opposed to female twins who are just waiting for their menstruation to naturally move from the stage of adolescence to that of procreation. The female twin benefits from a rapid integration at the end of the puberty rite, which takes her from the state of a girl to that of a woman through the force-feeding system, whereas the male [twin] needs a much longer educational process.

A newborn twin baby boy must immediately be taken away from his ordinary life and from his mother in order to integrate him into the abode of spirits. In addition to the twin initiation rites, the male twins must pass through the rite of puberty in their early years. They are equally involved in other ritual practices, which confer upon them the attributes of persons belonging to a magical-religious community. First, the twins are weaned from their mother at their age of puberty. They are then taken into a forest of liana plants. There they are whipped with creepers for about three days in order to induce nosebleeds and hence flush out the amniotic fluid (or so-called feminine fluid), which reportedly prevents the normal growth of children and the blossoming of masculinity. On the third day, the priests then reveal to the twins the secret of the sacred tam-tams, which under no circumstances, should they entrust to anyone else on pain of death. This specific initiation ultimately allows twins to break with the mother's loving embrace. The ritual restriction at this stage therefore prevents the mothers from getting close to and talking to the twins of both sexes or even touching them

[Here the author may have mistakenly written twins of both sexes instead of male twins with whom the ritual is concerned directly]. This principle must be observed until the newborn twins are officially recognized as human beings. It is only then that they can approach their mother or any other female.

At the end of this stage, the twins [officially] integrate into their respective communities. This is the second stage whose ritual practice begins with a necessary preliminary phase in which the twins are stripped of all clothing. They are left naked and blindfolded in a terrifying forest, without food or drink. This is precisely the moment of change in social identity: the children find themselves exposed in the forest without father and mother. Only a long detour of transfer of feelings emerges. The child and his/her community form one body. This stage can reportedly last five years.

As soon as the twins acquire the distinctive features of civilization, such as speaking the local language and walking upright, their father using a hen, will then try to find his father-in-law whom he politely asks to sacrifice the animal. After this ritual practice, the father and the mother of the twins can lift the sexual ban they have strictly observed for about five years.

The rites of childhood are essentially adapted to the demands of the environment, and the indispensable need to train people with a wide experience of wildlife for survival in a life dominated by hunting and gathering.

This third stage of childhood ends when the twins are between the ages 13 and 15 years old. The age of 15

marks their integration into the network of social life with the needs, relationships, and obligations that mark adulthood.

## 2.2. Adulthood

Marriage is the culmination of the communion stage between the living and the dead, and eventually those yet to be born. The marriage of twins is an economic and social institution in which men and women exercise complementary functions in the production and acquisition of goods and biological reproduction. Exclusively monogamous, marriage thus confers on women the same rights as men, since a woman is depicted in the Pygmy mythology as the person sent by god to break man's solitude and hence to be the sole partner in his life. The choice of a spouse is discretely made by a gemelliparous mother chosen by other gemelliparous mothers. The selection criteria are set out in the following Table 6.

### *Criteria for Choosing a Spouse*

The different criteria for choosing a spouse are presented in the table 6 below.

Marriage is a [socio-religious] obligation and appears to be a sacrament that contributes to the survival of humanity and the survival of core aspects of their personality and the intrinsic values of their descendants.

The priestess, chosen for the circumstances to look for a suitable spouse (male or female), often goes through all of the surrounding communities along with two servants officially designated by the maternal clan

**Table 6. Criteria for Choosing a Spouse**

Status	Constraints	Duties	Prohibitions
Spouse (Male)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Must have passed the initiation rites successfully.</li> <li>—Must have respect for ritual requirements such as never speaking, touching or seeing his mother or any other woman before the end of the third ordeal.</li> <li>—Must be a good hunter, good warrior and honey-gatherer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Must not be a male twin.</li> <li>—Must never be warned of the move.</li> <li>—Must not be the youngest son of his family.</li> </ul>
Spouse (Female)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Must be a virgin.</li> <li>—Must demonstrate her fecundity.</li> <li>—Must be polite, hardworking, submissive, and obedient.</li> <li>—Must have received ritual sanctification.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>—Must not be a female twin.</li> </ul>

Source: Twin rites among the Bongo of forestry Niari, Master's Thesis, FLSH, 2003.

chief. When the suitable female spouse is found, these two attendants should then involve themselves into the service of her family in order to undertake all kinds of work. This is simply because twins, who are highly regarded as gods, cannot put themselves at the service of an individual member of the community. The arduous tasks that these two servants will undertake are generally regarded as ritual actions and ultimately provide the two servants with a high degree of happiness and inner satisfaction. Any member of the twins' clan community will in turn prefer to initiate some services in honor of their future mother, highly regarded as both "queen" and sovereign. In order to [understandably] undertake such [daunting] tasks, the selected candidates are required to stay in this chosen female spouse's community for about two years. The conduct of these potential spouses for the twins should fulfill the high expectations [of the community] to bring honor to the whole community and hence to the spirits embodied by the twins.

After these performances have been deemed satisfactory, the priestess leads the chosen female spouse to a place of retreat in the middle of the forest, where the chosen female spouse and the male spouse will eventually meet for the first time and spend their first bridal or wedding night next to a group of gemelliparous women posted discreetly behind the surrounding trees to verify and confirm the chastity of the woman and the virility of the man. Participants can only return to their respective communities after observing in the twin woman's body some symptoms of pregnancy such as the deformation of the woman's anatomy and they do not meet each other again [for rituals], but definitely only after the twin woman's delivery.

### ***Marriage and Dowry***

Marriage is definitively sealed after the presentation of the child conceived in the forest during the [ritually] prepared test. The ceremony is preceded by a gruesome fight between the twin man and a brother, cousin or the nephew of the bride. This fight, sometimes bloody, is meant to symbolize the ability of the spouse to defend

his wife and the community in the future. This fight is readily the only public trial that the contender overcomes, and regardless of the outcome of the symbolic fight, the couple is led into a hut prepared for the occasion. The handing-over of the dowry is secretly done at night without the bride and groom's knowledge.

All in all, these ritual actions, despite the harshness of the trials, give twins many powers of a divine and mystical nature. The twins are anointed as true gods, but they paradoxically cause sacrifices, including infanticide which consists in sacrificing the weakest infants, or sometimes the strongest twins among them.

## **VI Infanticide as the Supreme Sacrifice of Twins**

According to Markus Lischer infanticide is the intentional killing of a child, immediately after birth.<sup>9</sup> The term not only includes deaths for the sake of sacrifice, but also involuntary infanticide frequently related to the circumstances of the birth.

Dr. Koen Vanormelinger, Representative of UNICEF Congo, aptly asserts that if the child and teen mortality rate is about 11.7% in the Congo-Brazzaville, the one of the Pygmies would probably exceed 25.0%. This high mortality rate is mainly caused by conditions of poor hygiene, the fatal neglect or lack of care after childbirth, and of course infanticide attributes to twin rituals (approximately 10.2%). Several possible cultural, economic, and social reasons can explain such an infanticide [in the Pygmy society].<sup>10</sup>

Culturally, Pygmy twins are, from their birth, subject to the rituals of childhood which include whipping them to get the amniotic fluid out. About 1% of the twins succumb to this ordeal. Likewise, in the case of male mono-sex twins, [Pygmies strongly believe that] the presence of two equal forces disrupts the established order of the community. Hence, it requires the sacrifice of the weakest male twin, who is often abandoned in the forest, where he is either exposed to bad weather or to wild animals without any prenatal care. (Approximately

<sup>9</sup> Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Résultats de nos entretiens avec les notables Pygmées.

5.1% of all twin deaths [over the past years have been recorded in this category]).

Economically, [it happens that] a gemelliparous mother, who does not get maternity leave, must immediately involve herself in economic activities [for the sake of the family]. In so doing, she must sacrifice the weakest of the twins and keep the most vigorous one. This is simply because walking in the forest requires that a woman be unencumbered and having only one arm free therefore limits her picking and hunting abilities (about 2.2% of all twin deaths [have to date been recorded in this category]).

On the social level, sacrifice is regarded as part of the reproductive system of Pygmies, so that sometimes the strongest of the twins may be sacrificed out of a mutual agreement between the father and uncle, especially when it is a question of repaying mystical compensatory and reparative debts [towards ancestors]. In a similar way, Pygmy twins are readily described as capricious beings who often die following a crisis of jealousy caused, for example, by the lack of affection towards one of them (roughly 1.9% of all twin deaths [have so far been recorded in this category]).

At the end of the ritually prepared tests and initiation rites from birth, twin survivors become active beings with divine rights, including the right over others' lives and deaths. Marriage later transforms them into individuals who definitively create new generations, while death places them in temporal immortality and hence in eternity.

The death of the sacrificed twins implies the performance of other ceremonies [in the Pygmy community], given a common belief that twins are not born as ordinary people, but rather they come directly into the world of the living [as the gods' messengers]. This is the reason why twins do not die, but they just return to paradise. Their death is greeted with the same total joy as when they were born. There must be no crying or regret lest the mourning family also loses the surviving twin. On this occasion [of mourning and funerals], participants sing the exploits of the deceased and praise the will of the gods, who have decided to take back the deceased person.

Thus far, the Pygmies consider deaths caused by the

twin rituals as something natural, involuntary, and hence useful to allow the perpetuation of their species [race]. In fact, it is apparently rare to see Pygmy twins reach adulthood. Equally, [should we posit in definitive that] the very concept of infanticide exists in the value system of the Pygmies.

## VII The Different Perceptions of the Twin Rites by Different Social Groups

### 1. Perception of the Twin Rites by Pygmies

#### *The Twin and Political Power*

[The general view among the Pygmies is that] every twin is ultimately embodied with a political power which is exercised on at least three distinct and consistent levels:

—The first level is that of specialization in a technique or activity of self-subsistence. The group of specialists constitutes of a real group which exercises a real power over the entire community. This group of specialists identifies itself has an executive institution.

—The second level is that of the initiates. It is the most complex level where twins are seen as being beyond their mystical and traditional clan and ancestral powers as means of obeying the selected ritual authority. It is precisely at this level that major decisions are made. Here Pygmy practitioners in particular show great respect for customs in order to safeguard the community balance and harmony. For this reason, Pygmies consider it a sacred power.

—The third level is that of the anointed spirits, the genies [or spirits of the place], and the gods. It represents the power of order, prosperity, and procreation. This level is especially constituted by mysterious persons like twins. This is in fact called the level of absolute authority. Such political power is highly regarded as the undisputed will of the gods.

Consensus and permanent consultation are methods that Pygmies frequently use to prioritize the general interest of their small-scale community and to ensure that no decision inherent in the community management creates a group of marginalized people. Their social groups are evidently true political institutions whose normal rhythm of collaboration and exercise is

temporarily interrupted by the ritual events pertaining to the birth of twins or extraordinary beings.

Viewed from within the ethos and mindset of Pygmies, twins are [highly] regarded as [sacred] beings who are quite different from other human beings. [For this reason, little public thought is given about how] the twins have a destiny oriented towards the salvation of the community. This is precisely what justifies all the ritual practices to which the twins are initiated, and which significantly forge their charisma and fulfill their destiny through the political and mystical powers they embody.

The end of the initiation rites thus confirms the culmination of the maturity required to organize and lead the community. The twins are equally considered as true oracles, great healers, unquestionably divine and as rainmakers. [On the surface, moreover,] they are instrumental in guiding the actions of specialized groups in the secondary acquisition of foodstuffs. Finally, the twins organize the individual and collective economic activities. The perfect mastery that Pygmies remarkably display in the in-depth knowledge on the subtlety of the forest really makes them true incarnated spirits who can save the community from all disasters, famine, disease, invasions and the death.

[The above considerations indeed offer an interesting look into how] the powers of Pygmy twins are limitless and indescribable. [Often known as mysterious persons,] they even influence the clan and lineage organization, setting out the daily tasks that must be performed by certain clan and lineage members of the community. The twins also reorganize the seasonal calendar of the community. [In some instances,] they order ritual practices and harmonize the relations between the members of the community by dispensing justice. The nature of the relationship with neighboring communities highly depends on the twins. All the political power is concentrated in their hands and, [viewed from outside], they seem to exercise the power of a true monarch.

Beyond their political power, Pygmy twins exercise real mystical power in the community. In this vein, they are considered as spirits of the gods and ancestors. It is precisely in this capacity that they provide the community with several powers delegated as a protection or a

charm in the form of amulets, powders, headbands, feathers, and statuettes. [More practically,] they exert their power through speeches and incantations which contain multiple providential spells, such as: good luck, bad luck, success, failure, peace, war, death, and life. [It is therefore not surprising that] they are highly regarded as being embodied with a divine power.

The power of twins is not a fiction in the Pygmy community and its application [in the public sphere] is made possible by the cultural predispositions that make the whole community. Pygmy twins always protect the community and command nature. Equally, they have the capacity to transform human beings into anything visible or invisible. Several elements are displayed at different places such as in the middle of the courtyard, in the enclosure or a circle made of small banana trees, or even next to another circle made of reddish sugar cane. In between the two circles, there are two relatively small/large fish ponds. One can also observe on the roof or within the hut some boundaries made of ashes or animal horns mysteriously fixed to the ground. Moreover, one can observe an old calabash decorated with kaolin or detritus of chewed cola hung from a crossbeam at one corner of the hut. These so-called fetish objects evidently express the presence of mysterious beings with magical powers recognized and feared by the whole Pygmy community and even by neighboring communities.

Twins thus become legends and true myths [in the Pygmy society]. As a result, they do not participate in community activities, except in cases of extreme necessity, such as hunting an elephant to enable the community to make food reserves. Every morning, for example, initiates [from different Pygmy families] come together to analyze their dreams in order to decipher the messages of the gods for that day, while at the same time directing conquests towards areas of abundance. Hence, no one can leave the village for personal business or activities if the dreams of initiates are not yet fully deciphered. It often happens that the skill and hunting genius of the twins express the extent and efficiency of their power and knowledge in magical practices. [In general, therefore, it seems that] their preeminence and leadership in this field inherently becomes a source of

benefits for all community members.

The distinct political power entrusted to the Pygmy twins is considered as a power of monarchical appearance but delegated through specialized means and embodied by the ritual specialists from each power acquisition sector. These ritual specialists thus exercise their roles in the particular sectors limited to their area of competence. This power is not based on the control or acquisition of wealth, but rather on the powers of twins to acquire the goods. The concept of capacity [here] is considered as the manifestation of a ritual efficacy that legitimizes the functions of the intermediary with the sacred, divine, and healing, which Pygmy twins are believed to be endowed with.

Nowadays, the neighboring peoples do not readily acknowledge of being proprietors of the Pygmies. Further, they claim to have never had formal relationships of domination with the Pygmies, even though the regional ethno-history records some of their apparent mandates on Pygmies at different points in time.

In addition, the political and mystical powers of twins remain something irreversible, uncompromising and uncontested [in the Pygmy society], simply because the twins come from the gods.

### *The Place of Twins in the Pygmy Community*

In Pygmy customs, the father and mother of twins usually receive great consideration and they are treated with a particular attention. In this respect, community members always greet them with much deference.

The gemelliparous parents reveal themselves to be endowed with a healing power of missteps leading to women's sprains and many other evils or misfortunes. Nevertheless, the gemelliparous mother is better treated than the gemelliparous father in the Pygmies' matrilineal society. Indeed, she is identified with the "Virgin Mary", the "Blessed Mother of God" who, having agreed to shelter Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior, in her womb, then receives that same care herself.

The gemelliparous mother is recognized to have allowed the return of the ancestors whose positive action is greatly anticipated by the whole Pygmy community. [In this respect,] her opinions are very decisive in the major decisions inherent in the management of

community actions. The community often honors her through a series of rites. She is, therefore, obliged to behave in the most exemplary manner.

When the gemelliparous father is not a twin, he should apparently be distanced from his twin children. [It indirectly underpins the assumption that] the mysterious nature of the twins' existence forces them to lead a life full of rituals. For this reason, the father's role here is reduced only to the production of food (hunting meat, honey, mushrooms) in order to feed priests, priestesses, and others initiates who are now responsible for mentoring the gemelliparous mother and newborns.

Evidently, [the non-twin] father is less involved in this ritual event of twins than the mother. He neither participates in the initiation rites of the twins nor in their naming ceremony, and even less so in the exercise of the twins' powers.

When the father is himself a twin, he is instead very involved [in various activities]. He participates in and contributes in various ways to the formation of his children's mystical personality. The father of twins becomes very indispensable when the children have to exercise the right of their power independently, such as dispensing justice. In the event of a dispute in the community, this type of father must ensure that his son, who has become sovereign, be impartial and do justice, taking into account not only the interests of the community and the reality and circumstances of the facts, but also the will of the gods. To whatever extent, the twin father ultimately helps his children to respect the norms of initiation, taboos, and the application of the Pygmy guidance in order to give a [constructive] feedback to their [respective] supervisor.

In conclusion, most twins and members of the Pygmy community (94.5%) believe that elaborate twin rites are beneficial to them and hence allow them to preserve their long-standing customs to which they are firmly attached. [The idea is that] the 5.5% who think otherwise are reportedly victims of the process of acculturation with the Bantu through modernity, globalization, and schooling.

## 2. Perception of the Twin Rituals by Bantu Peoples (Majority)

In view of the many situations that make the Bantu dependent on the Pygmies [in the Congo], the twinhood appears to be the most determining [socio-religious] phenomenon. Such dependence dates back to time immemorial, since the two communities encountered each other [in the region]. Furthermore, Pygmies remain the source of the multiple initiation rites that punctuate the customary life of the Bantu. In the long-term perspective, the Bantu have increasingly recognized the very fact that Pygmies are the only ones to have kept the authentic versions of these initiation rites. Indeed, despite the apparent emancipation of the Bantu in the region and their modernity and overwhelming numbers, Pygmies are highly regarded as a cultural treasure and the masters of the ritual practices and mysteries of the forest. Behind the deceptive façade of the relatively uniform ways of life between the Bantu and the Pygmies, the latter group is nevertheless characterized by a strong attachment to their community organization and clan-based foundations, as well as the foundation of their collective and inclusive life of the human being.

## 3. Perception of the Twin Rites by the Congolese Rulers

The body of evidence from the Congo's Report to the International Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005), the Survey on the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Indigenous Peoples or Pygmies in HIV/AIDS Prevention and their Access to Basic Social Services (UNICEF, 2007), the Analysis of the Situation of Indigenous Children and Women in the Congo (UNICEF, 2007), the plan of action resulting from the first forum (UNICEF, 2007), the Plan of Action Resulting from the First Forum International Union of Indigenous Peoples of the Central African Forest (FIPAC, 2007), and the national consultation workshop on improving the quality of life of indigenous peoples who deplored, *inter alia*, the practice of twin rites thus confirmed the extreme vulnerability of indigenous peoples.

In order to address these crucial issues, the Congolese government, with the support of its United Nations system partners, including UNICEF, has launched a major initiative concerning the indigenous people, the establishment of a package of measures to provide indigenous people with access to basic social services, support for the creation of the National Network of Indigenous Peoples of the Congo (RENAPAC) and sustaining the ongoing development of a legislative framework capable of protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

The national response, although relevant, has not so far produced the expected results. This might simply be due to the limited diversification of interventions and partners, if not to the absence of a genuine national policy that favors these indigenous peoples.<sup>11</sup>

The official discourse deplores this phenomenon of the Pygmies' marginalization and the harmful consequences of the twin rites. Paradoxically, however, some Congolese rulers resort to magical religious practices in the event of incurable illness or when they want to excel to or remain in positions of responsibility.

## VIII Conclusion

The twin rites among the Pygmies [of the Congo] revealed the existence of [specific] objects and places that only the Pygmy priests can master. The different ages and stages of twinning ultimately make it possible to read and reconstruct the sequences of the formation, initiation, and sacralization of the individual Pygmy [within a specific community]. In this regard, a twin is intentionally created in a magical religious environment which starts from childhood through death.

We found that the ritual practices of twins, which begin at birth and are then carried out in three other necessary stages of life are often accompanied by hard, painful, and sometimes fatal events. Pygmies prepare their twins not only for life in the nature, but also for an increasingly high status, which in effect results in the accumulation of experience, formation of spirit, and qualitative and positive training. These twin rituals

<sup>11</sup> Atelier de consultation nationale sur la qualité de vie des peuples autochtones, Brazzaville, décembre 2007.

serve them until they become adults and married persons.

Similarly, the Pygmies have long been recognized as the only ones who have remarkably demonstrated their ability to reproduce the mechanisms of social cohesion and orthodox management of the cultural legacy whose features are noticeable among the Bantu, their long-term neighbours and relatives since the time immemorial or their historical encounter. From the standpoint of Pygmy tradition, however, it is still thought that individuals do not limit themselves to proclaiming the divine essence of twins. Instead there are clear indications that the Pygmies often strive to frame the divine essence of the twins and bring the twin initiates to grasp its full understanding through a series of initiation rites whose basic purpose is to allow twins to enhance the understanding of the facets and contours of their sovereignty while being aware of the workings of their social or inventive genius [in the Pygmy society]. [This implies that] the power and might of the twins are resolutely linked in the service of the Pygmy community.

In other respects, [correlations from data indicate that] if the twin rituals among the Pygmies of the Congo have positive aspects, they are also caught up by the negative aspects, such as the practice of infanticide often that causes discontent and indignation of their neighbors and the international community.

As a matter of fact, the twin rites still resist today the multiple influences of modernity whose local governors and Bantu are victims to as they somehow vacillate between modernity and tradition.

Indeed, the Pygmies of the Congo still continue to be highly regarded as relics of primitive populations which definitely deserve preservation, social interaction, and scholarly attention.

Researchers interested in the issue of infanticide could therefore deepen the studies on the difference between Pygmy and Bantu customs in order to establish the dividing lines [constructed over the long-term in the Congo].

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