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ROUTLEDGE

DIALOGUE AND THE INTERPRETATION OF ILLNESS

Conversations in a Cameroon Village

Robert Pool

Dialogue and the Interpretation of Illness

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Robert Pool

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To the memory of
Bob Scholte

Like verbal communication itself, ethnographic presentation may appear full of redundancy if measured by standards that presuppose an ideal reader, a perfect match of content and form between text and translation, and complete sets of findings covering the, and only the, announced subject of research. Parsimony is a supreme value for those who already know; ethnographers, although some of them can say what they have to say more clearly and succinctly than others, are destined to tell baroque and tortuous tales.

Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance.*

...all ideas seem equally good to me; the fact of their existence proves that someone is creating. Does it matter whether they are objectively right or wrong? They could never remain so for long.

Lawrence Durrell, *Justine.*

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space is which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pécuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound rediculessness indicated precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled,* nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed (run like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberated what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.

Roland Barthes, *Image–Music–Text.*

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Acknowledgements

In announcing the death of the Author, Roland Barthes claimed that the text is nothing but a 'tissue of quotations'; the writer, never original, can only mix and imitate other writings. The author does not exist prior to the text, but is born simultaneously with it. The text only finds unity in its reading.

To a certain extent this is true of the present text. It is a product of my readings of other texts, be they the published texts of other anthropologists, the transcriptions of interviews and conversations from the field, or the spoken discourse of everyday life. Following convention, I will attempt to name the authors of some of these texts.

There are those whom I have never met but whose writings have inspired me: Dennis Tedlock, Michelle Rosaldo, Kevin Dwyer, Stephen Tyler, Paul Friedrich, Clifford Geertz, Richard Bernstein. And there are those who have inspired me both through their work and through personal acquaintance: Bob Scholte, whose untimely death deprived me of an inspiring teacher and friend, and Johannes Fabian, who supervised an earlier version of this book as a dissertation. When it comes to supervising Ph.D. students Johannes's philosophy is 'you either sink or you swim'. Individual tutoring sessions were few and far between, but he read my manuscript thoroughly (it was sometimes quite shocking how thoroughly) and wrote his comments in the margin, or announced them tersely while looking down at me from behind his pipe. But there was also dialogue. In his Tuesday afternoon anthropology seminar at the University of Amsterdam he aired his ideas and reported on work in progress. More importantly, through his maieutic method, he prompted, even forced us to develop and formulate our own ideas, often seeming to assume that we already knew, and that his task was simply to make us aware of this by patiently drawing out our knowledge. His Socratic approach, initially baffling in an academic context still largely dominated by a monological tradition in which knowledge in assumed to be transferred in a one-way process and facts discovered through the application of the proper methodology, has been perhaps my greatest inspiration.

Then there are those in the village of Tabenken who welcomed me in their midst as a guest and a friend and shared their lives with me, and on whose discourse this ethnography largely rests, both those who appear in these pages: Lawrence Banyong, Fai Nga Kontar, Fai Gabriel, Susan and Mathias Tomla, Fred Ngiri, Simon Ngengeh, Pa TaKwi and Pius Kwison, Tobias Ngwang, Pa Andrew Nfor, Francis Kongor, Father Robert Tanto, Pa Manasas Yangsi, Freda Malah; and those who do not appear, though they were no less important: Pa Tanto Ngeh, Yingkvu Cletus Ndamsa and many others.

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Texts are not born only of other texts, though, they are also shaped by the circumstances of their production. The fieldwork on which this ethnography is based was made possible by various persons and institutions. Professors Mathieu Schoffeleers and Jane Kusin supported my grant application, the Netherlands Organisation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) financed the project generously (grant no. W52-370) and René van Kessel at WOTRO ensured that my interactions with the bureaucratic apparatus proceeded smoothly and efficiently. In Cameroon the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRES) granted permission for the research and a special word of thanks is due to Dr Paul Nchoji Nkwi.

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Chapter 1

First Encounters

A Case of Malnutrition

My neighbour's compound consisted of three buildings, constructed from sun-dried mud bricks. There were two small houses with corrugated zinc roofs and windows with pieces of cardboard for panes, and a separate, windowless kitchen with a high, pointed thatch roof. The buildings formed three sides of a neat courtyard of stamped earth. It was a typical compound in Tabenken village and, indeed, in the rest of the Grassfields of western Cameroon.

My assistant, Lawrence, and I approached along the path through the coffee trees which separated my neighbour's compound from mine. Two women were sitting under the thatch awning of the kitchen roof. One of them, who was in her late teens, was shelling beans. The other, old and grey, had a child on her lap. As we entered the courtyard the old woman looked up and greeted us. The young woman ignored us and continued shelling her beans.

We sat down under the awning and Lawrence exchanged a few words with the old woman in Limbum, the local language. I looked at the child, a girl of about twenty months old. Her face was round and puffy. The dark brown skin was peeling from her cheeks and forehead to reveal pink patches of new skin. Her hair was soft and yellow instead of the usual springy, glossy black. Grossly swollen and discoloured limbs protruded from her ragged clothes, and there were open sores on her shins, on which hordes of flies had settled hungrily. The old woman occasionally swished them away with her hand, but they were persistent and returned as soon as she stopped. It looked like a textbook case of kwashiorkor, a disease described in the medical literature as a form of acute protein–energy malnutrition.

In 1978 a national nutrition survey had shown that the highest percentage of chronically malnourished children in Cameroon

were to be found in the western Grassfields, and that the area also had a relatively high degree of acute protein–energy malnutrition (URCNNS 1978). Local health workers considered kwashiorkor to be a major health problem and the Catholic Mission had established a special health centre in Tabenken village for treating kwashiorkor. This was all very surprising, because the western Grassfields were also one of the richest agricultural regions in the country and there was no shortage of protein-rich foods. It was thought that 'cultural factors', and in particular people's ideas about food and the etiology of disease, were responsible. I had come to Tabenken to investigate the cultural factors related to infant malnutrition and illness, to find out how people explained and interpreted illness in general and malnutrition in particular.

Shortly after I had arrived in Tabenken and settled down in my house Francis, a village health worker at the Catholic Mission health centre, had come to inform me that two women from a neighbouring village had brought a child with serious kwashiorkor to him for treatment. He said he had ordered them to remain in Tabenken until the child was better and they were now staying with a relative, who was one of my neighbours.

Lawrence and I had now come to examine the child, whose name was Confidence, and to interview the women. The old women was Confidence's grandmother, the young woman her mother. The grandmother was very worried about Confidence and she answered most of the questions, while the mother seemed unconcerned, gazing sullenly at the beans during the whole interview.

As I did not yet understand a word of Limbum and the women did not speak English, Lawrence acted as interpreter. I asked him to find out how long the child had been sick. The old woman answered, saying that the child had been sick for about five weeks. They had brought her to Tabenken on the advice of the village health worker in their village. I asked what the initial symptoms had been. The old woman said that Confidence's face and feet had become swollen. They had taken her to the village health worker, who had told them to give Confidence eggs, meat and milk. She had also given them medicine for Confidence. I asked whether they had followed this advice. The old woman said that they had followed it exactly, and that the swelling had then reduced. But then it started again very seriously later. In the meantime they had

stopped feeding her the eggs, meat and milk. When the swelling started once more they tried to feed her eggs again but she refused. Then they had gone to a traditional medicine man. He had given them medicine, but it did not help. Then they changed to another one, but that did not help either. Then they decided to come to Tabenken. I asked what they thought was causing the disease. The grandmother said that they did not know, but that the medicine man had said that Confidence had *bfaa*.

A Visit to a Traditional Healer

A few days later Lawrence, whom I had instructed to keep his eyes open for children with kwashiorkor or traditional healers who treated the disease, reported that he had been drinking with a man at the market who said that his child had kwashiorkor. The man said his child was being treated by Pa TaKwi, an old medicine man who specialised in the disease. I decided that we should pay the healer a visit as soon as possible and instructed Lawrence to find out where he lived.

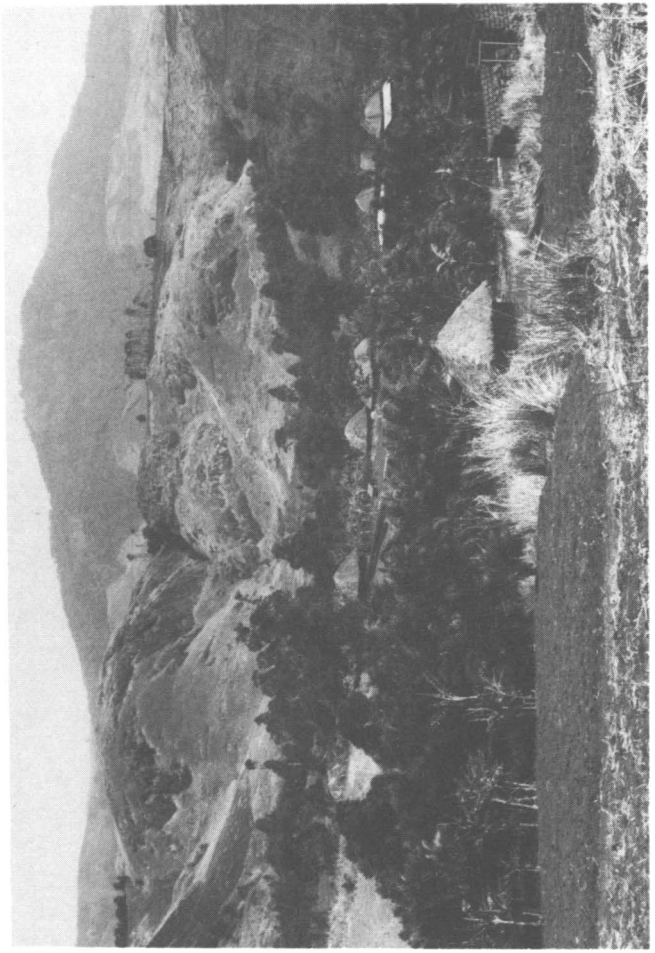
That evening Lawrence met the man again and this time he pointed out the son of the medicine man, who was called Pius Kwison. Lawrence spent some time drinking with Pius and arranged to come, together with me, to see the old man the next day.

The following morning we set out to climb the hill up to Pa TaKwi's compound. It was about twenty-five minutes' walk from my own house. After walking along the dusty main road of the village for some ten minutes we branched off to the right along a narrow path. Though the sun had not yet risen the sky was bright blue and the air was crisp and clear. We passed through the cold, damp shade of a raffia-palm grove and then past the coffee bushes separating the scattered compounds before starting to climb the stony slope which led to Pa TaKwi's compound. Once we had cleared the coffee bushes a few houses became visible on the slope below us, their red-brown mud brick walls blending in with the dry grass and soil which the women had worked into mounds in preparation for the planting that would follow the first rains some three months later. Looking up the slope toward where Pa TaKwi's compound was hidden by tall, dark green kola-nut trees, the first rays of the sun reflected off the early

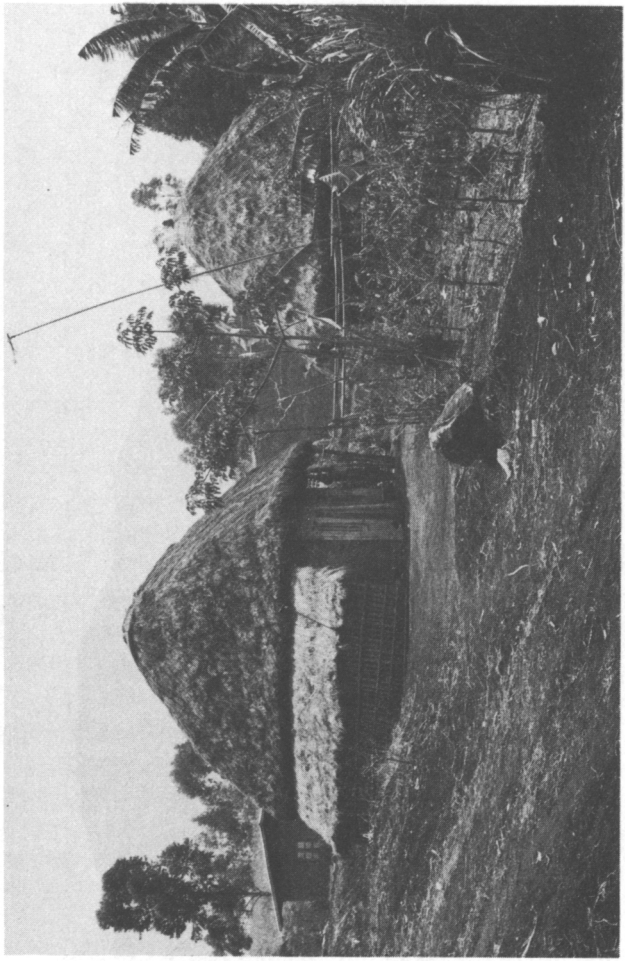
morning dew, turning the long grass into a sparkling white sea. In the valley below there was a mass of green foliage: the dark green, caterpillar-like forms of the raffia-palm groves, as they followed the contours of the numerous streams, the light green clusters of banana and plantain trees, the tall, slim blue-green forms of the eucalyptus trees with their white, peeling stems, and the huge, cumulus-like masses of the ancient kola-nut trees, billowing up, high into the air. This green mass was surrounded by the browns of the surrounding hills: dry grass and bare, tilled soil, punctuated by great mildewed rocks, each the size of a house. In the valley there were patches of low-lying mist, which were being fed by wisps of smoke seeping through the thatch roofs of the kitchens as the women prepared breakfast before leaving for their farms. The zinc roofs of some of the houses blinked in the early morning light. There was the strong smell of eucalyptus wood smoke.

After we had climbed the steep hill for another few minutes the path turned to the right and levelled out into a straight, wide drive which led into Pa TaKwi's compound. The drive passed through a well-kept garden before leading into the yard. Various species of flowering plants were arranged in a sort of rockery along the drive and around the house. It reminded me of an English cottage. Later I discovered that there were quite a few houses in Tabenken with gardens and hedges, all resembling English cottages. There were even whole villages nearby which looked like English villages. This is a result of colonial influence because, as soon as you cross from the anglophone to the francophone part of the Grassfields, the English cottage-style houses are replaced by rows of French-style houses with porches and louvre shutters.

At the end of the drive there were four or five stone steps which led into a large, open yard of bare, stamped earth. There was a house on one side of the yard and a separate kitchen on the other. Both buildings were made of sun-dried mud bricks, the universal building material in all Grassfield villages. The kitchen was a cubic structure with no windows, a raffia-bamboo sliding door and a high, pointed, thatch roof through which the smoke of the breakfast fire was seeping. Behind the kitchen was a bamboo enclosure for goats. Along one side there was a raised bamboo platform with cages full of rabbits, the fruit of American Peace Corps volunteers' efforts to increase the protein content of the



1 Tabenken in the dry season



2 A typical compound

(already protein-rich) local diet. The house was built in an L-shape and had a corrugated zinc roof. There were three rooms in one wing, each of which had a window frame boarded up with cardboard, and a single, windowless room in the other wing. This latter was Pa TaKwi's room, where he lived and received his patients. In the past, houses in Tabenken did not have windows, and older people still generally preferred them this way. Younger generations now build Western-style houses with windows, but are usually unable to afford the glass for the panes.

Pius was working in the yard, where the ubiquitous fowls and small children moved about carrying out their respective business. When he saw us coming he stopped and came toward us beaming. He shook our hands and greeted us in the way people do in Tabenken, by translating the more-or-less ritual Limbum sentences of greeting directly into English. 'Good morning. Come good, come good. How did you sleep? You slept fine? Good. What news? How for your skin?' He told us that his father had not yet returned from his palm bush (where he went every morning to tap palm wine) and invited us into the house, telling us to sit down while he fetched a calabash of palm wine, an indispensable part of any social visit in Tabenken, and indeed, as I was to discover, an indispensable part of life in general (newborn infants are often given palm wine before they receive their first breast milk, and it is sprinkled on the ground before social drinking so that the ancestors will not go thirsty). In the meantime I forced myself into a narrow, home-made bamboo chair, which soon began to feel like some fiendish instrument of torture.

Pius returned shortly with the 'calabash', which turned out to be a plastic jerrycan with a label reading 'DANGER, weed killer: this container is not to be used for any other purpose and should be disposed of after use', and three glasses. From the jerrycan he poured himself a full glass of the white, sour smelling liquid and drank it down in one gulp. He then filled our glasses.

All social drinking starts with the host drinking the first glass before offering the wine to his guests. This is a precaution against accusations of poisoning. If the host does not taste the wine first and one of his guests becomes sick then the host will immediately be suspected of having poisoned him. However, if he tastes the wine first in the presence of other guests, no one can accuse him of deliberate poisoning. For the same reason, when you drink beer in a bar in town,

3 Pius, forcing himself into one of his home-made chairs for the photograph

4 Social drinking in Kieku Quarter

the barkeeper always brings the bottles to the table and opens them there, under the eyes of the customers. Customers will promptly refuse any bottle of beer which has been opened behind the counter.

After we had drunk our first glass Pius turned to Lawrence and they exchanged a few sentences in Limbum, which I did not yet understand. Then they switched to English, and the rest of the discussion, except for a few sentences in Limbum, was in English.

[1.1] 1. 'He's telling us about the symptoms of kwashiorkor when it attacks the child,' Lawrence told me. I grabbed my cassette recorder from my bag and turned it on. 'When the child is very young,' Lawrence continued, 'immediately after delivery, you see some rashes on the skin. Then there's something that looks like fire burns on the skin. Sometimes the hair is very soft. These are the symptoms. This shows that when the child gets a bit bigger...'

2. 'When the child is about two years,' Pius interrupted, 'when the mother is going to contact [have intercourse] with the father. After some time you see the eyes swelling, you see the feet swelling. Then you know that it has gone right to the heart, already destroyed. It's easily cured when they are young.'
3. 'So when the child has just been born you can already see whether it's going to get kwashiorkor?' I asked.
4. 'Yes', Pius said. 'My father can see it. Right from when the child is born. So when he gives the medicine, then only three days and the child will be better. If, after three days, it has not been cured that means that it cannot be treated.'
5. 'So if the child can stay three days after he has given the medicine and these signs are not seen then he's not sure of treating the child?' Lawrence asked.
6. Pius took no notice of him. 'And the cause of that disease is pepper,' he said.
7. 'Pepper?' I asked, surprised.
8. 'Yes', Pius replied. 'Pepper, kola nuts, palm wine, young elephant stalk and garden eggs. They all cause the disease. From the mother's womb. If the mother stops then it cannot affect.
9. 'Did your father learn his medicine from his father?' I asked, changing the subject.
10. 'No, he was born with it.'
11. 'Born with it?'

12. 'Yes.'
13. 'So he's a born doctor?' Lawrence asked.
14. 'Yes.'
15. Lawrence seemed pleased. 'Then he must be a good scientist?'
16. 'Yes,' Pius said. 'He's a good scientist. And a soothsayer, he's a good soothsayer. If there is something, if there is any mistake, he can refer and tell the patient or the mother who comes with a child before he gives medicine. He cannot just give the medicine like that. If there is any sign he will just tell you what happened.'
17. 'Whether sickness has been caused by witch?' Lawrence suggested.
18. 'Yes, by witch.'
19. 'Or by carelessness of not using correct food?'
20. 'He treats twins too,' Pius said.
21. Lawrence leaned forward. 'Now I'm happy with what you are saying, because yesterday I could not believe that you were speaking good things to me. I thought that you were jesting or that you just wanted us to move and drink *sha* [corn beer]. But now I have seen that you are speaking something good. My name is Lawrence,' he said, as though they had just met for the first time.
22. 'You come from where?' Pius asked.
23. 'From Ndu, and this is mister Robert,' he said pointing to me.
24. 'Welcome doctor,' Pius beamed.
25. 'I'm not a doctor,' I said.
26. He raised his eyebrows. 'Not a doctor?'
27. 'He's doing research for the university,' Lawrence explained.
28. 'Oh, research, very good.'
29. 'I'm interested in kwashiorkor,' I said.
30. 'Same as your father,' Lawrence added.
31. 'Kwashiorkor is one of the worst diseases in this environment, especially Tabenken,' Pius said. 'Tabenken is first in Donga-Mantung. Even in the South West Province children are not having it as here. I don't know what is wrong.'
32. 'Maybe they're eating the wrong food,' Lawrence ventured.
33. 'Perhaps, but this thing is caused mostly by prostitution too. That's how it moves.'
34. Lawrence was not to be discouraged in his nutritional hypothesis. 'But do you believe that there is a type of food that if they eat it this kwashiorkor will stop?'
35. 'Well you know, some children take food and just mix it with

water and begin to swell up. They prepare this corn meal and give it to a child with only a little soup. The child takes a whole loaf of food and that will not work.' When people in Tabenken speak about 'food' they usually mean the staple fufu corn which is eaten with vegetables or meat stew, hence the reference to 'loaves of food' and eating 'food' with 'soup'.

36. 'Then it means that they should be eating much soup?' Lawrence asked.
37. 'Yes. More soup than food.'
38. 'I think that when your father is treating he tells them to eat better soup than what they're eating,' Lawrence said.
39. 'Yes, he tells them to mix it with red oil. It's very useful. In Kumba the people don't have kwashiorkor as here because when they prepare their food, they prepare small loaves, just like bread. You take a loaf and I take a loaf. And then you see big dishes of soup. Here we just eat food like that without soup.'
40. 'Made out of what, vegetable or meat?' Lawrence asked.
41. 'Various kinds. Mix it. Vegetables, okra and so on. You know the people there are very rich. We are very poor,' he emphasised, looking at me.
42. 'I think we have a lot of vegetables here,' Lawrence said, 'but we don't eat them.' He was one of the few farmers in the area who grew a large variety of 'European' vegetables.
43. 'They take them to the market to sell them,' Pius explained. 'You know, women are very funny people. They take them to the market to sell them for money. You see fat loaves of food without any soup and that's how these things develop.'
44. 'I think your father gives this advice to many women?' Lawrence suggested.
45. 'Yes, to many.'
46. 'That when they take this medicine they should go and eat better food too.'
47. 'Better food, especially food and vegetables,' Pius confirmed.
48. Here I thought it time to sum up: 'So there are a lot of different things which cause kwashiorkor?'
49. 'Yes,' Pius answered. 'These four main points which I gave you: the elephant stalk, the garden eggs, kola nuts and palm wine,' he said, counting them on his fingers. 'That is what causes it. And also *rra*, that green vegetable.'
50. 'We wish that you should practice this seriously with your father,' Lawrence said benevolently. 'Do the women here sell

crickets? I think that can act like meat.'
51. 'You mean crickets?' They don't sell them, they just eat them.'
52. 'They cut and eat it themselves and sometimes the adults deprive the children of food. I think so?' Lawrence suggested.
53. 'Yes,' Pius agreed. 'It goes like that.'
54. 'Then they are stingy with food for their children,' Lawrence said.
55. Pius sighed. 'My father treats so many diseases.'
56. 'Cough too?' Lawrence asked.
57. 'Yes cough too, diarrhoea, heart pain, stomach trouble and this thing when the legs are swelling. And if somebody has been killed by a stick or killed by anything, then you go there and...'
58. 'Fix the death,' Lawrence interrupted.
59. '...fix the death, where that man is killed,' Pius continued, 'whether in the bush or somewhere, and drive out the devils. You know that when somebody is killed like that those cannibals gather themselves there and begin to trouble the death. So you have to go there and fix it. That one is a very terrible one...'
60. 'Very terrible,' Lawrence agreed.
61. '...because if you don't fix it people will continue dying like that. Then my father gathers the people from that compound and he gives some three different names. When your own falls down in this way, if it's against you he will tell you [i.e. he discovers the cause through divination with cowrie shells]. Then they will bring a goat and kill it and take out the shit, er...' he glanced at me, 'waste matter, and go to the stream and take a small fowl, then kill it and throw it in the stream. Anyone who comes there now, any cannibal who comes and reaches that place will just die.'
62. 'Now you said the sickness of swollen feet happens to old people?' Lawrence asked.
63. 'Yes, old people, and those attacked by cough have it.'
64. 'So when you are attacked by a cough your legs swell up?' Lawrence queried.
65. 'They swell,' Pius confirmed.
66. 'You don't call these swollen feet kwashiorkor?' Lawrence persisted.
67. 'No, it's not kwashiorkor. This is something which only attacks adults, not children.'
68. 'How do you call that kwashiorkor in Limbum?' Lawrence asked.

69. 'Ngang.'
70. Lawrence looked puzzled. 'Then which one do you call *bfaa*?' he wanted to know.
71. '*Bfaa*?'
72. 'Yes.'
73. '*Bfaa* is the first name, it was the first name,' Pius answered.
74. 'The first name they were calling kwashiorkor?' Lawrence asked.
75. 'Yes *bfaa*. In those days people were not knowing anything about kwashiorkor. That was the beginning.'
76. 'But now they call it *ngang*?' Lawrence asked.
77. 'Yes.'
78. 'Don't they call it *bfaa* anymore?' I asked.
79. 'No,' Pius answered.
80. I asked: 'Is kwashiorkor also caused by witchcraft?'
81. 'Yes cannibalism.'
82. 'Cannibalism?' I was surprised.
83. 'Yes,' Pius said, laughing wildly. 'The practice of eating humans.'
84. 'How does that work?' I asked.
85. 'Pardon?'
86. 'How does witchcraft cause kwashiorkor?'
87. 'Well, it's another way of eating human being. When they see a very fat child they will just take a...a...' he stuttered from excitement. 'If it is in the body, and see what they are holding. Anyway, if they go to a native doctor he will cure it. But he will just pretend, take something behind it...cure that child.'
88. I was not sure what to make of this answer and tried to pose the question differently. 'So what kind of people cause kwashiorkor by witchcraft?'
89. 'Eh...sometimes...well I hope so, because this kwashiorkor mostly comes from the mother. And sometimes through prostitution. You know, prostitutes are with diseases. They have diseases and people don't know. You go and contact one and get a disease and give it to your wife. Then she will begin to suffer.'
90. Lawrence intervened. 'Now among the Wimbum people, a man who can cause witchcraft to eat the child and cause kwashiorkor, would this be a relative of the child or someone from a different family?'
91. 'It could be someone who brings human flesh and gives it to your child without you knowing. Not only from the family,' he

paused. 'That flesh is sold in the market...'
92. 'That's man's flesh?' Lawrence seemed surprised.
93. 'Yes.'
94. 'By witchcraft?'
95. 'By witchcraft it's sold in the market. Some have bought it from the market, some trade it.' Pius's eyes gleamed.
96. 'So witch people go to the market and see it?' Lawrence asked.
97. 'They see it.'
98. 'If you are travelling on your own you can't see it?'
99. 'You can't see it.' Lawrence asked.
100. Lawrence chuckled in his characteristic, high-pitched manner. 'That's interesting. Then we have two types of market here?'
101. 'We have two types of market,' Pius confirmed. 'When we are coming back they are entering...'
102. Lawrence chuckled again.
103. 'At the time people in the market are closing they are entering,' Pius continued.
104. 'So sometimes when the people are carrying a pot of meat, selling in the daytime, they mix it...'
105. 'Yes they mix it...' Pius's eyes flashed with excitement.
106. '...with the meat of people...'
107. '...with the meat of people...'
108. '...who are in witchcraft.'
109. '...by witchcraft.'
110. 'When a witchman puts his hands there, he sees the man's meat and takes it out...'
111. 'He takes it out.'
112. '...and he who does not see will only take the ordinary meat?'
113. 'Yes.'
114. 'Ah, that's interesting,' Lawrence sighed.
115. 'At this death celebration there at Tvum,' Pius said, referring to the death celebration of a village sub-chief who died shortly after my arrival in Tabenken, 'if there are no people who can see, then they can mix it and some are eating a different type of meat, and you who doesn't know are eating your own.'
116. 'You eat but the plain meat,' Lawrence said.
117. 'Plain meat,' Pius paused. 'It's sold everywhere at the market.'
118. 'Is it only the witches who eat human meat?' I asked.
119. 'Yes,' Pius replied. 'He who doesn't know cannot eat.'
120. 'So if I go to the market I can't buy it?' I continued.
121. 'You cannot even see it.'

122. 'I can't buy it by accident?'
123. 'No you can't.'
124. 'Can *you* see it?' I asked.
125. Pius raised his eyebrows. 'Myself?'
126. 'Yes.'
127. 'No.' He shook his head emphatically.
128. 'Because he's not a witchman,' Lawrence explained.
129. 'So only witches can see it?'
130. 'Yes.'
131. 'Yes,' Lawrence agreed. 'But a person who sees witchcraft, like Pa who puts *ngambe* [divines], if he goes there can he see them selling?'
132. 'Well,' Pius paused, 'he sees them selling...' He fell silent, and the sounds from outside penetrated the silence. Hens clucking, children laughing, women stamping corn in the distance.
133. 'A good science [seance?] sees but at night,' he resumed. 'Somebody who can see something clear in the night, not only in the daytime.'
134. 'When he sees...' Lawrence attempted to intervene, but Pius ignored him.
135. 'When he sleeps, that's the time he can see things. When he sleeps you don't find any hill. All this environment is plain. You don't find any hill.'
136. 'And action comes to him like dream?'
137. 'Yes, like dreams, and he sees correctly.'
138. 'Anything that they are doing somewhere, it comes in front of him?'
139. 'Yes.'
140. 'As if he's seeing a video?'
141. 'Yes. A correct science [seance?] or soothsayer sees something better in the night, not in the daytime. Because in the daytime they are hiding.' Pius's eyes gleamed again.
142. 'Hiding,' Lawrence repeated.
143. 'Yes.'
144. 'They too are sleeping,' Lawrence said. 'Then at night they start to move.'
145. 'At night they start to move about,' Puis confirmed.
146. 'That's why in Limbum we call it tvu', because they travel...' Lawrence attempted to explain to me.
147. *'Ntaa tvu"* 'ntaa tvu", Pius interjected excitedly.
148. Lawrence broke into high-pitched laughter and slapped his

hands on his thighs. *'Ntaa tvu'*, the witch market.'
149. *'Ntaa bsaa,'* Pius added, 'the gift market.'
150. Lawrence looked puzzled. 'What is a gift market?' he asked in Limbum. Here the conversation switched to the vernacular.
151. 'A gift market is where they go and take things. It's *tvu'*. They go up to *kop bfu*, it's a gift market.'
152. 'Ndu people only say they go to Kaka, where do people here say they go to?' Lawrence asked.
153. 'To *kop bfu*.'
154. *'Kop bfu*, where's that?'
155. 'On that hill,' Pius said, pointing to a mountain which dominates the village's north-eastern horizon.
156. 'Is the forest on that hill big?
157. 'Yes,' Pius answered, 'it's the biggest market in Mbum. The one at Kaka is not as big as this one. This is where the Wimbum go to take their things. If you are there often they may catch you.'
158. 'If you always go and take things can you take something so that other people will die?'
159. 'Sometimes you take and come with sicknesses.'
160. Lawrence turned to me and said, switching back to English, 'He said this hill,' he pointed in the direction of *kop bfu*, 'the witchcraft people go there and carry things and bring them here. Sometimes they go and bring food, sometimes they go and bring sickness.'
161. 'Sickness,' Pius repeated. There was silence as they both stared at the stamped mud floor. Then Pius looked up. 'By the time they are running from death you will find a kind of wind passing. You will see trees and banana stems falling. People beating them,' he said.
162. 'While they have gone to the market. And when they come back they will be running...' Lawrence added.
163. 'The devil will be following them...'
164. '...while they are going back home.'
165. '...while they are going back home.'
166. 'Or while they are collecting things from the market?' Lawrence suggested excitedly. They were both talking fast, their eyes flashing.
167. 'Yes, then start running,' Pius said, smiling.
168. Lawrence laughed. 'When you collect something from the market, you have not been giving.'
169. 'You have not been giving,' Pius agreed.
170. 'It's just your hand that takes it...'