

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD AMONG THE EFE AND THE BALESE IN THE ITURI FOREST: MORES AND ETHNIC IDENTITY SHOWN BY THE DEAD

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**ABSTRACT** The Efe Pygmies and the Balese often encounter the dead, awake as well as in sleep. The dead dwell deep in the forest, and continue their traditional way of life. The dead sometimes teach new knowledge and technology to the living and tell them to keep their traditional way of life. Perhaps in keeping with the wishes of the dead, the Efe and the Balese are reluctant to adopt the westernized life and ideology which local missionaries want to introduce among them. After death, the Efe and the Balese dwell in the forest so that they themselves have no intention to exhaust the forest resources. Therefore, their cosmology including the next life in the forest would better protect the forest than animal and plant conservation projects imposed by outsiders.

**Key Words:** African Pygmies; Efe; Balese; Cosmology; Ancestor.

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. Confusion in Studies on the Mbuti Pygmy Supernatural World

The Mbuti Pygmies, or the Mbuti, are hunter-gatherers and live in the Ituri forest, northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, former Zaïre) (Fig. 1). Although the Mbuti supernatural world has long been studied, researchers disagree with each other in many aspects, and studies on this subject are in a state of confusion.

There are at least two reasons for this state. The first is that there are a considerable variety of names of supernatural beings among local groups of the Mbuti. For example, even among the Efe, one subgroup of the Mbuti, there is a variety of names for supernatural beings. Among the Efe in the eastern part of the Ituri forest, "bari" is an important supernatural being; among the Efe in the northern part, "tore" is important (Vorbichler, 1978: 163).

The variety of names is partly explained by the influence from the neighboring farmers on the Mbuti culture. For example, the word, "bari," is not of Efe origin, but is from the Bira language, a Bantu language (Vorbichler, 1978: 163). The Bira call a supernatural being, "bari" (Harako, 1984: 159-160).

Similarly, the supernatural being "tore," among the northern Efe, is known among some Mamvu who live to the north of the Efe (Vorbichler, 1978: 163). It is not known which ethnic group adopted "tore" from the other, but surely there exists a cultural exchange concerning the supernatural world between the Efe and the Mamvu.

The second reason for the confusion is that researchers have no clear methods to the

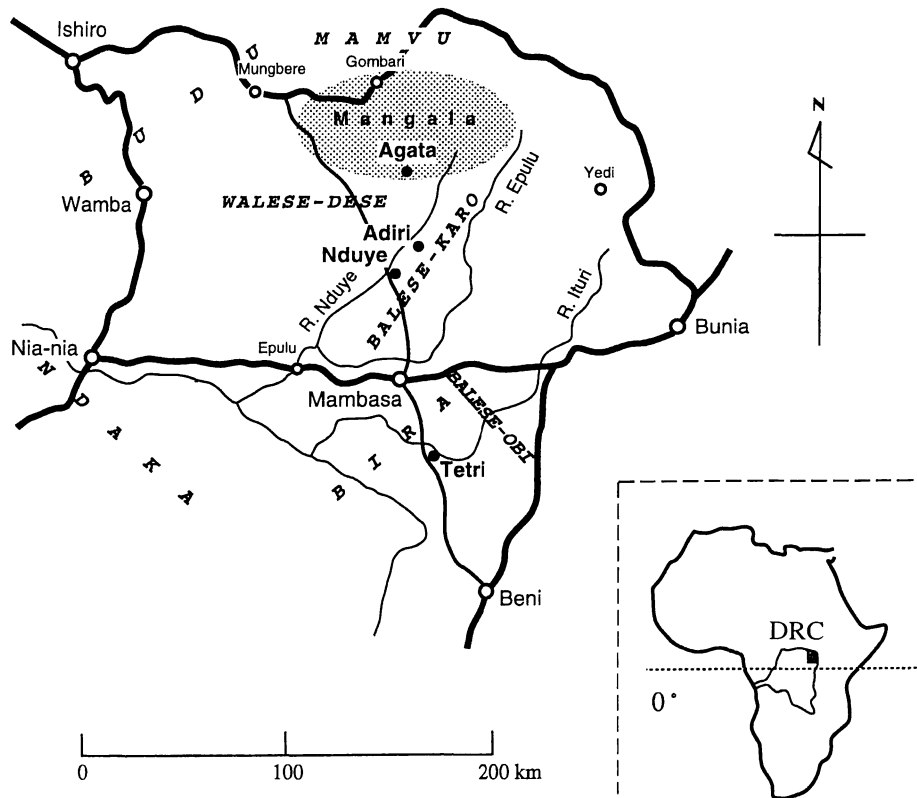


Fig. 1. The research area. Capital italic indicates names of ethnic groups of farmers.

study of the supernatural world. Contradictory descriptions in an article are not rare.

For example, Schebesta was told by an Efe informant that two supernatural beings, “tore” and “muri-muri,” were actually the same “great spirit to whom the souls of all dead men went” (Schebesta, 1933: 237). However, another Efe claimed that “tore” was the “supreme being in heaven” while “muri-muri” was a “strange mysterious creature of the forest” (Schebesta, 1933: 238).

To apply western concepts, such as “god,” “ghost,” and “spirit,” to the supernatural beings of the Mbuti, can induce conceptual confusion as well as nominal confusion. Schebesta described the “keti” and “mungu” among the Mbuti as “ghost” and “god,” respectively (Schebesta, 1933: 167-171). He, however, did not define “ghost” and “god.” To use such technical terms without definition can hinder researchers from understanding the Mbuti’s own recognition of their supernatural world, since these terms bear implications from the European cultures.

Such pitfalls are also apparent in a paper by Turnbull, the authority on the Mbuti religion. He admitted that there was “confusion ... on questions of religious terminology,” and that “we must go a great deal further” (Turnbull, 1965: 248); he acknowledged that the study of this area had not been elaborated. However, Turnbull himself mentioned “the God of the Forest” of the Mbuti without further definition and noted that it was “referred to by many different names, ... as ‘The Forest,’ also, though

less often, as ‘Father’ and ‘Grandfather’<sup>(1)</sup>” (Turnbull, 1965: 257). This description consequently added to the existing confusion to the study of the Mbuti supernatural world by introducing two new names. Unfortunately, his prolific works have become accepted as established theory.

## II. Approaches to the Supernatural World

Joiris stated that studies on the African Pygmy cosmology revealed the variety of researcher preoccupations more than the variety of supernatural beings among African Pygmies (Joiris, 1996: 245). We, researchers, should also note that African Pygmies in general often respond to researcher questions in the way Christians would easily understand, because they tend to think that Europeans and Japanese are all Christians.

Besides the above problems, there are two important factors in the methodology to the study of this area. The first is that different names do not always derive from different concepts, while it is possible that one name can involve more than two different concepts.

This issue of names and concepts has been almost ignored in the study of the Mbuti. As stated above, Schebesta introduced two contradictory opinions of the Efe. One said “*tore*” and “*muri-muri*” were the same while the other said they were different. However, in my research area, I am told that the category of *tore* includes that of *murimuri*.<sup>(2)</sup> Consequently, *murimuri* can be sometimes called *tore*.

The second factor is that supernatural beings of separate categories can be called by the same name, even if one does not include the other. According to Vorbichler, “*bari*” is the Supreme Creator, has wings, lives in the moon, and is a trickster (Vorbichler, 1978: 164-165). According to Harako, earthquakes occur when “*baketi*” runs around underground. “*Baketi*” also gives game animals to human beings (Harako, 1984: 152). I doubt that the Mbuti themselves hold a fixed image of “*bari*” and “*baketi*” with so many characteristics.

I think it possible that both “*bari*” and “*baketi*” contain several concepts. Two or more supernatural beings could have the same name. For example, in Japanese, *hotoke* means “Buddha,” the founder of Buddhism as well as a “corpse.” The Japanese word *hotoke* contains at least two separate concepts. If a Japanese folklorist did not distinguish the two concepts in *hotoke*, his work on Japanese folklore would naturally be regarded as nonsense. In my research area, *tore* could mean *murimuri* as well as dead people.

Why have the researchers not paid closer attention to this issue? I think the researchers have mistakenly believed that the Mbuti cosmology should be simple and easy to understand.

The study of the Mbuti supernatural world, which Schebesta and Turnbull founded, should be reexamined to rid it of nominal and conceptual confusion. In this paper, I will present several aspects of the relationship between the living and the dead through case studies of encounters with the dead. With the cases presented here, readers can examine the bases of my argument about attributes of the dead.<sup>(3)</sup>

My contention is that because of the dead, the Efe and their neighboring farmers, the Balese, have retained their traditional way of life. The dead have taught the living the mores of life and helped the living preserve ethnic identity. I also fear that there is a possibility that the cosmology of the Efe and the Balese could be destroyed in the future.

I will avoid using the terms, "spirit" and "god," which carry too many implications from European cultures. To use such terms can oversimplify the attributes of supernatural beings among other cultures. For example, because "spirit" denotes a psychosomatic dualism by implication, one is lead to regard the supernatural world as being based on the psychosomatic dualism. "God" can be easily regarded as the Creator, a Christian concept.

The supernatural world of the Mbuti is a part of their daily experience and exists parallel to the animal and the plant world.

The words, "supernatural world" which I have been using, is where what things happen that never happen in the material world. "Supernatural world" does not necessarily and properly describe the Mbuti's experience. However, I shall use these words to avoid using other words which are overburdened with implications from particular cultures.

I have chosen the Efe, a sub-group of the Mbuti, together with the Balese<sup>(4)</sup> because they share many features of their supernatural world. It has been noted that the Mbuti "just as much as others, appear to have adopted villager religious beliefs and practices. This could be taken as symptomatic of a much closer relationship involving a shared system of values" (Turnbull, 1965: 251). Vorbichler always presented the oral tradition of both the Efe and the Balese together in his papers. I doubt whether Vorbichler distinguished the similar two oral traditions. I have encountered the same difficulty in my research. In this paper, I will clarify whether a certain case was told by an Efe or by a Balese.

## RESEARCH AREA AND RESEARCH METHOD

### I. Ethnic Groups in the Research Area

I conducted research on the Efe around Adiri village about 80 km north of Mambasa, the administrative center of the Ituri forest, northeastern DRC, from July 1985 to February 1986, from July 1987 to February 1988, from August 1990 to January 1991, from July 1992 to October 1992, from July 1993 to October 1993, and from July 1995 to October 1995 (Fig. 1).

The Ituri forest is near the northern edge of the Afrotropical rain forest area. Grassland patches appear in the forest about 60 km north of Adiri (Terashima, 1987), where lies the ecotone between the rain forest and the grassland. The study area, although in the tropical rain forest, has both rainy and dry seasons (Ichikawa, 1978: 133; Bailey & DeVore, 1989: 465).

In Central Africa, there are various Pygmy groups: the Baka in western Congo and Cameroon; the Aka in Central Africa and northern Congo; the Twa in western DRC and western Uganda; and the Mbuti in the Ituri forest. In the Ituri forest, there are other ethnic groups who engage in swidden cultivation. The Bira, who are linguistically classified in the Bantu group, live in the central and southern part of the Ituri. The Ndaka and the Budu, also of the Bantu group, live in the western part. The Balese, of the Sudanic group, live in the northern part, namely around the research area. The Mamvu, of the Sudanic group, live in the vicinity of Gombari to the north of the Balese

(Vorbichler, 1965: 3-10; 1971: 29-31; Geluwe, 1957: 8) (Fig. 1).

The Efe and the Balese of my research area call the area to the north of Agata village, Mangala (Fig. 1), which means the area where Lingala language is spoken as a lingua franca. In contrast, Swahili is the lingua franca in my research area.

The Mbuti maintain a social and economic relationship with the neighboring farmers, and they use the farmers' language as their mother tongue with slightly altered phonetic features. The Mbuti neighboring the Balese use the Balese language as their mother tongue and call themselves *Efe*. It is not known what, if any, proper language the Mbuti used in the past.

The Balese are divided into several subgroups: the Walese-Dese, north of the Nduye River; the Walese-Karo or the Balese-Karo, around Nduye and northeast of Nduye; the Balese-Obi, north of Beni and west of Bunia (Vorbichler, 1965: 8-9) (Fig. 1).

Most of the Efe and the Balese who live in Adiri village and its vicinity, originally immigrated from the north around the end of the colonial period (Terashima, 1987; 68). The Efe and the Balese lived side by side in the north before the migration but split into at least three groups: people who migrated to the south founded Adiri village; people who migrated further to the north live now in Mangala; people who migrated to the east live around Yedi (Fig. 1).

The Balese of the above three groups are called Karo, whose language is slightly different from that of the Balese who have long lived in Nduye. Strictly speaking, the Balese in Nduye are not called Karo, but all the Balese in this area are collectively called the Walese-Karo or the Balese-Karo. In this paper, the Efe and the Balese signify the local population of each ethnic group in my research area.

The Balese mainly cultivate cassava, plantain bananas, sweet potatoes, kidney beans, peanuts, and rice. Although some of the Efe also clear land for farming around the Balese village, they are far from becoming self-sufficient. Their farms are usually much smaller than those of the Balese, and they rarely take care of them.

## II. Research Method

I conducted my research living in a Balese village and Efe camps. In the following pages, the "village" is the habitation of the Balese and other farmers, while the "camp" is that of the Efe. I conducted research mostly in Swahili, and asked informants to translate when I had to communicate with those who did not speak Swahili. My informants were a Balese and an Efe.

I do not use any oral tradition in this paper, although I use only the encounter episodes in order to clarify concretely the relationship between the dead and the living. I interviewed those who experienced encounters with the dead. First, I let them talk freely about their encounter. Then I asked them detailed questions. Later I asked other persons whether they had heard of the episode told by the same storyteller. Thus I tried to lower the probability that I would be deceived although it is impossible to eliminate the possibility.

I also asked my Efe informant and other Efe whether the information collected from the Balese can be found among the Efe. Likewise, I asked my Balese informant and other Balese the same question about the Efe.

As a result, I found that the supernatural worlds of the Efe and the Balese were so

similar, with few exceptions, that I almost could not distinguish one from the other. These two ethnic groups, however, differ in many other aspects of livelihood and culture.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD WHEN AWAKE

The Efe as well as the Balese often experience encounters with the dead and other supernatural beings into which the dead had changed. While not all of them experience such encounters, a few persons in each village and camp claimed to have encountered the dead. Therefore, the Efe and the Balese hear such stories from early childhood. To them, it is regarded a fact that the living sometimes meet the dead.

In some encounters with the dead people actually witness the dead and in others, in which people hear only the voice of the dead. There are other cases in which people meet and are spoken to by the dead.

The witnesses may or may not know the dead. In the latter cases as well as where only a voice is heard, it is not clear whether they encountered the dead or not. The Efe and the Balese, however, consider to have met the dead because the encounter took place where the living cannot be.

In this chapter, I present case studies of people witnessing the dead and of hearing their voice. I will briefly discuss the mountains where the dead gather to live after death.

In the following cases, my notes are in parentheses.

### I. Witnessing the Dead

#### Case 1. An old Balese man saw his late mother's brother.

Some time ago, one of my mother's brother in Mangala was killed by an elephant. He went to hunt elephants but an elephant killed him. I heard the news in Adiri village. A few weeks later, I set out for his distant village.

I arrived at the village. When I was walking in the forest to his grave, he himself passed by before my eyes. He appeared about 10 meters in front of me. He stopped there, he looked around and he went into the bush.

I ran after him calling, "Uncle, are you going to toilet? Are you going to toilet?" I could not find him again.

This old man could well have been day dreaming because he mourned and missed his uncles with whom he had spent his childhood. This is a rather unusual case, because in most cases, an unknown person suddenly appears.

#### Case 2. An Efe man saw a dead man.

When I was young and before I married my wife, I went by myself into the forest to shoot monkeys with bow and arrows. It was about 7 a.m. in the morning. A strange man passed before my eyes. At once the wind blew, and he

disappeared among the trees in the forest.

The strange man was an Efe. He had black skin like ours and had on something like *kusimavu* (a loincloth made of bark cloth).

This witness said that the stranger was a dead man.

First, note that both cases occurred in the forest. All the encounters with the dead occurred in the forest. The Efe and the Balese say that this was because the dead dwell deep in the forest although their graves are usually situated near the village or the camp.

Second, the dead man in case 2 had on a loincloth made of bark cloth, which is the traditional costume of the Efe and the Balese, and a typical attire of the encountered dead. The dead in dreams also are said to wear such loincloths.

Generally speaking, the Efe and Balese wear trousers or short trousers even in the forest; only a few old men wear the loincloth as a daily attire.

The Efe and the Balese say that the dead keep a traditional way of life deep in the forest. Even if people wore shirts and trousers when they were alive, after death they are said to wear traditional cloths.

## II. Hearing the Voice of the Dead

Some strange sounds heard in the forest are considered to be the voice of the dead.

### Case 3. A young Balese man heard a strange voice.

Around 1986, I went to Mangala with an Efe man to see my mother. I was staying with my mother for several months.

One day around 8 a.m., I went fishing in a river near the village. Then I heard a voice behind me, "Moo, moo, moo." The voice resembled that of *isungba*. I looked around but saw no one. Suddenly I started trembling with fear. I ran back to the village and told my mother what I heard.

They say the *tore* make such sounds.

This young Balese man considered the voice to be of the dead. As stated before, *tore*<sup>(5)</sup> means the dead as well as other supernatural beings. In this case it means the dead.

This young man said the voice reminded him of the voices of an *isungba*, a kind of funeral seen in some of the villages in this area. The music played at an *isungba* is regarded as a cry of the deceased.<sup>(6)</sup> This young man believed he had heard the dead because the sound had resembled the cry at the *isungba*.

### Case 4. An Efe man's story about the mountain where the dead dwell.

There is a mountain called Adu, which is on the opposing bank of the Nduye River. If we leave Adiri village in the morning and walked hard, we will arrive there at about 1 p.m.

While we cannot see the top of the mountain from its foothills, we sometimes hear voices and cocks crowing from the mountain top. Someone on the top may ask your name.

Adu and Aro, the latter of which is in Mangala, are mountains where the dead gather to live from various regions, such as Nduye and Adiri. All the dead of the Efe and the Balese dwell there.

When someone dies somewhere, we hear a sound, “biiiiiin,” from the direction of Adu, the sound we know to be the dead person opening the door to enter the house of Adu.

Actually, when a man’s wife died, we heard the sound, “biiiiiin,” before we received the news of her death.

One of our camps we use in the honey season is situated at the foot of Adu, and all of us have heard the voice of the dead from the mountain top. Near the mountain, the dead built barricades with rocks against people who want to climb.

People never climb Adu. If we dared to climb, the dead on the top would throw down rocks to kill us.

If someone points a finger at Adu, we will not be able to get any honey nor game.

The above legend has been told from the old days.

I collected several other cases in which people had been called or intimidated by the dead atop Adu; many Efe and Balese tell stories of the voice of the dead.

This mountain, Adu, is situated deep in the forest. While the dead are encountered here and there in the forest, some villages of the dead are on such mountains deep in the forest.<sup>(7)</sup>

I think it is quite curious that the people believe that the people from other ethnic groups also live together with the Efe and the Balese on the mountain of the dead. Someone even said to me, “You will also come to Adu when you die.”

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD IN DREAMS

The Efe and the Balese often encounter the dead also in dreams. As we, too, sometimes dream of the dead, there might be nothing special in such encounters. The next case is easy for us to understand because the informant dreamed of a late relative.

Case 5. A young Balese man dreamed of his late mother’s brother.

I dreamed of my late mother’s brother who was the first born of my mother’s parents. He died of appendicitis.

After about two and a half months from his death, I dreamed that my mother’s brother, his wife, who is alive, and I went to drink palm wine together which my uncle had prepared before his death.

After drinking the wine, uncle said to us, “Go back to your house. I am also going back to my house.” We said to him, “Where are you going back? Let’s return to the village together.” He answered, “I left the village long ago. I do not have my house there any more. I am living in another village elsewhere.” Seeing we were unhappy, he said, “Let’s go together. I am going to see you off.”



We arrived near the village, and he said, "You go," and disappeared. We could not tell which direction he had gone.

I woke up, and it was midnight. I began weeping.

In this case, the deceased was about to leave when the living refused to leave him, which is also seen in the next case.

As in the next case, we can often observe a variety of symbols, in particular, the symbol of death in dreams. Such cases suggest that death is significant in the culture of the Efe and the Balese.

Case 6. An Efe woman visited the house of her late parents.

In my dream, I went to see my late parents. Seeing me, they said, "What brought you here? Who called you?" I just went near to my parents. My parents' hut was a dome-shaped one made of leaves and wood.

In the hut, there was a wide river like the Adiri river. (Though this is hard to understand, I leave it as it is told.) I was standing outside the hut. My father asked, "Why have you come here?" and my mother also asked, "What brought you here?"

Now my father's father (deceased) arrived. The grandfather also said, "What do you come here for?" Another Efe's father (deceased) also arrived. He asked the same question as others. I could not enter the hut at all.

In the hut, there was a very bright light. It was not the light from firewood. It was bright as if a full moon had come out. I was scared, but all I could do was just standing outside.

Fish came to me. Before I left, a lot of fish arrived to block up the road. (I think she was standing in the river.) I just remained standing there. They said, "Do not enter the hut. Go away right now. Go home."

I woke up in the morning.

In this woman's dream, she went to her parents and they refused to see her. That is to say the dead themselves draw a strict boundary between the dead and the living, as seen in case 5. Although the Efe and the Balese are afraid of the dead, they do not refuse to see them in their dreams.

In case 6, there are several symbols of death. Among the Efe and the Balese, fish in a dream means that a sorcerer is going to kill someone. The bright light in the hut reminds the Efe and the Balese of the bright light with which a sorcerer is said to appear. When one dreams of such symbols, he/she will feel great anxiety.

### I. Being Taught in Dreams of the Dead

Dreams influence the everyday life of the Efe and the Balese. For example, when one had an evil dream, a ritual is conducted to avoid misfortune. When one dreamed of killing game, the traps are checked, just in case.

In the next case, a dead man gives advice to a living man.

Case 7. A Balese old man was given an advice by one of his late relatives.

One of my father's sister's children, Nosi, appeared in my dream and asked me, "What work do you do?"

I answered, "I am engaged in farming." Nosi said to me, "Well, where are your farming implements? You are not working. You are strolling. You should walk with a hatchet, an ax, a plow, and a bow and arrows every time when you go out."

I said to him, "Can anyone carry so many instruments?"

Nosi said, "Don't say such a thing. You are a mature man. You should take care of your own things."

Then I awoke at midnight. I went out and was sitting outside for a while, after which I returned to the bed.

This man who had this dream said that Nosi wanted to say the people of this village did not lead good lives, Nosi wanted to pointed out that the villagers were not industrious. From this dream on, this Balese said he remembered Nosi's words and always took his farming implements with him.

Case 8. An Efe man was given advice by his late father in his dream.

Today I dreamed of my late father. He looked like a youth. He had a bow and arrows and wore a loincloth (made of bark cloth). He came out by himself. In the dream he visited our camp at night.

He said to all members of the camp, "Why don't you go and walk in the forest? (meaning that all members should go hunt animals and gather plant food.) I see only the Efe of other camps walking in the forest. For us, the Efe, going to the forest is the only way to obtain money. It is the only way of life for us. You, the children of this camp, however, always remain at the same place without walking in the forest (meaning that people of the camp remain near the neighboring Balese farmers and depend upon their crops)."

Then we went out to the forest .... (I omit a long story following this sentence. In the story, he talked about a long journey to hunt game in the forest.) Returning to the camp, we called a merchant to sell the meat. We obtained money. We went to a store to buy cloths. And we returned to the camp.

Then I awoke in the morning.

This Efe man considered the late father's words to be true. He expected that their hunts would be successful in the forest. He was going to tell all the Efe in the camp about his dream, with whom he would go to the forest.

The dead sometimes give advice to the living Efe and Balese. In above two cases, the dead Balese told the living Balese to continue to live the traditional way of life as farmers; the dead Efe told the living Efe to continue to live the traditional way of life as hunter-gatherers. The dead appear in dreams to remind the descendants of traditional subsistence, and make them observe it.

The dead even give technical advice.

Case 9. An Efe man learned to make poisoned arrows from his dream. (The Efe man himself was already deceased. His daughter's husband told me the following story.)

An Efe man learned in his dream how to make a poison, *butari*. (*Butari* is a poison which is smeared on the tip of arrows mostly to kill monkeys in the trees.) He did not teach other people how to make it. He just smeared the *butari* on the tip of other people's arrows.

He used to say, "My late father came out in my dream, and taught me how to prepare *butari*." While his father was alive, he taught the son how to make the medicine to kill elephants but not *butari*. Long after his death, the father appeared in a dream and taught the son how to make *butari*.

In some dreams the dead also taught the living how to make more palm wine, which was soon carried out.

The Efe and the Balese say there is no other way to learn the preparation methods for poisoned arrows and special medicine, but to buy such knowledge from someone, or be taught in dreams.

## II. Songs with Dancing Originate in Dreams

Among the Efe and the Balese, songs with dancing play an important role. They call these songs *obe*.

Songs with dancing, in particular of the Efe and other African Pygmies, are well known and loved not only by neighboring ethnic groups but also by European researchers and musicologists (Sawada, 1990); their highly complex and beautiful music has influenced the music of neighbors including the Balese.

How do songs originate? There are very few reports on the origins of songs among African Pygmies. I think researchers have had an ill-founded belief that all of their songs are "traditional" and have been handed down from generation to generation since ancient days.

Most of *obe* of the Efe and the Balese, however, seem to have originated in dreams. Almost all *obe* originating in dreams were taught by the dead. Some *obe* have originated in recent years.

Case 10. A Balese man dreamed of an *obe* in 1987.

I was sleeping with my wife in my house. We have no children. In my dream, I was sitting in a *baraza* (this Swahili word means a meeting place of villagers).

At that time a large knife about the size of an arm came to me and was about to pierce my body. I, however, was sitting without fear and the knife disappeared right in front of me. If I had been afraid of the knife, they would not have taught me *obe*.

After that, a great fire came to me. It reminded me of burning the bush to prepare the field. I was sitting fearlessly. The fire went out right in front of me.

After that, a great snake came to me. It was about the size of a tree. It opened its mouth and was about to swallow me together with the chair on which I was

sitting. It disappeared in front of me while I was sitting fearlessly.

Then many Balese men and women came to me, and played *obe*. They wore *kusimavu* (loincloths made of bark cloth) and played two drums. I watched this *obe* and listened. When they went back, I woke up.

In the next morning, I went to work in a field of the chief, where I taught some of my coworkers how to play the drum of the *obe*, and others how to sing and dance.

People who appeared in my dream were dead, or *tore*. My late mother also sang and danced together with other dead people. When I dreamed of this *obe*, it had no words.<sup>(6)</sup>

As mentioned above, the Balese seldom wear loincloths made of bark. Men wear trousers or short trousers while women wear skirts or commercial prints around their waists. The fact that the dead wore loincloths in this dream, shows that the Balese dead observe the traditional life, namely of the pre-colonial period.

Many Efe *obe* also have been learned in dreams.

Case 11. An Efe was taught *obe* by his late brother. (As the person who had seen the dream was already dead, one of his relatives told the story to me.)

In the late 1960's or later, Pamukaba (an Efe man), who was one of Avion's (an Efe man) brother, died. His family was in mourning and slept outside the huts in the camp for nearly two weeks. When the mourning was over, they began slept in their huts again. One night, late Pamukaba and other deceased appeared in Avion's dream.

These people played an *obe* which Avion had never seen or heard before. Immediately Avion got up, woke the people of his camp in the middle of the night, and began to teach them the *obe*.

In contrast to the Balese, most of the Efe prefer the *obe* of their own origin to those of other ethnic groups. The dreamed *obe* are the pride of the Efe and the foundation of their ethnic identity.

When the Efe play *obe*, they simulate the singing and dancing of the dead. I think, in performing *obe*, the Efe imagine that they and the dead participate together. The next case clearly supports this argument.

Case 12. An Efe woman sang and danced with the dead in her dream.

Today I (an Efe woman, her name is Tamanea) saw a dream. I was going to a far village (village of the Balese) with Ubobi (another Efe woman) to teach the villagers "Kpamara's *oberochi*" (Fig. 2). (A piece of *obe* which an Efe man, Kpamara, learned from the dead in his dream.) On the way, we saw many *tore* ahead of us. We did not know them. All of them were Efe women.

I led the *tore* to the village. We arrived near the village. Ubobi and I entered the village while the *tore* waited for my call in the forest of the outskirts of the village. When Ubobi and I entered the village, all villagers were very happy.



Fig. 2. Efe women playing "Kpamara's *oberochi*."

They said, "At last the owners have come of the *obe* which we have desired to learn."

I began to sing. The *tore* responded from the forest. I sang again. They responded again. When I sang three times, the *tore* asked me, "Is it all right to come?" I answered, "Just come out." They came out to the village and began singing and dancing with us and the villagers. Singing and dancing reached its climax. We sang and danced. We sang and danced ....

While we were performing *obe*, a Balese man of the village died. A villager came in and said, "Everybody, listen to me. A man died now in this village." Villagers asked the dead. "Shall we bury his body now?" The *tore* answered. "You should not bury his body." Villagers asked. "Why can't we bury the body?" A noble one of the *tore* answered. "I am going to put a medicine in his nostril."

The noble one entered in the house where the body lay, and took out a small bottle. He took out a bit of powder from the bottle and put it in the nostril of the body. "Aicheeao!" At once the body sneezed and revived.

Then I woke up.

While *tore* can mean a variety of supernatural beings, *tore* in this case are the dead; Tamanea herself recognized the *tore* in this dream as dead Efe women although she did not know them at all.

The above is a dream with profound implications. There are at least two themes: The living and the dead together played the *obe*, one of the dead revived a villager. The former shows the joy of performing *obe* with the dead. The latter shows the theme of "death and rebirth" amidst the joy of playing with the dead.

This dream suggests that Efe dreams are religiously and ideologically much more



Fig. 3. An old Efe man and the *rere* stick.

profound than imagined.

### SUMMONING THE DEAD

Among the Efe and the Balese, there is a procedure, somewhat like a ritual, of summoning the dead. The majority of the Efe and Balese, who themselves have not encountered the dead, become fully convinced that the dead really live in the forest by participation.

This summoning is called *abete*. *Abete* is not used in any particular ritual contexts. Nor is it used to pray for something from the dead. This event is conducted only for the purpose of summoning the dead. When someone wants an *abete*, he will go and ask a special man who is able to summon the dead.

Not everyone can conduct *abete*. However, no training nor initiation is required. *Abete* involves mostly calling out the names of the dead to be summoned. Once someone tries an *abete* and the dead are summoned successfully, from that time on, the man conducts *abete*. Only men, but both Efe and Balese can conduct *abete*.

Case 13. *Abete* conducted by an old Efe man.

About 7 p.m., Iko (an old Efe man), who conducts *abete* and other people

gathered. Iko told me not to turn on a flashlight, nor to use the flash of my camera until *abete* is completed. It was all right to record their voices.

For about 10 meters from Sawada's house toward the bush behind the house, the men beat firewood and strewed charcoal. The moon had not come up and we were in total darkness.

Iko fastened many leaves (leaves of any kind of tree will do) and a *rere* (a wooden bell usually tied to the neck of a dog to tell its location in dog hunting) to the top of a wooden stick about 2 meters long (Fig. 3).

He started beating upon the ground with the *rere* stick and called out the names of the dead towards the bush. The Efe say that the dead come in the shape of a strange small beast called *abete* which can hardly be seen.

The *rere* stick becomes heavy and begins to jump here and there as soon as *abete* enters into the *rere*. Sometimes the *rere* stick jumps so hard that not even several adult men can control the stick. The *rere* stick often pulls the people holding onto it into the forest.

On that day, as Iko called out the names of the dead Efe men, the *rere* stick began to jump right and left, and the bell sounded louder and louder. Two other men joined to hold onto the stick with Iko. According to them, the stick became so heavy that they could not move it at their will.

Suddenly the bell hit something and broke. The *Abete* session ended at once. The men say when the bell breaks, *abete* goes away.

Here, I transcribe the recorded conversation of Iko and other participants.

Iko: Grasp (the *rere* stick), Ekuru (the name of a late Efe man), Ndima (the name of another deceased Efe), grasp my hands tightly. Not so loosely, grasp tightly.

Make the white man come closer. (Iko told a nearby person to bring me closer to him.) There, all right. (He referred to my position.)

Ndima, grasp now. Piri's father (the late father of a young Balese man), grasp.

Come closer. (He told the other Efe and Balese participants who wanted to help hold the *rere* stick.)

(To the dead) Grasp tightly, not loosely, grasp firmly, properly. Don't grasp loosely.

Gombari (an Efe middle-aged man, who was holding onto the stick): Don't let the guy hit me with the *rere* stick. (He said so because the stick began to jump here and there.) Don't let the *rere* stick hit that guy (namely, Sawada).

Apitoko (a young Balese man, who was holding onto the stick for the first time in his life): (To Sawada) Be careful. Don't fall down into the hole there.

Gombari: *Abete* broke the bell.

Iko: It's over.

Gombari: The bell broke against soft and loose earth.

Apitoko: It was terrific. I would have run away.

*Abete* are one form of Efe and the Balese dead, and so are *tore*.

I know an Efe man who could not believe that *abete*, or *tore* came to pull the *rere* stick, even though he believed that *tore* lived in the forest. One day, he had an

opportunity to hold onto the *rere* stick in *abete*, and experienced the stick jumping up and down. He became to understand that the dead really entered into *rere*.

Some people who have been strongly influenced by Christianity doubt that the dead lived in the forest. In the next case, a Balese Catholic priest tried *abete*.

Case 14. A Balese man who did not believe in *abete*.

One day, a Balese Catholic priest said,

“They say *tore* are in the forest. Up to now, however, I myself have not seen them at all. If I can see for myself, I will believe in *tore*.”

He fastened a *rere* to the top of a wooden stick and went at night to a spot along the road on the fringe of his village together with other Efe and Balese. Other people had tried *abete* before at this spot.

They held the stick and beat upon the ground calling out the names of the dead. When they called out a name of a late Balese man, named Kodemuka, the *rere* suddenly became heavy. The stick began to shake violently and began to drag people into the forest.

The people were terrified, threw away the stick, and ran back to the village. The next morning when they returned to the spot to pick up the *rere* stick, it was no longer heavy.

The priest said, “Now, I believe in *tore*.”

Both the Efe and the Balese conduct *abete*. However, they are not sure which ethnic group learned *abete* from the other. Only one Balese said that the Efe originally had conducted *abete*.

## DISCUSSION

### I. The Importance of the Dead in the Supernatural World of the Efe and the Balese

The cases presented in this paper show that it is not rare for the Efe and the Balese to encounter the dead and sometimes the dead give practical advice to the living. Moreover, *abete* helps people accept the reality of the dead.

It is clear that the dead occupy an important position in the supernatural world of the Efe and the Balese. However, oddly enough, the dead have received almost no attention in the studies on African Pygmies. Vorbichler stated that originally there had been no ancestor worship among the Mbuti (Vorbichler, 1980: 181), and Joiris stated that there was no real ancestor worship among the Baka, although they had a notion of ancestral spirits (Joiris, 1996: 258). Joiris also wrote, “Camps of a regional band are often linked ... also through co-guardianship of the tutelary spirits of the dead” (Joiris, 1996: 254). Joiris did not admit Baka ancestor worship in spite of the tutelary spirits of their ancestors.

As neither Vorbichler nor Joiris gave a clear definition of “ancestor worship,” I can not understand why they denied the existence of ancestor worship. However, I feel that neither recognized the ancestors, or the dead, to be important in the supernatural world



among the Mbuti and the Baka.

Vorbichler may not have recognized ancestor worship among the Mbuti because he wanted the Creator to be the most important supernatural being. For example, concerning the Efe prayer in offering game, Vorbichler described several names of supernatural beings such as “Mungu,” “Muema,” “Mbali,” and “Väter” (Vorbichler, 1980: 174). Although “Väter,” “Fathers” in English, could imply ancestors or the dead among the Efe, Vorbichler emphasized only the creatorship of those supernatural beings (Vorbichler, 1980: 175).

The Aka, in contrast, conduct rituals to appeal to ancestral spirits prior to their hunt or after a series of unsuccessful hunting (Bahuchet et Thomas, 1991b: 173-174; Joiris, 1996: 272).

Ancestor worship may or may not be what is practiced, it seems safe to say that the dead play an important role among the Efe, the Balese, the Baka, and the Aka. It is necessary to study further the role and the importance of the dead among African Pygmies and their neighbors.

## II. The Identity of the Living and the Dead Deep in the Forest

There are three characteristics of the dead among the Efe and the Balese. The first is that the dead coexist with the living in space and time. The dead do not dwell in some other life nor in heaven, but dwell close to the living, such as on certain mountains, and in the forest. Without any special ability or ritual, the living may encounter the dead in dreams and in everyday life.

The second is that the dead are thought to wear traditional cloths and live a traditional way of life.<sup>(9)</sup>

The third characteristic is that the dead teach the living cultural elements, such as singing new *obe*, making poison, and advising the living to keep the traditional way of life. In particular, among the Efe, the *obe* is their pride and important culture.<sup>(10)</sup>

The Efe and Balese dead provide the basis of the mores and identity for the living. The dead can affect the living by introducing them new cultural elements. Such a change, however, can take place only in the framework of traditional life; the dead tell the living Efe to keep up hunting and gathering, and tell the living Balese to keep up shifting cultivation. This is because the dead affirm and encourage the living to keep up their traditional way of life, in spite of continuing social change.

## III. The Potential Decay of the Cosmology of the Efe and the Balese

I often hear from local missionaries that their efforts among the Efe and the Balese, in particular among the Efe, are unsatisfactory. It may be partly because of the alcoholism and the use of marijuana among the Efe and the Balese. However, it seems certain that the Efe and the Balese find it difficult to believe the Christian teaching which says that one goes to God in heaven.

One old Balese man said to me, “When one is young, he/she is innocent. When one grows up to be five or six years old, it can be safely said that he/she must be a sinner. Are there any adult men who have never felt lust for other men’s wives? I, as a sinner, feel ashamed to go to God who is great and perfect. I don’t want to go to him. We have

no other choice but to live in the forest after death.”

His understanding of Christianity may not be theologically correct, but in any case, clearly he does not want to go to heaven. He is not convinced by the missionaries' threat that after death adulterous people can not go to heaven and will wander in the forest.

The Efe and the Balese wish to be united with their relatives who died before. I suspect they wish this because they feel they live their life with so much help from the dead. Therefore, they do not accept the cosmology of Christianity.

This is not to say that there is no probability that the Efe will change their cosmology to accept Christianity. According to Ichikawa, in the Tetri area to the south of Mambasa (Fig. 1), some Mbuti have converted to Protestantism and have given up wine and tobacco they used to love so much. This must be inconceivable to people in my study area. In the Tetri area, since gold was discovered in the early 1980's, great social changes have occurred, such as a population influx from other ethnic groups and a massive inflow of cash and goods. Forest resources, particularly the hunted animals have been exhausted and the Mbuti themselves have adopted the mining of alluvial gold as one of their main subsistence activities.

Since mining gold is completely new, the Mbuti dead may not be able to give practical advice to the living any more. Some Mbuti adopted Protestantism as a new moral system to resolve the anarchy in moral standards.

Such social change can also occur among the Efe and the Balese. Then, they will face a serious identity crisis as the Mbuti in the Tetri area. However, strict conservation of forest resources does not necessarily help the Efe and the Balese to preserve their cosmology. Most forest conservation programs aim to protect the population of living organisms, in particular, animals. In such programs, the cosmology, including the life after death, is totally missing. The materialistic purpose of protecting animals in this world is completely alien to the Efe and the Balese.

For the Efe and the Balese, the forest is a place to go after death. Exhausted forest resources make their next life impossible. Therefore, I do not believe they themselves will destroy the forest environment of their own will. Only when they are under the strong influence from outside just as in the Tetri area, will they stop taking care of the forest.

I believe that their cosmology including the afterlife can protect the forest resources more effectively than the ideology of natural conservation forced on local communities by outsiders. We should entrust the dead and the living of these forest-dwelling peoples with the conservation of the forest.

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## NOTES

- (1) It seems to me that Turnbull's description might be biased in favor of the Christian concept "God," also called "Father" and "Grandfather." However, "father" and "grandfather" used by the Mbuti usually mean men who belong to the previous generations. It is more natural to assume that they refer to their ancestors.
- (2) Although there are many different names for supernatural beings among the Mbuti, some categorically include others.
- (3) Other kinds of supernatural beings will be described in my forthcoming paper.
- (4) In Bantu languages, "ba" or "wa" is usually used as a plural prefix for mankind. However, since the Balese language is Sudanic, neither "ba" nor "wa" is a plural prefix. Thus, "Balese" is not a plural form of "Lese."  
Although recently some Balese use "Lese" as a singular form of "Balese," in this paper I use "Balese" to designate both the singular and the plural.
- (5) Besides the description by Schebesta which is already mentioned, other researchers have introduced different concepts to explain "tore."  
Geluwe cited Costermans (1938: 536) to say that the Balese regarded "Torè" as the Supreme Being. She also cited Joset (1949: 92) to say "Torè" meant ancestral spirits for the Balese (Geluwe, 1957: 166-167).  
Vorbichler stated that the Efe and the Balese of the northern part of the Ituri usually used "tore" to mean a bush demon or a forest demon and sometimes to mean the Creator, or the God (Vorbichler, 1978: 163).
- (6) I will describe *isungba* in detail in another paper which will deal with supernatural beings in general among the Efe and the Balese.
- (7) Cases similar to case 4 are not known among other African Pygmies. Among the Hadza hunter-gatherers in Tanzania, the bodies are buried facing certain mountains to which the dead are said to go (Woodburn, 1982: 193).
- (8) There are many *obe* with no words. There were also no words in the *obe* which this man sang for me.
- (9) There is a similar description among the Aka: after death, "les esprits des hommes" join the "esprit" of ancestors living in the forest, and live the same life as they had lived before death (Bahuchet & Thomas, 1991a: 125).
- (10) Also among the Baka, an initiate is sometimes taught specific medical plants, dance costumes, songs, and dance steps by "a spirit of a deceased Baka" (Joiris, 1996: 257). However, there is no description for other African Pygmies about the advice on the way of life of the living.

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