THE RITUAL AS 'A COMPLEX OF RITUALS': ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES AGAINST TYPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

by

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Abstract: Royal ritual has often been discussed with total disregard of non-royal ceremonies. In line with suggestions by a few other studies on ritual, it is here asserted that the king's installation among the Aruwund (Lunda of the *Mwant Yaav*) of south Democratic Republic of the Congo is better understood as a composite of different rites that affect the life of common people in Ruwund society, including birth, funerary, healing and twinship ceremonies. Such a standpoint can be seen to challenge typological and classificatory approaches to ritual.

Keywords: Royal symbolism; Aruwund (Lunda); Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Resumo: *O ritual real tem sido frequentemente analisado* per se, *sem ter em conta as cerimónias não-reais. Na linha do que foi já sugerido por alguns outros estudos sobre ritual, é aqui argumentado que a cerimónia de entronização do rei dos Aruwund (Lunda do* Mwant Yaav*) do sul da República Democrática do Congo deve ser compreendida como uma "constelação" de ritos de natureza diversa (de nascimento, funerários, de cura ou de celebração da gemeidade) que afectam os comuns no seio da sociedade Ruwund. Tal perspectiva questiona a validade heurística de abordagens tipológicas e classificatórias do ritual.*

Palavras-chave: Simbolismo real; Aruwund (Lunda); República Democrática do Congo.

I

Discussions of royal ritual have been too concerned with kings, queens and dignitaries, and in the process of understanding issues in royal symbolism too little interest has been focused upon the lives of commoners and on their symbolic systems. The classic and long-standing debate on the Swazi *Incwala* kingship ritual is a prime example of the assumption that an analysis of royal rites *per se* can constitute the

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ground for a solid interpretation of kingship symbolism.[1] Hence, Hilda Kuper's argument in her 1944 article is exclusively based on her detailed and unquestionably excellent description of the *Incwala* ceremony. This provides the sole basis for her sociological interpretation of the royal rite 'in terms of its effects on social stratification' (1944: 254 or 1947: 223). In this author's view, the *Incwala* dramatizes both unity and rank in Swazi society. Again, it is on the basis of Kuper's description of this ritual alone that Max Gluckman develops his cathartic analysis of the *Incwala* as a 'ritual of rebellion', allowing for the institutionalized expression of social conflict that strengthens kingship and renews the unity of the system (see 1954, also published in 1963: ch. III).

Against Gluckman's functionalist interpretation of the Swazi *Incwala*, Beidelman's classic essay (1966) represents a considerable shift in the analysis of royal ritual. Beidelman argues that an account of the indigenous beliefs and their symbolic constructs has to fit in with the study of ritual. The need for interpreting royal ritual within a more general and overall symbolic framework is clearly stated here. However, despite the relevance of Beidelman's point, his analysis is limited, like previous approaches, in that no other specific rites – and in particular those relating to commoners – are taken into account in the explanation of Swazi kingship. Royal symbolism stands again *per se* even if in its relation to more general symbolic constructs.

Many recent studies of great merit are also devoid of data on the wider structure of rituals within which, I believe, the understanding of royal symbolism should be pursued. Indeed, if a comparison between royal rituals of different, often neighbouring, peoples is commonly undertaken, and royal installation rituals may be placed in the context of other ceremonies of investiture affecting ordinary chiefs (such as in M. Izard's remarkable study of the Yatenga ancient kingdom of Burkina Faso, 1985, see ch. III in particular), very seldom is royal ritual analysed or compared to rites of a *different* sort which affect commoners in general.

In an article on the organization of rites, P. Smith returns once again to the Swazi *Incwala*, this time to stress the need for considering the overall structure of rituals (1979). He asserts that different 'systems of rituals' coexist within the same culture: rituals that concern mainly the life of individuals, those that engage the community in general and rites classified according to the 'occasional' or 'periodical' nature of the series of circumstances with which they are associated. However, I do not find the classificatory criteria suggested by him for the definition of a society's particular 'systems of rituals' of great help. In fact, Smith himself remarks that these different systems are flexible and open to a society's own interpretation and that rites concerning individuals can, in some contexts, be turned into collective events; while cyclical

[1] A similar remark could be made about the literature on the royal ceremonies of such kingdoms as the Bunyoro of Western Uganda (see Beattie 1959) or the Shilluk of Sudan (see Schnepel 1988).

circumstances can be ritually dealt with on an occasional, rather than a periodical, basis. Furthermore, rituals can belong to various systems and receive from them diverse elements and orientations (*ibid.*: 147-8). These categories, thus, appear to be operative only to a very limited extent. In spite of this, however, Smith's article appears to me an important contribution in that it claims that different rites which are associated with the same series of circumstances 'se répondent, s'opposent, se complètent ou se répètent...' (*ibid.*: 145), hence drawing us toward analysing rites in relation to other rituals of a distinct sort existing within a society.

Despite the overall tendency, there are studies in which non-royal rites are indeed taken into account in the study of royal symbolism. A. Adler's careful presentation of the king's funerary rites among the Moundang of Tchad (1982) is one such case, as is J.-C. Muller's study on Rukuba initiation rites in Central Nigeria (1989). The latter work is particularly interesting, for the author interprets the installation of Rukuba village chiefs as part of the initiation ritual system. The neophytes follow the same procedure as a chief up to the final stage of the initiation cycle, at which point they should acknowledge publicly that they are not chiefs by refusing to drink the beer which is offered to them in the sacred calabash of chiefship (part of the skull of an ancient chief is floating in the beer). In contrast to the young male initiates, only the chief at his installation should drink from the calabash, for the chief is, as the author states, 'the only full initiate' within Rukuba society (*ibid.*: 204).

But it is M. Bloch's analysis of ceremonial events among the Merina of Madagascar that appears more forcefully as an example of the study of ritual as 'a complex of rituals'. Although this is also the kind of analysis undertaken by the author in his extensive study of the circumcision rites among this people (1986), this approach is remarkably set forward in his shorter essay on the royal bath in the Merina state (1987). In this article Bloch proposes to understand the royal ceremony of the bath by reference to rituals of death, birth and fertility affecting commoners. In so doing, he concludes that royal ritual is built out of *non-royal* symbolism (*ibid.*: 271) and, therefore, that the ceremonial practices of ordinary people are of overall importance in the understanding of royal life.

It is such an approach that I intend to follow here. Indeed, when studying the installation ceremony of the *Mwant Yaav*, the king of the Aruwund (Lunda) of south Democratic Republic of the Congo,[2] an argument similar to that proposed by Bloch may be pursued. The nature of this ceremony can only be perceived by disclosing both its singularity and its resemblance to rituals that affect lesser individuals in Ruwund society. This being so, the symbolic practices concerning commoners should be taken to be as important an issue in the understanding of royal symbolism as the study of

[2] The Aruwund are the nuclear group from whom other Lunda peoples originated.

royal ritual itself. Indeed, this ritual *is*, and should be looked at as, a complex whole comprising a number of different rites by reference to which it ought to be defined. It is not just that rituals share and engender a common ideological thinking within which they are construed, or that they are built out of elements also present in other rituals that they constantly recall.[3] More than that, in much the same manner as the ceremony of the royal bath in Madagascar is both a ritual of blessing and a funerary rite, and the installation of Rukuba village chiefs can only be understood by reference to common male initiation, the king's installation ceremony among the Aruwund and the investiture rites of lesser chiefs also encompass *within them* various rituals of another sort.[4]

I hope to demonstrate that the enthronement of the *Mwant Yaav* is, above all, a ceremony of healing. In addition, I shall argue that it can also be seen to assume the contours of a funerary as well as a birth rite, or else of a ritual for twins, depending on the angle from which one chooses to view it.[5] It is from this perspective and in relation to a wider framework of distinct rituals that I shall next consider the king's and other investiture ceremonies in Ruwund society.[6]

II

Ruwund investiture rites, royal or non-royal, are centred on the ceremony of healing taking place inside the seclusion hut (*masas*).[7] This ritual procedure leads to the very crucial event in the installation of a chief, be it the king or another political chief (*cilol*, pl. *ayilol*):[8] the investing with the sacred bracelet of human tendons called

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[3] For the Aruwund of Bandundu such an approach has been comprehensively undertaken by de Boeck in his analysis of the overall therapeutic system of this peripheral group (1991, see in particular 1991: 434).

[4] This is close to the point made by M. Cartry in his chapter 'From one rite to another' (1992), although here not with reference to royal ritual itself. Following the recurrence of a mourning song in various rituals of a single African society, Cartry analyses the common features linking death to initiation rites among the Gurmanceba of Burkina Faso.

[5] Contrary to Bloch's conclusions for the Merina circumcision ritual (1986) – and suggested as probable for the royal bath ceremony (1987: 271, 296) – I will not be making here any kind of assertion as to which ritual preceded historically. There are, for the Ruwund case, no historical factors leading to a conclusion and, in any case, I question the explanatory virtue of a chronological assumption. As D. Cannadine remarks while introducing Bloch's article, to explain a ritual in terms of others considered chronologically prior does not solve the problem of accounting for the latter (preceding) events (1987: 16).

[6] No full description and analysis of the different rituals to be evoked here is intended, as these rites are considered only in so far as they elucidate the multiple facets which the investiture ceremonies can be seen to assume. Such endeavour would, anyhow, involve a complexity not compatible with the length of this article.

[7] A comprehensive description of Ruwund investiture rituals (and of the royal enthronement in particular) has been recently published in Palmeirim 2006: appendix. I refer the reader to this text for a sequential account of these ceremonies and more detailed data.

[8] The *ayilol* are title-holders (male or female) who fulfil political and administrative duties in the kingdom. Some live in the royal court while others are village chiefs and administer the territory under their jurisdiction.

rukan, which is the symbol of the ancestral power. Only once this purification ceremony is concluded, and when already in possession of the *rukan*, can a chief legitimately invoke his or her title of office and hold a first meeting where the 'name of succession' will be rendered public.

That a chief's investiture is primarily a ritual of healing, however, is not only true of this moment, when the successor to office undergoes therapy inside the *masas*. Indeed, it is the structure of the investiture ritual *as a whole* that follows the overall pattern of ordinary healing ceremonies, or else of healing sequences in other sorts of rituals. Let us focus, for a moment, on the royal enthronement ritual.

The installation of the *Mwant Yaav*, the Ruwund sovereign, takes place at the sacred lands by the river Nkalaany, the site considered to have been the scenario of the mythical events leading to the foundation of kingship (see Palmeirim 2006: ch. I). Here the heir to the throne will be invested by the *atubung* (sing. *kabung*), the ritualists representing the ancestral and autochthonous power. However, from the moment the heir arrives at Nkalaany he is considered a *muyej*, i.e. a 'patient', who needs as much to be healed as a woman who cannot bear children or a person afflicted by some disease.[9] It is indeed as a 'patient' that he is to be handed from one *kabung* to another. Each ritual investor hooks his little finger to the little finger of the future king as the latter passes on to their care, a gesture that characterizes the link between patient and healer in all kinds of therapeutic practices. The *atubung*, the ritualists at this royal ceremony, thus function as a group of healers. Two of them in particular, the holders of the titles of *Mukarusong* and *Caawut Yaav*, are to assume the leading role in this curative process by healing the heir to the throne inside the *masas*, the seclusion hut. As shall be demonstrated, the understanding of these healing events will inevitably lead us 'from one rite to another'.[10] Further than that, the investiture ritual will be seen *to contain* a series of rites that, beyond healing, celebrate at one time birth, death and the coming into the world of a being whose exceptionality recalls that of twins.

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Like the *masas*[11] of a chief, the healing practices that constitute part of a great number of other rituals in the Ruwund system take place from sunset up until just before sunrise. 'When the sun has gone' (*muten waya kal*) the time has arrived to

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For the purpose of this chapter, 'installation of chiefs' will refer generally to the investiture ceremonies of both king and *ayilol*, more precisely of *ayilol* who have the right to wear the sacred bracelet (*rukan*), as these are the Ruwund dignitaries whose installation procedure parallels more closely that of the sovereign himself.

[9] The concept of *muyej*, which I translate here as 'patient', includes both a person afflicted by some physical illness and one troubled by a misfortune such as, for instance, the death of a relative, a stillbirth or sterility. 'Illness' (*mayej*) is also employed in this wider sense.

[10] After the title of M. Cartry's 1992 chapter.

[11] *Masas* means both the hut and the period of retreat and healing taking place inside it.

initiate a healing action, whether it be the cure of a deceased's close relatives in a funerary rite or else the healing of a patient in the ritual for a woman's fertility. All these sorts of therapeutic action are generally designated by the verb *kwok* and a chief to be invested becomes indeed, as said before, a patient to be cured and purified of acts in the life prior to the investiture. A period of treatment and seclusion is, thus, a requirement even in the installation of *ayilol* who do not possess a *rukan*.[12] In the case of major offices endowed with a *rukan*, however, the curative process, which requires the use of the medicine called *malap*, is designated by a specific verb (*kulap*) and aims, additionally, at purifying the sacred bracelet of the death of previous title-holders, as well as at introducing the new chief to the food proscriptions inherent to such a high office.

In a chief's enthronement the curative practices carried out through the night terminate with a ritual bath before sunrise. In the case of the sovereign, the washing takes place in the Nkalaany River itself, after which the king is fit to wear, for the first time, his royal garments and regalia of office. Similarly, in rituals other than the installation of chiefs the healing process culminates in the ceremonial bath of the patient, just before dawn. The sick person is washed in a river by the healer (*ngang*), after which the 'dirty' clothing used during the treatment is to be discarded. Impurity will thus be disposed of and the patient emerges in a new state of cleanness, dressed in fresh garments, just as the sun rises.[13] This is so in funerary rites, which require the healing of the deceased's close relatives after a burial (widowed spouses, orphan children or parents of a dead child), as well as in fertility rituals. In the latter case the cure aims at bringing the spirits of ancestors (*akish*) hindering a woman's fertility to manifest themselves through a patient's trance. These spirits, such as those named *atulemb* for instance, are believed to inhabit a person's body habitually, and it is only when 'unsatisfied' that they may eventually obstruct a woman's pregnancy.[14] By manifesting themselves as a result of the curative practices, the spirits will reveal their identity and request a sacrifice from the living. A meal is then prepared in accordance to the desire of the *akish* in question, and the woman should thereafter be able to conceive.

The healing of a deceased's close relatives, or else of a woman aiming to conceive, takes place mainly *outside*, in the former case just in front of the house of the dead and, in the latter, in front of the house of the unfertile woman or of one of her relatives.

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[12] Healing does not take place in the investiture of a *nvubu*, a *cilol*'s sub-noble.

[13] Ritual washes always take place in a stream or river source and under no circumstance is the water brought into the village for such purpose, as impurity would then remain inside the village rather than being washed away by the river.

[14] Other illnesses can also be attributed to particular sorts of spirits (*akish*) such as the *amalemb* (no sing.), for instance, which are responsible for limb, arm and back pains, and difficulties in breathing, among others. Healing in these cases follows a similar procedure as for the *atulemb*, and the patient is also guided into a trance during which the spirits will reveal their names and request offerings in food. It is claimed, however, that the *atulemb* are the only *akish* of Ruwund origin.

In either case the body of the sick person is periodically washed during the course of the night with a whisk of leaves that are dipped in an appropriate medicine. This action is designated by the verb *kukupul* and is accompanied by singing (of songs specific to the ritual in question) carried out by the audience to the rhythm of drumming.[15]

In contrast, the healing in investiture rituals is extremely *private* and the procedure followed is considered secret. The ceremony takes place away from the eyes of the population, inside the seclusion hut called *masas* where only a very restricted number of people are allowed to enter. As mentioned before, in the *masas* of a chief who has the right to the *rukan*, a particular sort of healing takes place. Generally referred to by the verb *kwok*, 'to heal' is here designated by the verb *kulap* as it involves the specific medicine called *malap*. The latter, a medicine composed of leaves of particular trees dipped in water, is also applied with a whisk of leaves over the patient's body (v: *kukupul*) in the very same manner as in the therapy of patients in other rituals. In the king's installation, all dignitaries present in the *masas* (except for the two *atubung* who are the healers themselves) are treated in this way. The *rukan* is also washed with the *malap*, an action which is believed to make the bracelet widen until it fits the heir's wrist.

Although the healing process in funerary and fertility rituals does not require that the patient go into retreat, in some cases of affliction the therapeutic practices imply a long period of confinement in a hut called *maseku*, similar in all respects to the *masas*. The *maseku* consists of a hut built in grass and surrounded by a fence forming a small compound in which the patient is to live in isolation during a period of time prescribed by the healer. This is the case, for instance, with a pregnant woman who has previously experienced a stillbirth or else whose children have died consecutively after birth.[16] Following the healer's instructions, such a woman should retreat during the whole pregnancy up to the day in which the newborn is able to come out of the enclosure walking by him or herself (to curtail the long duration of the seclusion, the period can eventually end when the baby starts crawling). The same procedure is undertaken in the case of the birth of twins. Again, the mother and the newborn twins should be in confinement until the latter take their first step.

In the *maseku* enclosure, young children alone (not yet initiated in sexual relations) can enter freely. The father of the twins, or else the husband of the pregnant woman, is allowed in only after having purified himself with a medicine (*mwon wa mu cizaw*) that is placed for the purpose at the entrance of the enclosure. The few other people allowed in (such as elderly women past child-bearing age) should also apply this medicine.

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[15] In funerary rites only the spouse(s) of a deceased is/are submitted to this kind of healing designated by the verb *kukupul*. Parents or orphan children do not undergo such treatment.

[16] Although it is mostly women who are treated in the *maseku*, men can be also prescribed similar cure. Other illnesses, such as epilepsy, require the patient to retire in the *maseku*.

Rules (*yijil*) affecting those confined to the *maseku* are very strict. Twins or other newborns cannot be taken out of the enclosure under any circumstances (in the mother's absence they may be left with one of her young sisters/cousins, for instance). The mother, in turn, cannot leave the compound to go and socialize in the village, although she is permitted to maintain her daily routine of going to the fields. In this case, however, she has to observe a number of rules, such as not responding to salutations and making use of a medicine (*mwon wa rufiish*, 'medicine of aborting') prescribed by the healer whenever she comes to a crossroad or a bifurcation, when crossing a river or else when fetching water from a source.

Additional interdictions are enforced upon both parents during the period of retreat. These affect the mother more strictly than her husband, and it is believed that should they be followed rigorously the children will walk more quickly, thus ending the confinement period earlier. The proscriptions include a number of foods, the cutting of the patients' hair, the act of adultery, participation in a funeral or the consumption of cooked food during the mourning prior to the burial of a deceased in the village. Rules of commensality also have to be observed, and food can only be cooked by the sick woman herself and in her own personal cookware.

Once the children are old enough to walk out of the *maseku* by themselves, a ceremony takes place to lift the interdictions (v. *kujiril ku maseku*). This consists mainly in the consumption of a ritual meal (by both parents and children) that includes all the foods proscribed during confinement. All other interdictions are equally abolished and the patients' hair is then cut (the woman's for the first time since her retreat; and the children's hair, the first time since birth). Finally, a ritual washing is undertaken. The woman, who wore white clothes all through the seclusion, and the children are to put on clean garments and dispose of the old ones.

In relation to both fertility and funerary rites – and despite the fact that the patient is not obliged to retreat in either case – a number of interdictions, similar to those affecting one in seclusion in the *maseku*, are also enforced upon the patient. Hence, on the occasion of bereavement, the deceased's close relatives (widowed spouses, orphan children or parents who have lost a child) are not allowed to eat *cooked* food[17] until they undertake a therapeutic process after the burial of the corpse.[18]

Similarly, in the fertility rite of the *atulemb*, for instance, healer and patient are not to consume cooked food until the final phase of the ritual. Then a medicine (*mbij ja mwon*) containing various kinds of meat and fish mixed with leaves and palm oil

[17] During mourning only *mukank* (raw unsoaked manioc) and raw peanuts are offered to the participants.

[18] Patients in the *maseku* and chiefs with *rukan* are equally expected to refrain from eating *cooked* food until the burial of a deceased has taken place. Unlike the close relatives of the dead person, however, chiefs can start consuming cooked food immediately after the interment without any kind of prior healing being necessary.

(*maany ma ngaj*) is given to the patient;[19] and a meal is prepared to be consumed by the sick person, the healer and other women in the audience who have once been submitted to a similar cure. Again, in funerary ceremonies, after the ritual bath and cutting of the patients' hair that concludes the healing, it is a ceremonial meal that brings the interdictions to an end. The consumption of the meal begins, in this case, with a ritual action designated as *kusumish* (v.) *ruku* ('to make [someone] bite manioc dough'), in which the healer introduces the patient to the first cooked food after the fast.[20] The healer takes a little portion of *ruku* in each hand and places a piece of cooked chicken with a small bit of charcoal inside it, and then gives this to the patient to bite.[21] The latter takes a bite and immediately spits it in the directions of sunset and sunrise. A similar gesture is performed by the healer, who also throws the remnants of the bitten pieces towards both directions.[22] This gesture is believed to disperse death away from the living as the charcoal, being a piece of extinct fire, is associated with death. It recalls a dead person in that 'it no longer has fire in it', and fire is strictly connoted with the vitality of life[23]. After these procedures the meal is shared between the healer, the patient and all those present on the occasion who have previously experienced an equal loss.[24]

Once more, a chief's ritual of investiture parallels the structure of the healing process described above. Not unlike the seclusion in the *maseku*, in the *masas* of a chief, besides the healers and the patient (in this case the successor to office), very few people are allowed in. In fact, only those who have already been submitted to this very same ritual previously (and therefore chiefs who equally hold a *rukan*) and young children of the candidate (not yet initiated in sexual relations) can enter the confinement hut to pay a visit during the ceremony. And, once more, like the patient in the *maseku*, the inheritor of an office must wear a white cloth wrapped around the body. In addition, all those entering the ceremonial hut are to take off their shirts and shoes. Finally, as

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[19] This medicine is also employed in the healing of a chief inside the *masas*.

[20] No healing practices at all take place in the case of the death of a child in a family (*diivumu*) where one other child has already died. The parents can start eating cooked food immediately after the burial without *kusumish* (v.) *ruku* being performed.

[21] The chicken is replaced by boiled egg when the deceased is the first child to die in the nuclear family (*diivumu*). If the chicken represents a deceased adult, the egg stands for a child.

[22] This same ritual theme also appears in the fertility ceremony for the *atulemb* spirits at the particular moment when the medicine (*mbij ja mwon)* is administered to the patient. Before the sick person is actually given it, the healer (here designated by the specific name of *kalal*) will eat a little herself. She places a small portion on top of a *muyaay* (a rattle made of a small calabash with seeds inside) and makes a gesture in the direction of both sunrise and sunset. Only then does she ingests the medicine and gives it to the patient. The same gesture is repeated as the healer gives the medicine in turn to every woman in the audience who has also undergone a similar cure on a previous occasion.

[23] For a similar reason in funerary rites the relatives of the deceased paint their faces with ashes mixed with water.

[24] Widows will share this meal with other widows present, orphan children with other orphan children and parents who have lost a child with other parents in similar circumstances.

happens also in healing sequences of other rituals, the new incumbent is not allowed either to speak or fall asleep all through the night while undergoing treatment.

An interdiction relating to the consumption of cooked food is also enforced upon the successor to an office during the installation ceremony. As in other cases, and following the healing and ritual washing of the patient, the chief being invested will also undergo a ceremony meant to lift the interdictions and introduce him or her to the first cooked meal after the fast. It is meaningful, however, that this ritual action is here designated *kusumish* (v.) *ruku*, just as in funerary rites.[25] Indeed, a chief's installation can be regarded as a ceremony that heals a deceased's relative. The heir is of necessity a relative of the deceased *Ant Yaav* (pl. of *Mwant Yaav*), to whom he now succeeds, and the *rukan* represents, according to my informants, the late predecessors of the office. In the case of the sovereign, the royal *rukan* was, in the past, to have an additional contact with death as a new set of human tendons was added to it at every installation. Hence, it is both the heir and the *rukan* that have to be purified with the medicine *malap* during the curative process inside the *masas*.

The ritual meal that cancels the proscribed behaviour concerning food takes place either in the invested chief's private kitchen (*malal*) or else inside the seclusion hut. In fact, the participants in the *masas* of a chief (much like the patients in the *maseku*) can only eat food cooked in the fire of the *masas* and, by no means, prepared elsewhere. In the case of the king's installation ceremony, it is the *kabung* holding the title of *Mwiin Cipet* who is in charge of performing *kusumish* (v.) *ruku* to the *Mwant Yaav*. In the kitchen of the king's palace at the Nkalaany, the *Mwiin Cipet*, here functioning as a healer, gives the *Mwant Yaav* a piece of *ruku* and meat to bite, thus introducing the sovereign to his first meal inside the *malal*.

As can be seen, thus, the procedure for introducing a chief to eating in the *malal* is very similar to the ceremony that, in other rituals, brings a patient's interdictions to a close. However, while in other kinds of rites the ceremonial meal lifting the prohibitions allows the healed patient the free consumption of cooked food thereafter, a chief possessing a *rukan* is compelled, from the investiture onwards, to eat *forever* in seclusion (inside a *malal*) and to observe strict rules as concerns a vast number of foods.

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But the installation rites will lead us further into this journey through other rituals, whose contours the former are seen to embody. Indeed, from the *masas* the successor to an office emerges 'reborn' so to speak, with a *new* status, that of a chief

[25] Although in the installation of chiefs no charcoal is given with the *ruku* to bite. The remnants of the pieces bitten are also thrown by the healer in all directions.

or king, and in a *new* state of purity. In this sense an investiture ritual can also be seen as a ritual of birth (or re-birth). It is this aspect that will be examined next.

If used to refer to the ceremonial hut and time of seclusion of a chief during the installation ritual, the term '*masas*' is, curiously enough, also employed to designate the period of confinement a newborn spends in the house of delivery. The baby is 'to enter the *masas*' (*kwandam ku masas*), that is to begin the period of retreat, immediately after birth and will only be allowed out of the house of birth the day after the umbilical cord has been cut. While the child is in seclusion, visitors eat and drink, day and night, in the house. People coming to welcome the newborn are not allowed to touch the baby until the midwife has washed and rubbed him or her with an appropriate medicine. Also, as in other situations of seclusion, the house of the newborn is protected against impurity (associated with sexual intercourse and menstrual blood), which may be carried in by someone coming from outside. For this purpose a root (one which has grown across a road) is cut and placed in the doorway.

The day after the cutting of the umbilical cord, when the *masas* of the child comes to an end, a string of cloth called *mukay* and containing pieces of bark scrapped from the root that had been on the doorway is tied around the baby's waist.[26] This string is believed to give strength to the child's body and to protect it against impurity. The newborn is to wear it until the day he or she starts to walk. All births, thus, appear to follow a similar kind of procedure: twins and children born in the *maseku* are more vulnerable to impurity and have to endure a long and tightly ruled confinement until they begin their first steps. Common babies, not requiring such a long retreat, are nevertheless obliged to wear the *mukay* from the moment the umbilical cord is cut until they are able to walk.

Curiously enough the term '*masas*', employed for both the seclusion of a chief and of a child at birth, is also used to designate the little hut built to shelter a bitch and her newborn puppies. Inside the hut a bed of leaves is made, just after the bitch has given birth, to lay the newborn on. The mother will come in and out of the hut until the day the puppies are able to walk and make their way out of the *masas* by themselves. Indeed, the Aruwund believe that dogs, being fed by people (unlike other domestic animals, such as goats, chickens, etc., who feed themselves), behave like 'children' and are therefore very close to men.

Considering the semantic scope of the term '*masas*', we realize that the investiture of a chief, if conceptualized as a healing ceremony, is equally understood as a ritual

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[26] This set of practices is designated by the verb *kukay*. The impurity and other negative forces contracted by this root, which has been stepped over again and again by strangers, are believed to have a protective quality and endow the bearer with some kind of immunity. De Boeck notes that the verb *kukay* has, among the Aruwund of Bandundu, the sense of reversing evil to its source, therefore nullifying its effects (1991: 374).

of birth by means of which a new being is to emerge in a renewed state of purity.[27] In fact, this quality of 'newness' is itself conveyed by the etymology of the word '*masas*' which is related to *musas* ('newness', see Hoover 1976). Interestingly, the latter term is also used to mean 'dawn, sunrise', and it is indeed when the sun appears in the horizon, at dawn, that the successor to a high office, emerging from the seclusion hut, is to become chief.

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On all ritual occasions, healing practices are accompanied by the chanting of songs, which are believed to have therapeutic properties and are specific to the particular ceremony at stake. In the fertility ritual of the *atulemb*, for instance, the songs lament a woman's sterility; while in the bereavement of a dead person, chants of sorrow (*maas ya mushet*) characterize the first part of the ritual up to the burial of the corpse. After that, the songs aim at cheering the living.

In a chief's investiture, the songs which accompany the healing process inside the *masas* are the very same ones that are performed for twins on their birth and monthly at the rise of the new moon. Indeed, when twins are born 'songs of *ubwang*' (*maas ma ubwang*) have to be chanted periodically during a ritual procedure that aims at 'domesticating' their unusual abilities and powers of sorcery, as well as at protecting them and keeping them in good health. These songs praise the extreme fertility and procreative powers of the twins' parents, and talk in a licentious and impious manner of sexual matters in general. They are considered a medicine (*mwon*) able to heal the twins and to help their sense of hearing as well as their faculties of expression.

At an investiture ritual songs of *ubwang* are chanted during the period of healing and retreat inside the *masas*, from sunset till dawn. No signs of anger or bashfulness at the obscenities or insults uttered should be exhibited by any of the participants in the ceremony. These would be received with disgust and severely criticized (a fine, *cibaw*, can eventually be levied in such a case). The songs are believed to strengthen the king (or chief) and make him face things without fear, shame or shyness. They should 'open the eyes' (*kuca ku mes*), that is, allow him to 'see' (and therefore prevent) attacks of sorcery and make him have clarity of mind and an unbiased judgement. The lewd joking will also help his oratory faculties, as a king (or a chief) should always set matters clearly and without hesitation.

The singing of *ubwang* is also accompanied by unrestrained criticism, and in the *masas* of a chief all rules concerning *usany* ('shame') are nullified. Such is the case even with the proscriptions ruling the attitudes between *akawusany* (relatives linked by

[27] De Boeck argues the womb connotations of the seclusion hut, which makes the idea of the coming out of the *masas* as a birth all the more forceful (1991: 392, 401-2, for instance).

an avoidance relationship). Should two participants in the *masas* hold a kinship relation of avoidance (which absolutely forbids the reference to sexual matters), all linguistic interdictions normally enforced upon them would be abolished.

The fact that the songs of *ubwang* are sung for both chiefs and twins does not constitute a surprise, as the Aruwund, like other African peoples, state openly that 'twins are chiefs'. Indeed, twins benefit from a special status within Ruwund society, being allowed to salute the king or village chiefs as equals and being buried sitting on thrones, while commoners lie down in their graves. If this association points out very clearly to the procreative powers and extreme fecundity associated with kingship/ chiefship in Central African contexts, it is mainly the *uniqueness* and exceptionality of these beings (chiefs, kings and twins) which is stated here. This I have argued at length elsewhere (Palmeirim 2006: 120-2) by drawing attention to the fact that the same songs (of *ubwang*) and ritual practices carried out for the twins also apply to other children considered 'special' in Ruwund society. It is so for the *ngal*, a child whose top central incisors grow (unusually) before the lower ones; or for the *mujing*, a baby born with the umbilical cord around the neck. Both are believed to have tricky temperaments and excessive powers. Other children, not considered troublesome themselves, are nevertheless associated with the twins in the songs of *ubwang*. This is the case with a child born just before a set of twins (called *kalet*) or for one born just after (*cijik*), as well as with children whose delivery was somehow atypical (breech delivery, a baby born facing upwards, etc.) and as such is premonitory to the most singular of all births: the birth of twins.

It is the uncommonness of their birth or of their natural features that make these children unique. Likewise, an heir to an office comes out of the healing ceremony that takes place inside the *masas* duly purified from the death of his predecessors and suitably freed from the constraints of his previous life, in order to emerge as a sole and matchless being whose powers are as startling as the extraordinary event which is the birth of twins.

Final note

It is argued here that the Ruwund king's enthronement ceremony (or, for that matter, any chief's investiture) comprises *within it* a set of distinct rituals, being at once a healing practice, a funerary ceremony, a ritual of birth and the celebration of a being whose uniqueness and marvelousness evokes that of twins. Data such as these may be called upon to defy typological and classificatory approaches to ritual and, in the line already proposed by Bloch, draws our attention to the need of considering *non-royal* rituals in the study of royal symbolism.

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