

Conclusions

PROGNOSTICATION

It is nearly ten years since I last left the forest as I write this, and though we have excellent accounts of various groups of Mbuti from the team of Japanese ethnographers that worked there subsequently, it is still too early to predict the outcome of the process of change so recently set in motion. It is worth considering, nonetheless, just what the various possibilities are, and what factors are involved. If nothing else, such consideration is likely to inform us about the nature of the process of change in our own society, and some of its possible implications for us. The Mbuti are no different from the rest of us in that they have recently been caught up in a world in which the pace of change seems to increase almost daily. They differ in that for them the scope of change is much vaster than it is for us, and its nature totally different.

The seasonal climate described by Tanno and Harako for the mid-seventies, for instance, is quite at variance with that described for the colonial era, and experienced myself from 1951 to 1959. We need much more data before we can assess the full extent and distribution of this climatic change, however. Both Tanno and Harako attribute the annual process of fission and fusion to seasonal variation within the forest, but since there was no such variation in the past it is possible that even today other factors are at work in determining the various patterns of Mbuti nomadism. And it is important to remember that there is absolutely no valid reason why there should be one general pattern; there might well be as many patterns as there are hunting territories. Seasonal change may very likely be an important new factor affecting nomadic patterns, however, particularly insofar as it affects the movement of game and the availability of edible forest vegetable foods. Seasonal change will also affect the Mbuti indirectly, insofar as it affects the activities of major roadside communities such as administrative and trading posts, road work cantonments, lumber mills, commercial plantations, and missions. It will influence Mbuti movement by creating not only a seasonal demand for their labor, but also a seasonal incentive for them either to come to the road or avoid it. In both respects it will affect the Mbuti differentially according to age and gender, and this will in turn radically affect their heavily age-and-gender-structured pattern of social organization.

The change in size and character of the roadside settlements is much less ques-

tionable as a factor inducing change in the traditional Mbuti way of life. Prior to independence many villages kept goats as well as chickens, and thus had at least some source of meat other than from the forest. The years of war destroyed all livestock, and up to 1972 only a few villages were beginning once again to raise chickens, and that primarily for purposes of trade rather than consumption. This, together with the continuing increase in the number and size of roadside settlements, created a totally new demand for all kinds of forest produce, but particularly for meat. The new settlements also attracted the Mbuti's interest and had more to offer them than had the colonial settlements. In considering any change in Mbuti nomadic patterns we must take into account the nature of such roadside settlements—traditional villages, administrative posts, lumber mills, missions, or gold mines—as well as what they needed of the Mbuti, and what they had to offer by way of incentive or payment.

During the colonial era it was already evident that certain luxuries were on their way to becoming necessities. Among such luxuries, which the Mbuti could at that time still do without quite comfortably, were iron products (mainly paring knives, machetes, and spear tips) and certain plantation foods (stomach-fillers such as manioc, plantain, and, where available, dry rice). Other village products, such as arrow tips, cooking utensils, and clothing, were considered more as trade items than as luxuries. But recent reports indicate that for one reason or another a very real measure of Mbuti dependence upon the villagers has replaced the previously viable mutual interdependence. This is all the more startling when we remember that in the colonial era the villagers had *economic* need for forest products whereas the reciprocal need of the Mbuti was *political*, namely the exclusion of the villagers from the central forest.

One reason that the Mbuti are now becoming more economically dependent upon the villagers, if that is the case, may be that they are actually losing a previously self-sufficient technology. This is not necessarily to be "regretted," for the distinction between self-sufficiency and isolation is narrow, and the present trend may be an adaptive one. However, virtually all reports, published and personal, as well as my own observations in 1970–72, indicate that the hunt is a prime cause for this new dependence. The larger number of villagers and the increasing market for meat to be carried by the passing trucks to the towns of Kisangani, on one side of the forest, and Bunia, on the other, means that Mbuti have to spend more time hunting if they are to satisfy that demand. *If* there has been any decrease in game, or adverse change in the migration pattern, that would increase the time needed still further.

I do not quite follow the argument of Tanno and Harako that this reduces the amount of time available for gathering. Among the net hunters the women used to gather as the hunt moved from one site to another and while the men were setting up their nets, and among the archers the women were not needed on the hunt. Some other factor is at work, unless the same passion that Mbuti always had for village foods is being mistaken for need. It may also be that there is less vegetable produce available in the forest due to the major climatic change that seems to have taken place. The Harvard study will give us more detail specific to that area, at least.

Putting the rather fragmentary and isolated reports together makes a disturbing picture, one which seems to indicate that not only is there less gathering, or perhaps less to gather, but that the hunting technology (I can only speak for net hunting) itself is somehow being lost. Or perhaps it is deteriorating as it seeks to adapt, unsuccessfully, to a rapidly changing context. For instance, a zoologist recently reported that large animals break through the nets and smaller ones slip through. In my previous experience I seldom heard of large animals breaking through the nets, and was never with a band when this happened. Nets took far too much time to repair, and were hastily lowered if any large game was put up by the beaters. The most damage ever done was if a snared animal was not quickly removed, in which case it would try to chew its way through the net and might damage it with its horns. As for smaller animals slipping through, they would have to have been smaller than the smallest antelope, since the standard mesh in the same area was seldom more than two inches. Tanno (1976) gives the mesh as five to seven centimeters (two and a quarter to three inches). But then Tanno also describes a very different technique from that known to me earlier, asserting that the men stand *inside* the circle of nets (it always used to be outside), and that game is beheaded. (This would only have happened if it was a large antelope that could not be conveniently carried whole; killing was always by slitting the throat, even in areas where there was least Muslim influence).

He also refers to men lighting a hunting fire, *near the place of the first hunt*, and using the charcoal to smear on their faces and thus secure a good catch. This is very different from the hunting fires that I had seen lit by children or younger youths, not so much to secure a good catch as to lessen the act of desecration. The ritual described by Tanno is, however, very typical of village "medicine," something Mbuti used to ridicule.

Both Tanno and Harako make virtually no mention of women or men gathering on the hunt, yet that is when it always used to be done. Both indicate that the hunt lasts much longer than I had ever known it to last in colonial days. Tanno gives an average time of nearly eight hours. Harako cites nearly eight and a half hours, with an average of seven casts of the net, each day. This would have been unthinkable in the old days, when the hunt was away from camp no more than four or five hours, frequently less, and might have caught enough for its needs after the second, if not the first cast. And finally, whereas any net hunt that I ever saw took the form of a semicircle of men with their nets faced by a semicircle of women acting as beaters, with youths standing at either side where the two semicircles joined, sealing the most likely escape route, both Tanno and Harako indicate that the men outnumber the women, and with their nets form an almost closed circle, the women beating in through the bottleneck. To me this seems more like a variation of another technique used by the archers, who form a circle and send in a dog, or sometimes youths, to drive the game from the center outwards, where the archers kill it with bow and arrow.

These differences might be explained by the fact that both Tanno and Harako were working at the eastern extremity of the net-hunting area, where there would be greater likelihood of influence from the archers. And Tanno's description of the hunting fire certainly indicates village rather than Mbuti religious belief at

work. This all raises the specter of there being so many variables at work (diffusion, acculturation, climatic and environmental change, territorial variation, as well as differences in field techniques and procedures, let alone objectives) that it becomes questionable whether there is any value in comparing these diverse studies in an attempt to understand the process of social change. But if we are content, for the moment, with general tendencies rather than demonstrable "truths," then we can say that plainly by the mid-seventies the Mbuti, wherever they are observed, have for whatever reason departed from their traditional way of living.

They have also, it seems, departed from their traditional way of thinking, though here we can so far only go by what has *not* been said. The fact that men light the hunting fire, and at the site of the first hunt rather than near the camp where the hunt will first set out, is one indication of a significant change in values, as is the "medicinal" (village) nature of this fire. The absence of any reference to the values attached to the killing of game is equally significant, for it is most unlikely that competent researchers such as these would have missed such a connection unless it had diminished in importance or been totally abandoned.

And there is no doubt that village beliefs were infiltrating even the forest life of the Mbuti. It was not just in the village that the *nkumbi* became a part of the life of the Mbuti. Their increased participation in official, even senior roles in the initiation is significant enough, but before I left the Ituri I saw the *nkumbi* strongly influence several Mbuti *elima* festivals. The *elima* that I saw in the seventies were held in villages rather than in the forest, and I was told that this was from preference. It would have been out of the question, before, for an Mbuti *elima* to do more than perhaps make a sortie into a village and stay there a few days. But now they not only started and began in villages, but they built an *elima* camp at the outskirts of the village, in imitation of the *nkumbi* camp. The girls dressed in deliberate imitation of the *baganza*, the *nkumbi* initiates, and were referred to as such by the villagers. This happened not only at Epulu, where something of the sort might have been expected because of its medial nature, but even at highly traditional villages such as those of Kopu and Koki and Bandindikpe, on the Bira side, and two similarly traditional villages on the Ndaka side.

With this in mind, I cannot help but wonder if contemporary accounts of what verge on unilineal descent systems among the Mbuti are not further signs of recent acculturation, rather than, as they used to be, part of the pretense Mbuti always used to put up, when in a village, of adopting the village cultural patterns, thus effectively keeping the villagers ignorant of the forest pattern. While both Harako and Tanno insist on a much greater degree of lineal unity than I had ever found, that was never (for me) really the issue. Everyone belongs to two lineages and *can* trace descent through either, both, or neither. I had observed Mbuti to trace descent in the male line exclusively for the benefit of or in relation to the village world. Descent had no significant structural or functional significance in their forest world. The lineage never functioned as a corporate unit, except, perhaps, in the event of death, when those members of the dead person's lineage who were present in the territory at the time were permitted and expected to mourn for the first three days. This exception hardly defines the lineage as a corporate unit. And while both Tanno and Harako trace descent in various territories they studied, just

as I did, they cite no evidence that the *Mbuti* traced their descent in the same way, nor that the kinship system or terminology was of any social significance in either the forest or village worlds of the *Mbuti*. This may well be because their objectives were quite other than the study of kinship. But since both researchers spent considerable time in the forest it seems clear from their reports that the *Mbuti* used the same terms of address and reference when in the forest as when in the village, and this alone would be evidence of change.

Another example of "negative" evidence of change that has taken place among the *Mbuti* in these past few years is that neither Tanno nor Harako mentions the role of song and dance as an integral part of *Mbuti* social structure. This is true, at least, in the publications available to me at the moment, though there may be mention in as yet untranslated Japanese publications. Nonetheless, it makes me wonder, for both the technique of singing and the structure of the music were directly, even obviously, related to the most vital elements of *Mbuti* social structure. Change in the one would surely necessitate change in the other—for as long as adaptation were possible, that is. Just as net hunting becomes unproductive when the number of hunters falls below a certain minimum, or in the absence of the necessary ratio of male and female, adults and youths, so does the net-hunting mode of song become impossible to sing under the same conditions.

It is plainly hazardous to make any "general" assessment of the scope of change from the reports available at the moment. Even with regard to the nature of change there is little that we can add to what has already been suggested. The most recent information certainly indicates that the process of adaptation has given way to the more drastic process of alteration, if not transformation. A centripetal series of adaptations, always related to a central focal point, has apparently given way to a centrifugal or helical movement outwards. And it looks as though the vital strand that anchored even the centrifugal process to that same core in the past has broken, that strand being the clearly structured opposition between the forest and village worlds, the sacred and the profane. If this has indeed happened then it is not only useless to bemoan the past, it is neither doing the *Mbuti* a service nor doing them justice. They themselves would be the first to describe such a romantic attachment to the past as being *waziwazi*, out of time and out of place, out of harmony with the real world all around us.

INTERVENTION: CONCERN AND RESPONSIBILITY

What then does all this mean to us, other than that in order to deal with the present we obviously have to have much better information than we have at the moment? That in itself is a starting place, for in almost any consideration of social change it is the very nature of our information to be fragmentary, gathered as it is at different times, in different places, by very different people with different objectives. A certain humility is required, with respect to our own discipline in particular. Any piece of anthropological research is out of date the moment it is done, and any attempt to generalize for major populations in the absence of a

wider coverage than can ever be accomplished by a single field worker is bound to be unreliable.

That *caveat* by no means implies, however, that there are not things that we both can and should do. Just what those things are depends to a large extent on the interests and abilities of the individual, but I see in the above account a clear indication that there are both things that we can and should *do*, and things that we can and should *learn* from such studies, given their inherent limitations.

There is a lot of disagreement about "doing," particularly when it smacks of "social engineering." Ultimately, of course, the responsibility for "doing" lies with governments, but it seems clear that as scholars working in a foreign country we not only have an opportunity, but an obligation to contribute whatever we can to the work of minimizing the dangers of change, however induced. Whether we can or should attempt anything more positive is a matter of individual choice. Much less questionable, surely, is our responsibility to apply what we have learned in other cultures, from our experience of social change elsewhere, to the situation in our own societies.

And it may well be that abroad, as at home, the best way of becoming involved in the process of change, actively as well as theoretically, is through personal concern rather than academic interest. We may even set off for the field with a most excellently planned research project and find, upon arrival, that events conspire either to make that project impossible, or to suggest that there may be something even more important and worthwhile to be accomplished. It is at that point that our academic interest often becomes qualified (and, I believe, enriched) by personal, human concern. The balance between the two forces is not easy to maintain. Rather than argue the case it seems appropriate to give two examples that arose during the course of the 1970-73 field research undertaken in the Ituri by Dr. Joseph Towles and myself.

We were awarded a grant by the National Science Foundation for a study of the village population of the southern Ituri, designed to counterbalance the bulk of research that had previously been done on the Mbuti. My own research among the Mbuti had convinced me that to study the social organization of either population in isolation was only barely possible, but the only way to understand their dynamics was to consider both populations as comprising one total society. Even then I would have been sceptical about any boundaries defining that total society.

When we arrived in the Ituri, having made preliminary contact with the government of Zaïre in Kinshasa, where we discussed our project at length with the Minister of Culture, we found that there were virtually no villages to study. We informed the funding agency that this was the case, and that the best we could do was to observe the reformation of village society that seemed about to take place. The National Science Foundation could well have recalled us, but it was prompt in urging us to stay. Both the central and local governments also had to be alerted to our change in plans, and both agreed that this would be just as worthwhile, even more so from their point of view. They also requested that we keep them informed, since they had so few administrators in the field at that time. We both ranked that request far above any academic considerations that discountenance working as

government "agents," even in an informal way. We made that decision in light of our impressions of the people we had met and who were directly concerned: the Minister of Culture and the Governor of the Eastern Province, as well as local administrators. The alternative would, for us, have been to abandon the project.

But our attitude toward cooperation was much more positive than negative. We were not being asked to help as "experts"; we were not being asked for any developmental plan ready to be implemented. We were merely being asked to help fill a temporary gap in the government's communication system at a highly critical time, when by any standards the area needed all the help it could get.

We also made the common courtesy call on the American consul in Kisangani, another formality deliberately avoided by some so as to avert any suspicion of being a government agent.

I mention these preliminaries because they are often treated as mere formalities, to be avoided or performed only perfunctorily, as though they were tantamount to signing some agreement to "collaborate." I have always found, even in colonial days, that such formalities often opened doors that could never have been opened otherwise, contributing to the scope and quality of the research. And just as often they made possible a cooperation that included participation of the society being studied in administrative discussions concerning their future. I have never once been placed in a position, as a result of making the closest contact possible with such authorities, where I could not readily refuse to divulge information if that seemed proper, and it has been seldom that I have had to refuse any request for information or action.

The two major considerations of the central government and of the local administration in the Ituri were economic and political. They were thinking at the wider, national and provincial levels, and had as yet had no time to grasp more of the local situation than was available to them through the old colonial records. Certainly they did not at that time have anything like enough trained personnel (or even untrained men and women who could at least have acted as observers) to study the economic and political repercussions of the years of war from the point of view of the Ituri population. (The Belgians had left their former colony with something like thirteen university graduates.) Their concern was more with the sensitive international borders with Sudan to the north, Uganda to the east, Rwanda and Burundi to the southeast, and Tanzania, just a hop across a lake.

They were also concerned that while this eastern province had never produced much revenue even for the colonial government, its productivity was now zero. The gold mines, coffee plantations, and lumber mills needed to be reactivated, the road repaired so that it was serviceable for both commercial and military transportation, a school system established (for the first time ever) that would reach into every part of the forest. And an administrative system had to be established that could effectively control such necessary preliminary development. This was at a time when the villagers had not yet emerged from hiding. There were still active rebels living like bandits in the forest; the road was all but impassable, and the administrative official nearest to Epulu had just established himself, under military protection, at Mambasa, fifty miles away (half a day's drive, if you were lucky).

From what I could see from the vantage point of living on the road, watching as

villages slowly reformed, the political and economic considerations that seemed most urgent right there had nothing to do with international boundaries or the national economy. What seemed much more threatening and potentially disastrous was the mutual fear and suspicion that persisted while village society was slowly taking shape, and the severe food shortage and almost total lack of protein, vegetable or animal. The political situation gradually eased to some extent, particularly when talk began of a great *nkumbi* that would bind the forest together again. But mutual suspicion never died out entirely, and a big factor in this was the difficulty of communication. It was not just that the road was so bad that it was almost as quick to walk long distances as it was to wait for a truck to pass, which might not be for days. It was rather that there was little incentive for communication.

Ndaka and Bira villages had always tended to be somewhat isolated and autonomous, and the present conditions merely encouraged this tendency. In colonial days a market system had sprung up that helped solve both inherent problems—economic and political. Markets used to rotate from village to village, within clusters of four or five villages all within easy walking distance of each other. This provided an opportunity for socialization, for the resolution of disputes, for courtship, for entertainment, and for all the other needs that markets fulfill. It helped to link one end of each tribal territory with the other, and it forged links that bridged tribal territories. The unexpected failure or destruction of a certain crop in one place could at least be mitigated by market exchange. Specialists, though few, were able to offer their wares, and the products of blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, weavers and basketry makers, tanners, and others served as a kind of currency as well as supplying needs. The market also, incidentally, provided a vehicle for the movement of cash.

From the local point of view it seemed that markets were just what this part of the Ituri needed once again, and for the same economic and political reasons. Villagers themselves began recalling how well markets had served them, and Mbuti began to say how much *akami* would be avoided if they could bring their meat to markets rather than having to deal with individual villagers.

ECONOMIC INTERVENTION

Even when a request to intervene comes from the people you are working with, and where the need for some kind of intervention seems unquestionable, there can never be too much caution. In this case there were two anthropologists who could consult each other and cross-check each other's findings, and between us we could gather far more data than either could have done alone. We discussed the various possibilities with villagers from as far as the Ndaka *chefferie* to the west and the Bira *chefferie* to the east. We came up with a plan, the politics and economics of which appealed to everyone, even to the few Ngwana Muslims left in the area, which was surprising since the plan involved raising pigs. The project had to be inexpensive, easy to implement, and related in some way to the past. It had to demand participation and cooperation, provide economic reward, and directly affect each and every village along the roadside.

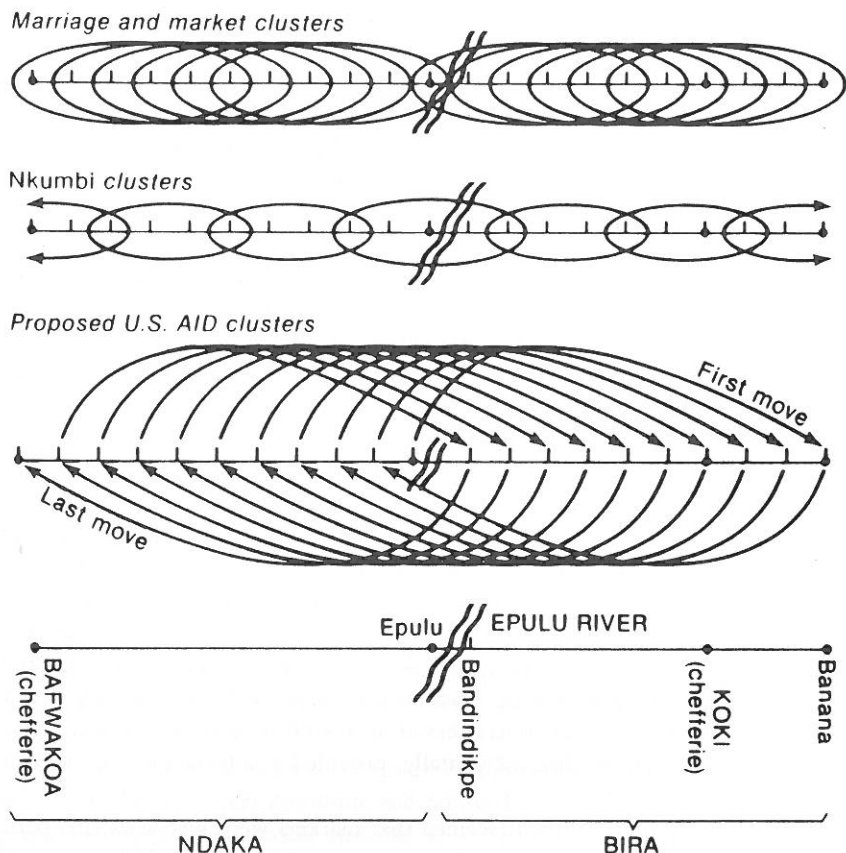


Fig. 9: Exchange patterns. This shows how the proposed plan for American aid would have corresponded to the traditional patterns of inter- and intratribal clustering and cooperation in markets, marriage, and nkumbi initiation. See also Fig. 7.

The authorities approved and offered to appoint local representatives to supervise the project until it stood on its own feet. The Mbuti, who might have been expected to oppose the plan since it offered the villagers an alternative source of meat, even offered to contribute some labor. (For them the connection with the past was that now, if the plan succeeded, the villages would once again have something worth exploiting.) (See Fig. 9.) And when the American consul heard of the plan he offered to ask AID (the Agency for International Development) for the necessary money, with no strings attached. It was only a small amount, but it would have seriously affected our research budget.

The money was primarily for the purchase of hoes and axes for ground clearance, and for a small amount of breeding stock of a kind of hog well suited to raising in the forest. The plan was to raise a number of hogs at Epulu, the labor being provided by the Ndaka villagers, with some help from the Mbuti. Epulu was chosen because it was the larger of the two medial villages on either side of the river,

Bandindikpe not having nearly enough people to initiate the project. Epulu was also favored because it easily fell under the supervision of the government agent at the park station. But the reason most often cited by the villagers for choosing Epulu was that it represented the best of the old days, since Putnam had always been a "chief" to both the Bira and Ndaka equally, and had always mediated on their behalf with the colonial government. The decision was acceptable to all.

Young hogs from the very first litters were to be set aside for presentation to the most distant village included in the project, across the river and on the far Bira side. That village in turn would present an equal number of piglets to the Ndaka village next up the road, westward from Epulu, and so on, until finally Bandindikpe would make the final presentation from its first litters to the distant *chefferie* of the Ndaka at the village of Bafwakoa. In this way the project would start at a village renowned for the Ndaka ritual specialists living there at the time, who would make the first presentation to a politically important Bira village (just beyond the Bira *chefferie* of Koki), and it would end with a presentation by the powerful Bira ritual village of Bandindikpe to the political center of the Ndaka. In this way the political extremes of the two tribal territories would be brought into an exchange relationship. And this was in an area where the social mechanism of reciprocity, with all its manifold implications, was well entrenched in tradition.

Meanwhile, the economic benefits, as well as the political benefits, would be felt locally as each village in turn became the nucleus of a small market cluster of villages. Epulu itself would be able to trade with Bandindikpe across the river, and the Ndaka villages to the immediate west.

All that the plan needed now to be put into effect was the land for the first hog farm, at Epulu. Sites had been chosen at all the villages, including Epulu, and there had been no problems, since with villages only recently established there was no shortage of suitable land where only secondary vegetation needed clearing.

The project collapsed before the first axes and hoes had even begun their work. The boundaries had been staked the day before, but in the morning, when clearing was to begin, the stakes had all been removed. A villager who sometimes called himself a Bira and sometimes an Ngwana (currently he claimed to be Bira), and who had recently established a small restaurant (which he claimed was Ngwana) on the roadside where the trail led down to the traditional village, appeared with an alleged kinsman who was a roving junior representative of the district administration. He said that the land chosen was his, that he was about to clear it to grow food for his roadside restaurant, which the government wanted to feed the government officials and *commerçants* who passed by. And since it was an Ngwana (Muslim) restaurant he could not allow hogs to be raised *anywhere* in the village. Further, Mustafa claimed, his father had been Masoudi, the great Bira chief (actually a government-appointed agent, raised in a mission and then as a Belgian administrator's "house-boy"), and had acquired rights to this land in the days of "Putnam." He himself had been to a mission school, Mustafa said, and had powerful friends in government, like his "cousin" (the junior administrative assistant).

That was the end of the project. Something much more important than a viable market system had now come to the fore, and it was almost as though everyone had expected it. Mustafa's father had been a government-appointed *capita*, or headman,

at a Bira village across the river, and had been heartily disliked by all. I had never thought of him as a "bad" man in any way; it was just that he had sold himself body and soul to the white *wazungu*. He always wore a white tunic with four pockets filled with pencils and other symbols of civilization. He had been one of the first that the villagers had pointed out as deserving of death at the hands of the Simba, and with him had died his wife and all his children, except for Mustafa. And now Mustafa wore what looked suspiciously like the same white tunic jacket and, just like his father, was behaving like an Ngwana while claiming to be a Christian Bira. And he was not even on his own side of the river.

For a moment there was an upsurge of hostility toward the Ngwana, still disliked for their association with slavery in the past and their subsequent association with the colonials, and, above all, feared for the supernatural powers they were believed to wield. Real Ngwana came to the fore and disowned Mustafa, and repeated that they had no objections to the villagers raising hogs. But the damage had been done. Even though when the administrator at Mambasa heard about it he recalled the junior who had sided with Mustafa and officially approved the usage of that land, nobody was prepared to risk being cursed by Mustafa. I was myself advised to stop eating at his restaurant, as I often did, in case I was poisoned. Word of this incident spread up and down the road, and with remarkable rapidity the entire project, which had been so enthusiastically supported, was obliterated by rumours of Ngwana treachery and threats of sorcery.

Blame was eventually diverted from the Ngwana, since there were not many left, to the black *wazungu*, and this, together with the *nkumbi*, was more effective in creating the political solidarity needed than the project could ever have done. The concept of reciprocity had at least been revived and remained alive; informal trading began along the lines suggested (mainly of plantains, sweet bananas, and manioc). Within a few months a regular market was being held at Epulu, though it tended to remain fixed there rather than shifting from village to village, as in the past. This was because of the growth of the station, and the trade goods which its members were able to contribute to the market. All that was lost, perhaps, was the advantage of shifting markets and a readily available supply of meat. Meat continued to be the major commodity in demand all along the road.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

If "grass-roots" projects of this kind are subject to all manner of hazards, including inadequate planning, major projects imposed from outside are every bit as hazardous. Good intention has little to do with success or failure. President Mobutu's proclamation concerning the "*émancipation des pygmées*" did not fall on deaf ears in the eastern province. A well-meaning but uninformed entrepreneur, Lomata, took it upon himself to implement the proclamation by bringing the Mbuti out of the forest and settling them in roadside villages. There they would live by farming and, like other "*citoyens*," make their contribution to the national economy and take an active part in the political process. His project somehow acquired official status and was given official blessing and financial support. At

certain chosen sites he had clearings cut, and within a mere three months constructed "ideal" villages, much of the work being done by Mbuti under his supervision so that the clearing was efficient and the buildings, in the traditional rectangular plan of the local villagers, were sturdy and sound, fit for permanent habitation.

During this work the Mbuti were fed and clothed and supplied with all the necessary tools and materials. Sometimes cash incentives were offered to induce more and more Mbuti to come out from the forest and join these model "emancipated" villages. The actual numbers were small, but the effect was enormous, and far more disastrous than similar attempts I had seen made by the Belgian colonial administration. Then the Mbuti never had any real intention of staying; they had played along partly out of curiosity, partly for whatever they could get out of it in the way of food, tools, or other marketable commodities, and partly to please. As soon as these motives were satisfied they had simply abandoned the projects and gone back to their hunting.

But now there was more than curiosity. The material incentives were much more real and (now that Mbuti were also subject to taxation) tinged with necessity, and the desire to please others was replaced by a more materialistic self-interest. The project was, for the Mbuti, much more in the nature of a genuine experiment. It was clear to some of them, at least, that their world was already changed so dramatically that a correspondingly dramatic change in life-style was called for. Before independence there had been talk among the youths of spending more time down on the roadside, the better to know what was going on so that they could better adapt. Now the talk was of nothing less than abandoning the forest and becoming *citoyens*. Those that I spoke with refused to admit that this was the same thing as becoming villagers, for, they said, they would build better houses, have better plantations, make more money, be stronger and healthier and altogether "bigger" than mere villagers.

As I have said, the (for them) entirely new spirit of competition had already begun to infiltrate their forest world during the years of war. Now it began to emerge not only in assertions of difference, but in assertions of superiority. The villagers did not take well to this, since they had always tried so hard to assert their own superiority, though in a rather friendly, paternalistic way, and quite without giving offense. Lomata unconsciously fanned the flames, transforming the old traditional and highly functional opposition into a destructive hostility. He pointed to the new "pygmy" villages, which were indeed, while they were being built, neater and cleaner and better-built than any of the existing non-pygmy villages, and told the Mbuti that this proved that indeed they were citizens, and not just as good as anyone else but even better. The Mbuti, he said, were *real* citizens, because they were doing all this not for their own profit, like villagers, but to please President Mobutu and make their contribution to the new nation. The roadside Mbuti were quick to incorporate all this in their singing and dancing, which they were not loath to do whenever a single villager walked by to see what was going on, or whenever they visited a nearby village or market.

It was at this point that the villagers stopped calling themselves *citoyens*, a term that had assumed with great pride and satisfaction as the significance of independence began to come home to them. For the villagers the term, instead of

being honorific, became a term of abuse and derision, an epithet far more filled with hostility, even violence, than the term "animal" had ever been before. "Citizens? Certainly not. *We are real people. Pygmies are citizens!*"

The villagers also saw what they took to be the government pouring money, not only into the construction of villages, but into the preparation of plantations for the Mbuti, with a seemingly limitless and free supply of the best of tools, equipment, and seed. They perceived this as a direct attack on their own economy, which was never much above a subsistence level, and at this time, just after the years of war, was still precarious and fraught with danger. The Mbuti, ever quick to ridicule such attitudes, countered with ridiculous boasts, which the villagers took seriously: boasts of how the government was going to buy only from pygmy villages and pygmy farms, of how pygmies were going to grow fat and wealthy and the villagers were going to die of starvation in their puny, dirty villages. Of course the government had nothing to do with any of this, but each division of the local administration seemed to think that Lomata's program had been initiated by some higher level in the local government, and at the provincial level it was assumed that it had all originated in Kinshasa.

In this way the new nation, almost overnight, lost the enthusiastic loyalty and all the vitality and fervor that had marked the first experience the village population of the Ituri had of true independence, of being a part of a free nation and of being asked to contribute to the growth of that nation. And while the Mbuti at first held the new government in high favor for all that it was doing for them, they had much less of any kind of conception of what a government was than did the villagers. In any case, disillusionment was not to be long in coming.

Also, notice, both they and the villagers had slipped into talking of "*pygmées*" rather than *Mbuti* in this new context. Even some of those Mbuti who had refused to come out of the forest and be part of "*émancipation*," referred to the "emancipated" Mbuti as *pygmées*, or, also derisively, as *citoyens*. It is a poor day for a new nation when the very concept of citizenship becomes tarnished with derision, ridicule, and hostility, and when it is used to emphasize rifts between major segments of the nation's population.

Throughout all of this, Dr. Towles and I watched with dismay, but without interfering with as much as an opinion. The model villages were much closer to where I was than to the far side of the Ituri, where he was working. But even there, far away from any road, the "*émancipation des pygmées*" was having its effect, and relations between villagers and Mbuti were deteriorating, just as was the reputation of the central government, which was held responsible. But then we began to get reports of sickness and death. Meanwhile I had visited Lomata in Kisangani, and during long discussions with him about the program had begun to suspect that however well-intentioned he was, he was very much an entrepreneur, unqualified, and not, as was supposed, a government official.

Dr. Towles and I then jointly and separately visited a number of the model villages and found a terrible deterioration from when we had seen them a couple of months earlier. The Mbuti had abandoned the rectangular houses, most of which were still unfinished, and were living in their own style of small, conical leaf houses, built behind the others or on the edges of the clearings. Accustomed to



The rectangular shapes and inflexible architecture of the conventional villages were so foreign to the Mbuti that even when they stayed on the roadside they lived in their traditional leaf huts behind the abandoned "model homes" only just begun. These new villages for "emancipated pygmies" quickly became death traps, breeding malaria, dysentery, yaws, and venereal disease spread by truckers up and down the road.

never staying in one place more than a month, the Mbuti had no idea of the sanitation required by sedentary residence. The model villages were filthy and reeked with the odor of decomposing garbage and human excreta, since nobody had thought to teach the Mbuti to build latrines, let alone how to use them, or to follow hygienic practices other than those appropriate for a nomadic life in the deep forest.

Disease was rampant, for not only were the villages filthy, but water supplies had become polluted. This was something else that was totally beyond the experience of the Mbuti, who can drink with absolute safety from any source of water in the forest. The change from a high-protein diet was taking its toll. And on top of all this the Mbuti were suffering from the effects of heat prostration, due in part to prolonged living out of the cool shade of the forest, and in part to the nature of the work now required of them. This was work for which their musculature was simply not properly developed, and which necessitated far more exertion of energy than the same work did for villagers of normal stature. This resulted in a buildup of body heat, which was exaggerated when the work was out in the direct sunlight.

Health was further deteriorating because these model villages fell prey to truck drivers who found it possible to exploit the Mbuti girls as prostitutes much more cheaply than they could the more worldly-wise villagers. Not many Mbuti girls

allowed themselves to be exploited this way, but even so, because of their own custom of premarital sex within the Mbuti world, the venereal disease brought by the truckers spread rapidly among the village Mbuti, and even from them back into the forest. It was impossible to pinpoint any one of these factors as the cause, but the mortality rate leapt upward, and Dr. Towles and I felt an unanthropological compulsion to intervene.

Through the Provincial Governor we notified the central government with a simple, factual report. Far from being ordered out of the country for "interfering," as might have been expected from newspaper accounts of the sensitivity of the government to foreign opinion, we were thanked for our concern, and within three weeks an investigating team was sent out. The program was halted to give us time, we were told, to come up with an alternative program for *émancipation*. This we were not prepared even to attempt on our own, but we contacted the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in New York, and in view of the urgency of the situation they immediately agreed to finance a conference at their conference headquarters in Austria, setting us ahead of their regular conference schedule.

It is normal to plan such conferences at least a year in advance; Dr. Towles and I only had something like three months. But at the end of those few months we assembled at Burg Wartenstein an interdisciplinary group drawn from Africa, Europe, and the United States, and including Zaïroise scholars and representatives of the government of Zaïre. It had been planned to include two Mbuti, but at the last moment the government decided that the long air journey, and such a dramatic change of environment and climate, involving two weeks away from the forest, would involve too much risk to their health. So we had to make do with statements made by Mbuti concerning the issue of social change in the Ituri.

The extent of the interest of the government was evidenced by the fact that the Minister of Culture planned to come himself, for the entire two weeks. Just prior to the conference, however, he was appointed to take charge of another ministry, and the new Minister of Culture, feeling unprepared, appointed one of the principals of the National University to take his place. Right at the outset the government made its position clear, that its participation was conditional upon our agreeing to work entirely and exclusively within the framework of its official and published political and economic objectives.

The first two days were spent examining just what this meant, and some of the scholars present were at first reluctant to accept any such restriction on their freedom. But then the obvious necessity for such a position led us to accept it as a challenge rather than as a restriction. From that moment onward there was nothing but a lively cooperation in the endeavor to find a way by which the perfectly legitimate goals of the government of Zaïre for the economic and political development of the Ituri Forest could be achieved with a minimum of disruption and danger and remain as closely allied as possible to the felt and expressed wishes of the local populations.

That cooperation itself was perhaps more important than the plan for peripheral (rather than central) development that the conference eventually arrived at. In this case at least, the usual mutual suspicion and antipathy between scholars and government officials proved totally groundless. The fact that the scholars were drawn

from different disciplines helped, for it made it easy for them to accept the government officials for what they truly were, representatives of yet another discipline. In studying President Mobutu's *Manifeste de la Nsèle* none of us found anything that raised any ethical or moral problems. And rather than being a drawback, the two-week time limitation proved a positive asset. It was coupled with the government's frank statement that if we did not come up with an acceptable alternative within that time then that it would have to continue with its program for *émancipation* as best it could. Even to the government that was unacceptable.

The plan we arrived at was a compromise, but it is doubtful if we would have done much better if we had been given two months rather than two weeks to confer. The plan recognized and did its best to avoid the physical and social dangers that we had seen at work under the old program. It anticipated other dangers and difficulties that had not yet even appeared. And, above all, it made maximum use of all the positive potential we could discover: in the people, their culture, their aspirations, and in the situation itself and the will of the government to deal with it. Our greatest mistake was not to allow for continued academic cooperation with the government, so that ongoing field research would have been an integral part of the plan for social change.

DIVERSITY VERSUS CONFORMITY: PROBLEMS OF GENERALIZATION

The two situations described above (that of the plan for hog-raising and village markets, and that of the "model pygmy villages" and the subsequent Wenner-Gren conference) are not intended to show how to plan and implement social change, a specialized art in which neither Dr. Towles nor I had any training. Rather, they are intended to show how, in the field, circumstances may demand a choice between involvement and dissociation. Sometimes that is a choice between human concern and the lack of it, between responsibility and irresponsibility. Either of the two situations might have been dealt with better by others, but others were not available when and where needed. At least through the concerned effort and involvement of two individuals good will and hope were engendered. The anthropological perspective provided the basis for a deeper mutual understanding than had existed before, and a few practical gains were made. And our research, far from suffering, was considerably furthered by our being brought into an even closer, and somewhat different, relationship with individuals and with the society as a whole.

In addition, both the government and a number of academics from different disciplines and different countries were persuaded that it was possible and worthwhile to join forces in the face of social problems. The Wenner-Gren conference was for all of us an exciting demonstration of how well different disciplines and a national government *can* work together, given shared and genuine human concern. At the end of that conference we all realized how much more *could* have been done had such cooperation begun earlier, and had we planned for it to continue into the future. In itself, that was no small gain.

What can we and should we learn from such a field experience; what does it mean for us in our own changing social context? This of course brings us to a

consideration of the comparative method, or perhaps better, of the potential of comparison. Such comparisons can probably only be made at a very general level, but that does not diminish their value. In making such comparisons we are concerned not so much with specifics, but rather with the general principles at work in two or more societies. (And as we look at the process of change and adaptation in the Ituri several such principles seem to suggest that a critical reevaluation of our own situation might be called for.) We are not, however, looking for a theoretical model, which, properly applied to another context, will provide specific answers to specific questions. Rather, we are looking for a sharpening of our awareness and sensitivity.

This is not to say that more precise, theoretically valid structural comparisons are impossible, or even unlikely; in a sense that is little more than a procedural and mechanical problem. I am suggesting that much less questionable and more certain to be profitable is the juxtaposition of the two cultures with the express intent of finding questions to ask, rather than answers to preformulated questions. This process is likely to be a creative one, the full pursuit of which might seem to fall more within the realm of philosophy than anthropology. It was this very pursuit, however, that gave birth to the concepts of both sociology and anthropology in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and we would be little worse than presumptuous in attempting to return to it. That at least seems preferable to social irresponsibility. Moreover, it is a pursuit that can be followed by student and scholar, professional and layman alike.

Another factor must be taken into account when we confront the problem of generalization, particularly when dealing with an ongoing process. The problem lies in the question of where we can, with justification, draw acceptable boundaries within which such generalizations will be both valid *and* significant. That factor is related to the inescapable fact of diversity. So far the tendency of those who have worked in the Ituri has been to assume that not only is generalization about all Mbuti possible (I have fallen into this trap myself to some extent), but that there somehow *should* be a considerable degree of conformity, and this despite recorded differences in language, hunting technology, and environment! Scholars who find their theoretical deductions challenged, even by facts uncovered elsewhere *and* at another time by other scholars, not infrequently dispute the facts. This is a remarkable academic truth that is by no means confined to the Ituri.

Yet everything we know about the Ituri tells us of the reality of diversity, and suggests an almost conscious effort to maintain diversity and prevent conformity. If the various populations of the Ituri have anything in common it may well be their common dedication to the principle of opposition without hostility, a principle that has enabled them to come together as a powerful political confederation. Why should the same not be true among the Mbuti, given their highly nomadic life-style, their strong territorial affiliations with each other and with such a diversity of village populations?

All this makes me question what seems to be our own very different quest for conformity, our unwillingness to readily accept diversity, and our association of diversity and opposition with hostility. As economic and political forces demand a higher level of communication and cooperation among the various populations

of the Ituri they seem to achieve this by increasing the complexity of structural interrelationships at every level: domestic, economic, political, and religious. Yet the thought of becoming "one people" has not yet begun to arise. Even the *nkumbi*, which could be said to be the foremost integrative institution, functions powerfully to reassert and maintain the opposition between all adjacent populations, at least at an ideological level, while integrating them at a political level.

Perhaps this is something we should look for in our own society, however we define that term (that is, hemisphere, nation, state, community, or whatever). This seems all the more necessary since we, under not dissimilar economic and political pressures, while clamoring for unity and conformity (as though they were synonymous), are also subject to many tendencies to fission and diversification in all areas of social life. The Ituri has much to suggest about such tendencies, including the possibility that diversity and nonconformity, even fission, *may* for us, as for the Ituri, be blessings in disguise rather than signals of disunity.

OUR OWN CHANGING WORLD

At a very general level, I find the very romantic appeal of the Mbuti provocative when turning from them to our own society. When *The Forest People* was published, although criticized by some as being romance rather than anthropology, it had enormous and immediate appeal. Even if the whole thing had been a fabrication, this would have been significant, for good novels often succeed by filling gaps in the lives of their readers. But *The Forest People* made its impact, I believe, because the near-Utopia described rang true, and showed that certain voids in the lives of many of us could indeed be filled.

The foregoing account indicates that throughout the long period of change affecting the Mbuti, the least of their concerns have been with material comfort, wealth, or security. Even at this moment, caught in the middle of an economic pincer movement, they seem more concerned with the quality of community life than with economic success. They are still largely preoccupied with values rather than goods, and still see security of the most social kind in a viable, however adaptive and changing, value system. Is it this focus on quality rather than quantity, on Spirit rather than Matter, that makes so many in our society envy something about the life-style of these remote, pre-stone-age, but contemporary African hunter-gatherers? If so, then what does the relative lack of focus on values in our society signify? What causes it? What does it portend?

Juxtaposition of two social contexts can provoke many such questions. It can also raise questions about more specific aspects of social organization. For instance, the Mbuti concept of family is quite at variance with ours. That in itself is neither surprising nor significant, but the question it provokes in me is whether or not this can be related to perhaps correspondingly different concepts of sociality in the two societies.

The familial image of "society" for the Mbuti is much more of a reality than it is with us, though we still occasionally talk of the nation as a family, or even of a family of nations. But with the Mbuti the family, certainly during the colonial

era, clearly established a model for social behavior. It was a model based on the lesson of interdependence learned during infancy and childhood. It was an interdependence of all those within the "family," regardless of age, gender, consanguinity, or affinity. The process of socialization was built on the strong affective bonds existing within the nuclear family. They were quickly aligned with the effective bonds of mutual interdependence, transcending the narrow limits of the nuclear family. Clearly with our traditional concept of family a very different process is at work, tending to narrow rather than expand social horizons, with an emphasis on individuality rather than sociality, on independence rather than interdependence.

Unfortunately there are no recent reports on the situation in the central area best known to me, so I can only properly draw on changes that took place up to the early seventies, the first few years following the "years of war." But even at that point a change was taking place in the concept of family, perhaps corresponding to the increasing social cohesion coming about between Mbuti and villagers, among other factors. It seemed that the nuclear family was becoming a more enduring institution. That is, it was not just the *affective* basis of the wider territorial, cooperative, interdependent family, but in much larger measure an independently *effective* unit. The family, in assuming greater importance at the nuclear level, was becoming a divisive institution. A study of how this relates to the changing economic and political context in the Ituri might well throw light on the significance of current changes taking place in our own concept of family and sociality.

The apparent change in the Mbuti concept of "family" seems clearly reflected in the changes of economic values that were already manifesting themselves strongly by the end of 1972. In the past these values had been focused on cooperation, equality, and interdependence, with an equable division of labor between both genders and all age levels. These values were now being steadily replaced by competition rather than cooperation, independence rather than interdependence. Although economic equality still persisted and was maintained by extensive exchange and sharing, the way had been opened to inequality. For one thing, the Mbuti now had ready access to cash, their first experience of portable wealth, making inequality possible for the first time.

More significant still was the related shift of emphasis from their old economic norm of adequacy to one of surplus. The surplus was sought not for their own subsistence economy, but rather for the sake of maintaining effective relationships with the ever-increasing body of villagers dependent upon them for meat and other forest products. Before independence a surplus of meat arose accidentally, a cast of the nets snaring more game than the Mbuti could use that day, the surplus being sent to the village. Now the surplus was actively sought, and ideally every hunt was intended to produce a surplus that could be traded for both economic and political gain.

Thus the Mbuti seem to be moving inevitably to a more competitive economy, in which individual success is both possible and acceptable. With us the tendency seems to be different, despite the high value we still nominally place on private enterprise, competition, economic independence, and individual success. While we

still nominally resist state control, in an emergency all that seems to be forgotten, and not only the community, but even the individual increasingly demands to be taken care of *by the state*, voluntarily opting for *dependence*. Even a minor disability is all too often made an excuse for early retirement on a comfortable pension, although some individuals suffering from major disabilities, whether entitled to compensation or not, insist on continuing to "earn" a living. And while there are areas where there simply is not enough employment to go around, the amount of initiative exerted towards the often stated value of "independence" through self-support is hardly remarkable. In plenty of areas where there is a job market it is easy to find those who prefer (or find it more profitable) to exist on unemployment benefits. In the rural county where I live, for instance, there are unemployed people who live in comfortable houses with plenty of land, yet who would not even consider hoeing that land in a serious attempt to grow their own food. Just as the Mbuti are finding (for better or worse) a measure of independence in their individual lives, we seem to be losing it. Whether that means that we are also losing our focus on self-sufficiency and individual self-interest or not is another matter.

Juxtapositions in the areas of political and religious life can also be usefully made. The clear allocation of political power to Mbuti youth in the past would surely have rung a familiar chord in the minds of the youth of this country, who protested so successfully what they took to be the cataclysmic political policies of a gerontocracy that would not live to suffer the consequences of their own actions. But in 1972 the Mbuti, who always felt that since the future belongs to the youth of today it is for them, not for the elders, to make policy, seemed to be giving away to the location of effective political control in the hands of the adults. This occurred as economic considerations became predominant, and for the Mbuti, as hunters and gatherers, the economy was necessarily in the hands of the adults. This contributed to the overall breakdown of the old system of interdependence, for now Mbuti youth had no area of social responsibility of their own, and together with children and elders were becoming increasingly parasitic, from the point of view of "productive" adults. This led non-adults to seek, wherever possible, their own independence, political as well as economic.

But this tendency was still, at that time, being held in check by the old concept of time and space. This, as with so many hunters, defined both economic and political needs in terms of that particular moment and that particular place. While there were all these tendencies toward fission, competition, inequality, individuality, and independence, however, there was still no room for the systematic planning for these values that is built into our system. The concept of "progress" itself remained a virtual impossibility, for the "here and now" still dominated. Political relationships, although from an outside point of view determined more and more by adults rather than youths, were still largely contextual, and constantly shifting.

To some extent that may be true of us. With the threat of a nuclear holocaust undeniably real, global destruction being alarmingly well within our potential, some find the incentive to plan far into the future somewhat diminished. Others find it negligible and, rather like the Mbuti of old, live from day to day. But that particular

time perspective was for the Mbuti structured into a totally consistent social framework. For us it is, for the moment at least, still out of kilter with the rest of our social organization, geared as that is to the linear concept of time and the related value of "progress."

In the Ituri the impact of change is perhaps most clearly seen in recognizable shifts in religious belief and practice, and this makes me wonder if the same may not be true for us. In the relatively short space of time that I was away from the forest, a mere eleven years, the years of war seemed to have brought about major changes in both belief and practice. The remaining Muslim Ngwana were far less isolationist (as witnessed by their willingness to tolerate the raising of hogs and their almost inconspicuous participation in the *nkumbi*). The Mbuti were on their own initiative bringing their sacred *molimo* into the villages whenever they saw fit, exercising a measure of supernatural control in what had previously been an alien, profane world. And the villagers were incorporating the Mbuti more fully into the *nkumbi*, giving them increased responsibility as officiants.

But at the same time the Mbuti words denoting the values of *ekimi* and *akami* were seldom heard. This may, of course, have been partly because I spent most of the time in the village rather than in the forest, though I tried to allow for this. But all my cross-checking indicated the same lack of reference in the forest world to these two values. This change was the more significant because another term in the same language (a form of Bira) was being used much more widely. This was *bongaisa*, the causative form of the word *bonga* (also just *bo*), meaning good. In the causative form it meant to make good, or cure. Formerly this had both material and spiritual connotations. Medicine "cured" an infected wound, and the *molimo* "cured" death, making it good. But now the word was being used to imply that other supernatural curative powers were at work, spirits rather than Spirit, and this was strictly in line with village religious beliefs. The old opposition between the forest and the nonforest had apparently lost its sharpness; the Mbuti no longer seemed to regard the forest as their own private, exclusive and sacred world any more than they seemed still to regard the village as entirely profane.

This convergence of the religious worlds of the two major populations undoubtedly corresponded to and facilitated the greater economic and political contact that was now necessary. It in no way obliterated the opposition, though perhaps it had taken a step in that direction. Given the overall context, however, that is no justification for supposing that the next step will be in the same direction. Up to the end of 1972 at least, it was plain that differences in religious belief and practice continued to support a vigorous and vital diversity of self-perception, while at the same time providing a basis for effective interaction, even integration.

Changes in our own religious belief and practice are much more difficult to assess. For one thing, we start off with a much greater diversity than the Mbuti, and the tendency seems to be toward ever-increasing fission, division, subdivision, and reduplication; as well as multiplication by the introduction of previously exotic religious systems from beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. The first question posed for me by the juxtaposition of the two situations is one of clarification. Whereas, despite shifts in both belief and practice among the various populations of the Ituri, there is absolutely no discernible diminution of the intensity of belief or

frequency of practice, I do not get such a clear picture in our own society. The problem is compounded because of the loose way in which *we* habitually define "religion." But insofar as a belief in Spirit, or some supernatural power, is an essential component of religion (as it is in the Ituri), then perhaps the diversity of outer forms of religion in our own society indicates a reversal of the materialistic trend noted above, rather than a weakening of "religion." The very multiplication of "cults" may well indicate a recognition of the absence of Spirit in the more formal, established religions.

Whether we examine the problem at the national level or at the level of the smallest community, our understanding of the Ituri situation suggests that we inquire into the relationship, in our own society, of practice to belief and, where we find a discrepancy, to ask why there is such a discrepancy in our society and not in the Ituri. Does this suggest (as do other comparisons in other areas of social organization) that we are subject to change rather than adaptation at certain levels?

At the very least, any such juxtaposition is likely to make the most opinionated of us, provided we retain our rationality, question such generalizations as pose an "either/or" situation, as, for instance, in the two contrasting opinions that the proliferation of "cults" represents the failure of religion, on one hand, or an increasing concern with spirituality on the other. The Ituri situation tells us that both may well be true, that spirituality is sometimes most difficult to find in the body of a great formal religion, just as it is often difficult, in such religions, to find the intimate and omnipresent interconnections in daily life between religion and politics, economy, or family found so frequently in "primitive" religious systems.

If a consideration of social change and adaptation in the Ituri leads us to a more critical appraisal of the implications of change in our own society, such a study will have been more than justified. The extent to which we can make useful structural comparisons rather than content ourselves with juxtaposition will vary according to our divers purposes. The same is true of the extent to which we can or should apply the process in reverse, seeking to understand the process of change in the Ituri through such understanding as we have of the process at home. In the former case we should learn to be highly critical of generalizations as to the direction in which change is taking us and whether that is right or wrong, good or bad. So, in the latter, we should learn to avoid the mistake of those who bemoan the "passing of the primitive" instead of accepting the reality of change and learning what they can from simple cross-cultural studies.

Indeed, we might do well to start by learning from the Mbuti that there is as little sense in bemoaning the past as there is in anticipating the future. Perhaps such an attitude, such realistic contentment and occupation with the here and now, is only possible in their particular context. But we can still learn from it. Up to the present this way of looking at the world immediately around them has enabled them and their culture to persist through an incredible length of time.

The indications are that they will continue to adapt, back and forth, for as long as there is a forest in which they can perpetuate a forest way of life. For despite a certain religious rapprochement with their village neighbors, the Mbuti (in the Epulu region, at least) still seem to regard the forest as the major repository of all that is sacred, thus making something sacred of their total way of life, even in

the context of contemporary change. So intense is their devotion to the forest, or rather to "forestness," that even if the forest is ultimately destroyed by conscious exploitation of its economic resources or by haphazard and uncontrolled overdevelopment, it would not surprise me in the least if the Mbuti were to continue to adapt, finding a new source of sanctity in the new here and now. That indeed would be a lesson we could all learn from, and it need in no way lessen the importance of the measured concern for the future that is so necessary in our own social context.

Juxtapositions of the domestic, economic, political, and religious areas of social life among the Mbuti and ourselves seem to suggest that the Mbuti are cautiously advancing into the dangerous waters of modernization, with its increasing focus on independence, competition, inequality, and material wealth. At the same time, we may well be advancing by tentatively stepping backwards into the well-tried primitive values of family-writ-large: interdependence, cooperation, and reliance on community (or state) rather than on self, on Spirit rather than Matter. Perhaps then, as with our concept of time and space, we need to revise our concept of progress. We need to look beyond our own narrow horizons for a better understanding of what is "backward" and what is "advanced," and to search in other cultures for more wisdom as to where our ultimate security lies: with a conglomeration of individuals or with a society that is also, in every respect, a community.

Recommended Reading

The literature on the Mbuti is not extensive; the following suggestions provide a representative coverage of different points of view from different times and places. None tell the whole story; together they begin to approach it.

Harako, Reizo, 1976. *The Mbuti as Hunters: A Study of Ecological Anthropology of the Mbuti Pygmies*. Kyoto University African Studies, Vol. X, 37-99.

A meticulous study of Ituri ecology and its social significance.

Ichikawa, Mitsuo, 1978. *The Residential Groups of the Mbuti Pygmies*. Senri Ethnological Studies, 1, 131-188.

A contrasting study of the Mbuti band as a virilocal, patrilineal group.

Schebesta, Paul, 1933. *Among Congo Pygmies*. London: Hutchinson.

———, 1936. *My Pygmy and Negro Hosts*. London: Hutchinson.

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