

the forest foods on which we would live in the deep forest. Anyway, the hunters could always hunt for more pots and mortars whenever they wanted them, they said, breaking yet again into a comic pantomime showing how easily the stupid villagers were fooled.

Yet with all this mockery and ridicule, and very real trickery, there was never a trace of malice or real hostility. If anything, it was really rather friendly ridicule, a form of group joking relationship that merely helped to establish the clear and necessary difference between "them" and "us." Simple preference marked the essential difference, rather than any sense of superiority or inferiority.

As it happened, I loved the cool and dim light of the forest and the high humidity did not bother me at all; it was much less oppressive than the heat and dust of the village. And whereas the water in the villages tended to be contaminated enough to give me stomach disorders, I could drink from any forest stream with impunity. Above all, in the forest there were no mosquitos or flies, except high up in the canopy or along the banks of the wider rivers. My obvious pleasure in being away from the village, and the fact that, through stupidity rather than bravery, I was totally unafraid, quickly classified me as a "forest person" rather than a "villager."

That was fine by me, but it plainly colored my field work, giving me much greater access to the lives and thoughts and dreams of the Mbuti than I could otherwise ever have had, but at the same time denying me equal access to the world of the villagers, who came to regard me with the same kind of rather amused disdain that they had, or pretended to have, for the Mbuti. Once, proud of having learned one of their languages (KiBira) from the Mbuti, I tried it out in a Bira village. But they said (somewhat contemptuously) they had a hard time understanding me because I spoke "just like an Mbuti." To some extent I was always excluded from the inner world of the villagers. But then, any fieldworker is limited by many things—by his or her gender, age, marital status, food preferences, stamina, and health. The best we can do is to accept those limitations knowingly, take whatever corrective action is possible, and not pretend to omniscience.

During all those first three field trips, during the colonial era, I fell into the same role as a classificatory Mbuti, and spent my time with them whether they were in village or forest. They seldom stayed in the village for more than a few days at any one time, and the deeper they went into the forest the longer they stayed away, though in the Epulu region, where I mostly worked, the village was never more than a fast three-days walk away.

Some anthropologists, most in fact, have held that the Epulu band was not typical, partly because of the presence of Patrick Purnam. He had come to do his field work there, but had stayed and established a hospital and a kind of hotel for the rare travelers who, in those early days, ventured along that dreadful road linking Stanleyville (as it was still called) to Bunia and the roads south. Later the colonial government established an animal-capturing station at Epulu, and it was alleged that this made the Mbuti of the Epulu territory still further atypical. There is some truth to this argument, and we shall look at it later. But for the moment I shall simply repeat, with the advantage of hindsight, what I said then, namely, that in most essential respects I found little difference between the Epulu Mbuti and any other net-hunting Mbuti in the forest world. I think many, though not all, differences

"The Mbuti Pygmies" Holt-Rinehart & Winston, Inc.
The Dryden Press 1983

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of opinion are due to the changes that have taken place in the years that intervened between the fifties and the seventies. But for the purist, and as a matter of simple fact, let us take what follows as representative at least, if not only, of the Epulu band.

THE CONCEPT OF "FAMILY"

Right away I was in trouble. It is almost as though the Mbuti want to confuse the anthropologist as much as they do the villagers! The band that left the village and established a temporary camp an hour or so away, on one of my very first visits into the forest, was in fact only a part of a much larger band that was already encamped much deeper in the forest. And, when at the end of a day's march we arrived in the main camp, I found that some of those who had set out with us and who had spent the past two weeks in the camp near the village, and before that had lived in the Mbuti "permanent" camp, had not arrived. They had split off along the trail somewhere and, I was told, gone to join "in-laws" in other hunting territories. One of these happened to be across the tribal border and in Bira land, whereas Epulu itself was an Ndaka village. This, of course, I soon found to be the normal pattern of fission and fusion, and when the main hunting camp moved, it in turn divided, some leaving and others joining it from other territories, often from as many as four or five territories away on either side, and sometimes a good deal further. The "band" itself then, was never the same in composition from one month to the next.

Trying to establish the kinship composition of a "band" was a tricky operation. The Mbuti referred to any one hunting camp as a family, and they applied kinship

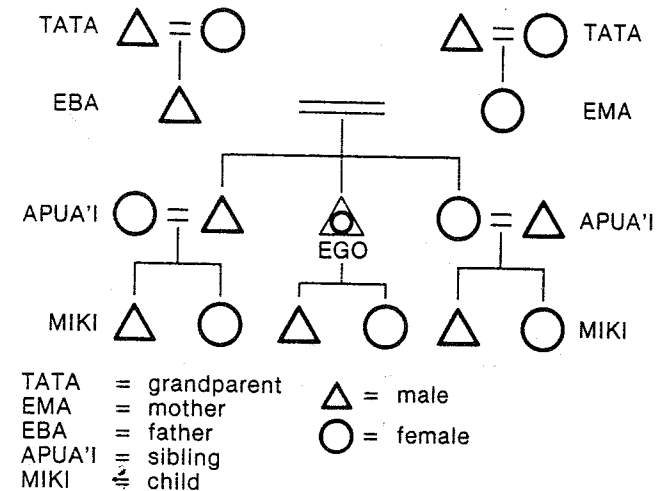


Fig. 2: Generational/kinship terms of address and reference. From the point of view of ego, sexual differentiation is only made at the parental level.

PRIBUZENSTVI

terms to every single member of that camp. The terminology for address or reference was simple:

Grandparent	<i>Tata</i>
Mother/Father	<i>Ema/Eba</i>
Sibling	<i>Apua'i</i>
Child	<i>Miki</i>

One thing to note right away is that gender is only differentiated at the parental level. As far as the Mbuti were concerned, that was the only level where it had any relevance. The sexual relationship prior to marriage, when no children are born, is one thing; between married partners, when children *do* result, it is something totally else. In the first (premarital or, as it proves, extramarital) instance it is of personal and private rather than social and public significance. Only when children are born, or only when children *might* be born, making the sexual act socially significant, did the Mbuti see any need to distinguish gender. Gender, for the Mbuti, was related directly to procreativity. After all, children and elders are incapable of bearing children, and since they are capable of doing all other things equally, without regard to gender, why make the distinction?

As for youths, who, we would say, clearly *are* capable of producing children whether married or not, the Mbuti simply denied the fact and said that although youths could have sex whenever they wanted (within minimal bounds of privacy and respect for others) children would never be born until the youths were married. There was only one restriction that I could discover on the way the sexual act was performed: in premarital or extramarital sex it is forbidden for the partners to embrace each other fully; they must hold each other by the elbows. The distance so induced of course in no way need prevent conception, yet Putnam said that for the twenty-five years he had lived in that area, keeping a record of births and deaths and marriages, he had never once come across a case of a girl giving birth to a child or even becoming pregnant before she was married. And in the years that followed, up to my last visit at the end of the colonial era (and even after independence), I similarly could never document a case of extramarital pregnancy. It may be that some herbal contraceptive is used, though again I could never document the fact, try as I might, and abortion was similarly denied and undocumented as a possible explanation.

The net result however, as the Mbuti saw it, was that every Mbuti child was born within wedlock. That was, they said, because you got married when you *wanted* to have a child. In other words, every Mbuti child is born because he or she was *wanted*. That is the heart of the matter, as the Mbuti see it. Regardless of the technology employed, and the extent to which Putnam and I were deceived or correct, the *belief* is a reality of real and enormous social significance, and immediately makes of the Mbuti family something very special and vitally important. It is a voluntary rather than an involuntary association, so that when they refer to an entire hunting camp as family, they are saying something very important. They are saying that the "band" is something held together by bonds quite different from, almost without regard to, "lineage."

In fact, the only way I could define "family" (or "band"), even going by the

usage of kinship terminology, was as "those people who are living together in a single hunting camp and cooperating in the hunt, at any given moment." The moment someone left the camp, even if they were siblings from the same womb, the kinship terms of address and reference were no longer used, but were replaced by personal names. Conversely, when a stranger, totally unrelated by kinship, was accepted into the camp and became a member of that economic unit, he or she was accorded kinship status according to age and marital condition. Even when a band was split up into a number of smaller segments within the same hunting territory, each forming its own small hunting camp (*pa* or *apa*), the same applied, the concept of "family" shrinking accordingly. If we disregard actual kinship, however, we could consider all those hunting within any one recognized territory as a "clan," which may subdivide within the territory into "lineages." I prefer to retain the Mbuti usage and refer to "camps," using the term "band" to refer to all those within any territory, even if divided into several camps.

As the Mbuti saw it the family was primarily of economic significance. The tracing of actual genealogies was made difficult enough by the insistence of the Mbuti that they were "truly" related to every other person in that hunting camp, and had no "real" relatives in other camps, bands, or territories. Whenever they did admit to a relative elsewhere it was usually a sign that they were about to pack up and move to join that relative's camp. Such movement always took place when the monthly general relocation took place, which was when the immediate vicinity had been hunted and gathered to the point that the daily hunt was inconveniently far away from the camp. But even in the middle of the life of any one camp, in the first or second week perhaps, an individual or a family often might suddenly pack up and leave, or another family arrive and settle in. Such movement was of political rather than economic significance. It was a way of averting a major dispute that was brewing between two individuals or families. Mobility was perhaps just as much of political importance as it was economic, and sometimes band movement was determined by the relationship of the band, or of individuals within it, to the village, and to whatever "demands" the village might be making.

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIALITY

There was little property to inherit. As they moved into elderhood adult males relinquished their hunting nets and spears according to the needs of their "sons." Although this generally meant a biological son, it could also be a son-in-law, or one of the classificatory "sons" who happened to be in the camp at that time and in need. A woman tended to hold on to her possessions until she died, but they were equally few and equally easily renewable: a gathering basket and a metal paring knife, and perhaps a machete. At death the tendency was for biological sons to inherit from fathers, daughters from mothers.

At birth a child "inherited" nominal clan membership and its associated totem from her or his father, suggesting a patrilineal system at work. At that time, however, although every Mbuti could recite his or her clan membership and totemic affiliation, and did so readily enough, I was suspicious (and confused). Why, I

had to ask myself, were they then so reluctant to make the distinction between "real" and "classificatory" (or fictive) kin? Several times I was scolded for bad manners and "impropriety" for my persistence in pursuing biological relationships to include kin beyond the camp, and even worse, in pursuing them within the camp to demonstrate that some who claimed kinship were not biologically related at all. And then, when cross-checking in other camps, other bands, and other territories, I began coming across the very same individuals that I had met elsewhere, and they not only claimed different kin, but sometimes gave different clan and totemic affiliations. Most often they were those of their mothers, sometimes of their wives, and not all that infrequently, those of a close friend in that camp! Where was the neat, clear-cut kinship system so beloved of anthropology?

Only after my third field trip, each time making Epulu my headquarters but necessarily cross-checking information with territories on either side, was I able to discern some consistency. There was very definitely a tendency for bands to be patrilineal in composition, though this seemed more the case with the archers than with the net-hunters. While in different social contexts any one Mbuti might cite different clan affiliation, I *was* able to trace clan genealogies that made sense. But I could only do this when considering the clan's relationship with the village world, for each clan of village farmers claimed a hereditary relationship with a clan of forest, Mbuti, hunters. Since the villages were very definitely (though not exclusively) patrilineal, patrilocal units, each village saw the adjacent hunting territory as belonging to an equally patrilineal, patrilocal Mbuti clan.

We have already seen that the economic and political realities of forest hunting life demanded a constant population flux and interterritorial movement that completely denied the reality of the village ideal of a localized clan, and as far as I could see that was all that the Mbuti clan system was, a village ideal. For the purposes served by their relationship with the villagers, and no other, the Mbuti traced their descent in the male line and assumed clan names and totems. We shall have to examine this in more detail later, but it is important to establish that in forest context, during those three field trips, I almost *never* heard clan membership or totemic affiliation cited, which is surely a measure of its *effective* insignificance.

We can all trace descent in any way we like; that does not make us patri- or matrilineal. It is only when lineality is manifest in effective ways that we can talk of a "system." There was a tendency for brothers to hunt together; after all, they grew up in the same nuclear family and learned hunting techniques from the same biological father, and on the hunt it is important to know your fellow hunters intimately, if the hunt is to be successful and safe. But it was rare for all brothers (if there were more than two) to be in any one camp or even in any one territory at any one time. Members of any one camp might have, according to my calculations, biological kin, male and female, who were hunting in other territories as far away as one hundred kilometers in either direction. When the "clan" is dispersed over a distance of two hundred kilometers it is difficult for me, in the context of forest hunters, to see it as a very effective sociological unit.

There were no problems of inheritance, since all property was perishable and renewable (hunting nets were constantly being added to, knives and machetes constantly being stolen or "borrowed" from villagers), and on the other crucial

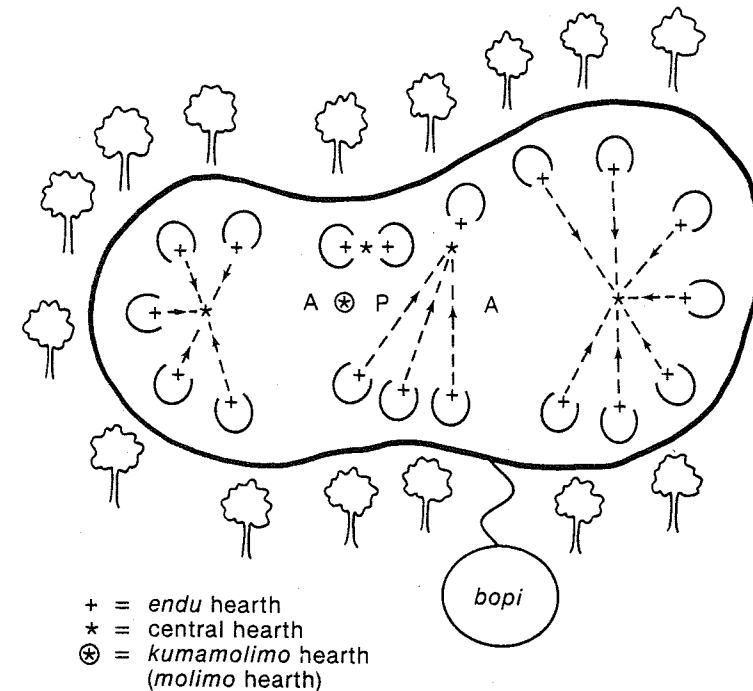


Fig. 3: Schematic representation of endu hearths in an Mbuti hunting camp. The Mbuti conception of "family" unites in terms of address all those who hunt together and live in the same camp at any one time. Within such camps, which change in composition as they change location monthly, there are distinct lines of fission and fusion that can be seen by the way the endu are clustered, and by their orientation with respect to the central hearths. If the molimo is in progress there will be one special central hearth (the kumamolimo) placed so as to suggest the maximum unity for that camp.

issue where a kinship system is always invoked, marriage, clan membership was virtually ignored. When a couple were about to get married, the crucial question that was asked was "is your spouse-to-be near or far?" By this both genealogical and territorial distance were meant, for both were important considerations to the Mbuti.

It is consistent with their economic definition of "family" as "those who hunt together in the same camp at any one time" that their primary consideration in marriage should be economic. In marrying "far," in territorial terms, you give yourself the maximum economic and political advantage. In case of dispute you can move to your spouse's territory readily and hunt there, since you will have frequently visited it with your spouse. (Mbuti are loyal to their nuclear families, if not to their lineage or clan!) And the further that territory is from the scene of the dispute, the better. Similarly, if the weather is bad in one part of the forest, spoiling

the hunting or gathering, it is highly advantageous to have ready entry into some distant territory well beyond the effects of the local weather system.

Affinal bonds, forged through marriage, are those most exploited to claim the right to hunt in other territories, but almost as frequently exploited are the claims to have a brother or sister, a father or mother, or just a friend, in the camp you wish to join, for whatever reasons. And occasionally people visit just for the sake of visiting, without making any such claims to kinship or friendship, though it would be difficult to find a camp in which you could not make some such claim. Even knowing of someone who is known to someone in the camp you are visiting is considered a valid claim.

So much for a kinship "system," for the moment. I traced many marriages within the nominal clan, though according to the villagers all clans were exogamous. If pressed, the Mbuti simply claimed that actually that clan was divided into subclans that *could* legitimately marry. When considering a proposed marriage the Mbuti never cited clan membership. They merely asked if anyone could remember if the couple's grandparents were related. This effectively prevented the marriage of first cousins on either side.

But if clan, even lineage, were of little consequence, the concept of family was primary. In following any one band throughout the course of the year, I noted that each successive camp, about a dozen in all, was different in size and composition. Significantly, it was also different in shape (see Fig. 4). And it was almost possible to predict the size and shape of the next camp from the size and shape of the first. At first this seems to add to the confusion of the kinship system, but once we abandon the concept of a classical kinship "system" at work, another system immediately comes to light, and one that is much more truly "effective."

When an Mbuti calls another "mother," he or she is acknowledging all the rights and privileges and the duties and obligations proper between a mother and child. The model for social behavior is clearly established in the nuclear family. But quickly, as we have seen, the child learns to address everyone by one or other of the terms he uses within the nuclear family, regardless of kinship but according to *age*. Thus any female Mbuti of the same age level as your mother will be addressed by you as *Ema*, and you will have the same expectations and be able to make the same demands on all those "mothers" that you can on your own. To a certain extent there is even a comparable affective relationship to match the effective bonds. What an incredible system of social security *that* system offers! No matter where you are, in whatever camp in whatever territory, you are bound to a plurality of mothers and fathers and grandparents and siblings and children as powerfully and effectively as if they were your own biological family. There are no such things as orphans, no childless mothers, no solitary children without brothers and sisters, and no lonely old people, for all old people have one immense family to care for them, wherever they are.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

All of this is learned during infancy, where perhaps the most important lessons of socialization are learned, in the *endu*, the home of the nuclear family. The rela-

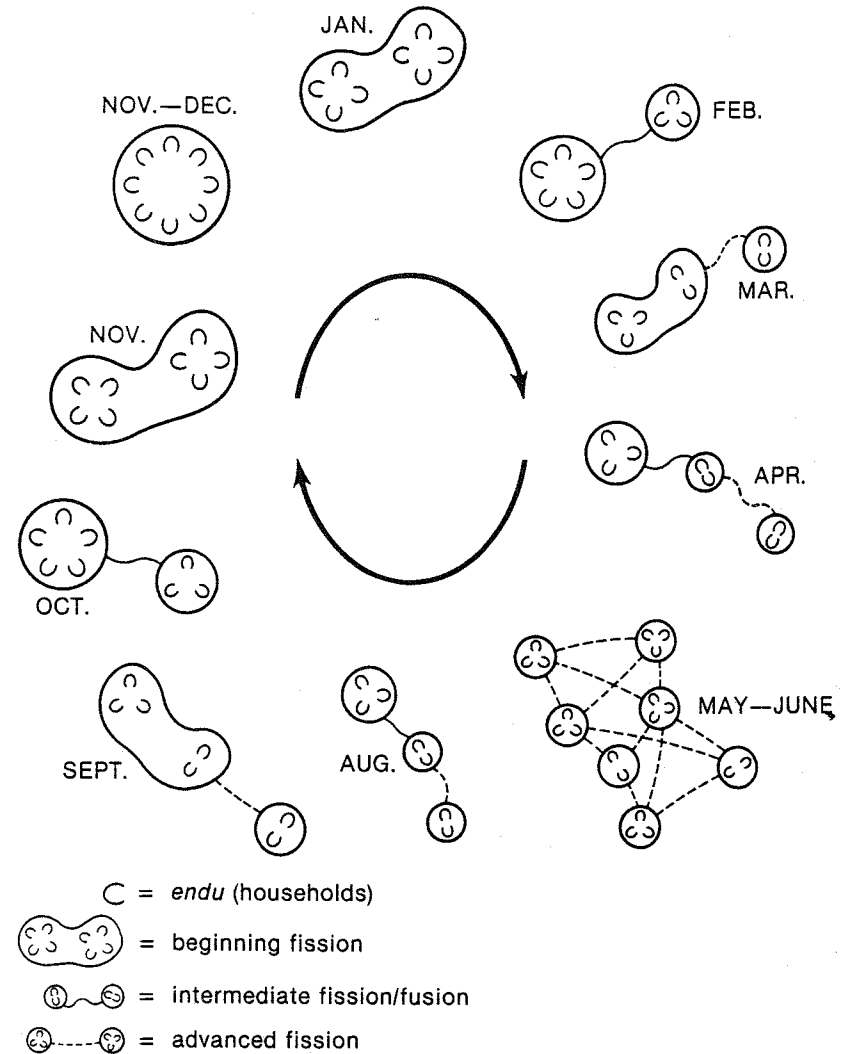


Fig. 4: Idealized series of camp changes showing the process of fission and fusion utilized for conflict avoidance during the course of a one-year period.

tionship between affective and effective bonds is the child's first introduction to the realities of the Mbuti economic system, with its emphasis on sharing and cooperation. In the first three years of life every Mbuti alive experiences almost total security. The infant is breast-fed for those three years, and is allowed almost every freedom. Regardless of gender, the infant learns to have absolute trust in both



For the Mbuti, education into social consciousness begins at the mother's breast. Here the infant is wrapped in a freshly cut and decorated piece of bark cloth, symbolizing its ultimate dependence on the forest, the mother and father of all.

male and female parent. If anything, the father is just another kind of mother, for in the second year the father formally introduces the child to its first solid food. There used to be a beautiful ritual in which the mother presented the child to the father in the middle of the camp, where all important statements are made (anyone speaking from the middle of the camp must be listened to). The father took the child and held it to his breast, and the child would try to suckle, crying "ema, ema," or "mother." The father would shake his head, and say "no, father . . . eba," but like a mother (the Mbuti said), then give the child its first solid food.

At three the child ventures out into the world on its own and enters the *bopi*, what we might call a playground, a tiny camp perhaps a hundred yards from the main camp, often on the edge of a stream. The *bopi* were indeed playgrounds, and often very noisy ones, full of fun and high spirits. But they were also rigorous training grounds for eventual economic responsibility. On entry to the *bopi*, for one thing, the child discovers the importance of age as a structural principle, and the relative unimportance of gender and biological kinship. The *bopi* is the private world of the children. Younger youths may occasionally venture in, but if adults or elders try, as they sometimes do when angry at having their afternoon snooze interrupted, they invariably get driven out, taunted, and ridiculed. Children, among the Mbuti, have rights, but they also learn that they have responsibilities. Before the hunt sets out each day it is the children, sometimes the younger youths, who light the hunting fire.

Ritual among the Mbuti is often so informal and apparently casual that it may pass unnoticed at first. Yet insofar as ritual involves symbolic acts that represent unspoken, perhaps even unthought, concepts or ideals, or invoke other states of being, alternative frames of mind and reference, then Mbuti life is full of ritual. The hunting fire is one of the more obvious of such rituals. Early in the morning children would take firebrands from the *bopi*, where they always lit their own fire with embers from their family hearths, and set off on the trail by which the hunt was to leave that day (the direction of each day's hunt was always settled by discussion the night before). Just a short distance from the camp they lit a fire at the base of a large tree, and covered it with special leaves that made it give off a column of dense smoke. Hunters leaving the camp, both men and women, and such youths and children as were going with them, had to pass by this fire. Some did so casually, without stopping or looking, but passing through the smoke. Others reached into the smoke with their hands as they passed, rubbing the smoke into their bodies. A few always stopped, for a moment, and let the smoke envelop them, only then almost dreamily moving off.

And indeed it *was* a form of intoxication, for the smoke invoked the spirit of the forest, and by passing through it the hunters sought to fill themselves with that spirit, not so much to make the hunt successful as to minimize the sacrilege of killing. Yet they, the hunters, could not light the fire themselves. After all, they were already contaminated by death. Even youths, who daily joined the hunt at the edges, catching any game that escaped the nets, by hand, if they could, were not pure enough to invoke the spirit of forestness. But young children were uncontaminated, as yet untainted by contact with the original sin of the Mbuti. It was their



When children tire of playing in the bopi, they are always welcome with their many mothers and fathers in the main camp.



Before the day's hunt all hunters pass through the hunting fire, lit by children. Sometimes they sit down beside the fire, as if washing themselves in the sacred smoke.

responsibility to light the fire, and if it was not lit then the hunt would not take place, or as the Mbuti put it, the hunt *could* not take place.

In this way even the children in Mbuti society, at the first of the four age levels that dominate Mbuti social structure, are given very real social responsibility and see themselves as a part of that structure, by virtue of their purity. After all, they have just been born from the source of all purity, the forest itself. By the same reasoning, the elders, who are about to return to that ultimate source of all being, through death, are at least closer to purity than the adults, who are daily contaminated by killing. Elders no longer go on the hunt. So, like the children, the elders have important sacred ritual responsibilities in the Mbuti division of labor by age.

In the *bopi* the children play, but they have no "games" in the strict sense of the word. Levi-Strauss has perceptively compared games with rituals, suggesting that whereas in a game the players start theoretically equal but end up unequal, in a ritual just the reverse takes place. All are equalized. Mbuti children could be seen every day playing in the *bopi*, but not once did I see a game, not one activity that smacked of any kind of competition, except perhaps that competition that it is necessary for us all to feel from time to time, competition with our own private and personal inadequacies. One such pastime (rather than game) was tree climbing. A dozen or so children would climb up a young sapling. Reaching the top, their weight brought the sapling bending down until it almost touched the ground. Then all the children leapt off together, shrieking as the young tree sprang upright again with a rush. Sometimes one child, male or female, might stay on a little too long, either out of fear, or out of bravado, or from sheer carelessness or bad timing. Whatever the reason, it was a lesson most children only needed to be taught once, for the result was that you got flung upward with the tree, and were lucky to escape with no more than a few bruises and a very bad fright.

Other pastimes taught the children the rules of hunting and gathering. Frequently elders, who stayed in camp when the hunt went off, called the children into the main camp and enacted a mock hunt with them there. Stretching a discarded piece of net across the camp, they pretended to be animals, showing the children how to drive them into the nets. And, of course, the children played house, learning the patterns of cooperation that would be necessary for them later in life. They also learned the prime lesson of equality, other than for purposes of division of labor making no distinction between male and female, this nuclear family or that. All in the *bopi* were *apua'i* to each other, and so they would remain throughout their lives. At every age level—childhood, youth, adulthood, or old age—everyone of that level is *apua'i* to all the others. Only adults sometimes (but so rarely that I think it was only done as a kind of joke, or possibly insult) made the distinction that the Bira do, using *apua'i* for male and *amua'i* for female. Male or female, for the Mbuti, if you are the same age you are *apua'i*, and that means that you share everything equally, regardless of kinship or gender.

YOUTH AND POLITICS

Sometime before the age of puberty boys or girls, whenever they feel ready, move back into the main camp from the *bopi* and join the youths. This is when they must assume new responsibilities, which for the youths are primarily political. Already, in the *bopi*, the children become involved in disputes, and are sometimes instrumental in settling them by ridicule, for nothing hurts an adult more than being ridiculed publicly by children. The art of reason, however, is something they learn from the youths, and it is the youths who apply the art of reason to the settlement of disputes.

When puberty comes it separates them, for the first time in their experience, from each other as *apua'i*. Very plainly girls are different from boys. When a girl has her first menstrual period the whole camp celebrates with the wild *elima*



Youths are responsible for settling disputes and are constantly critical of adult behavior. Here they criticize the way adult males kept the best honey for themselves.

festival, in which the girl, and some of her chosen girl friends, are the center of all attention, living together in a special *elima* house. Male youths sit outside the *elima* house and wait for the girls to come out, usually in the afternoon, for the *elima* singing. They sing in antiphony, the girls leading, the boys responding. Boys come from neighboring territories all around, for this is a time of courtship. But there are always eligible youths within the camp as well, and the *elima* girl may well choose girls from other territories to come and join her, so there is more than enough excuse for every youth to carry on several flirtations, legitimate or illegitimate. I have known even first cousins to flirt with each other, but learned to be prudent enough not to pull out my kinship charts and point this out—well, not in public anyway.

The *elima* is more than a premarital festival, more than a joint initiation of youth into adulthood, and more than a rite of passage through puberty, though it is all those things. It is a public recognition of the opposition of male and female, and every *elima* is used to highlight the *potential* for conflict that lies in that opposition. As at other times of crisis, at puberty, a time of change and uncertainty, the Mbuti bring all the major forms of conflict out into the open. And the one that evidently most concerns them is the male/female opposition.

The adults begin to play a special form of "tug of war" that is clearly a ritual rather than a game. All the men are on one side, the women on the other. At first it



Akidimimba during her final elima dance, after which public opinion coerced her into marriage. Dances of the elima girls make public the responsibility of adult womanhood, while the choreography, like the musical form, emphasizes special patterns of cooperation.

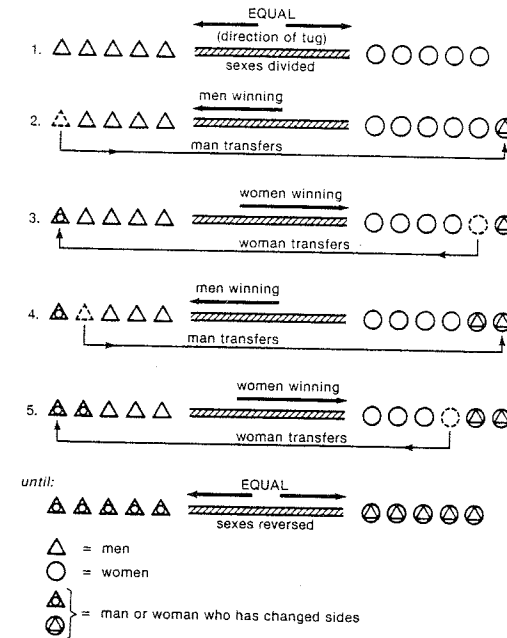
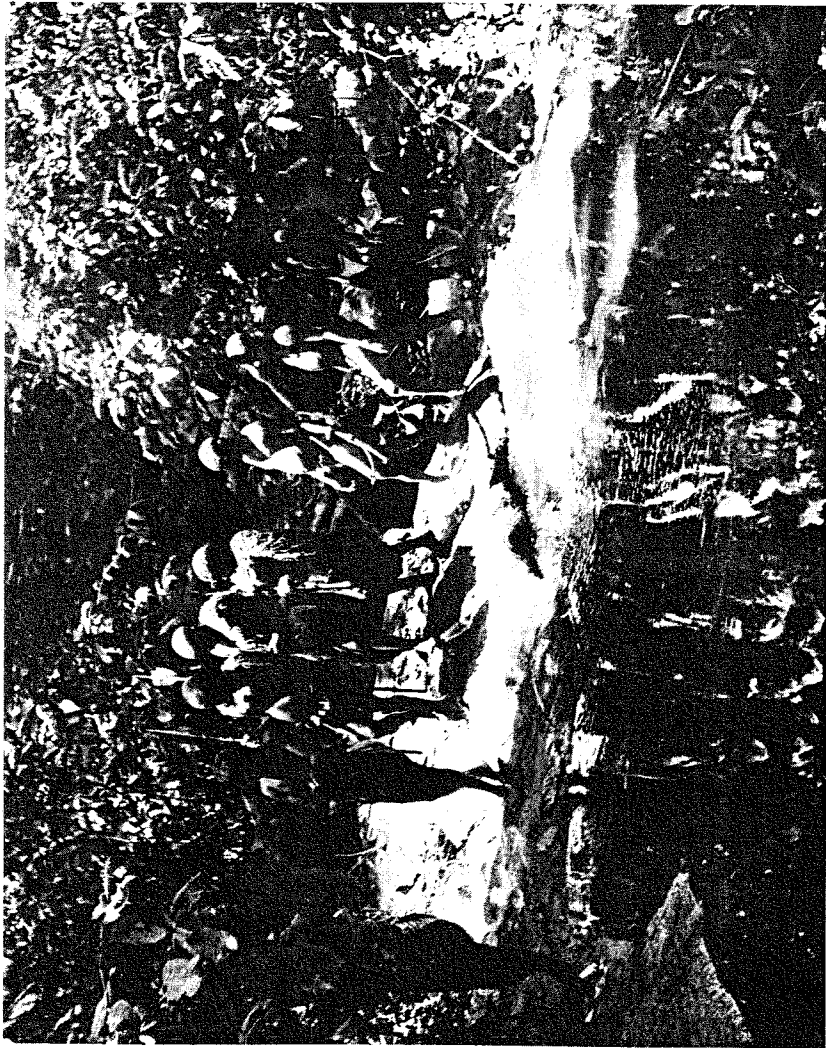


Fig. 5: Tug of war. This is one of the Mbuti's many techniques of conflict resolution, involving role reversal and the principle of opposition without hostility.

looks like a game, but quickly it becomes clear that the objective is for *neither* side to win. As soon as the women begin to win, one of them will leave the end of the line and run around to join the men, assuming a deep male voice and in other ways ridiculing manhood. Then, as the men begin to win, a male will similarly join the women, making fun of womanhood as he does so. Each adult on changing sides attempts to outdo all the others in ridiculing the opposite sex. Finally, when nearly all have switched sides, and sexes, the ritual battle between the genders simply collapses into hysterical laughter, the contestants letting go of the rope, falling onto the ground, and rolling over with mirth. Neither side wins, both are equalized very nicely, and each learns the essential lesson, that there should be *no* contest.

ADULTHOOD AND ECONOMY

It is significant that this is primarily an adult activity, though the youths may mock it and even imitate it as a way of ridiculing the adults. That is because adults are generally considered to be the most troublesome members of any camp. This is inevitable, but making it plain and overt helps to offset what might, in other circumstances, quickly become a tendency toward the domination of Mbuti society



As they get close to the place where the hunting nets will be set up, men and male youths tend to come together in small groups. Except in rare patches of sunlight, as here, the Mbuti are barely visible against the forest background.

by the adults, who are, after all, the hunters and gatherers, the food providers, and the life givers. But then, the youths will argue (joined by the elders—the alternate generation principle at work), it is the adults who are the cause of all the “noise,” all that goes wrong in the camp. For they are the killers of animals, and killing is the greatest “noise” of all. It is as though the adults sense this ambivalence themselves, for every day they bring back the food that all Mbuti clamor for and enjoy with such relish, yet it is they who daily renew the hard fact of man’s mortality. And although women do not kill, they do participate in the hunt. Children and elders *can* go on the hunt, but they are never an integral part of it, and have no position or role other than as bystanders.

Apart from being the major economic activity, the most dramatic event of everyday life, the hunt is also the greatest sacrilege in the life of the Mbuti, and full of inherent conflict. To some extent this is ritualized and turned to advantage.

Among the net hunters, after passing through the hunting fire the men and women moved on, perhaps only a short distance, or perhaps an hour or more away from the camp, depending on how long they had been hunting in that area. They used to straggle out of the camp in no apparent order, each heading in his or her own way to the place where the first hunt of the day was to start. Women gathered as they went, and even when in place, waiting for the men to set up the nets, they continued to look around for nuts, mushrooms, and berries, or the sweet *itaba* roots that are such a delicacy. What they gathered in this way actually formed the bulk of the daily diet, and certainly added to the variety of ways in which the game could be cooked and served, but little glamour attached to gathering, and the women, just as much as the men, found the hunt exciting. Despite its dangers there were seldom even minor injuries, and most of those came about through carelessness.

While the women were filling their baskets with vegetable produce the men set up their nets, over three feet high and up to a hundred yards long, in a huge semicircle. It was impossible to see the length of any one net, yet all the men positioned themselves and started setting their nets up at the same time, each unfolding his net and hanging it on low shrubs or saplings until he came to where his neighbor had started hanging his net. The precision was as remarkable as that of the women, who by then had also taken up position, silently. At a given signal they began beating in towards the nets, whooping and yelling, striking the ground with bundles of leaves and sticks. The game put up in this way mostly fled towards the nets, rarely would it double back through the line of advancing women, though sometimes big game—a leopard or a buffalo—might do that. If big game was sighted the women cried out a warning to the men, who lowered the nets to let the game through, rather than risk having it tear its way through, destroying a good net.

The nets snared everything from the smallest duikers to the largest antelopes. Some game, usually the heavy game, often tried to escape to the side, where the semicircle of nets ended. That was where the youths positioned themselves, with spears or bows and arrows, or as often as not, simply with their bare hands. This was the chance for a male youth to prove himself as a hunter and, by presenting a large antelope caught with his own hands to the parents of his girl friend, win

their approval for him to marry her. But whereas the adults were all shouting and making a lot of noise to scare and confuse the game, the youths remained silent, hidden, until their turn came.

I mention this because the Mbuti used the word *akami*, meaning "noise," to mean not only noise, but also conflict; fighting within a tightly cooperative camp can spoil a hunt just as effectively as too much noise at the wrong moment. Silence, or *ekimi*, is the preferred quality of "peace." The adults, caught in the dilemma of having to kill to survive, were also caught in the dilemma of having to create *akami* in order to succeed as hunters. And adulthood, as I have said, is regarded as a time of *akami*, of noise and conflict. Even though involved at the edges of the hunt, the youths managed to remain aloof, and to retain the positive value of *ekimi*.

TECHNIQUES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This was as it should be, for the role of youth in the Mbuti division of labor is the role of politician. They are the lawmakers and the judges. That is also as it should be, for there is little cause for conflict in the life of youth. More important still, the best singers and dancers are to be found among the youth, and dance and song are the prime means by which Mbuti regulate the good and the bad in their lives. Just as children are by their very nature best fitted for the sacred role, lighting the hunting fire, because they have just come from the source of all sanctity, and just as the adults are best equipped for the economic role in life, being at the height of their physical capabilities, so are the youth deemed best fitted for the political role. They have not yet become hunters, bringing death to all living creatures. They are not yet well-enough developed for that role; they will become hunters when they marry. But they have the vigor and vision of youth. They are the singers and dancers. And above all, the future is theirs.

Recognizing change as inherent in their way of life, the Mbuti avoid codifying behavior into what is right and what is wrong. At any one time there is a general consensus as to right behavior, which is what is right for that moment. But if a question or dispute arises then judgment is given only in terms of what is right for the band, or camp, as a whole. Ultimately that means what is right for the forest, the ultimate arbiter. Right and wrong are not inherent in any action; right and wrong can only be determined by the effect of any action.

This does not mean that the rules of behavior are vague, or are so fluid as to have little meaning. Often the rules are very specific, and as long as they work for the general good they remain unchanged. But as the context changes, as it did when the villagers first moved into the forest, and still more dramatically under colonial rule, the rules change. I saw them changing as the Belgians increasingly encouraged commercial exploitation of the forest, changing the relationship between hunter and villager, even between hunter and forest. And as independence approached there were heady decisions to be made: whether to spend more or less time in the village, where contact could be had with the modern world that

was closing in around them. And always it was the youths who made the decisions, for, as the elders said, the future was theirs to live in.

Even when it came to settling disputes this fell largely to the youths, for through their music they were associated with the positive value of *ekimi*. However loud a forest song may be, it is never "noisy" in the Mbuti sense.

Mbuti music is highly integrative. The very musical structure and form and the techniques of singing reproduce, almost exactly, the patterns of cooperation required in whatever aspect of real life that particular kind of song relates to. Thus *elima* songs are sung in antiphony, with the girls taking the lead, representing the coming division of the sexes, but also the fact that it is an opposition devoid of hostility. Among themselves the *elima* girls sing in parallel seconds, illustrating the ideal kinds of relationships they should have with each other, the closest kind of friendship and intimacy (something that the males do not need, it seems). The hunting songs are always sung in round form, and in canon, and utilize the hoquet technique, by which the melodic line is broken up into separate notes, each sung by one hunter, so that the melody cannot be made to sound unless all the hunters sing their individual notes, with precision and at exactly the right moment. The hunting song thus recreates the intensive cooperative patterns required by the hunt, and like the hunt the grouping is circular, with women forming one semicircle around the fire, men forming an opposing semicircle, with youths on each side where the two semicircles almost join.

So it is with the other two major modes of Mbuti music; each reinforces the appropriate patterns for the corresponding activity. One is a gathering song (particularly for the honey season) and the other a death song. All four forms of song demand cooperation; not one of them can be produced by a single singer. The only solo song that is possible is the lullaby, an intimate communication between a mother and her child, to be sung by her alone and composed specially for each child while it is yet in the womb.

THE MOLIMO AND "JUSTICE"

While the youths do not sing a prominent part in the hunting song, any more than their active role in the hunt is prominent, they dominate the other song forms. Of these the *molimo* songs are the most powerful, for the *molimo* represents the spirit of the forest itself, and in all times of major crisis it is invoked by song. For this song to be heard by the forest it must be sung by an unmarried youth, into a trumpet that transforms the sound into something quite unearthly.

As the adults sing around the fire at night, trying to restore *ekimi*, the youths slip out of the camp and go to where the *molimo* trumpet is hidden, high up in a tree. They take it down, bathe it in a stream where it will be kept, night after night, until the crisis is ended, when it will be restored to its hiding place in the *molimo* tree. The youths then wrap it in leaves so that it looks like a part of the forest. It may be anything from six to fifteen feet long, but as they come into camp all the youths will have one hand on it, symbolizing their unanimity. One of their number,