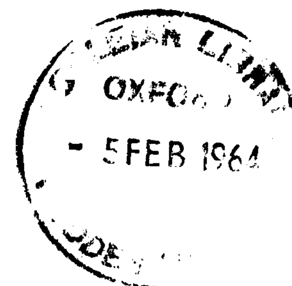
THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



A b s t r a c t

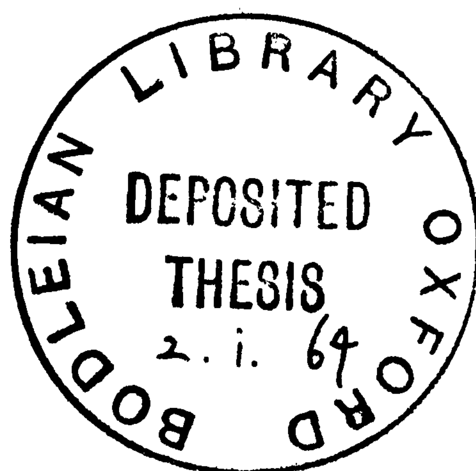
of

THE LIMBA OF SIERRA LEONE

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THEIR FOLKTALES

OR "ORAL LITERATURE"

Ruth Finnegan



Nuffield College
Oxford
Trinity Term
1963

Ch. 1 The thesis is an annotated edition of Limba folktales or "oral literature". This is unusual in recent British anthropology in spite of the earlier interest in the subject, mainly because of the reaction against evolutionism, and the more recent structuralist and functionalist approach. Various approaches to folktales and myth are laid aside as irrelevant or unhelpful. The senses in which linguistic, structural and, in particular, sociological, approaches are relevant to the present study are discussed, and various criticisms made of the narrowness or misleading implications of the more recent "sociological" attitudes to oral literature in non-literate societies. The present approach is to treat such material as having the status of literature ("oral literature"), rather than as being in some way utilitarian, and to relate the stories to their social background, discuss their contents, categories, delivery, and narrators systematically, and discover something of what they mean to those telling and hearing them.

Part I. The social context.

It is necessary to understand the background of the stories in order to grasp their effect and

Ch. 2 meaning. Limba life and story are set within the context of village and farm, and the chronological framework of the rice-farming year which is of

Ch. 3 great significance for the Limba. Marrying and wooing a wife is a frequent subject in the stories and of great concern to all Limba men. The procedure is described in some detail, as is also the nature of Limba marriage. The Limba view of women in certain roles is discussed to throw

Ch. 4 light on various points in the stories. Chiefship is also considered, as it has great importance in all Limba life and, in a rather different way, is often brought into stories. A chief's authority and duties are mainly in the spheres of hospitality,

Ch. 5 knowing what happens, and "speaking". The final subject is religion - the Limba view of Kanu ("God"), by reference to whom the Limba, in an unsystematised way, set their actions and experiences in a wider context; of "the dead" who are the common

ancestors who bind together and mark the unity of the present society; and of the various individuals with special spiritual powers. Some people have to power to "see" spirits, or to become witches, and both these activities are described. Finally the Limba view of psychology and the central part they attribute to the "heart" are mentioned and brought into relation to their view of the importance of "speaking" well in order to make people's "hearts cool" and to achieve the "coolness", i.e. freedom from physical and moral harm (thɛbina lima), that the Limba always strive for.

Part II. Language and literature.

Ch. 6 The Limba take a conscious interest in their own language, perhaps partly owing to the fact that they are surrounded by many different linguistic groups. In the spheres of greeting, thanking, accepting and announcing etc. language is used in a "performative" way to cement or maintain certain contracts or social relationships, to act and not just to state. "Speaking" is a

central concept which runs through many aspects of Limba life, and is recognised to be used for more than just statement of fact or expression of feeling. Against the background of this interest in language and speaking it is possible to examine Limba literature.

Ch. 7 Story-telling is one among several forms of Limba artistic expression. It is impossible to classify stories definitively in terms of subject matter, truth, or purpose, but for convenience Limba stories are discussed under the three headings of stories about people, stories about Kanu and origins, and stories about animals. The main general topics of Limba stories are summarised - e.g. marriage and love, family relations, "slander", friendship, chiefship, food, and cunning. No one moral is being put forward, but various comments are being made about human actions and situations. The range of the word mbɔrɔ, most often translated "story", is wide as it also covers such things as historical accounts, riddles, proverbs, and analogies. The basic concept seems to involve both the idea of age, and the idea of analogical comment on something.

Ch. 8 Limba stories are not only literature, but "oral" literature. It is essential to devote some consideration to questions of occasion, performer and style of delivery. The part taken by the audience in support of and response to the narrator is discussed, and examples given of some individual story-tellers, though this is not an expert profession in Limba in even the way singing can be. Style and technique are discussed, in particular the way in which the teller uses the potentialities of the language to make his points particularly effective or striking. The form or structure of stories is analysed briefly, specially the opening and closing formulae. Finally the genesis of stories is discussed. There is no one fixed or correct version of any Limba story, and the particular form in which it is told on any one occasion depends on various factors, in particular the individual performer. Though he draws on the store of traditional theme, style and technique, each story is a unique composition by a single individual. The idea of common or "folk" authorship is in this sense mistaken.

Each story is a new creation built on the traditional materials. Limba stories should be classed as literature composed by individuals, and not as some special phenomenon which needs a special external explanation.

Part III. The texts.

Ch. 9 After a brief note on recording, orthography, translation etc, Limba texts and translations are given of a little over a hundred Limba stories recorded in the field, with brief explanatory notes. The stories are given in three sections for convenience: stories about people; stories about *Kanu* and origins; and stories about animals. This is followed by a short fourth section with historical texts, proverbs and riddles. Finally there is a brief appendix listing the narrators of the stories included.

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διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ζῷον ὁ ἄνθρωπος πάσης
μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζῴου μᾶλλον,
δῆλον. οὐδὲν γάρ, ὡς φαμέν, μάτην ἡ φύσις
ποιεῖ· λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζῴων.

Now the reason why man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech.

<u>Aristotle. 1253a</u>.

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PREFACE

This thesis is really three things in one. First, and most important, it is an edition of Limba oral literature, with introductory chapters which explain the stories in the light of their social background and of the Limba view of language and literature, an account of their stories and story-telling, and, finally, texts, translations and commentary. It also tries to give some account of the Limba in terms of their own language and literature. And, thirdly, it lays stress on the significance of language and literature in society, thus adopting an approach which has not, recently at least, been followed by most British social anthropologists. In view of these three aims, the thesis has grown to great lengths. Nevertheless I make no apology for this since the great bulk is largely due to the inclusion of the Limba texts and translations themselves, and these need no apology.

Practically nothing has been published about the Limba. They probably number something under 200,000 in all, and live in the north of Sierra Leone in an

irregularly shaped area of about 1900 square miles of mainly hilly country. They are grouped into seven chiefdoms ruled over by Limba paramount chiefs. In the north of Sierra Leone modern communications and education have been developed less recently than in the south, so that there are relatively few educated Limba, and, compared to many of the peoples of Sierra Leone, they are noted for their retention of much of their traditional custom and culture, of which their oral literature described here is one important part.

The fieldwork on which this account is based was carried out in 1961 with grants from the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the Horniman Fund. The main part of my stay was in the east of Limba country, and statements in this thesis refer primarily to that area, and to conditions in the year 1961. A general survey of the Limba in the traditional categories of ethnographic investigation was presented to the Colonial Social Science Research Council in September 1962. Much of this basic ethnographic material has not been repeated here, since this thesis is concerned primarily with only one aspect of Limba life.

Having written this account of Limba oral literature I can now see many gaps. For a complete study there is much more that could be said, other questions that should also have been asked. Thus I cannot but be dissatisfied. However it can perhaps be said that the very possibility of such dissatisfaction does show something of the potentialities of the rather unusual approach I have taken up here. And it can certainly be added that it at least marks some advance on the previously accepted conclusion about the Limba asserted by E.F. Sayers, an authority on the north of Sierra Leone, in 1927; "Limba is a very fourth-rate language in which, so far as my experience goes, it is almost impossible to get any fine shades of meaning expressed ... Limbas (pure blooded), although good manual labourers, are certainly the most obtuse minded of all Sierra Leone peoples". My account here has therefore, I would hope, revealed something more of Limba language and thought than, it seems, was previously recognised.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY. SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, FOLKTALE, AND ORAL LITERATURE.

This thesis is an edited collection of Limba "oral literature". It mainly covers their stories which are of the kind usually referred to as "folktales". I describe the social background from which the stories spring, for without a knowledge of this it is impossible to understand the meaning of the stories for those who heard or told them; give some analysis of the Limba attitude to language and story, and of the style and performance of stories; and finally include texts and annotated translations of some Limba "oral literature", mainly stories.

That this approach and subject stands in a very particular need of the usual introductory apologia, is both obvious and surprising. Obvious in that I must clearly justify my claim that a discussion focussed round "folktale" can be presented as "anthropology" in the context of the current lack of concern with such matters among British social anthropologists.

surprising, in view of the great interest in stories and verbal art once taken as a matter of course by earlier field-workers and authors of monographs on foreign peoples, an interest still assumed in much American anthropology as self-evidently a part of the subject. This first chapter therefore explains the present attitude of social anthropologists to the study of folktales, and describes the apparently unusual approach which I am adopting.

The present situation is that British social anthropologists now mostly take very little interest in folktales.[1] In the last thirty years or so practically no collections of African folktales have been made by social anthropologists to supplement the work published in earlier decades. Though some popular editions of African tales in smooth English or attractive format[2] have found their way to England

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1. In this introductory section I use the term "folktale", discussed later, to cover the usual scope of "household tale", "fairy tale", fables, legends, and, at times, what are sometimes classed as "myths", and so on. See e.g. Thompson 1946 p.4.

2. e.g. Radin 1953, Jablow 1962.

recently, and though linguists may have presented or analysed texts in phonetic or grammatical detail, any systematic study or collection by professional British social anthropologists has been lacking.

Contemporary general and introductory works on social anthropology now often include little or nothing on the significance of verbal art even when they give a certain amount of space to the discussion of the plastic arts.[3] As Prof. Berry points out in his stimulating survey of the field in Spoken Art in West Africa, the change of general theoretical standpoint in the last thirty years "has not led (as was reasonable to hope) to improved techniques in collecting, but to an almost total neglect of the subject".[4] The American folklorist R.M. Dorson can sum up the present state of English folklore studies (by which he means primarily the collection and analysis of folktales) by writing that "in England the cause of folklore has

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3. e.g. Firth 1951, Evans-Pritchard (ed.) 1956, Piddington 1950 and 1957; the 6th edition of Notes and Queries has some sound remarks on the collection of stories, but the space devoted to this is meagre compared to that on the "arts", and is about comparable in length to the section on "string figures and tricks".

4. Berry 1961 p. 14

languished since the generation of Lang. British social anthropology has severed its once intimate relations with ethnologically minded folklorists ... English social anthropology today has discarded folklore"[5]

The absence of interest in folktales and oral literature among modern British social anthropologists is, then, unmistakeable. What perhaps is even more striking is the scorn with which many British social anthropologists react to any mention of the word "folktale" (and even more extremely of course to its congener "folklore").[6] There are good historical reasons for this reaction, which I discuss more fully later, and, as I also emphasise, the term "folktale" is in some ways not a very happy one. Yet it is striking that the word itself should sometimes seem to provoke such scorn that any serious interest in the study of, to use the more acceptable terms, "verbal art" or "oral literature" can be so easily classified as automatically uncritical, irrelevant, or, simply,

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5. Dorson 1961 pp. 302 and 305

6. The words are now commonly written "folktale" and "folklore"; the hyphenated form was more common in the earlier period. I have tried to adopt the appropriate forms in my discussion but it is hard to be completely consistent.

non-anthropological merely by attaching to it the label of "folklore". "Folklore", and hence by extension "folktale", has become a term of abuse in British social anthropology.

This current neglect of and even hostility to the study of folktales is all the more surprising when contrasted to the earlier work in England on this subject. The works of the nineteenth and early twentieth century mythologists are still regarded as standard reading in social anthropology. Their work covered not only what would readily be called "myth", especially when applied to Greek or Indian sources, but also such tales as those included in, say, Grimm's collection which fall, on any definition, into the class of "folktale". The leading protagonists were of course Max Müller and Andrew Lang, and it was in an English context that they engaged in the controversies still so famous for their equal erudition and wit.[7] Müller, with his stress on comparative Indo-European and "nature" mythology, was finally, according to the

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7. For accounts of earlier analyses of myths etc. see e.g. Thompson 1946, Krappe 1930, Müller 1881, Lang 1887, Lindgren 1939.

usual conventional view,[7a] "vanquished" by the anthropological school of Lang and his followers, partly through such ridicule as Lang's parody of Müller's early man with his "passionate sympathies with the fortunes of the sun and the dew ... morbidly anxious for the welfare of the sun and tearfully concerned about the misfortunes of the dew ...";[8] one famous satirist even went so far as to "prove" by Müller's methods that Max Müller himself, and his home Oxford, did not exist but were "solar myths".[9] Lang on the other hand preferred to derive myth from earlier stages of savagery when "tales that even to remote and rudimentary civilisations appeared irrational and unnatural would seem natural and rational".[10]

These battles are well known and need not be further recapitulated. The point is that though there is now little systematic study of the subjects with which they were concerned - myth and folktale - their views, however discredited in detail, are still recognised

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7a questioned by Dorson in Sebeok 1958 pp 15 ff.

8. Lang in Grimm ed. Hunt 1884 p. xxi.

9. Gaidoz 1884

10. Lang 1887 pp. 4-5

as within the scope of the subject. The relevance of their views to the subject-matter of social anthropology seems still to be taken for granted.

Besides this general interest in the subject of mythology, usually in practice including what we now call "folktales", anthropologists and other students of "primitive man" in the last century and earlier years of the present one often seem to have assumed that any close field study of, say an African people, would naturally include something of their folktales, stories, proverbs and so on. Up to about 1930 it appears to have been quite regular for any monograph to include, usually as a final chapter, 20, 50, or even 100 pages of stories or proverbs.[11] Junod in 1912[12] gave an excellent account of Thonga folktales, discussing, for example, the "place occupied by folk-tales in the life of the tribe", the classification of Thonga folklore and its literary value, the style of narration, and the antiquity and creation of tales. There were alsomany books devoted mainly to collections of tales,

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11. e.g. Roscoe 1911, Routledge 1910, Huffman 1931, Meek 1931, Smith and Dale 1920.

12. Junod 1912-13 Vol. 2 pp. 191 ff.

proverbs, riddles and other texts, usually with the original vernacular facing or accompanying an English translation.[13]

Some of the earlier collections seem to have been motivated in part by the desire to present Africans as "fully human". Koelle for example writes in the preface to his pioneer work published 1854, that some acquaintance with Kanuri literature is

> "a circumstance of paramount importance so long as there are any who either flatly negative the question or at least consider it still open 'whether the Negroes are a genuine portion of mankind or not'. It is vain to speculate on this question from mere anatomical facts, from peculiarities of the hair, or the colour of the skin: if it is mind what distinguishes man from animals, the question cannot be decided without consulting the languages of the Negroes; for language gives the expression and manifestation of the mind".[14]

Other collectors were also interested in the possible origins of the tales they recorded in their psychological effects, their explanatory function, the evidence they seemed to afford of the primitive man's supposed

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13. e.g. Schlenker 1861, Koelle 1854, Burton 1865, Callaway 1868, Torrend 1921, Rattray 1913 and 1930, Hollis 1905 and 1909, Beech 1911, Doke 1927, Bleek and Lloyd 1911.

14. Koelle 1854 p. vi.

incapacity to distinguish between himself and the animal world, or in simply letting "the negro ... speak of himself in his own words".[15] The main interest was very often a philological one, and some collections therefore had little social commentary to make the meaning of the translations significant to English readers in the sense in which they were understood by the people who narrated or heard the original texts. However some publications did have lengthy notes or introductions,[16] and though some of the explanations might seem farfetched nowadays, some attempt was , even then, being made to fill in the social background of the tales. Whatever the defects of interpretation or rigour in these earlier collections, their authors did realise that these items of verbal art were of importance to the people studied and a significant aspect of the culture as a whole; so, as a matter of course, they included them as one part, or the main part, of their accounts of the peoples they wished to describe.

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15. Burton 1865 p. xxvii.

16. e.g. Herzog 1936, Cardinall 1931, Tremearne 1913, Werner 1933, Nassau 1904 and 1914.

It is then at first sight surprising that the present students of Africa, those who have followed in the footsteps of both these field investigators and the earlier mythological speculators, have been content merely to reject the methods and interpretations they applied to the study of myth, folktale and oral literature, without, in this case, wishing to improve on them in the same field.

This is the more remarkable in that American anthropologists have apparently retained at least some interest in the study of folktales. The Journal of American Folklore, for example, (unlike its English counterpart Folklore.)[17] is dominated by professional scholars, and there has in recent years been a brisk interchange of views on the study of folktales, "verbal art" and so on in the context of anthropology.[18] Systematic studies of myths, tales, and other oral literature have been undertaken by American anthropologists from the classic work of Boas to the more recent studies today.[19] A writer working in America can

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17. See Dorson 1961.

18. e.g. Basoom 1953, 1954 and 1955; Lévi-Strauss etc. in 1955 (1958), Simmons 1961, Dundes 1962.

19. e.g. Boas 1916, Reichard 1947, Benedict 1935, Herskovits 1936 and 1958.

state in the course of a discussion of "the role of proverbs in Fante culture" that "a knowledge of what has been traditionally termed 'folklore' and more recently 'verbal art', has long been considered essential for any well-rounded ethnography".[20]

Why then, it is necessary to ask, has British social anthropology turned away from a study with which it was so closely concerned in its origins and which in other places is still considered as an essential part of its subject matter?

The answer must be looked for in the history of the subject as it developed in England. There are in fact easily understood historical reasons behind the present attitude to folktales. Of these, two are of particular importance.

In England "folk-lore" was from the start closely associated with evolutionary anthropology, and the early members of the Folk-Lore Society included such names as Tylor, Lang, Haddon and Frazer. "Folk-lore" was likewise evolutionist and was, in fact, often described as "the study of survivals". It was generally delimited as the customs and beliefs of both primitive

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20. Christensen 1958 p. 232.

or "early" man, and of the modern peasant, the "folk" among whom could be found the survivals of the earlier, cruder, stage of human evolution. "The science of folk-lore" in the eyes of G.L. Gomme writing in 1885, for example, was "the science which treats of the survivals of archaic beliefs and customs in modern ages",[21] and in the second issue of the early journal the Folk-Lore Record Andrew Lang too speaks in the same terms: "the science of Folk-Lore examines the things that are the oldest, and most permanent, and most widely distributed, in human institutions ... Folk-Lore is the study of survivals".[22] Frazer was, of course, widely regarded as providing the culmination of this movement with, for example, "the Golden Bough, in comparison with which all other attempts to solve the riddle of the sphynx must appear dwarfish".[23] Frazer's adherence to the concept of unilinear evolution and the doctrine of survival is quite clear. He states his own position on folklore himself in, for example, the preface to Folk-Lore in the Old

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21. Folk-Lore Journal III 1885 p. 14.

22. Folk-Lore Record II pp. i, vii.

23. Krappe 1930 p. xx.

Testament:

> "Modern researches into the early history of man, conducted on different lines, have converged with almost irresistible force on the conclusion that all civilised races have at some period or other emerged from a state of savagery resembling more or less closely the state in which many backward races have continued to the present time; and that, long after the majority of men in a community have ceased to think and act like savages, not a few traces of the old ruder modes of life and thought survive in the habits and institutions of the people. Such suvivals are included under the head of folk-lore, which in the broadest sense of the word, may be said to embrace the whole body of a people's traditionary beliefs and customs so far as these appear to be due to the collective action of the multitude and cannot be traced to the individual influence of great men".[24]

When this concept of unilinear evolution came to be rejected, the whole foundation of the "science of folk-lore" collapsed with it. The study of primitive society developed other interests and theoretical preoccupations and was, under the name of "social anthropology", adopted into several British universities. Among academic anthropologists and fieldworkers the term "folk-lore" came to be reserved as a synonym for the old evolutionist and uncritical position held by earlier writers in the subject, and by now totally rejected. Those "folklorists" who clung, and still

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24. Frazer 1919 Vol. 1 p. vii.

cling, to the old theoretical framework, and write, for example, about "the folklore of the British Isles" in terms of odd local customs, by-ways, "survivals", old superstitions, or "ancient fertility cults"[25] are regarded with scorn by modern professional anthropologists - and in general rightly so - as being out of date, uncritical and addicted to a totally mistaken theoretical framework.[25a] It is not surprising in view of this that "folklore" has become a term of abuse among social anthropologists today.

The one unfortunate consequence of this reaction against evolutionism - and hence against the term "folklore" - has been that one part of the traditional subject-matter of "folklore" which was in fact <u>not</u> inextricably evolutionist, has been rejected by modern social anthropology at the same time as the rest. The study of oral literature ("folktales") seems to have been abandoned at the same time as the doctrine of survivals. The early issues of the journals of the Folk-Lore Society[26] had included not only accounts

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25. e.g. Hull 1928, Alford 1952.

25a. cf. also the otherwise interesting works of Graves 1955 and Bowra 1962, both vitiated by their outdated evolutionist emphasis.

26. Folk-Lore Record, Folk-Lore Journal, and Folk-Lore (now spelt Folklore).

of quaint customs and superstitions defined as "survivals", but also texts of folktales and oral literature from mainly non-literate communities. It is true that these were at the time interpreted according to the prevailing mode of thought: tales collected in, say Italy, were sometimes presented as "survivals", those from Africa or Polynesia as representative of an earlier, once universal, stage of society. But the collection and analysis of such tales did not in fact necessarily depend on the evolutionist framework in the way that the selection of odd customs in England or Wales as "survivals" more directly did. But when anthropologists rejected folklore in the sense of the customs of "the folk", a study steeped in evolutionist ideas, they also lumped together with this any study of what could be regarded as the literature of "the folk" - folktales. They therefore turned in general away from any systematic study of the oral literature of non-literate peoples, a study not, in itself, necessarily bound up with evolutionist ideas, even though traditionally classed with "folklore" and called by the similar word "folktale".

The study of folktales, therefore, instead of

being taken over by professional anthropologists and pursued in a more rigorous and systematic way, has in fact been neglected by British social anthropologists over much of this century. Any work that has been done on this subject has been from a mainly amateur standpoint, or from a primarily linguistic point of view by grammarians, phoneticians and philologists.[27] The prejudice among anthropologists against any line of enquiry once closely associated with the unpopular concept "folklore" goes very deep. Yet there is in fact no logical objection to a study of "folktales" in the terms of modern non-evolutionist anthropology.

The existence and subsequent rejection of evolutionist anthropology is, then, one of the main factors behind the present neglect of oral literature by social anthropologists. Another reason for this is, paradoxically,[28] the interesting work on myth by Malinowski, or rather, the way in which this was taken up by other later writers who adopted a "functionalist" or "structuralist" approach to the study of society.

27. Contrast however the accounts in Green 1948, Berry 1961, and Whiteley (1964)

28. Paradoxically, because Malinowski in fact collected and published texts, and gives a most valuable discussion of the occasions and classes of Trobriand oral literature in his work on myth 1926 pp. 23 ff.

Malinowski is constantly cited for his remarks about the effects of myth in society-its function as the "mythical charter" in stabilising society generally or in justifying the position of certain groups within it. Myths justify and validate. They are "the dogmatic backbone of primitive civilisation". The function of myth is "to strengthen tradition and endow it with greater value and prestige".[29] Others interested in the functional integration of society took up this idea in particular of myth as a stabilising force, or as directly resulting from, or reflecting, or equalling, the "social structure" of the society they were studying.[30] Examples of oral literature were singled out as "myths" if they could be closely connected with a continuing social structure, a stable and stablising force. "Their myths and legends" writes Fortes, for instance, of the Tallensi,

> "are one means of rationalising and defining the structural relationships of group to group or the pattern of their institutions ... In the elaborately differentiated structure of Tale society there are regions of high tension where

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29. Malinowski 1926 pp. 38, 125.

30. e.g. Fortes 1945 pp 23 ff; Evans-Pritchard 1940 pp. 229 ff, Leach 1954 p. 14, Middleton and Tait 1956 pp. 26-27; and cf. the rather psychological approach in the earlier writings of Radcliffe-Brown, 1922 esp. chap. VI.

> groups are coupled together in polar opposition and regions of low tension where the units of structure are articulated in complementary relations to one another. The myths epitomize the factors which differentiate one group from another".[31]

A more recent remark by Beattie in his general study of the Banyoro expresses much the same viewpoint.

> "What interests us most about myths is the way in which they may express attitudes and beliefs current at the present time. Mythologies always embody systems of values, judgements about what is considered good and proper by the people who have the myth. Especially, myth tends to sustain some system of authority, and the distinctions of power and status which this implies. Thus Nyoro myths tend to validate the kinds of social and political stratification which ... are characteristic of the culture, and to support the kingship around which the traditional political system revolved. In Malinowski's phrase, Nyoro legend provides a "mythical charter" for the social and political order".[32]

One of the main interests in recent social anthropology, therefore, has been in the social function of "myths" in validating or stabilising, or in the close connection of myth with the social structure and the network of social relations to which social anthropologists chiefly directed their attention. This has meant that since analysis was centred on "structure" or "function", the collection or examination of a large body of oral literature for its own sake seemed irrelevant.

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31. Fortes 1945 p. 26.

32. Beattie 1960 p. 11.

Fieldworkers were correspondingly less concerned to investigate, for example, how far the people themselves in fact made a distinction in their verbal art between what the anthropologist tended to class as "myth" (i.e. socially useful in some sense, or illustrative of some general principle which he wished to demonstrate) and what he put down as "folktale" (i.e. merely "culture", irrelevant to the network of social relations).

This emphasis on the social effectiveness of "myth" can be connected with the neglect of other forms of oral literature. Even if "myth" could be regarded as in some way "stable" and "fixed", folktales were clearly fluid, changing, not tied to the social structure, amusing by-play, and with no "deep" or constant meaning. There had been earlier attempts to show the "usefulness" of folktales by emphasising either their role in education through their expression of morals or, alternatively, when the stories told were "coarse", their psychological and cathartic effects[33] - but none of these approaches were felt to accord well with the current concentration on institutions which *really* affected the society, had an important

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33. e.g. Van Gennep 1910 chap. 1, Rattray 1930 pp. ix-xii.

function, or fitted into the structure. In any case, the actual labour of collecting many texts just could not, in practice, be combined with the equally long and laborious task of systematically collecting genealogies which were self-evidently necessary for a structuralist analysis. For various reasons therefore connected with the recent theoretical framework of British social anthropology in terms of structure and function, little interest has been taken in the systematic collection or investigation of forms of oral literature among African peoples.

The present lack of interest in this study, in contrast to the earlier work in this country and the present situation in America, may therefore be traced both to the strong reaction against the tenets of unilinear evolution, and to the consequent interest in a structuralist and functionalist approach to the study of society. There are, it seems, good historical reasons for the present position of folktale study in modern British social anthropology. This explains the paradoxical situation with which I began that such studies are both to be found in the earlier history of the subject, and yet at the present time are so unpopular that a special apologia must be put forward

by anyone embarking on such a study.

A proper survey of the various approaches that have been made in the past to the study of myth, folktale, fable, or oral literature in general is clearly impossible here. It would, for one thing, involve a conspectus of nearly the whole history of anthropology, for the degree of interest (or lack of interest) in the two subjects are closely intertwined. The main lines are in any case clearly summed up in Thompson's classic work The Folktale.[34] All I propose to do therefore is to indicate specifically some of the approaches I am not, in fact, adopting, and to distinguish the lines in other approaches which I have considered it fruitful to follow up in the present study. By differentiating certain questions which others have treated, I shall at least make it clear which questions I am not trying to answer. This perhaps is particularly necessary in a field that has been so confused and fought over as that of mythology, and, by extension, folktale.[35]

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34. Thompson 1946; cf. also Krappe 1930 and the shorter remarks in Berry 1961 and Whiteley (1964).

35. The theories about myth and folktale have for the most part been so closely linked that it is impossible to discuss one without the other, even though in particular cases they may have to be distinguished.

In the first place, I am not asking about the origin either of Myth and Folktale in general, nor of the specific tales found among the Limba or others.

Questions about the general origin of institutions are associated in particular with the earlier comparativist and evolutionary interests of nineteenth century anthropology. Whether folktale in general arose from diffusion, independent invention, the dark shadow of language, the desire for an intellectualist explanation of natural phenomena, the inability to differentiate humans and animals, or the like constitution of the human mind everywhere is no longer a question usually considered worth investigating. Some of the answers have a certain truth - stories are sometimes aetiological, animal tales are widespread throughout the world, tales do pass from one people to another - but when these are posed as <u>general</u> questions or theories about all Folktale or all Myth they are quite unhelpful. Similarly the once debated Indian or Indo-European hypotheses about the provenance of the present tales of Western Europe are not discussed here, and they are by now in any case of doubtful value as general theories.

More exact and rigorous are the questions about origin treated by the so called historical-geographical

school of Finnish folklorists, also followed by Stith Thompson in America. This school is interested in the geographical and historical origin of particular tales, and works through a precise comparison of evidence. They attempt to reconstruct the "entire life history of the tale", working back to the primitive local forms, hence to the ultimate archetype, in rather the way philologists trace back a series of manuscript traditions to their first original. Stith Thompson's monumental Motif-Index of Folk-literature is on the same lines.[36] The "motifs" (i.e. plots, subject matter, types of character and action) of folktales etc.[37] are classified for easy reference and comparison. This question about the specific life-history of various tales has been one of the dominating influences in the more recent study of the folktale. I shall later, in Part II, refer to some of the difficulties raised by their assumption that one can isolate a set "prototype" or "original" of any given tale; this concept does not accord well with

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36. Thompson 1955.

37. i.e. folktales, myths, ballads, fables, mediaeval romances, fabliaux, jests, exempla, local traditions; but not riddles, proverbs, or customs and beliefs.

the nature of Limba oral literature at least. But, in contrast to the grand evolutionist theories, this limited diffusionist approach is a precise and scientific study of folktales which has much interest. Though I do not adopt it here, it could be regarded as complementary, not contradictory, to the questions with which I am primarily concerned. It is partly because the comparative evidence on the various plots etc. can be found in Stith Thompson and writers with a similar interest[38] that I have not thought it worth while to follow up and cite references to the comparative distribution of tales similar in plot to those I present from the Limba.

It has sometimes also been asked in general terms what can be the "real" content, or inner meaning contained or symbolised or hiddenly expressed in folktales or, more often, "myths". Max Müller's famous answer was that myths are basically about natural phenomena, principally the sun. Others suggested such themes as "totemism", "ritual", the primitive fear of death, dreams, or sub-conscious desires. More recently it is sometimes implied that

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38. Thompson 1955, Herskovits 1936, Klipple 1938.

what myths really express is, in a sense at least, the "social structure" or "social values". Fortes, for example, writes of the Tallensi myths of origin that they are "nothing more than formulations of the contemporary scheme of political and ceremonial relationships";[39] and Leach asserts that myth is a form of "symbolic statement about the social order".[40] Insofar as these are intended to be generalised theories about the nature of myth, about what its real, though latent, subject matter is, I am not concerned to treat them.[41]

Primarily psychological questions I also lay aside. It may well be, for example, that, as Rattray[42] for one has suggested, the narration of prohibited or shocking episodes during a "period of licence" has a certain cathartic value for the individuals concerned. This would indeed seem a plausible interpretation of one of the by-products of story-telling. I am not however competent to judge this in the case of the Límba. Similarly I cannot decide how valid in the

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39. Fortes 1945 p. 23.

40. Leach 1954 p. 14.

41. On the sociological theories implied here see below pp. 42ff

42. Rattray 1928 and 1930 p.x.

Limba situation is the suggestion sometimes made that stories about, for example, the origin of death, in some way psychologically support the bereaved or troubled individual and aid him to cope with the situation of death - though this may in fact be true in psychological terms. Nor am I capable of asking or answering questions posed in Freudian terms, nor of discussing Jungian archtypes. Similarly I will not try to assess Jung's dictum that "all mythical figures correspond to inner psychic experiences and originally sprang from them",[43] or the Jungian approach adopted by Radin in his study in American Indian mythology where he asks about the content and meaning of the "original" plot:

> "About this there should be little doubt I feel. It embodies the vague memories of an archaic and primordial past, where there as yet existed no clear-cut differentiation between the divine and the non-divine. For this period Trickster is the symbol ... he represents not only the undifferentiated and distant past, but likewise the undifferentiated present within every individual".[44]

These kinds of questions are treated as irrelevant to the present study.

Another approach to oral literature, always in this case entitled "myth", is to discuss not its origin,

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43. in Radin 1956 p. 195.

44. *op. cit.* p. 168

content or meaning, but its significance as a form of thought. This psychological or epistemological viewpoint is taken by, in particular, Cassirer,[45] in his postulation of "mythopoeic thought". This he considers a specialised way of apprehending reality, distinct from scientific thought. "There is no natural phenomenon and no phenomenon of human life that is not capable of a mythical interpretation, and which does not call for such an interpretation".[46] Whether there actually are empirical grounds for postulating this kind of special thinking as distinct from other forms may be doubtful; but I am not in any case concerned to discuss whether or not the Limba think "mythopoeically" in Cassirer's sense, but merely to present and explain certain of the tales they in fact produce, by whatever processes, and the concept which they themselves have of a "story" (mbɔrɔ).

These various questions, whether historical, pseudo-historical, symbolic, psychological or philosophical, are all equally questions which I am not raising in this study. Certain statements have commonly

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45. e.g. Cassirer 1944; cf. also Frankfort 1949, Lévi-Strauss 1958.

46. Cassirer 1944 p. 73.

been made about "myths" in these terms, often in a way that is too general to be of much help when applied to particular situations, and sometimes by those who in any case are not really competent to judge these matters. However even in the cases where such questions have an obvious interest or point, I am not entering into them here.

There are however other approaches to the study of myth and folktale which are in varying degrees relevant to the present study. These are the approaches which could be called the "structural", the "linguistic" and the "sociological". As will appear, these can at some points be very closely related to one another.

"Structural" approaches can have various emphases, but what all share is some attempt to analyse or distinguish the basic components which make up myth or folktale (or particular examples of these) and, often, to analyse the form of the whole in terms of these components. How clearly these units are demarcated and analysed depends very much on the approach and purpose of the particular writer; the basic data for analysis or comparison have included such concepts as

"type", "motif", "function" "bundle of relations", "motifeme" and even, perhaps, "the bit".[47]
Likewise the selection and use of these various units have been various. Stith Thompson's main interest, for example, has been merely to provide a ready index of "motifs" to facilitate historical-geographical studies of diffusion; Propp looked to the analysis of the stable, constant elements in Russian folktales (the "functions") in order to explain the problem of their simultaneous uniformity and variety; Dundes wants to isolate what he calls "emic units" for scientific comparison, Lévi-Strauss and Leach seem also to be interested in the structural laws of "mythical thought" or "human thought" in general as well as in the basic structure underlying particular myths or tales.

In so far as these analyses concern themselves with the more general questions about folktale, myth or mythical thought, I shall not directly discuss them here. I am attempting only to treat of the oral literature of one particular people, and whatever insights may come from these wider theories, I do not

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47. Thompson 1955, Aarne 1961, Propp 1958, Lévi-Strauss 1958, Dundes 1962, Leach 1962.

attempt to consider them in any <u>general</u> way. I am not, for example, concerned - or competent - to decide on the conclusion of Lévi-Strauss' "structural" analysis of myth that "the kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and ... the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied".[48] Nor am I concerned to confirm or deny general propositions such as that with which Leach ends his analysis of the structural oppositions in the myth of Genesis:

> "whenever a corpus of mythology is recited in its religious setting such structural patterns are 'felt' to be present ... it seems evident that much the same patterns exist in the most diverse kinds of mythology. This seems to me to be a fact of great psychological, sociological and scientific significance".[49]

The discovery or discussion of such wide cross-cultural structural patterns is not my aim.

It is worth discussing in a little more detail the classic article by Lévi-Strauss on "The structural study of myth", first published in 1955, both because of its intrinsic interest and because of the very great

48. Lévi-Strauss 1958 p. 66.

49. Leach 1962 p. 35.

prestige associated with the name of Lévi-Strauss and his term "structural".[50] He professes to be adopting a new and more scientific study of myth by finding the "gross constituent units" of a myth: these turn out to be not isolated elements or even isolated relations but "bundles of relations". These multi-dimensional relations can be transferred to punched cards and, ideally, processed by I.B.M. equipment. In this way it should be possible to discover the structure of an individual myth with its variants, of groups of myths and, it seems, of mythology and mythical thought in general.

In order to explain this approach in more detail Lévi-Strauss shows how he would apply this method to two test cases, the Greek myth of Oedipus and the Zuni origin myth. He writes down the units (including such units as "Oedipus kills his father Laios") in four vertical columns, "each of which include several relations belonging to the same bundle". This, he says, can then be read two ways, either down or across, according to the two-dimensional nature of

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50. Lévi-Strauss 1958. cf. Dundes's remarks in the Journal of American Folklore 1962, where he concludes that "the structural study of folklore ... looks promising indeed" p. 104.

the myth. The exact process of the argument is too long to reproduce here. The point however that I want to make is that for all the scientific apparatus, and in spite of his several perceptive or stimulating remarks by the way in the course of his analysis, the end result of his method is in fact to misrepresent at least the Greek myth. The components which are singled out for his columns do not seem to be those that are important, or even present, in all versions of the Oedipus story (though one of the virtues of his method, according to Lévi-Strauss, is that it can cover all versions), nor are they particularly stressed in the fullest version of the myth that we possess, Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Furthermore one of Lévi-Strauss' main points is what he considers the feature of the relation between "the denial of the authochthonous origin of man" and "the persistence of the authochthonous origin of man". But this seems on the face of it a most un-Greek idea; what evidence Lévi-Strauss has that it was implied in the narration of the Greek myth is not stated. His conclusion about what the Oedipus myth "means" seems equally unconvincing.

> "The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is authochthonous (see, for instance, Pausanias VIII, xxix, 4: vegetals provide a model for humans),

> to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that humans beings are actually born from the union of man and woman ... the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which, to phrase it coarsely, replaces the original problem: born from one or born from two? born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape authochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life verifies the cosmology by its similarity of structure ...".[50a]

This conclusion, with no further attempt to relate it to the actual facts of Greek thought or practice, seems not only unconvincing but positively misleading. However ingenious, it appears to be reached only by ignoring or twisting the form and natural Greek significance of the myth. Yet this unfortunate example was one of the two specially chosen by Lévi-Strauss as a model for the successes of his own structural method.

This long discussion of one structural approach has illustrated a point of some importance. That a method, (however dignified by the impressive term "structural") which ignores the detail of the social and cultural background for the elegance of abstract theory can be very misleading as to the facts. Certain

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50a. Lévi-Strauss 1958 p. 56; cf. the expression in terms of a formula _op. cit._ p. 64.

insights may be generated in the process certainly, but if taken as a universally applicable method the dangers of distortion are great. It is too easy to twist the material, however slightly, to fit a preconceived scheme of structure, columns or levels. The ancient Greeks (or their scholars) can look after themselves; in a well-worked field every twist or new gleam of light may be welcome - perhaps. But for societies for which the basic data have not yet been established or publicised it seems unhelpful to look too quickly for basic structural patterns. If such patterns cannot easily be fitted to the Greek material without distortion (a distortion in this case easily detected) how far is it desirable to apply this to less well-known peoples?[51] This kind of analysis can have drawbacks as well as insights. It is dangerous in being at once too broad and too narrow.

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51. e.g. the Winnebago and Tsimshian, Lévi-Strauss 1960 and 1958; the latter account is the more convincing in proportion that so much more of the background detail is supplied. cf. also the similar analysis by Leach 1962, where the myth of Genesis is analysed without any evidence being put forward by the author either of a knowledge of the Hebrew language or early society, nor of any deep acquaintance with the meaning of Genesis for those who would be likely to read, recite or hear it in contemporary society. This gives his analysis a rather limited value.

Too broad as implying a claim to be able to produce patterns of myth or mythical thought generally or universally applicable; too narrow in its tendency to isolate a text from its full social or literary context. At any rate, whatever its possible insights, this is not a method which I find readily adaptable to the Limba material I present here.

More convincing and more relévant to the present study are the attempts at close formal analysis of a number of tales from a given society. This is the method followed by Vladimir Propp, one of the Russion "formalist school", in his work on the morphology of the folktale. He discusses and criticises various earlier attempts to classify such material, and makes clear that he is discussing only one aspect of the folktale, leaving, for example, studies of style to other specialists, and he does not claim universal or definitive validity for his own analysis. He distinguishes the "functions" - the stable elements of a tale - which are constant and independent of the *dramatis personae*, and lists those that are found in the Russian folktales he has analysed. From this he is able to show both that there is a unity of structure in all the

tales - the number of functions is limited, their sequence always identical - and that on this basic structure an infinite number of variations and recombinations are possible. He is thus able to comment on the creative work of the story-teller; in some spheres, the over-all sequence of functions for instance, he is constrained; in others, such as the choice of functions, the _dramatis personae_ and the style, he is free to create. The interest of this closely argued analysis of limited material is obvious and the detailed investigation he makes in fact throws more light on other examples of folktales than the more general theories. Much the same kind of analysis could be made, for example, of certain aspects of Limba tales. Though I would not wish to categorise the common themes of Limba tales into such clear-cut formulae as does Propp with his "functions", the point he makes about the paradoxical uniformity/variety of folktales is relevant. The same move (or "function") does occur in different Limba tales with different _dramatis personae_; that, for example, of telling another's secret to a third party occurs both with the three actors being God (_Kanu_), the prototypical Limba man

(Sara) and the palm tree, and with a finch, a hawk and a hen. This point should come out more clearly in the later chapters on stories and story-telling especially with reference to their style and genesis.

There remains the related but smaller-scale structural approach in which, given an understanding of the social background and context, the form of a single tale, poem, song, or group of these, may be analysed in a way more akin to the procedure of literary critics than to that of the grander sociological theorists. Under this heading one could discuss the way in which episodes are linked together, how far the close of a story may echo or reflect its start, what kind of standard conclusions there are, whether or how far there is a central theme, form or motif in each example. This connects with the later discussion of the "linguistic" approach to folktale. Here I only add that this kind of approach is in part followed in some of the section on the style of Limba stories in chapter 8. I have also in a sense built my own commentary on this into the actual presentation of the stories by dividing them into paragraphs, a division which indicates something of what I consider their structure, but one

obviously not directly dictated by the story-teller. Thus certain aspects of the form - the sequences of parallel episodes for example - become self-evident, even though I have usually not added further detailed notes on this topic in the commentary.

Closely related to some aspects of these "structural" approaches are those which I have labelled "linguistic". Some of the questions asked by linguists who have collected or studied specimens of African oral literature are not directly relevant to a social anthropologist. I am not, for example, concerned or competent to analyse the grammar, syntax or phonetics of Limba. Such studies have normally been of interest only to the specialist philologist as published texts tended to be annotated and transcribed from a linguistic point of view, necessarily isolated from the social background which gave them meaning for the original teller or listener. This specialist linguistic approach is, then, one which I will not attempt here.

A related approach which is of interest is that of the analysis of style, comparison of various "versions" of the "same" story, accounts of individual

story-tellers, story-telling techniques and so on. This is a topic which recently seems to have been attracting more attention.[52] This kind of analysis is clearly relvant in any discussion of the folktale as a living or changing art, and of the use made by individual story-tellers of traditional (or new) material, and I discuss some of these problems in chapter 8. This is of special significance when - as in the case of the Limba, and perhaps of many other peoples with strong oral traditions - the people themselves consider the style and drama of the performance as almost of comparable importance with the content. To give just the vernacular text, the bare subject matter of a tale, or merely an abstract of the plot, was sufficient at a time when the main interest of students was centred on philology, on the diffusion of certain plots or archetypes, or on the social function served by the statement of certain origins. But for any systematic treatment of oral literature some account of style and technique is of obvious importance.

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52. e.g. Thompson's remarks 1946 pp. 449 ff; Delargy 1945; the work summarised in Berry 1961; Dorson 1960; Lord 1960.

Finally among the approaches I characterise as "linguistic" is that which would be adopted by someone who considered folktales primarily as "oral literature", in much the same way, that is, as that traditionally devoted to written literature. This approach has been notably absent in most studies of African folktales, myths, fables, or songs. This is perhaps partly because when a people were known to be "non-literate" or "primitive", any notion of their possessing a form of "literature" might seem to be self-contradictory. Thus what might have been classed as at least akin to literature if encountered among other peoples, could be, in the case of "primitive" Africa, treated as presumably being in some way utilitarian rather than literary.[53] If analysed at all it could easily be assumed to have some "social value", to be part of the social structure, or to answer various psychological needs rather than to be a form of art in its own right. This assumption that the oral literature of primitive peoples was likely, if studied, to turn out to be somehow directly useful now seems to

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53. But see Chadwick 1932.

be passing. A new approach is evident in, for example, Berry's inaugural lecture on spoken art in West Africa, as well as in the projected new Oxford series of "African literature", and Whiteley's discussion of the concept of "oral literature" in the introductory volume of the series.[54] By now one can assert that, naturally, "oral literature" must be seen in the light of its social context, without necessarily having to go on to make the unwarranted assumption that it can therefore only - or best - be regarded in terms of its social or ritual value, or its direct social function.

Clearly an appreciation of the literary aspect of verbal art and orally transmitted narratives must rest on some prior knowledge of the society in which these are composed and performed. This point would also presumably be accepted by most traditional literary critics also. It is in fact just because I consider the Limba stories in this thesis as examples of "literature" (albeit of orally transmitted literature) that I have included so many chapters dealing with the social background in Limba society, and, perhaps paradoxically, so relatively little direct discussion

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54. Berry 1961, Whiteley(1964) pp. 1-12

of the stories themselves as literature. My reason for this is that once the basic knowledge of the social context is acquired, the stories reveal themselves as literary performances. Without any knowledge of the social, economic and religious experience of the Limba people, much of the content, overtones or attractiveness of the stories would be unintelligible and their meaning for the people who composed or heard them would be too easily misinterpreted or brushed aside; external explanations (of psychological need or ritual value etc.) to account for their apparent oddness to the English reader would then seem more plausible. The meaning or artistry of the stories cannot be grasped without at least some preliminary knowledge of the society. Nor, indeed, can the society be fully understood without some realisation that it possesses, among other things, a corpus of oral literature. It is at this point that the literary and the sociological approaches inevitably meet.

Finally I must discuss the approaches normally classed as "sociological". My discussion will recall much of what I said earlier about the functional-structural approach to the analysis of myth, but it is worth following this up further here as some of the

assumptions, dangers and implied narrowness of this approach are not always recognised. The extreme "sociological" position taken up by many recent British social anthropologists makes it rather harder to apply to non-literate peoples the methods which would naturally be applied to any other cultures.

There is, first, the sense in which myths are analysed "sociologically" as being in some way effective and useful to the society in which they are told; they either validate and confirm the position of a particular group, or they contribute to the stability and integration of the whole. So long as maintenance of the _status quo_, equilibrium and stability are assumed to be suitable or central topics of sociology, then clearly the analysis of myth etc from this point of view can be taken as self-evidently a "sociological" interpretation, whether phrased in terms of the noble lie, the opium of the people, or the mythical charter. In social anthropology this approach can be most directly connected with the "functionalist" analyses of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.

Secondly, myths are also sometimes spoken of and analysed in a way that seems to involve the assumption

that they and the social "reality" in some way directly mirror each other or are causally related. In a sense of course this is obviously true. But it is sometimes taken further to imply that the institutions and beliefs of a people can be deduced from their mythology,[56] or that a definitive account of myths can be given in terms of the social institutions or values which they reflect.[57] This is, however, "sociological" in the sense that the myths are being related to those accepted entities of sociological analysis, "structure", "values", or "institutions".

Both these approaches are perfectly legitimate in that they have led, and lead, to much stimulating and perceptive analysis in detail. There are however certain dangers in applying them crudely, and it is misleading to assume, as it sometimes seems to be at present, that these extreme positions are the only properly "sociological" approaches possible in the study of oral literature.

In the first place, it is significant that the

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56. As is sometimes taken to be implied by Boas' classic on Tsimshiam mythology 1916.

57. As implied by Beattie 1960 loc. cit., Radcliffe-Brown 1922 chap. VI and in some of the accounts in Forde 1954.

normal word used in these analyses is always "myth". This term carries with it the connotation, implied but not clearly stated or perhaps even realised by the writers, that the narrative in question is in some sense authoritative, deeply meaningful, held in common, known and taken seriously either by everyone or by a group of recognised experts. The words "folktale", "fable", and "oral literature" carry no such overtones, and are thus felt to be unsuitable for use in a structural functional analysis. To consider systematically items described by these terms might seem irrelevant or marginal; but once something is called "myth" it can be immediately assumed to be significant, often without any further demonstration. "Tales" are mere amusement, or "culture"; "myths" are structural.

Once stated in these terms, the danger is obvious. Some peoples certainly may distinguish clearly between two categories of oral literature, one roughly or exactly translateable as "tales", the other as "myths";[58] others may make, in terminology

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58. cf. e.g. Malinowski's discussion of Trobriand categories in this respect 1926 pp. 25 ff; and Green 1948.

or practice, comparable distinctions which could perhaps be shown to be akin to the first; yet other peoples again, among them the Limba, either make no such distinction at all or possess nothing which could be properly rendered as "myth" in the full sense often implied by the word. As Stith Thompson has repeatedly pointed out, in the light of his incomparable study of the literature, the distinction between myth and folktale is almost impossible to draw in general terms.

> "As we get away from Western cultures and enter the circle of more primitive peoples, there is less concern about separation of folktales into the mythical and non-mythical ... In this respect there is the greatest difference between individual tribes, and a strict classification of these tales into myths and non-myths is qite impossible".[58a]

It is clear at least that in the case of a people who do not themselves divide their tales in terms of the categories implied by the theorist, it may be misleading for the sociologist to take certain special tales from their context and, label them "myths" for the purpose of analysis or presentation. The tale may nonetheless be interesting when regarded from this point of view;

58a. Thompson 1958 p. 106.

but in that it has been taken from the context of the whole class of tales of which it is only one, the evidence has to that extent been twisted. At any rate the reader has a right to be told something of the grounds on which the ethnographer has translated the native word as "myth".

This kind of approach seems to have resulted not from any conscious overweighting of one side of the evidence, but from the sort of theoretical bias with which fieldworkers have collected their data. Accustomed to focus their gaze on "myth", an entity which is well known to have a social "function" or be tied to "structure", their view of other, possibly related, stories was necessarily blinkered. Yet these other stories might have given added meaning or at least context to the first. This bias also meant that often only certain kinds of stories were looked for or recorded - those, for example, to do with "origins", or "God", or genealogical relationships - whereas other stories merely about human or animal adventures may not have been included even if they were, from the point of view of the people concerned, precisely comparable in general style, tone and

situation.

This selective collection or interpretation of evidence is of course often very hard to avoid. Among the Limba, for example, I was at first very impressed by the significance of what I automatically considered to be a "myth" in the full sense of the term, the story of how God (Kanu) in the beginning came down and gave palm wine to the (apparently) first Limba man, and hence to the Limba people as a whole. It was not until I had recorded fifty or so other stories that I fully realised that that particular one was no different in style, outlook or occasion of telling from other obviously light-hearted stories about animals, birds, or a man trying to woo a wife, and that the main pivot of the plot (the secret told to the hero by a third party) is also a common one in other Limba stories like that, for example, about a finch and an eagle.[59] Again this does not remove all the significance of the first story; but it certainly shows it in rather a different light. There can then be a danger in ignoring the classifications and attitude

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59. The stories are Kanu and palm wine, The finch and the eagle; cf. also The finch's loan, The sun, the hawk and the hen.

adopted by the people themselves in relation to their oral literature, in favour of the observer's own theoretical categories. Sometimes it seems that the word "myth" is used not to render any term or concept of the people themselves, but rather as a easy device by which the theorist may attach an acceptable label to an isolated tale as an indication of the kind of interpretation which he intends to give of its significance.

There is also the second danger of implying that any tale which seems significant to the theorist must also be well known, deeply meaningful or highly valued among the people being thus interpreted. That this sometimes seems to be assumed results again from the same theoretical bias of looking for significant items, labelled "myths", and not, therefore, taking pains to ask the question of how many people in fact are familiar with the narrative cited or take it seriously in a way they do not with other narratives. It is not, therefore, always made clear in monographs whether some story, referred to perhaps as a validating or stablising myth, is in fact a myth in the sense of being known to most people, or at least to most experts, being told regularly in answer to certain questions or on certain

occasions, or as forming part of a more or less systematic cosmology or mythology in the sense familiar to us from the probably very different society of Greece or Rome. This certainly is the picture immediately suggested to many people by the word "myth". But whether particular myths in a given society actually possess some or all of these attributes is not always explicitly stated.

This too can be illustrated from the particular case of the Limba. When I first heard the story of the separation of God from man,[60] this naturally recalled the many similar stories cited from other societies; the story, for example, that is regularly cited at the beginning of accounts of Ashanti religion is the "myth" that long ago "God" (Onyankopon) lived near man, but because he was knocked by the end of a long pestle which an old woman used for pounding her food, he went away up above.[61] It would then have seemed natural to assume that the Limba tale could have been treated similarly as the foundation of Limba religion or cosmology. But – unfortunately for this

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60. Kanu goes up.

61. e.g. Busia in Forde 1954 p. 192.

approach - it turned out that in fact the Limba story was not well known at all. Nor was it told, apparently, for any set situations, or ever even as much as mentioned on the many occasions when I questioned people about the nature or acts of Kanu, "God". The only time when I did hear the story was when it was told me with a group of other stories, including those about people and animals, in the ordinary context of story-telling and not that of a discussion of religion or history. Yet if this had been the only story I had thought to record and I had not investigated how far it was in fact known, it would have been tempting to have introduced it in an account of Limba religion as a "myth" comparable to other myths cited in anthropological or classical writings. The story is still an illustration of a typical Limba attitude. But again, when put in the context of other Limba stories, most of which are, in fact, considerably longer or more elaborate or more popular, the evidence appears rather different from when it is presented in isolation. Any historian, after all, who cites contemporary sources in evidence of his generalisations knows that he must also discuss the nature of his sources - whether they are primary,

representative, how far they are in themselves biased or selective. I suggest that much the same attitude should be taken up by a social anthropologist who wishes seriously to cite oral literature as evidence of his interpretations. Merely to refer to "myths" is not sufficient without some elucidation of the nature of these in a particular society.

There is a third implication sometimes inherent in the sociological analysis of myth that might not always be accepted if made explicit. This is the implicit emphasis on stability.[61a] A myth can be seen as the guarantee of a traditional order, an essential factor in the <u>status quo</u>. This approach has already been mentioned. Not only does it, at times at least, seem to carry the implication that society in some way <u>needs</u> stabilising by myths and that the consequent stability achieved is fixed and unchanging, it also often correspondingly presents a picture of myth itself as fixed or unchanging. A special stress can thus come to be laid on the purely "African" or the fully "traditional" myth. This fits with the common assumption that

61a. It is well criticised in Leach 1954 e.g. p. 278 — myth as a mechanism of disintegration not just of integration and stability.

that a "myth" is naturally a narrative or a story recited in a fixed form, word perfectly, with no possible change allowed. This may certainly be so in some societies. But in the case of Limba oral literature at least - and, I suspect, that of many other non-literate peoples also - quite the opposite is true.[62] There seems to be little concept of verbal accuracy and identity and it is striking how often in the stories (some of which in a different analysis might well have been dignified by the name of "myths") the "same" story is constantly recurring in different words or forms. The stories change, grow, incorporate new material, weave the old motifs round a lorry, a white man, a biblical episode. To suggest, in the case of the Limba, that either their oral literature or the society which this might appear to "guarantee" is fixed and unchanging would be misleading.

Finally there are the dangers, perhaps too obvious to point out, of taking everything in the stories too literally as a guide to the institutions or values of the society in which they are told. This approach is perhaps understandable in the case of some American

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62. See Chaps. 7 and 8.

Indian peoples where relatively little evidence about the traditional society may now be available beyond the texts that have been recorded in the past or from a few scattered informants. But this can sometimes not be a very reliable guide, as has been pointed out by many writers.[63] In any case it is unnecessary when the texts have been collected by an anthropologist who has also made a study of other aspects of the society. A simplicist account might, for example, suggest that all Limba believe in the constant possibility of transformation from one form to another as happens in some stories or that a certain kind of magic is constantly practised, or believed to be so, because some of the heroes of stories are represented as possessing these powers. In fact, though the Limba suggest both that the famous chiefs in the past, and the heroes of certain fabulous tales did possess these powers, they are not commonly attributed to people nowadays (though they are occasionally). Similarly with the picture of chiefs presented in several stories, as oppressive, possessed of great power and immense riches

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63. Esp. Lévi-Strauss 1958 etc.

likely perhaps to give his chiefdom to the hero of the story; this certainly does not fit the contemporary position, and though in some ways it is slightly more plausible when projected into the past, even the nineteenth century situation does not exactly match that described in the stories. Again the theme - so common among folktales - of the hero marrying the chief's daughter or settling in his wife's village cannot be taken to imply either matrilineal inheritance or uxorilocal marriage, neither of which are the rule among the Limba. Furthermore the stories also do not <u>necessarily</u> stress everything that is of importance to the people themselves in the terms in which an ethnographer would describe these. The Limba, for example, are very aware of their obligation to pay the yearly chiefdom tax, and take great account of their dead ancestors in both belief and practice. Yet in the stories there are practically no direct references to either of these subjects.

In the same way one cannot always argue directly and simply from folktales to the moral beliefs held by the people. Certainly very many moral ideas are illustrated or stated explicitly in the stories; but

this cannot be assumed to apply in every case. In several Limba stories, for example, the irresponsible rascal Tunkangbali (or Tunkangbei) breaks rule after rule of politeness, good sense and social responsibility, yet, by no virtue of his own, he ends up unscathed and even, in one account, as chief;[64] the rebellious daughter who refuses to obey her father succeeds in obtaining the six diamond combs she demands even though this costs her father his chiefdom.[65] One cannot simply assume with no further evidence that the simple and self evident purpose of these folktales is, for example, to inculcate the correct moral lessons into the children who hear them told. Morals are at times attached to the stories. But these are sometimes very loosely added on, sometimes seem a mere after-thought, sometimes are absent completely or differ with different tellings of the "same" story; at other times they seem to be in the nature of a generalising comment rather than a straightforward prescription of moral action. There seems to be no simple rule about this at all.

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64. The three rascal boys; Tunkangbei, Palongbei and Yisinua.

65. The story of a millionaire.

Various other moral effects have been suggested by those who look for moral purposes behind such tales. Even if the moral is not explicitly stated, for example, perhaps the tales really at base convey the moral that cleverness is better that brute strength, or in a hierarchical society, represents the "discreet protest of weakness against strength".[68] Again this sort of remark, sometimes assumed to apply to almost any examples of African folktale, fits with some of the material, not with all. In Limba stories it is quite true that at times the spider is represented as tricking the elephant and the hippopotamus, the goat gets the better of the leopard by his ingenuity, the chameleon in the end gets his own back on the monkey. But in other tales the results are different; the spider himself is defeated by the strong chimpanzee, by an antelope, or by his wife who is bigger than himself. Goodness does not always triumph though it often does; Tunkangbali, already mentioned, bullied his younger brothers, broke the rules - and met with success and praise; the spider cheated the firefly,

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68. Junod 1913 Vol. 2 p. 205; cf. Werner 1933 p. 26.

injured the leopard's children, and yet escaped the leopard and reached home safely. It is true of course that, as with any other literature, Limba folktales must be seen in the context of the social values around them, and, in a complex way, they both form part of these, derive from them, and contribute to them. But to assert some simple theory of a general moral lesson inherent in all examples of folktales in an African society, or that every story, if it is a "folktale", must somehow have some definite moral, can only lead to difficulties. Such an approach can only be sustained by either ignoring or twisting some of the material, or clinging so hard to the belief that the folktale - being the product of non-literate people - must somehow be shown to be directly utilit - rian that the evidence is submerged in the theory.

Various difficulties then are raised by some of the traditional "sociological" approaches to the study of oral literature. This does not mean that I reject the necessity of connecting the stories closely with their social background and context: this after all is the subject of this whole thesis, one which manifests perhaps a greater regard for the necessity for seeing a practice in the light of its own context

than do some of the traditional more generalised approaches to folktales. Nor am I suggesting that nothing has been gained from the "sociological" analyses criticised. Much of what they point out is true. My point is that to assert a unitary and definitive interpretation of folktale (or myth) as necessarily always of one type can be misleading. A simplicist and one-to-one correlation of story whether with social structure, social value, stabilisation, cosmology or morals may in certain cases not only be one-sided but lead to factual mistakes. The stories can no more be fairly explained when torn from the context of other and similar stories, than they can if taken out of the context of the society in which they were told and composed.

There is however, a third "sociological" approach to be mentioned. The analyses I have discussed above have all been, directly or by implication, rather general ones, often concerned, it seems, with the overall relation between "myth" and "structure", with "the folktale" and "society", or with the place of fables in moral education.

This approach is more limited. It is to discuss

the stories that occur in one society only - the social situations in which the various examples of oral literature occur, who tells stories, for whom, when and why; the occasions on which proverbs are cited, the situations associated with riddling, the concepts and classifications adopted by the people themselves when they discuss their oral literature. This sort of sociological approach involves not broad assertions about the function or meaning of Myth or Folktale, but a close study of a particular society. This is in fact the kind of enquiry which Malinowski recommended[69] even though, as it turned out, it was his view of myth as charter than became popularised. This sort of approach seems at present to be rare among social anthropologists and students of folktales. It is said however that Russian writers have worked on these lines, making sociological studies of the social background and so on of their folktales, and it is unfortunate that little of this work is available in translation and remains a closed book to western scholars.[70]

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69. Malinowski 1926 pp. 20 ff.

70. See Thompson 1946 p. 451. One easily accessible account, recently published, is by Dégh in the Hungarian periodical <u>Acta Ethnographica</u> 6. 1958.

The few detailed studies made from this point of view in the west seem mainly to have been by American students.[71] It can be seen how closely this kind of study can be linked with questions of style, specially for a non-literate society, and with the part taken by individual story-teller in dealing with the traditional material, or with process and change.[72] Who tells the stories, how, and why, are all questions of sociological significance in that they deal with the stories in their social setting rather than as isolated texts produced only for the grammatical comments of linguists, analysis of psychologists, or morphological remarks of formalists. This limited and particularised approach - which I follow here - is a suitable one for a social anthropologist.

There is one final approach which is essential for any sociologist or social anthropologist conducting a systematic study of a form of oral literature. This is to ascertain what a story (or proverb or riddle) means to those who tell or hear it. This in a sense is also a limited question. It does not deal with any

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71. e.g. Simmons 1961 and 1955, Christensen 1958, Benedict 1935, Reichard 1947.

72. e.g. Dorson 1960.

large-scale theory of Myth or Folktale but is merely a close study of the social background of a particular people without a knowledge of which it would be impossible to understand the subject matter or overtones of their oral literature. It is true that in a sense a study of "meaning" could take one very far, through various possible levels of interpretation. But it must at least be admitted that there is a basic minimum of common experience among any people, or in any historical period, which must be known to a student before he can appreciate the meaning, in the obvious sense, of a story told in that society or at that time. Without some acquaintance with, for example the nature and concept of marriage among the Limba, something of what is conveyed to the Limba listeners by a story about a young man's quest for a wife would be lost to an English reader. Similarly the stories about Kanu would be puzzling without some knowledge of Limba religious beliefs - just as an English poem about spring or ramantic love would be uninteresting to one who knew nothing of English society and concepts, and just as the story of Hamlet, told in a West African context, proved to mean something unexpectedly different

to its listeners there.[73] Some knowledge of the background is clearly indispensable for the appreciation of what is conveyed in any literature; and this is especially so in the case of oral literature when each tale is told for the occasion, directed to an audience of natives listeners actually present. A treatment of folktales in this light is also clearly a sociological one, and is followed, in particular, in Part I of the thesis.

The approach I am adopting is, then, a sociological one in the sense that I try to set the stories in their social background so that they may become intelligible to us as literature in Limba terms; and this also in practice necessarily includes a certain attention to language, style and story-telling techniques.

The two terms that I have used to describe the subject matter of this thesis are "folktales" and "oral literature". I shall not discuss these terms at length; their application should become clear from the later discussion and examples in Parts II and III,

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73. Bohannan 1954.

better than by an abstract definition at this stage. However it is important to point out certain overtones and ambiguities in both these terms which may make them rather confusing at the outset.

"Folktale" is not altogether a good term. In the past it has sometimes been used to distinguish one special class of narrative from, for example, myths, sagas and legends. But though these distinctions are certainly useful and necessary in some cases, in many non-literate societies they are now realised not to apply. This is in fact one reason why I have included mention of "myths" so often in the earlier discussions, for what is said of folktale often applies, or should apply, to the common accounts given of myths, and vice versa; it is therefore impossible to treat the terms in isolation from each other. In this study I do not set up such distinctions, as they would not be properly applicable to the Limba situation, and am using "folktale" to cover every kind of story however it might be classified by theorists with other interests.[74]

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74. This does not cover the short section I have grouped under "miscellaneous", i.e. proverbs, riddles etc. - the term "folktales" is used only as a rough indication of the main subject-matter, the stories.

More serious are other implications suggested by the word "folktale". It has misleading connotations of the "Folk", of evolutionist anthropology and of the doctrine of survivals. It also sometimes conveys the suggestion that each tale is in some way "fixed", traditional and unchanging even in the smallest item, the set heritage of the people. Finally, and most insidiously, it seems to suggest that the tales are in some way created by "the folk" collectively, that communal authorship and not individual composition is proven.

Not only do I not intend to assert any of these assumptions sometimes attached to the word "folktale", but one of my main purposes is to controvert these three suggestions if applied to the Limba folktales. The idea of survivals in the old sense is <u>not</u> relevant in analysing Limba stories. The tales are <u>not</u> immutable but quite the contrary. And to ignore the part taken by the individual story-teller and the extent to which he moulds the traditional themes would be to make a fundamental mistake about the nature of Limba stories and their concept of language and artistic expression. If the term "folktale" has <u>necessarily</u>

to connote these ideas then the main aim of this thesis could only be to demonstrate that my own sub-title, "folktales", is a misleading one.

Nevertheless I have retained the term both because though these three implications are so often in practice connected with the term this seems to be an inheritance of out of date ideas rather than logically implied by the term itself, and because the word has generally been used to cover the kind of stories which I am including here. I use "folktale" therefore as a mere descriptive word for general reference and not for precise definition.

Less popular is the alternative form "oral literature". I have used this term intentionally in order to point to certain aspects of Limba tales, but at the same time it raises difficulties of its own. In some societies in which there exist both written and oral traditions of story-telling[75] it could sometimes be hard to draw a strict line between oral and written literature; this however is not a difficulty that arises in the case of the Limba. More complicated

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75. See e.g. Pfeffer 1939 on the Fulbe.

is the question of just what, in a non-literate culture, is to count as "literature". Among the Limba there are many formal linguistic expressions, often thought attractive as well as useful in themselves, which are used in thanking, blessing or acknowledging another's authority;[76] a certain formality of language is associated with speeches in law cases, with funeral harangues and, even more, with songs, prayers and invocations. Just where to draw the line is difficult. In practice I have included only a very few examples from the latter categories, and devoted the main treatment to the forms, "oral literature" by any standards, that the Limba themselves would roughly include under their term mbɔrɔ- stories, fables, parables, and, less frequently, proverbs, riddles and, occasionally, historical narratives. However the distinction I have drawn is arbitrary and practical only, for convenience rather than analysis, and even the Limba term mbɔrɔ itself is not a clear cut one.[76a]

The main ommission is any systematic treatment of

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76. See chap. 6.

76a. See chap. 7.

Limba songs (_kulunga_ or _keng_). These could be regarded as an important part of Limba oral literature, their poetry to the story's prose. A song suffers very particularly, of course, from being recorded in cold print without the drums and dancing which give it meaning, or its repetitions, rhythms and melody. However the main reason for the omission is simply that their recording presented such particular practical difficulties - not only had the music and often indistinct diction to be coped with, but the words and meaning were often obscure even to the Limba themselves, so that to make a translation was often almost impossible. It is true that "songs" are not included directly under the term _mbɔrɔ_ which I give as my sphere of reference so that I am formally justified in excluding them. Nevertheless since they occur in many stories and could rightly be defined as oral literature, my incapacity to discuss them except in passing is unfortunate. However for the purpose of this thesis, "oral literature" must be taken to refer primarily to _spoken_ art.

The term "oral literature" is then not altogether unambiguous or clear-cut. But it is a most suitable term to describe the present field of study. It is

useful, like "folktale", in that it suggests the comparative context in which it is possible to set the Limba texts, and thus points to a dimension that would be lacking if I had insisted in using only the vernacular term *mbɔrɔ*. The use of the term, "oral literature" points particularly to the literary aspect of the Limba tales and the sense in which there is a certain likeness between them and other kinds of expression also described in the same terms by, for example, the Chadwicks in their classic work *The Growth of Literature*, Delargy of the Gaelic story-teller, or Lord's fascinating analysis of Yugoslav oral poems and the oral tradition in Homer.[78] It also emphasises another aspect of Limba folktales that I wish to stress - the significance of the *oral* element, and, therefore, the importance of style and technique, and the part of the individual author of composer. In short, I am treating them as having literary - "oral literary" - rather than purely utilitarian status.

My purpose is to produce an edition of Limba oral

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78. Chadwick 1932 etc., Delargy 1945, Lord 1960.

literature. No grand theory is being put forward about Folktale or Myth or Structure. The aim is the mere limited one of presenting a body of material - the tales - which is not a negligible part of Limba culture, and attempting to indicate something of what they mean to the Limba who tell and hear them through some account of the social background and of the nature and techniques of story-telling. This limited aim is, I consider, quite sufficient. To present a corpus of material before inaccessible and comment on it so as to convey its meaning in context, much in the manner of any standard edition of a text - this is worth while even when not accompanied by any attempt at a new theory, interpretation or speculation, some striking universal conclusion or attractively elegant analysis.

This limited aim has a special value in the present situation. So much second hand material has been published on Africa that the presentation of texts with close translations and commentary is particularly worth while for its own sake. These are the primary documents. In the study of other peoples it is normally taken for granted without question that an investigation of the society as a whole must include some aquaintance with its language and literature. In this respect

oral literature is basically no different from written literature, nor should African societies, just because they are African, be exempt from the rigorous and systematic study given to others. Now that more is known of non-literate societies and now that there are more students prepared to study them, less is said of their great "simplicity", and people need no longer assume that there can be short cuts by which such societies may be assessed once and for all without careful and detailed studies of many different aspects. One of these aspects is oral literature. This is as relevant in a full study as the traditional topics of, say, religion or politics. Language as well as economics is a social fact, and a society reveals itself in its complexity through its language and literature as it does in its other institutions.

Another merit of the present approach is its rareness in modern British social anthropology. Any discussion of oral literature has usually been confined to the structural or functional approaches to myth which I have suggested are in certain ways limited or misleading. A fuller account of folktales in the light of their social background, their meaning for the people who tell them, their style and narrators, may encourage

others to follow up this rather unusual but fully sociological approach.

Finally this limited aim is useful just in proportion that it avoids the grander theories of some of the earlier speculators. The time is past in British social anthropology when people asked about the origins or nature or purpose of Religion or Kinship as a whole. The stress is now mainly on detailed and less ambitious studies of these topics in particular societies, and any simplicist universal account is avoided. Myth and folktale seem to have been the last subject to reflect this change in emphasis, and, specially with the word "myth" which so often seems to have a special magic of its own, the discussion seems to have been seen in terms of generalities rather than particulars. The best corrective to this can only be a precise study of the subject in one society. This may serve to show in what senses the grander theories are, in a particular case, sometimes illuminating, sometimes irrelevant or unhelpful, and sometimes completely mistaken.

My aim is, then, merely the limited one of a straightforward edition of Limba literature. This I have done on the model of many classical editions. I give introductory chapters on the social background

and subject matter of the stories,[78a] followed by a section on language, on the classification and nature of stories, and on the problem of style and composition.[78b] This is followed by texts and translations accompanied by a few elucidatory notes.[79] The question raised is not the generalised one Why? but the particularised What? and How?

A limited study of this nature should need no justification, and no further apologia, I consider, need be added. For I do not accept that only those studies shall count as properly "sociological" which advance some new formula or some striking theoretical conclusion. However it may be well to conclude by

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78a. Part I. The information is that collected in the course of my field-studies, and is supported by my own observation. It does not rest on an assumption that just because something occurs in the stories it must therefore also necessarily be so in reality.

78b. Part II.

79. Part III. An alternative way to present some of this would have been to give each story in turn followed by long explanatory notes on the social background and meaning, in rather the form adopted by Beidelman 1961 and 1963. This is an illuminating way to present the evidence (though either I or the Limba rather lack the flair for comparable sexual symbolism), but with over a hundred stories to comment on an introductory, more general account, followed by brief notes on each story, seemed preferable and certainly more economical.

pointing out two emphases in my treatment[79a] which may seem of particular interest - apart, that is, from the basic assumption that it is worth while to approach the understanding of Limba society through its oral literature at all.

The Limba take great interest and delight in their own language. I have therefore given several long quotations in the introductory chapters from their own descriptions - this is in any case a suitable method in a volume devoted to their literature. I have also discussed this subject in detail in one chapter, suggesting an obvious sociological approach to language by the analysis of the use of certain linguistic formulae and the relevance of this in various social relationships. This kind of sociological approach to language seems to be one rather neglected by social anthropologists.[80] It certainly applies very well to Limba outlook and practice. Furthermore the discussion of their view of language in a way not very common among social anthropologists throws light on certain aspects of their

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79a. Mainly in Part II, "Language and Literature".

80. But cf. Evans-Pritchard 1962, Malinowski 1935.

oral literature and its delivery.

Of perhaps greater interest is the question of the composition and performance of the stories. How far are they "traditional"? how far due to individual talent or expression? is there anything to be said for the suggested theories of collective authorship? what are the implications of the epithet "oral"? Part of the answer to this question lies in an acquaintance with their social background and experience - the limits within which the Limba story-teller lives and practises. Part is also evident in the corpus of tales in Part III - the many similar but disparate tales, the same yet differing versions. Perhaps the main value of the texts as given here is that they form a <u>collection</u> in which are inevitably juxtaposed so many tales with their likenesses, dissimilarities, repetitions, combinations and recombinations of themes. This in itself conveys more clearly than could any long abstract discussion the traditional yet individual nature of each tale, and the infinite number of "variants" of the "same" tale according to teller, occasion or audience. Each performance is in a sense a unique composition - and yet fully traditional. This account of the genesis of Limba stories may throw some light on the nature of

oral literature when practised - and studied - as a living art rather than as a series of dead, fixed texts, analysed in the study rather than in their own social context.

P A R T I

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The background and materials of Limba stories

Chapter 2

Rice, village and farm.

The destiny of the Limba people is rice-farming. This is an implicit assumption in day to day life. It is also brought out in many of the stories. The prototypical Limba man is represented as having been given a hoe or rice (pakala) while the white man is given a book, and the Fula the Koran.[1] In another story, Kanu ("God") is pictured as coming down onto the earth to show the first Limbas how to grow rice, and telling them "here is your food ... this is your bank";[2] and in Koto and Yemi the black man, Koto, is depicted toiling hard in the fields, while his brother, the white one, does none of the work. The same contrast is often referred to in conversation in such phrases as "hoeing is our writing" or "our hoe is our book". The Limba consistently, in story and reality, see themselves as primarily rice farmers in contrast to other peoples they have encountered.

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1. The white and black brothers; Limbas, Fulas and Europeans.
2. Kanu gave food to the Limbas.

In most parts of Limba country, rice farming is still the main occupation and interest. The Limba are farmers who prefer, if possible, not to sell much of their surplus rice but keep it instead for lavish use at festivals or for generous hospitality to strangers. Though they do also possess a few cattle and cultivate secondary crops (including some for cash), such as millet,[1] groundnuts, maize, cassava or tobacco, the main emphasis is always laid on rice, whether the traditional upland variety or the more recent swamp rice. The yearly cycle of activities is dominated by the cycle of upland rice farming, and the "hungry time" is when the staple and favoured food, rice, is scarce and people have to depend on the much less popular cassava, yams or millet. Rice is continually spoken of and discussed by old and young; they delight in distinguishing scores of sub-varieties, or in speaking with pride and enthusiasm of the traditional farming methods which were taught to them by the "old people" and by Kanu, or about the joys of drumming and singing as they farm the steep hill-sides in their joint

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1. Properly "hungry millet" (digitaria exilis)

"companies".

Rice farming is clearly central to Limba society, both economically and in their own experience and view of themselves as distinct from other peoples. It is also of great importance in the stories, for these presuppose a knowledge of the significance of farming - of, for example, the phases and associations of the agricultural year and the system of farming "companies". This chapter therefore describes rice farming[1] and the significance of rice and farming for the Limba. It includes a brief description of the villages from which people set out to make their farms and where they form their "companies", followed by an account of the rice farming year and of the importance of rice as food.

1. Village and farm.

Limba villages are compact and settled. Often, specially in the north, they are perched on the hill tops, reached only by a narrow path up the steep hillside, or surrounded by a thick cluster of great

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1. I cannot also include here a description of the secondary crops, however economically important, nor of the general economic organisation of Limba society, but limit myself to themes recurrent in the stories or essential to their understanding.

cotton trees, visible from far away, which have grown up from the palisade once built round the village to protect it from attackers. Near the village is the watering place where the women walk daily to fetch water, people go to bathe, and just by the entrance one finds the smith's rough hut, the focus for most of the men's secret ritual. Inside, the village is divided into several adjoining "compounds" (<u>kuru kuru</u>), consisting of a ring of houses facing inwards onto the central circular space where the rice is dried on big mats, the dead are buried, dances are performed, and sacrifices of animals or rice-flour are carried out. Traditionally, and still very commonly, the dwellings are round thatched huts, each usually with a common central room and smaller private rooms to the side. In a village there may be anything from about ten to about sixty of these huts, or as many as a hundred or more in a paramount chief's village. Between the circular compounds there are often high fences of cane grass which dwarf the children as they run between them. In the centre is the hut of the chief who "owns" the whole village in virtue of his responsibility for it and his membership of the ruling clan whose founders,

it is said, were those who first made a village in that spot. In his shaded verandah people gather morning and evening to hear the "big men" decide cases and reconcile disputants.

It is from this permanent village that people go out to cultivate their rice on the slopes of the neighbouring hills. In the Limba view, human beings (wɔ mɛti) differ from animals and from the "spirits of the bush" in two main ways: they make rice farms; and they live in villages (mɛti). Wherever a man goes to make his farm, he likes to come home at night to the settled village to sleep.[1] Belonging and returning to a village is the accepted complement to the labour of cultivating the scattered farms by day, and the village is the centre to which a man's allegiance is bound and where his family both lives and is buried. Only the hunter, endowed with special powers and skills, is thought able to wander alone and unafraid in the bush at night.

It is also in the village that the farm work is

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1. In the densely populated Safroko chiefdom people more often sleep at the farm itself, and this is also occasionally done elsewhere if the farm is very far from the village, or if there are known to be wandering herds of cattle around, liable to eat the rice at night.

organised. This is usually through the households who jointly own and work the rice farms; also, on occasion, through the "companies" formed for all or part of a village. At night when the people are home from their farms, the crier may call round the various compounds in the dusk announcing special events in the farming calendar - some "company" to be formed in a few days time, for example, or the date set for people to tether their animals to guard the growing crops. In the centre of the village is the chief's household with its many "people" - wives, children, dependants - who help the chief in his farm so that he can get much rice to feed his people, cook for the "company" who come to help him, and entertain strangers to the village. Except for some individuals in the chiefdom capitals and on the main roads, every member of a Limba village regards himself as, basically a rice farmer. There is little division of labour in Limba society, and little emphasis on expert crafts. Even smiths and hunters, in spite of their extra source of wealth, assume the necessity to make farms; chiefs too are glad to visit their own farms, to greet and thank their workers and help with the work themselves.

The farms are of various kinds. The most important are family rice farms, usually of upland rice. These are normally made on the hillsides in an alternation of farm and bush fallow, the cycle being anything between about five and ten years. As well as his work on this joint family farm, a married man also cultivates a strip for the use of himself and his own family to one side of the joint farm. Women frequently make their own farms, usually in the swamps, where they persuade their friends or relations to help them, and grow swamp rice or a series of secondary crops. In addition there are special millet and groundnut farms, and occasional banana plantations. But both in their work and in their own representation of themselves, the Limba are basically _rice_ farmers, cultivators of family upland rice farms. For, it is assumed, it is the characteristic of a human being, or a least of a Limba human being, both to make a rice farm and, his work done, return to the fully social life of the village, where there are the ties in virtue of which he cultivates and desires rice.

The village, then, is not only the economic focus, but also the centre of religious, political and social

activities. Every village has its chief or leading elder, and the hearing and "speaking" of cases, so important throughout all Limba life, are held with greatest formality and decision inside the village. The important religious sacrifices, burials and memorial ceremonies must be carried out in the village itself, not in the farm or farm-settlement; an adult who has died in one of the farms is carried to the village for burial, and it is in the centre of one of the village compounds that animals are sacrificed for the peace and health of the whole village of chiefdom. The farming "companies" are organised on a village basis and are regarded as important for more than purely economic reasons. Only a full village possesses the sacred bush and secret objects of the men's and women's societies, and initiations are made by the village. It is during these initiation ceremonies, as strangers flock in to see the dances, that members of the village are especially aware of their unity and together act as hosts. The village, already bound together by many ties of marriage and of actual or fictional kinship and descent, is in certain contexts, therefore, a self-conscious unit, politically, religiously and

economically, and one which can send representatives in its name to ceremonies and festivities elsewhere. When, as often, people travel within and beyond Limba country, one of the first questions they are asked on arrival is "Where do you come from?" (kamɛ ngale?) to which the correct reply is the name of a village.

Distinct from the villages proper are the farm-settlements. These are not self-sufficient units in the same sense, and are looked down on by people living in the villages as "the farms"; their inhabitants look to the village for all important purposes. These farm-settlements have about two to ten huts, often 2 or 3 miles from the village, and built actually at the farm. One or several families may live there semi-permanently, but they are committed to going to the main village for all big occasions, such as initiation, an important case, or even participation in a farming "company" when a boy whose family wishes him to take part has to sleep in the village itself for the duration of the "company". Those who die must be taken to the village, and the chief there notified of the death.

These farm-settlements are usually founded by a man who is already well off, but wishes to live very

close to the farm where food is easier to obtain and where, therefore, he may become rich more quickly. His family live there with him to work, and he is sometimes joined by friends or relatives who are ill or, for some reason, are ashamed to live in the village. A farm-settlement is regarded as a place of hard work and retreat.[1] Sometimes the founder returns to his original village after some years, leaving his dependants to work for him in the farm-settlement which he therefore "owns". Therefore in any village there may be wealthy men, usually members of the ruling clan or family, who have their own "farms" in this way, because "one of their ancestors went there to make a farm and get rice". The founder's village is itself sometimes spoken of as "owning" the settlement as "its farm", and this relationship may continue over several generations. On the other hand if the original founder chooses to remain in his farm-settlement, and becomes wealthy by getting much rice and attracting many people to him, thus becoming "well off" (nib gbang),[2]

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1. cf. The story of Kubasi, where the wicked chief is sent to "the farm" as punishment.

2. A frequent phrase in the stories, signifying wealth in both people and rice.

the settlement may grow and expand until its members begin to think of it as a village and try to assert its independence and self-sufficiency. It is in this way that many of the present villages are said to have grown up in the old days. But even if a settlement becomes established, after a struggle, as a full village, it remains in a sense subordinate to the village from which it was founded, and whose seniority it acknowledges.

This is how it happens in Limba country that a large village is so often surrounded by a ring of smaller, more recent ones, which are said to be "owned" by it, and which tend to send in representatives for all important occasions; they are often ruled over by relations of the ruling house of the senior village. These satellite villages, in turn, may each have a number of their own farm-settlements, which may or may not in time also grow to full villages. It is in the central, senior, villages and, above all, in the chief's village, where the first famous ancestors lived, that the "old old people" are buried, and where the chief sacrifices are held for the whole land and people, so that their inhabitants may "get much rice, and live

with peaceful hearts".

This, then, is the geographical and social setting within which so much of Limba experience is located, and which, likewise, forms the setting of most of the Limba stories. The action moves between the village, where the chief lives and where are found people's homes and families, the farms, the place of hard work, cooperation and source of food, and the path between the two - a path perhaps difficult because of deep rivers or the dangers from the surrounding bush, but always ending ultimately in one of the two primary localities of Limba life, village or farm.

2. The cycle of rice farming.

The rice farming cycle is at the heart of the Limba social and ritual year, and of their system of time reckoning. The year is basically divided into two parts - the dry season (firi) when there is leisure and food, and when many important ceremonies are performed, and the wet season (thamo) when there is much work to do in the farms and people are hungry. "The wet season fell. There was hunger" is a constant theme in both story and real life. The names of the

months too are used not to describe measured periods of thrity days each or even exactly correlated with the observable phases of the moon, but are applied when a certain operation is in progress in the farm. They are reckoned by rice growing rather than by chronological calculation. Thus sangsang is the hungry month when women are weeding the growing rice and food is scarce; warakatha is the time of weeding and chasing the birds; and polipoli the time when the harvest has been gathered and people are resting or dancing. Similarly in the stories, the effect of a long series of actions or of the passing of time is often created not by any statement about months or numbers of days or hours, but by a precise reference to the various successive operations of the farm - clearing, burning, hoeing, weeding, chasing and harvesting. This cycle occurs again and again as the chronological and social framework in which the events are set, and its recurrence reflects the constant cycle of tasks that takes place, year after year, in any Limba village and farm. Each phase of the agricultural year has its associations for a Limba - the due operation, sacrifice, song and set order of work - and their mention sets the story in a distinctively Limba framework.

The first phase of the rice farming year begins about March following the leisurely season of feasting and plenty. The first operation is the clearing (<u>mahi</u>) of the bush that has grown up over several years since the last cultivation in that spot. The owners of the farms, old men who are heads of households, indicate the area to be cleared, and make a sacrifice by offering rice-flour or killing a hen for the dead "so that the rice may be much". Then the young men go out into the forest or bush to cut down the undergrowth with their cutlasses and axes. This is one of the few operations that are not carried out with singing and cooperation; "we Limba like to sing and drum when we work in the farm; but not for clearing, the strokes are not the same". Usually each young man clears singly in one part of the bush, near, but not jointly with the others, and if he sings it is not with a chorus but for himself.[1]

After the thick bush is cut down, the weather becomes hotter, and the cut vegetation dries out, so becoming ready for the next stage, the burning (<u>thi bu</u>).

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1. In Safroko chiefdom this is said sometimes to be done with proper "company", singing and drumming.

As it is put in <u>Kanu gave food to the Limbas</u>, "<u>Kanu</u> brought out the sun. It was hot. The sun shone hotly, for about a month. It was dry. They went to put fire". The bush is set on fire with great care, and should be notified to the local chief, especially when the farm is near the village, for the thatched roofs of huts catch fire easily and every year some villages are burnt by mistake.

Usually not all the cut trees and bush burn completely. The men go out to slash the remaining wood up into more manageable lengths and toss them into large piles to which the women set fire by blowing into flame the smouldering logs they have brought with them from the village. This is the gathering and reburning (<u>kari</u>). If the farm owner is the chief or a village elder, many people come on a set day to help - his own children, wives, relations and friends, as well as the men who have married or wish to marry his daughters - and the men sometimes sing with solo and chorus as they hack at the fallen trees. The owner sees that large quantities of rice and sauce are cooked for the workers and about midday all sit down in the shade to eat together, drink palm wine if they have it, and rest from the tiring and filthy job of chopping at the

blackened vegetation.

The burnt farm is then ready for the sowing. Meantime, in the north, the scattered areas covered by thick grass are also being cleared (muku) by groups of men and boys who cut through the tough stems with their hoes, working in a row and, often, singing. This type of farm can be cleared later because it will burn more quickly and thoroughly leaving no large branches or undergrowth to be gathered and reburnt. This clearing too is hot and heavy work, and the men drip with sweat, but "the work is sweet: that is what Kanu has given me".

By about May, the rains are about to begin, and the farms are ready for the rice sowing (pai). As this begins, special sacrifices are usually made. In some places a small hut is dedicated for the dead just outside the village, and every house provides a contribution of rice to sprinkle near it, for "this is how we get much rice".

Hoeing in the seed is always reckoned as one of the outstanding phases of the agricultural year, so that "hoeing" (yɔli) is often used as a general term to cover the whole activity of farming. This is the season of hardest labour for the men and boys, as they

work day after day, sometimes in the pouring rain, hoeing the ground for the new seed; it should all be completed before the heaviest rains. Yet it is also, for the workers, one of the exciting, even enjoyable, phases of the whole year, when the drums are heard from the farms across the valley, "companies" work together, and the boys compete in skill and strength.

Various kinds of "companies"[1] are formed in order to organise this hard and urgent work. The most common is the one called kunɛ. This is made by each family in the village, or part of the village, giving one of its sons to the "company", which then goes round the farms of all the families spending a day in each. There are usually between 20 and 30 boys in a "company" and it is commanded by three or four of the oldest boys, those initiated in the last couple of years. The rest are ideally boys coming up to the age of initiation, or younger. Two among them are chosen as drummers to lead the beat on their wooden drums.[2]

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1. "Company" is the term always used by literate Limba to translate kunɛ. In a few of the villages on the main roads, these cooperative hoeing associations are tending to die out, but in most parts of the country remain central to Limba farming.

2. Or gongs (ngkali).

The "company" is formally opened by a sacrifice which is performed in the village by one of the elders on behalf of the older boys who "own" the group as a whole. A hen is killed and a ritual performed over the "company's" special horns, followed by their eating the hen and rice given by the families taking part.

Then early in the morning one of the boys blows his horn, and the members of the "company" flock out together to the farm decided on for that day, with their hoes and their drums. Their work is to proceed in a long row, following the sower who is broadcasting the seed over a wide strip of the hill. The two drummers walk in front, marking the time and sometimes singing, and the whole group follow wielding their hoes in strict time to the beat, in a long line stretched across the hillside. The whole line raises its hoes as one, then together makes the three downward hacks at the ground, in exact and rhythmic time, breaking up the soil to cover the seed. The work continues all day or until the area is finished, for the "company" has great self pride and likes to compete with others in speed and hard work. No member of the group is allowed to hoe out of time or drop behind. Even the youngest boys for whom the work is exhausting take a pride in

keeping up with the beat, and even though they are abused or beaten by the older ones for flagging near the end of the day they are happy and excited to be members of the "company". The older boys are especially proud of their responsibilities, and like to show their strength by stationing themselves near one of the weaker boys and hoeing strongly and widely.

Near midday the work ceases for about fourty minutes for the workers to eat. This is one of the great moments of the day. The owner of the farm and his wives like to make a display of plentiful food, and have often made preparations for several days before. The rice and sauce is dealt out in large bowlfuls, and the boys sit down on the hillside in little knots of five and six to devour the food. The owner makes a speech of thanks to the "company" as a whole for their help in hoeing, thanking the leaders by name "and you others, I will not be able to name you all - you are doing a good thing today". He gives them a token of his gratitude in the form of 3d or 6d in money, or a few kola nuts.

Then the boys are called back to their work. They continue until the farm is completely hoed. For

several weeks this is their daily task and they rest only one day in ten or fifteen, or when the rain is too torrential in the early morning for them to go to the farm.

The most striking thing about this "company" is the way in which really hard and even painful work is organised in such a way that the main association is one of pleasure and excitement. The "company" is a proud and self-conscious unit, seriously and formally thanked by the elders, and aware of the important work it performs; and the beat of the drums and sideways step up the hill, recalling the step of a dance, integrate the swing of the work and the drum into one rhythm so that, however tired, the workers often end up happy and exhilarated. Even at other times of the year, people recall with excitement the joy of the hoeing "company" and the "sweet beat of the ngkali drum".

That even a small child, for whom the work is very heavy, can still be happy and excited by his membership of such a "company" was shown in the following fluent and proud statement about farm work by a nine (?) year old. It is the work of the "company" that he stresses in particular as the high-light of the whole cycle.

"They clear the forest. It is dry. All the wood is dry. They put in fire, it burns. It is left. Then they return and reburn it. When it is all finished, the company is made. Those going to the [adult men's] society are in charge, they are the seniors. They look for horns, a hen and rice. They come, and the hen is killed. They speak before the horns, 'we are going to work, let no witch come'. When the rain comes, and the thunder, they hoe all the day. The small children come too and hoe. When the rain comes, you take off your shirt and hoe, standing in the rain. You don't stop. If you stop, the older ones beat you. After the hoeing they weed. The rice grows and gets seeds and takes in water, and begins to be ripe, and is ripe, and is dry. Then we harvest and pile it, and thresh it and put it in the store. It stays there for long, then it is brought to the village. Next year we go to another place, and make a company again. We hoe ..."

The main work of hoeing, then, is performed by these "companies" of boys, regularly formed each year. There are also a few other associations of special kinds to help people with their hoeing. A man sometimes calls out a number of people for an "association

for friendship" (magbaki) asking a crier to go round the village at night to beg people to come and help one of his friends on the named day. In the past, and still in a few places, a whole village (mamɛti) used sometimes to join in hoeing the chief's farm in return for rich and plentiful food, and the recognition that his rice would be needed to entertain friends and strangers. Besides these, there is the gathering "for marriage" (mathɔnɔ) into which people enter with special enthusiasm. It is formed by a son in law calling a special company to hoe for his wife's father, and consists of 60, 100, even occasionally 200 people. Unlike the boys' regular "company" this is a big occasion in the locality, and one in which the local men all join. The best adult drummers of both ngkali and kusung drums are asked to play and sing, and people look forward to the occasion with anticipation. The young man who is calling out the gathering asks the crier to go round announcing the date: "Attention all of you, attention all of you. Greetings to you. A mathɔnɔ gathering is called for - (father in law) by - (son in law) for Thursday. Please. Please. So that we may not be ashamed. That is it. It is finished". Preparations have been made for days

beforehand by the owner and his wives, and the young man is anxious to have a large number of people, and is greatly chagrined if only a few come and the masses of food cooked by the owner go to waste. But if many people come he is proud and busy, "his heart is good". He himself works vigorously in the middle of the line of hoers as they proceed with amazing rapidity up the field, striking their hoes into the ground in regular time, or throwing them up in the air and catching them, with joy and excitement. In a very few hours the whole farm is finished. At the break for eating, speeches are made. The man who called out the <u>mathono</u> group has been brought various contributions by his friends, in 3d's or 6d's, and these he hands on to his father in law, saying "We have all come to help you and honour you. Here is money. Here are gifts". His father in law thanks him many times for the great help and honour he has given him.

Hoeing, then, a time of hard and urgent work, is also a time of excitement, and of the recognition and cementing of ties between members of one village, between friends, and between those related by marriage, through both their actual cooperation in "companies" and joint gatherings, and the speaking and thanks that accompany it.

When the hoeing is complete, the women and children watch the farm for a few days, to prevent the birds from destroying the seed, and to break up the clods with their hoes. The men build rough huts in the farms where people can shelter during the day from sun and rain, and can leave their farm implements.

After some weeks the rice is tall enough to need weeding (purung). This is exacting and protracted work, lasting several months, and is always performed by the women. The weeds that spring up and continually threaten to choke the growing rice must be distinguished and plucked out by hand. The women pride themselves on their skill and speed in this task - "thɔ! thɔ! thɔ! thɔ!" as they verbalise and mimic it.

At first the women weed singly in the farms of their husbands, fathers or brothers. The owners are expected to come personally to the farm to greet and thank them, often with a token gift of snuff, palm wine, or kola.

From July or August, the weeding begins to be more organised. The women form their own "company", the kugbɔkithɔ. This too is organised on a village

basis, often primarily by the unmarried girls, and is opened by a sacrifice made for them by one of the older men, so that they "may have peace". The girls go to the man who is the best player of the ngkali drum and the loudest and most skilled singer of the kugbɔkithɔ songs, to beg him to accompany them. "They go to the one who drums, and take a token present. They say 'here is the present we have brought for you. May you come and beat the drum for us'. He says 'I accept'". The drummer is proud to accept the invitation and honour implied by their choice. As with the boys' "company", the girls go in a group from one farm to another, weeding each day for different owners, and having food cooked for them with the rice that is now beginning to become scarce. They weed in a long line, bending down to their task and plucking at the weeds with quick fingers in time to the beat of the drum. The drummer, usually followed by a younger boy to accompany him on a small higher-pitched drum, proceeds slowly up the hill before the line of women, calling out one of the resonant kugbɔkithɔ songs that beg them to work hard and well; they reply in chorus after each line, repeating and adding to the words. In between the periods of weeding they dance or play excitedly, and receive the thanks of

the farm owner. Though they are very aware of the pain and labour of weeding - the cold, wet, hunger, and their often lacerated hands - yet, as with the boys, the rhythm of the songs and drums dominates the whole event. "The singer drums and sings and watches. His song is about the weeding, begging them. When they reply to the song, their hearts are good [happy]."

As the rice grows taller, it has to be guarded against the birds and animals that can cause great damage to the crop. So, from about August to October, the ripening rice is watched throughout the day, and the birds and animals chased away (pang). This is the main job of the children. All day, from before dawn until sunset, they sit or stand on the specially built platforms in the rice fields, in rain or sun, shouting until they are hoarse to frighten the birds, whirling the long slings around their heads to send stones whizzing at some cane rat among the rice, and all the time turning and watching all the different directions for marauders. "All the animals come. Kanu calls them all, to eat the rice. That gives us much suffering - oh! very much. It is painful here - the chasing. When the sun rises, you go. You are tired. It is hard". The older boys are in charge, and if they see

any watcher seen to flag, they call out to them across the rice "You! you! do not forget the rice. Think of the animals! There are birds - cane rats ... Think of the animals!" This is the time when the children are left most on their own, and though the work is, as they continually point out, painful and exacting beyond any other work for there is no rest or respite and food is short, yet they enjoy trapping animals, telling jokes and riddles, tapping and drinking their own palm wine, and making their "children's trifles" (mathiani) of wicker hats, wooden stringed instruments, and toys.

This is how one child described the joys and pains of chasing.

> "In the morning I was wakened. 'Off with you to the chasing'. You go and chase. You chase. You go and sit on the platform. You go for your sling, you come and sling stones against the animals, shouting kuyele, kuyele, kuyele, [a kind of bird]. The sun sets. You go and pierce the palm tree. You drink. You are given palm wine, and come to the village. The wine is drunk. In the morning you hang the gourd over your shoulder, you take it to the palm tree, then you go and chase. You are called. If a woman has gone to the farm and cooked millet, you are called. Good! It is for eating! You eat. You go to chase. You go and stay there for long. The sun is hot. The animals come. Then the animals (?) come, they come to eat the rice. You are called if you are not there already. You go. You go and sit on the platform. The animals set out. You sling stones. They go somewhere else.

> Your companion slings stones. Well, we chase them away, so that they will go home. They go home to the forest".

If the rice is much eaten by the birds or animals, the chasers are beaten and scolded by their father and in addition are greatly ashamed, for everyone will hear him say "my rice is eaten". They are very aware of their responsibilities in protecting the family rice, and of the thanks they are due to receive for this from their elders.

> "When they [owners] go to the farm they greet the people there well. When they do that, then their [chasers'] hearts are good, they will work well ... they will go early and chase the birds well the next day ... If the rice is not eaten, then the owner gives the chasers a gift, and thanks them well. He looks all round the farm, and the chasers' hearts are good".

Soon the rice is ripe and dry, and about October the harvesting (<u>ngong</u>) can begin. First a purification ceremony (<u>masiang</u>) is usually held in the farm. Then the rice is cut with small knives by the men and women of the family or their friends and relations. There is no formal association organised for this work, but all members of the family should be present, and friends like to help each other. The rice is tied in bundles and put on the tree stumps to dry, then after a few days gathered into a great heap on a space cleared out of the

hillside. One boy described the process:

> "When we start on the harvesting, at the time we start, there is no food for us. We spend the day, fasting. We come and spend the night, fasting. Then when the sun is setting after we have gone to begin harvesting - then at that time food is cooked for us at harvesting, in the evening. When the sun rises again, we go and work at harvesting. A little is left to do. The next day we go and finish it. When two nights have passed, we pile it up and carry it. We tie the rice in bundles - so big- and tie it with bush ropes, and carry it to the threshing place, and pile it up. That is how the old people tell us to pile it. When two more nights have passed, we go to the threshing".

By this time, people are happy. They have access once again to their favourite food, rice. "We dance and drink much wine. We could not dance before because of hunger. When the harvest comes, we eat so much, we are filled. Some eat a little at first, then call for palm wine and drink; then eat again and dance".[1]

The first rice has merely been trodden out by individual women as they need it for cooking. But a few days after the harvesting an organised threshing (sɔkɔi; fang) is often held by the owner of a big farm. This too is a big event of the year, talked about with

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1. There are frequent references in the stories to the moment of harvesting i.e. eating again after the hunger and hard work of previous months. e.g. Sara miser, Sara scrounger, The spider tries to cheat his wife.

anticipation even in other months. The rice is untied and laid down in the centre. Then the young men gather round it in one or more circles of about twelve people each, and beat it out with long sticks. This is a dance as well as work. All the sticks are raised together, and brought down - one, two, three: - one, two, three - in uniform strokes with a pause between each three; as they are raised again the dancing steps kick the straw further and further down the slope until only the loosened grain is left behind on the floor. As they progress, the singing becomes gradually more regular until, often, the whole process is taking place in time to the singing of a leader answered by a chorus of one or several groups. The men are streaming with sweat but highly excited; they do great high leaps as part of the dance, or career wildly across the threshing floor shouting and singing. To the Limba, the songs and associations of threshing are among the "sweetest" of the year.

When the grain has all been separated from the straw and is lying on the floor, one of the men sweeps it up into a high cone in the centre. One of the strongest takes a flat winnowing basket to fan (fuku) the rice

and blow off the chaff. He circles the pile which is turned for him by two kneeling assistants, and sings one of the special fanning chants to accompany the strong stiff sweeps of his arms as he fans the rice, while the rest sit in the shade to watch.

Then comes the crucial moment. This is the time when at last the season's rice can be seen to be little or much, and when envious-hearted neighbours may try to transfer it by magic means to their own farms and witch it away. Once it is safely in the store, it cannot be touched. But while it is being taken from the centre pile to the store of sticks and straw a few yards away, it is in great danger. So the young boys fill up their baskets at great speed, and run to empty them into the store, urged on by the old men. One man watches over the diminishing pile, speaking and praying continuously over it as the boys carry.

Here - to give one example - is a young smith's prayer over his guardian Sanasi's rice:

> "Ka harika wo longtha; ka harika wo longtha. You smiths. You dead. What is here is Sanasi's rice. It is what we have threshed today. When we beat it, it was not much. When we fanned it, it was not much. But now when we gather it up - let there be much. If someone tries to come and witch away the rice as a big bird - let that not happen; let him

> not be able to take it away. We are not chasing anyone away, except those who are witches. O you smiths. The man that can say 'since I was born I have not made use of the smith's work - let that person only be able to witch away the rice! [sc. no one]. If there is a quarrel in the house - let it be free and finished - let it not follow the rice".

By the time the prayer is finished, the rice is safely in the store, where a ritual is performed over it to "lock" it for the months it will remain in the farm. The owner of the rice is told "we have finished the threshing". Then he "brings out a kola, saying 'here is your thanks', and we go off".

The harvest is then complete. It is not until several months later than the main bulk of the rice is carried in (nanthi) to the store huts in the village. Meanwhile the season of feasting and dancing has begun. Food is plentiful again, palm wine can be tapped, and the weather is dry. People are glad to dance all night when the moon is full, and the girls and, even more, the boys practise their dances for their coming initiations. Husbands sell a little of their rice to buy dresses for their wives, and girls are given in marriage. Over the next few months of the dry season from about December to March, important cases and ceremonies are held, for there is now rice and leisure, and people can travel

more freely than in the rains. Memorial ceremonies and witchcraft ordeals can be held, and the girls can be initiated and fed during their unproductive weeks in the bush. The greatest occasion is the boys' initiation which only takes place in each village once every four or five years, after a specially large amount of rice has been planted and harvested. The ceremony is dependent on vast quantities of rice, for the (literally) hundreds of visitors to a large village must be entertained lavishly, and on the morning of the circumcision, basin after basin after basin of cooked rice carried to the bush for the adult men in ostentatious yet necessary display. This is the season of rest and ceremony, and for the rice that is essential for this.

It is the upland rice farming, then, that dominates the year for the Limba. In spite of the many secondary crops, it is always in terms of the rice cycle that the Limba envisage the year and reckon the passing of time in village or story. The seasons and months are connected with the phases of rice farming or rice consuming, and even the weather is related to the growing of the rice: the sun comes out, they say, in time to dry

the felled forest for burning; the rain falls and the rice grows. The cycle of work and leisure, hunger and plenty is one "we found from the old people" and, in one story,[1] was first instituted by Kanu to help the Limba people.

Rice farming is thus the main interest and preoccupation of the Limba. They admit - and rightly - that it also brings pain and hardship: the sun is hot, the rain cold, and they are pricked and cut and torn by the sticks in the farm. "We Limba, we have much suffering ... Work in the farm is sweet. But the rain - the cold - the hunger - we Limba suffer much". Nevertheless the most striking, and surprising, thing about Limba rice farming is the extent to which they enjoy and value it. Even children of only three or four years fight their companions for small hoes to try to copy their elders in the farms, and people of all ages speak with enthusiasm and interest about rice, enquiring about its well-being when someone comes back from the farm - "how was the rice?" - speaking of the dances and songs that accompany rice farming, or describing

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1. Kanu gave food; cf. The dog and rice.

in conversation or story the various phases of the farming year in a way full of meaningful and fascinating associations for the Limba who hear them. "We - the rice - we love rice very much. The dead love rice too ... we make sacrifice to the dead people so that the rice may be much. If the dead accept we have much rice". People sing in the farms, even when alone, because "we are happy there. There is our work. That is our "books", our food. So we are happy there". The whole tone of the telling of the story of Kanu gave food was one of drama and almost miracle, as the various phases of the rice growing year were described one after the other, the way the set operations were performed, the sun and rain came out at the right seasons, and the rice grew seeds and became ripe; and "when they had finished harvesting it was much more than what they had sowed. That pleased them".

The other marked characteristic of Limba rice farming is the emphasis on cooperation. This is an element of many aspects of Limba life - housebuilding, swamp farming, sharing of resources - and they tend to make wide use of the expressive reciprocal forms of

the verbs[1] to express mutual help or inter-dependence. It is in their rice farming that this element of cooperation is made most explicit in the formation of their farming "companies", an institution of which the Limba are proud. They introduce many references to such "companies" (kune) into their stories; the boy Bayo, for instance, is said to have made a "company" with the animals, and the monkey and the catfish are shown forming a "company" which results in the discomfiture of each in turn. The same term is also sometimes used in the stories with the rather different, though related, meaning of emulation, competition or even hostility, a sense which is not, explicitly at least, inherent in the concept of a farming "company" in everyday conversation. However, the most common and immediate application of the word is always to the joint hoeing "company" through which one of the hardest and most pressing tasks of the year is so light-heartedly completed. Through this kind of cooperation, the farms are jointly worked, and the ties of family, marriage, friendship and authority that bind people in

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1. i.e. verbs ending in -ande, meaning "each other". e.g. mang - greet; manande - greet each other in turn.

the village are extended to the farm, recognised and reinforced by their joint work and music there, and the formal thanks and speeches that accompany each event. This is the known and accepted background to Limba life and Limba story.

3. Cooked rice.

Eating cooked rice (sisa) is, for the Limba, one of the main aims and pleasures of human beings. It is true that during the wet season they are pleased to find any food, and "if there is no food, you endure it; you do not want people to laugh at you". But the preferred food is always rice. Even in the wet season when others are eating millet, the local chief must try to keep a store of rice for strangers - he would be ashamed to give them only millet. The Limba ideal of happiness is to sit in the evening with great bowlfuls of rice and sauce, and a gourd of palm wine. Rice is for them the best and most satisfying of food, and, they point out, "without food a man cannot stand". "You will never again eat rice" is used in one tale as a periphrasis for death. "The stomach", as it is wryly related in another, "is the chief of the body"

and all the other parts must obey when the stomach gives them the order "I want to eat, I want to be filled with food". To give real pleasure and satisfaction this necessary food, it is assumed, can only be rice.

The cooking and preparing of rice is done by women. After the threshing the rice is prepared by heating or parboiling it, drying it on large mats in the sun, and then beating and fanning it several times to remove the husk. It is cooked by being put in a great iron pot over an open fire with a little water, then part boiled, part steamed for some time until the rice is dry. It is served out for the household under the supervision of the senior wife. Men, women, and children usually have separate bowls, one of rice, and a smaller one of sauce, made out of such things as pepper, palm oil, vegetables, and, if possible, meat or fish. The shares of food must be fair, and no mother is allowed to give her own child more than others; but it is assumed that she would like to do so. The "scrapings" (<u>ngati</u>), however, may be given to whoever the cooker wishes, and this extra portion is always a matter of great moment. A mother may give it

to her favourite child, or to the growing son who helps her to carry water; a girl may give it to her special friend or lover; and, in the story of The hunter and the three twins, much is made of the fact that the mother, in her joy and affection, gave her husband and children not only their expected shares, but all the extra scrapings as well.

Cooked rice, whether at the regular evening meal or the midday meal in the farms, has many overtones of love, friendship, and hospitality. A sister may cook for her brother, a girl for her lover, a mother for her children. In marriage too the cooking of rice plays an important part.[1] When strangers come to visit, it is essential to cook rice for them so that when they go away they may say "We were cooked for. We were filled".

Eating with other people too is regarded as important. Someone who refuses to eat with you or to accept a handful of food offered from the common dish is considered hostile or proud, as was Sira in her refusal of food in Kanu gives chiefship. It is

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1. See chap. 3.

essential for a man who wishes to gain a good name to call his friends to eat with him, and a husband often tries to take out a handful to give to a favoured wife or child. A man standing for chiefship would have no chance of election if it could be suggested that he was too proud to eat with others or if he went off to eat by himself indoors, shutting out his friends. Eating with people, cooking for them, and offering and accepting cooked rice is a sign of friendship and human responsibility.[1]

Rice, then, whether raw or cooked, is an object of constant interest. When, as so often in the stories, references are made to the cultivation, preparing, cooking or eating of rice, the meaning is far more rich and full of overtones to a Limba than would be possible to any foreign reader. Manifold associations are necessarily evoked - of song and dance in the farms, drumming, cooperation, food, the recognition and thanks from old men, the care of a mother, and, finally, the sight of the rice gradually coming up in the fields, becoming brilliant green in the rain, developing seeds,

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1. cf. the monster in Sira and the monster, who hid the food cooked for him, wanting to conceal his true nature, for "the monster will never eat rice" and is not human.

and growing ripe and yellow for harvest. The constant references in story do more than just set the scene or give a chronological framework, they add an extra dimension of meaning and vividness to the whole narrative.

Chapter 3.

Marriage and the Limba view of women.

Many of the stories open with, for example, "a man married a wife", " man once wooed a woman", or take as their theme the sufferings a young man undergoes to win a wife, or the ways in which a man is loved or betrayed by women. Those who tell or hear the stories already know the details of Limba marriage. From their own experience they can, for example, enter into the intensity with which a young man looks forward to becoming a married man or being given a wife, and are already well aware of the many implications of marriage which are assumed but not stated by the story-teller.

This chapter is therefore concerned with the procedure and nature of marriage - one of the major institutions of Limba society - and with the Limba view of the nature of women. A complete ethnographic account is not attempted. I merely touch on some points which are essential for an understanding both of certain themes in the stories and of the society from which these stories spring.

1. Wooing and marrying a wife.

A young man's marriage to his first wife marks a great step forward in his social and economic status. For the first time he has a prospect of obtaining wealth in the two things the Limba most value - rice and children. Before marriage he has no individual access to either of these, for without a wife he can have no private strip of farm nor legitimate children of his own. A young man therefore awaits his marriage with great expectancy, the more so as the arrangements are protracted and involve both hard work and lengthy formalities by both his parents and himself.

Girls are still often[1] betrothed in childhood. A young man has therefore to wait many years before he can be given the wife that is promised to him. Often the girl is asked for while still a small baby in her mother's arms. The boy (or his mother) goes to the girl's mother with a head-tie, the recognised

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1. This is no longer everywhere the case; specially in the main road villages there are some modern changes in the marriage pattern. However the account given here is that normally described by the Limba, is still widespread, and is commonly portrayed in the stories.

sign of early betrothal (<u>hathi</u>), saying "this is my first gift for marriage. I love your daughter, I want her for my wife, to marry her". If this is accepted, then the boy and his parents begin on the long task of taking continual presents to the girl and her parents, bringing palm wine morning and evening, kola nuts, money and clothes, making courteous visits with gifts and fine words on all special family occasions such as funerals or initiations, helping the girl's parents by working on the farm at the busy seasons or even calling out an occasional "company" of their friends to hoe for the rice planting.

The young men regard this period of waiting and serving as a long and wearisome time. The usual pattern they say, is that they have to watch their young wife growing up over many long years. They see her learning to walk and talk a little, being weaned, growing bigger month after month, beginning to take pleasure in the gifts of clothes and ornaments brought to her, and then, at last, when she is 12 or 15, being considered old enough to be initiated into the women's society, the <u>Bondo</u>.[1] With this initiation a man's

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1. Initiation comprises clitoridectomy followed by a one to ~~or~~ two month seclusion in the bush.

wife at last becomes a woman. So he should give great gifts to show the joy he is always expected to feel. He must pay money for her initiation fees, supply her with clothes, jewelry and cosmetics,and send food for her to eat while in the bush. The young men take great pride in giving such gifts and honouring the girl's parents and initiators with fine speeches and presents. At the final coming out ceremony (hunguta) when the girls emerge, lined up, oiled and gleaming and admired by all, the future husbands dance wildly, shooting guns and drinking wine, ecstatic with joy that their wives are now at last women, prepared for marriage after the long wait over so many years.

This aspect of the length of time and the hard work involved in winning a wife is always emphasised in descriptions by young men. It is still to the fore even if in fact the man, or "husband", as he is already referred to, spends some of the intervening time down country earning money. The wait is still represented as a long one, and while he is away his parents should visit and help the girl's parents on his behalf. They must be willing to take orders from them and to "walk gently, for they are in the house

of their son's wife". All this counts as part of the bride-price due to the girl's parents, and even if he is away and only sending gifts or services through his parents, the boy himself is still spoken of as the one who is "wooing"[1] his wife.

The years are sometimes in practice fewer when the girl is betrothed not in infancy, but several years later. But in this case too the time is represented as long, and protracted formalities thought of as an essential part of the marriage preparations. Here, for example, is a description of the betrothal of a girl who is already old enough to think for herself and cook for the man.[2]

> "If a man sees a girl he would like to marry, he or his messenger will go to her parents. He takes a gourd of palm wine, carried by a child, and four kola nuts. When he goes into the hut, inside in private he gives the gourd and says that 'he has come to visit the parents'. They understand by this what he means. They give rice to their daughter for her to cook for this 'stranger' who has come ... He doesn't say anything about the girl. But everyone knows why he has come. If this marriage pleases the

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1. Dethi, i.e. seeking or being in the process of getting.

2. The details of the account are not necessarily accurate for all parts of Limba country, but the general outline is characteristic. (These quotations are referred to further in chap. 6).

girl, she will be glad to cook well for him. Thus he knows that she is pleased[1] ... All sit there. The man takes out the four kolas and given them to the parents. He keeps one more white kola in his pocket. Finally he breaks this kola into two pieces. He gives one half to the girl, and keeps the other himself, to show his heart is clean.[2] She should take her half and bite it, then put it in her waist band to show that she is clean to the man. After that, if her parents have any difficult and heavy work to do, they send a child to the man saying 'we have heavy work here'. Then he comes".

After all these preliminary formalities have at last been completed and the girl has been through the Bondo initiation, she is normally "given" (dungkuno) to her husband as soon as she is thought physically mature, and as the main bulk of the bride-price (nahulu) has been paid over. The husband initiates this stage of the proceedings by a formal request for his wife to be given to him. This too involves lengthy formalities and politeness of the kind always insisted on between a man and his in laws, a point well illustrated in the following account.

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1. cf. Sira and the monster where the girl shows her uncontrolled delight in her suitor by cooking him the best rice. His unhuman nature is demonstrated clearly by his refusal to eat this.

2. mɛthɛ, i.e. sincere, meditating no deceit, unfaithfulness or witchcraft, all represented by the whiteness of the kola.

"When she is full grown and her breasts are full, then they are willing to give her to you. You find much money and take it. You get wine. You make a lappa [skirt], as a present to give to the mother of the girl. So then you have the lappa, the money and the wine; you take it for the parents of the girl, your wife. You say 'We have come for no trouble. We have come for the sake of the girl. It is for no trouble'. The old men greet you ... saying you may come. You say you have come to the girl's parents. 'Here is wine. Here is a lappa', or, if you have it, money, or a goat, country cloth, salt, whatever you have been able to get, you bring it with you ... If they agree, the girl's mother is formally told (pengkito). She says 'I accept (yɛrɔkɔi). It pleases me. He has acted well to my husband. He said he loved my daughter. Now I say that I accept. From this time now, the boy will always care well for me. If he gets a kola nut he will give it to me, me her mother. If he gets money he will give it to me. If he gets salt he will give it to me. If he gets oil he will give it to me. If he gets salt he will give it to me. If he gets oil he will give it to me. If he gets wine he will give it to me. If I am tired he will work for me, the mother. It is because he loves my daughter - that is why he cares well for me'.

"Then they all come. They come to discuss the matter. They say 'It pleases me'. They thank (kalangang) the man who has come 'I thank you, I thank you for you coming. Greetings for [under-going] the journey, greetings for the sun, greetings for the rain. I, the father of the girl, have no long word to say. I accept by grace of the mother who bore the girl. She says that it pleases her. I too - it pleases me. I accept'. Well, since he has accepted, the man who has come is told of this. He says 'It pleases me. I thank you' and gives a token gift ... They thank him.

"He goes home. He goes back to his people who had sent him, and tells them [formally] of what has happened. Then he looks for wine, to go again, to ask about the date [for the girl to go to him].

He comes and announces (tong danthɛkɛ) this. He says 'But I want to fix the date'. The parents agree. The date is fixed. He goes home."

The actual payment of the bride-price (nahulu) usually involves a cash payment of something between £5 and £10, or gifts of traditional goods such as long containers of salt, kola nuts, rice, native cloth or occasionally, for a wealthy man, cattle. This transaction too is conducted with formality and with many interchanges of regards and thanks between the two families. Though the money or goods are all, in the end, counted in together, the bride-price is paid in various parts during the interview. Here is one account of the many formal stages gone through during one payment.[1]

"The money is paid in parts. Thus:

4/- - as the "calling attention" (kupeniti) because the man is about to say an "important word".

2/- - as the "greeting" (kumang)

1/- or 6d - to ask if the parents will let you speak (thong thongɔng ba hugbongkila ha). Then if the parents answer 'yes', then you speak, and give:

10/- to the mother and father as a formal asking about the girl, whether she is married (huthɔngthingina namɛ wo dengo) ... Then the girl's parents tell you if anyone has come to woo the girl. If

1. Here again the details are not universal, but the general approach in a series of formal offers, acceptances, and thanks is characteristic.

not, she is still a child. The parents agree, if the girl loves you. Then the man gives:

£4 - as "the right to love" (bohe kulɔnggbɔ) and

£1 - to "make the love firm" (kahatang kulɔnggbɔ), that is, strengthening the love so that it may endure. This is the "love of marrige" (kulɔnggbɔ ko ta hudɛnga) ... Now she is your wife.

2/- - "borrowing the wife" (nthele yɛrɛmɛ), that is to ask if the girl may now go to her husband's house."

The time, then, has been fixed for the girl to be given to her husband. This is usually a few days after the formal discussions, to allow her to wash her clothes and prepare her things. She goes round all her friends and members of her family to say goodbye; "I have been given; I have come to say goodbye to you".

Two of her relatives are chosen to take her to her husband.[1] This is called the "escorting" (hupɛta) and is also accompanied by formal speeches and thanks. The girl is given rice, oil, a mat, bowls, and various personal ornaments such as head-ties, soap or a small mirror, to take with her to her husband's house. Before she leaves a sacrifice is made in the house to "announce it to the dead, to tell them that she has been given". As she is about to depart, she crouches down

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1. Often but not always in another village.

before her hut for her parents to pray that she will not be ill, that her husband may love her, and that she may have many children. If she is popular several of the family may go with her for part or all of the way, showing her honour, as well as the official "escorters" who are formally responsible for her.

When they arrive, the "escorters" tell the husband that they have now brought his wife. "Here is a wife brought to your house, and here is the token gift (kɛmɛ - usually a kola) to show it". The husband and his family must thank the escorters, and give them a gift for themselves, and also one to take back to the girl's parents to announce that she is now with her husband.

> "They accept - those to whom the wife was brought. They get money, and say 'Here is this money for the girl's mother; and this money for the girl's father; and £1 for the one who brings the wife. We - that pleases us'. Well, he [escorter] goes back home. He comes and makes the announcement (tɔng danthɛkɛ) and shows the money. But the woman is left with her husband".

The girl spends two nights with her husband. On the third day he kills a hen, to make a sacrifice for her and to tell the dead "Here is the wife I have been given", so that they may soon have a child. Much rice is also cooked and the husband, wife and relations

eat it together.[1] If she is a virgin the husband likes to send extra money, perhaps £1, to show his pleasure, accompanied by a white kola; if not, a red kola. After that, "she remains in her husband's dwelling, and goes there to sleep".

This, then, is the procedure normally expected for a man's first marriage, and the terms in which it is normally described. It is a protracted as well as a costly arrangement, and few men manage to acquire a wife before the age of about thirty.

Besides the regular difficulties of finding the bride-price and conducting the long drawn out arrangements, there is also the extra risk that when the girl is ready to be "given" she may decide that she dislikes her betrothed husband, and therefore refuse the marriage. In the past, say many Limba, this happened seldom, and there were in any case ways of persuading or forcing her, by imposing a "swear"[2] or imprisoning or starving her.

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1. The sacrifice is an honour to the girl as well as a religious act. Thus in The man killed for a banana the girl's attractiveness is emphasised by the chief's extravagant gesture in sacrificing not the usual hen or even goat, but an ox.

2. A curse imposed through a material object, much feared by the Limba.

Now however it is more common. It is easier now, for example, for a girl to run away down country, or, instead of going to the man chosen by her parents, prefer someone who has just come home after earning enough to pay her bride-price on the spot. Sometimes the girl can be persuaded by her parents or the chief to go to her promised husband, by being "begged" with fine words or with money or gifts; this is the situation described with amusing exaggeration in The story of a millionaire. In some of the larger villages on the main roads, particularly in the south, a certain amount of stress is now laid on the necessity of obtaining the girl's full consent before the main bride-price can be accepted. In Safroko chiefdom, for example, the money paid over the girl's parents is sometimes not given directly to them but to an old man who is present; he puts the money on a head-tie and places it at the girl's feet saying that it is for her to decide whether or not her parents are to spend ("eat") it; if she agrees she must then take the money and give it to her father, saying "don't be afraid; you are my father; eat this money". If she disagrees, then the money and goods already paid over the years must all be refunded to the

husband. If necessary he sues the parents in court for the return of his bride-price, saying "I wooed a wife, but she refuses me. I want my bride-price. The wife refuses me. Her mother too says she does not want me". With the money, he goes and looks for another wife. Yet from his point of view, no sum of money can really compensate him for the many years he has spent waiting and working for his wife, and for his disappointment at losing the immediate prospect of at last becoming a married man.

Marriage, then, and the preparations for marriage, are thought of as one of the most important events in a man's life, an event which is fraught with difficulties, formalities, and expense. A man often speaks with gratitude of the essential help given him in this matter by his relatives and friends. His mother, he says, helps him to get a wife by spinning for him so that he can then weave cloth to take to his in-laws; his father helps him with money and by supporting him in the trying arrangements with his wife's people before whom he must conduct himself with great shyness; and his friends, especially the contemporaries initiated with him, encourage him by keeping him company and even

at times helping him with money. This also comes out in the popular stories about a companion's help in the difficulties and dangers of winning a wife.[1] A friend's support is particularly valued at this crucial time, and any request for help would be unlikely to be refused for this might lead to the bitter reproach of "you - you did not want me to get a wife". Winning a wife is considered one of the most important steps for any young man - a wife is "a very great thing - a human person" - and a stage in his career which is full of difficulty, work, expense and waiting. As one man concluded his account of marriage "thus marrying and wooing a wife - it is hard".

It is not therefore surprising that there are continual and effective references in the stories to the proceedure of wooing and marrying, and to the consequences and nature of marriage itself. The references are of many different kinds. They allude to the supposed origin of bride-price, for instance (in The beginning of marriage), of the obstinancy of a girl and how she was won by an ugly suitor (Sira and the monster), of the

1. e.g. Two friends where one man both travels to support his companion and is actually prepared to become blind to help him.

beauty of an attractive young girl and the attempts to win her by offers of large bride-price, gifts or sacrifice (The man killed for a banana), and of the trials through which a man goes to win his wife (e.g. Two friends, The wooing of Sira, Koma tricks his brother in law, The woman who wanted to be greeted). All these references have in common the assumption that a wife, however difficult to acquire or troublesome to live with, is yet self-evidently something that all men struggle to win. "Men do not love men, but women".

2. Limba marriage.

For a Limba, the ideal is a polygynous marriage with many wives and children. In practice this is usually only attained by paramount or section chiefs, who sometimes have up to 30 wives; some of the famous historical chief are even said to have had as many as 100. Many of the wealthier village elders have 4 or 6 wives, while the younger men may only have one, or, as yet, none. A poor man without many relations to help him may never succeed in winning a wife at all. Several years elapse between a boy's official coming of age at initiation and his marriage, and during this

time it is quite usual for him to have affairs with the young wives of the chief or elders, paying a fine of £2 - £4 if he is caught or is "confessed" by one of the wives. But, for every man, the ideal remains to have many wives of his own.

The reasons for this, say the Limba, are very simple - "rice and people". These two go together. Once a man has several wives, and therefore a bigger rice farm, he can call in his friends and show hospitality by giving gifts of cleaned or cooked rice; he can thus attract more people around him; as the number of his wives grows, so too does the number of his children, and so of people to work for him and, again, increase his production of rice. A great number of wives is particularly important for a chief since he above all is expected to be hospitable to strangers and give presents and entertainment with open-handed generosity. Marrying a wife means that a man gets a farm of his own, and more respect from other people. If he marries many wives he is able to build a house of his own separate from his father's and form his own household; he will have around him many children and dependants to show him honour and

greet him morning and evening; he will get more rice and money to pay bride-price for yet more wives, and, when he dies, children will be left after him in the village to give him prayers and offerings and keep his name (keng) alive. This is every man's ambition. Even an as yet uninitiated boy will say that his desire is one day to have two wives and four children and build himself a house of his own; once he has children, he says, even if he should die young, he will still be called on when he is dead, and remembered in the sacrifices for household or compound. "If you have no children, you cannot become a big man". Honour (yiki) to a Limba means the greetings and visits of many people, in life and in death; to achieve this he must have rice, wives and children.

Many wives, therefore, are essential if a man is to acquire the things he most values - rice and many people to bring him honour. But at the same time as continually assuming or asserting the good results of polygyny, the Limba are also very conscious of the difficulties of having many wives. The wives quarrel over the treatment of children or because one is jealous that her co-wife has more or healthier children

than she has. The husband dare not try to settle the quarrel himself; if he did he would be accused by the one he decided against of favouring the other; "now I know you don't love me, now I know clearly - I won't accept it" (yang sa me). A wife who is angry with her husband, they say, may run away or may turn to witchcraft, bringing great danger to the whole family. This is one of the reasons why the husband must never show favouritism in any open way. Even if people in practice guess which is the wife he prefers, he should never make her any special present - or if he does, it has to be given in complete secrecy, concealed from all the others. Otherwise they will come and complain "you married us together, and you wooed us together - now you are loving her more", and the husband will know that they are right to be angry.

This potential friction between co-wives is an accepted factor in marriage, even though in practice the wives are often friendly and cooperative. It is also assumed in several of the stories, e.g. The two women, Two co-wives, The jealous mothers. Many co-wives cause great trouble, admit the Limba, quarrelling together, or having to be fetched back from their

parents' homes, given exactly equal gifts[1] and watched over by their husbands; sometimes they are thought to join up against their husband to conceal their love affairs or even practise witchcraft against him. On all these counts, then, Limba of all kinds, but especially those on the main roads who are influenced by the ideals of a cash economy, say they would in some ways prefer to make do with only one wife. As one English-speaking Limba put it (albeit with slightly drunken exaggeration), "One wife, one trouble; two wives, two troubles; three wives, three troubles; four wives, four troubles. I will repeat. One wife, one trouble ..."

The difficulties of polygyny are therefore clearly recognised, in both larger town and bush village. Yet almost all Limba assert that in spite of these difficulties, marrying many wives is clearly essential if it can be achieved, in order to acquire rice and children. "Some people would like only one wife. This would stop much trouble. But they have to think about their farms and rice, and about getting many people".

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1. If a husband has not enough to go round all, then the division ought to be made by the senior wife and not himself.

Rice and children, the two themes which are basically bound up with the whole concept of the nature and purpose of marriage, are also implicit in much of the Limba view of the mutual responsibilities of husband and wife. This should emerge from a brief description of the Limba ideas and practice about these rights and duties.

The most important single contribution which a wife makes to the family farm is her weeding. There are many other smaller ways in which she helps throughout the year. But weeding the rice during the wet months of July - September is her special task and skill, one for which her husband is almost completely dependent on her. This is why a man cannot have a farm of his own until he has a wife. She will both weed his farm consistently and possess the necessary skill to distinguish and swiftly remove the weeds from the rice and the five or six other crops that have been inter-sown among it. For this special work of hers she must be specially thanked by her husband; and Limba men sometimes also spontaneously express their sympathy and appreciation for the women who, they say, go out in the pouring rain to weed the rice, their hands turning pale with the cold and their only clothes soaked in the rain. The husband's

contribution is to clear, burn, hoe and thresh. In the rest of the farm work the men and women mostly work together.

By virtue of this cooperation, the husband and wife jointly own the rice. It would, for example, be considered quite wrong for a man to try to keep all the rice for himself. This is what the irresponsible spider tries to do in the many stories about him and his wife Kayi, and the conclusion is often his complete failure and discomfiture. Indeed it is one of the understood rules of marriage that the husband should not even begin the harvesting of the rice "behind his wife"; if she is away from home when the rice becomes ripe he should, theoretically, go and fetch her before starting to reap the farm. Though it is the man who is normally spoken of as the "owner" of the farm and who has the right to sell some of the surplus rice if he wishes, he only owns or controls it "by grace of his wives". The rice stored in the village is under the control of the senior wife (sometimes called the "house-owner" (babangka)). Each day she takes out the amount that is to be cleaned and cooked for the whole house-hold, and supervises the cooking and sharing out of the

food. The partnership between husband and wife is recognised to be of great economic significance and one that is essential for the production of rice, which, in turn, is itself essential for marriage. "Without rice a marriage is not sweet".

Husband and wife have also particular economic pursuits peculiar to themselves which do not necessarily involve joint ownership. For example, though the wife's first duty is to help her husband by weeding on the joint family farm, she may also, if she wishes, make a farm of her own, helped by her husband, brothers and friends, who assist with the heavy work.[1] She alone however is the owner of the produce. She is generally expected to share some of the rice with her husband, cooking for him or his guests, and for this she is duly thanked. But she, not her husband, is the one who ultimately owns the rice; and she usually chooses to sell some at least of it to buy herself clothes or, perhaps, help a son with bride-price. A similar

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1. A woman's success in persuading people to come to help in her private farm means a great deal to her; this is why, in Four wives, the woman who abandoned her workers was comparable to those who, respectively, risked death, killed her child or betrayed her father.

principle applies to the trading in which, specially in the larger villages, the women sometimes earn a considerable amount over the months. Even if the husband was the one who first gave the woman her capital, he cannot claim her earnings as a right. If she is a "good wife" she helps him when he is in difficulties, paying the yearly tax for example. But even though the men often try to cheat or coax money out of their wives, they implicitly recognise that it belongs to the women.

Economic cooperation between husband and wife does not, therefore, extend to a complete sharing of resources. The women have their own sources of wealth through marketing and their private farms, whether of the market gardening type, secondary crops such as millet or groundnuts, or swamp rice. The men find money from the sale of palm produce, practice of various crafts, and selling of surplus rice from their farms. But in the central point, the production of the family rice on the joint farm, both husband and wife are required to make their own contribution to the work, and to consume the produce jointly. Much stress is laid on this as *the* natural sphere of inter-dependence ~~between~~

between husband and wife, and rice, it is always considered, is an essential result and condition of marriage.

Rice is also involved in the second major task expected of a wife, that of cooking for her husband and his guests. A man would "be ashamed" (<u>niɔ kulahu</u>) to cook for himself, and needs a woman to do this for him. It is also shameful if he has not wives to go quickly to prepare and cook food for strangers who come to visit him, or if a wife is dilatory about going for water and cooking when his companions come to eat with him. It is sometimes said that the wife a husband loves best of all is not necessarily the most beautiful or most lively, but the one who can cook most quickly and effectively when his friends come to see him. For then he gets honour and a name for ready hospitality, and many people like to come to visit him.

Cooking for the household as a whole is the duty of the wives, under the supervision of the senior wife. Cooking in general is one of the tasks considered most characteristic of a woman, in both story and actuality.[1]

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1. e.g. the girl in <u>Sira and the monster</u>, the mother in <u>The hunter and three twins</u>, the woman in <u>The woman with four lovers</u>.

Though in practice their joint cooking may at times lead to disputes between wives, if, for instance, one thinks that she has done her share of the work already or that another's child has been given too large a share, in general it is considered that one of the main binding forces in a household of polygynous wives is if they all "cook together in one pot".

Cooking specially for one's husband is also an important facet of marriage. This is one of the things a young bride must do when she first comes to her husband's house: "she cooks well for him, showing him all the sweet sauces she learnt in her parents' home". It is also understood that the wife who will sleep with her husband that night is the one who has been assigned to cook specially for him that day, bring him gourds of water to wash and drink, and serve the dishes of rice and sauce. Partly because of the sexual overtones of "cooking" a wife's failure to cook or husband's refusal to accept her food is considered as almost tantamount to a total rejection of the marriage,[1]

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1. cf. the spider's rejection of his wife's food in <u>The spider, the whip and the pot</u>.

and is always taken very seriously by any court trying to arbitrate or decide between husband and wife; this would show that their hearts "were not clean to each other".

Sexual relations, therefore, as well as economic inter-dependence are connected with the wife's duty to "cook", and a husband takes exception to his wife's cooking for an unrelated man in secret from him (as, for instance, in the story of The jealous husband.) In theory the husband has exclusive sexual rights over his wife. But this is a theory more subscribed to in practice by the married men than by the younger bachelors or by the women, and the husbands believe - with some justification apparently - that many of their wives have lovers. It is true that a girl is expected to be a virgin when she is first given to her husband and at the time of their initiation the girls swear that they will go to no man before their husbands. But, as they sometimes point out themselves, nothing is said then about their behaviour after marriage. The women are quite prepared to admit something of the justice of their husbands' complaints "Of course we have lovers" they sometimes claim, "It is not hard. If you want to

go off to him, you tell your husband 'I am just going off to the stream to wash'; then quickly quickly you alter direction and to to him". Sometimes the women are afraid of their husbands; they also know that unfaithfulness may make childbirth difficult unless they are reconciled and "confess the evil in their hearts, so that the heart may be clean again to the husband". But, in view of the general attitude about this, it is not surprising that one motif in the stories is that of the upright husband betrayed by a wife who has told his secrets to her lover, and that this, for Limba listeners, should be a popular and meaningful theme.

It is also typical of the Limba view of marriage that the sexual aspect should be spoken of in the idiom of the material cooperation between husband and wife, specially that of cooking the rice. A man who suspects his wife of unfaithfulness believes that what the woman does is to blow on the sauce to separate off the poor part for her husband, keeping the thick rich sauce underneath for her lover. It is because of _rice_, it is sometimes said, that an adulterer should pay his fine to the rightful husband, as compensation for the

cooked food that, it is assumed, the wife will have given to her lover; and when the husband is making a speech in court complaining of his wrongs, what he often speaks of, with great drama and feeling, is the food that has been secretly given to another man; "she went and gave the rice to him; and he went off, fuuuu, with the rice!" Rice, both raw and cooked, is central to the relations of Limba husband and wife. For whatever sexual significance marriage may hold for individual men and women, what is always stressed in descriptions of marriage is not a wife's attractiveness but her work; her first duty and role as a wife is always expressed in terms of her economic and material contribution. "If a wife doesn't work, and cook and wash and go to the village - even if she is very lovely to look at, you won't marry her". A wife's work includes many tasks, such as fetching wood and water, farming, spinning, and cooking. But it is often summed up in terms of rice - her weeding of the rice farm and preparing and cooking of rice for her husband. "Rice is essential to marriage; without rice there is only quarrelling".

The other main purpose of marriage is children.

Much centres on this aspect. Both when the wife leaves home to go to her husband, and when she has been accepted into his house, prayers are made to Kanu and the dead that she may have children. If a wife does not conceive, special sacrifices and rituals are performed, or divination made to discover the reason for this.[1] Both men and women want to have many children, and for a wife barrenness also means she will have no children to care for her when she is old. This is a matter on which she is liable to be very touchy. Limba say that this is therefore a frequent cause of quarrelling; a childless wife will be jealous and quarrel or even use witchcraft against her envied co-wives who have children. It is considered very bad for a husband to reproach his wife, either explicitly or by suggestion, for her lack of fertility; this, it is thought, may well make it even less likely for her to have children, and would also be a sign that "his heart was bad to her", that he did not, in his heart of hearts, really wish her to bear the children she wanted. "All women want to have children and become pregnant", and this is one reason

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1. cf. the references to this in e.g. Four wives, The story of Kubasi, The chief's son, Two women.

why a husband and wife must keep a "clean heart to one another".

Because children are so valued in a marriage, many of the complementary rights and obligations of the couple are centred on this. It is, for example, the wife's duty to carry, suckle, and care for her baby, see that it has food, and not leave it when it is crying. The suckling continues for about three years, sometimes at the wife's home, and during this time the child is never far from its mother. Even later it remains very dependent on her for its daily food, and there are several stories told on the theme of an orphan's sad lot if his mother dies and he is left to the care of his step-mothers. Each mother is concerned to watch the interests of her own child and to make sure that the other wives are not giving extra large portions of the food to their own children. This is a frequent and expected cause of quarrelling among co-wives. It is the father's duty to try to avoid showing favouritism among his wives' children. He is also expected to express his gratitude to his wife for her labour in bearing and rearing a child, a task recognised by the Limba to be a difficult one. Just

after the child's birth, in particular, the husband is obliged to take great pains to visit his wife, to bring her a gourd of palm wine, and to see that she has rice and a fowl cooked for her, "to return the blood to her body". He must express his thanks for the "great thing" which she has done for him in bearing the child. At this time, especially for a wife's first child, the husband should also send presents to his wife's mother to show his pleasure.

As the children grown up, the household becomes larger, so that the husband receives honour and labour from his children as well as from his wives. The boys can help with the men's work in the farms, and sacrifice to him after he is dead. In addition a son will see that his mother never wants, for even when he marries he will be glad to have her in his household. The girls help their mothers with the women's tasks, and also increase their father's wealth by the bride-price, through the money, goods and service paid by their husbands. Therefore continual care of the children of the house is essential, and it is an important duty of a wife to see that they are fed with rice and sauce. The husband, for his part, head of the household, prays

and sacrifices that all his "people" may be well and at peace, and calls for a diviner to discover the causes of deaths in the household so that the effects of witchcraft or of a "swear" can be counter-acted or prevented, and the children be safe.

Besides the interdependence of husband and wife in the main purposes of marriage - rice and children - a third aspect the Limba like to stress in marriage is the related "respect" (yiki) each should give the other. They should "speak well" to each other. If a man "abuses" (yaki)[1] his wife by speaking rudely to her this is a fault taken very seriously if she complains to the elders, and he would be made to "beg" her with apology and gift. There should be mutual respect. The wife however is particularly bound to honour her husband, clapping when he speaks, bowing or curtseying, and fetching and carrying for him. The theory is that she is inferior and should obey him. Nevertheless a husband also has responsibilities towards her, and in her parents' home, where he must go to fetch her if

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1. This is what the spider, an anti-social being, does to his wife Kayi. On yaki, "abuse" see chapter 6.

she runs away, he is always in a position of inferiority. He can only give gifts and beg her parents humbly to let him "borrow" his wife back again.[1] Usually she is not allowed to go, especially if her husband has been in the wrong, until there is a public reconciliation, with each "speaking well" to the other and manifesting the respect and gratitude they are expected to show to each other.

Respect, then, good words and cooperation are important in marriage. Nevertheless the Limba also think of marriage as a kind of conflict.[2] This conflict is represented, in particular, in the many stories of the anti-social spider and his wife, Kayi, who is bigger and stronger than he, and whom, for the most part, he tries to trick without success. People are not surprised if husband and wife quarrel, and many of the cases decided or arbitrated at the small local courts of chiefs and elders are to do with quarrels between husband and wife or with the more drastic, but not

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1. cf. the spider's taking of kolas to beg for his wife's return in The spider tries to cheat his wife 2.

2. On the ambivalent attitude of husband to wife see further below pp. 172 ff.

uncommon, case where a wife has left her husband so that he is demanding back her bride-price from her parents. Men admit that they are dependent on having a wife and, at the same time, that this causes them much trouble because of their wives' shamelessness, infidelity, and the "bad" nature of womenkind in general. The women too have an ambiguous attitude to marriage. Though in some ways not wholly dependent on their husbands, they recognise that they are obliged to work for him, bound by the bride-price which is "like a rope".[1] This comes out, for example, in the chorus of one of the women's songs, which goes "oh my load; oh my load; oh my load", where "the load" refers both to the actual weight of the wood or water carried by the wife, and to the bride-price that has imposed this task on her. Nowadays wives not infrequently leave their husbands, temporarily or permanently. "They say 'I don't like such and such a man. Today I do not love him'. They part. If you don't like someone will you greet him morning and evening?" But on the other

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1. This also refers to the way bride-price binds the two families together.

hand women also say that a husband is essential to give his wives gifts and help. Once a year, after the harvest, a husband must give each wife a dress or skirt, and must also be prepared to help her in her private farm and give her the continual respect and thanks due to a wife. "A man sews for his wife, sees that she has food, gets her everything. It is from your husband that you get clothes, and you get children". From the point of view of both man and woman, therefore. marriage is represented as involving both conflict and yet cooperation according to their shared and accepted aims.

The obligations, then, between husband and wife, are regarded as basically mutual rather than one-sided, and are expected to be conducted with respect and good words on either side. Either party who fails to live up to the expected standards is blamed by neighbours as well as the local court of chiefs and elders who often try to compose marriage disputes. The code to be observed is understood by all parties, and rests on the system of mutual rights and duties that accord with the Limba view of the purpose of marriage - that it is fundamentally concerned with the production of rice,

and the bearing and rearing of children, the "many people who bring you honour".

3. The Limba view of women.

Many of the stories treat of women, whether as mothers, wives or young girls, and an understanding of these depends partly on some knowledge of the part taken by women in Limba society. This section therefore deals first with the position and activities of women, and secondly with the Limba view of the nature of women in general and the characteristics attributed in particular to a wife, a mother in law, and a mother.

The difference between men and women is strongly emphasised in Limba society. In many spheres - the economic, social, political and religious - the part played by men and by women is expected to be very different.

The economic division of labour has already been indirectly referred to.[1] The main division is by sex. In rice-farming, the men do the heavy work of clearing the bush, burning, hoeing, and threshing, while the women both help throughout the year by cooking, seeing

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1. See chapter 2.

to the fires, and fetching and carrying, and also have their own special job of weeding. Both men and women cooperate in harvesting, and in carrying the rice to the village. In addition to this, the women often have their own private farm to work, with some help from the men, or grow food for "sauce" in gardens in or near the village. The women also do much of the work on the secondary and some of the cash crops, such as millet, groundnuts, or tobacco. In non-agricultural activity too there is a strongly marked division of labour by sex. Men are in charge of house building and repairing, hunting, fishing with traps, smith-working, weaving, sewing and the tapping of palm wine and gathering of palm fruit; they also manufacture such things as large baskets, musical instruments, red dye, and leather products. By contrast, the women clean and mud the house, fetch water and firewood, fish with nets, card and spin the cotton, weave mats and small baskets, process soap and palm oil, and dye cloth indigo; they also go in for small scale marketing specially in the larger villages. This division is, in Limba eyes, a right and natural one, befitting the respective natures of men and women. It is, for

instance, forbidden for a woman to weave cloth, or, still more, to have anything at all to do with smithcraft, for "Kanu gave that to the men".

In spite of, or rather because of, this strict division, the Limba clearly recognise the necessary cooperation between men's and women's activities. This is particularly marked, as already pointed out, in the case of rice where the situation of marriage makes quite explicit the essential inter-dependence of husband and wife. It is also evident in other activities also; in the manufacture of cloth, for instance, a commodity highly valued by the Limba, the cotton is planted by the men, then gathered, cleaned, carded and spun by the women; the men then wind it from the spindle onto the shuttle, weave it into narrow strips of cloth, then sew and tailor it into long gowns. The favourite illustration always given of this is of the way in which a mother spins thread for her son to weave and take to his mother in law; through her essential help he eventually wins that most valuable of all commodities, a wife. The Limba stress the way in which a man is dependent on women for their essential contribution to the well-being of the whole

community.

Socially also the division between men and women is very marked. In the context of death and burial, for example, the women are required to weep and wail in mourning, and to sing sad songs as they dance in a circle round the dead body; they should fall down on the ground in the prescribed gestures of grief, and should be raised and comforted by the men. The men do not cry, but fire guns to express their sorrow. It is the men also who dig the grave and speak formally to the visitors who come with sympathy and presents. Members of the same sex as the dead wash and carry out the corpse and perform the final ceremonies after the buying, and a man is buried lying on his left side, a woman on her right for "a man and a woman are different".

In other social contexts too women are expected to act differently from men. There are various prohibitions to be observed by women, especially in regard to the smith's hut which no woman is allowed to enter. A woman may not eat eggs or tortoise flesh, both allowed to men, nor touch a hunter's bag. The vocabulary of men and women is also required to be

different in a few key words and phrases. The formal word <u>lɔngtha</u> (<u>ng</u>), for example, by which speeches and prayers are ended is forbidden to a woman who may only say "I have finished" or clap to honour the men present and end her words formally. Clapping is in general a characteristic activity of a woman. She claps to show respect for superiors, usually men; she also claps when the men are sacrificing, for that is the women's special contribution to the ritual since, unlike the men, they do not formally "speak" or pray. It is unusal for a man to clap, and if he does so it is to express the fact that he is deliberately putting himself into a position of inferiority in order to beg humbly for forgiveness or help.

The social distinction which is assumed to exist between men and women is made quite explicit by the Limba secret societies.[1] The women's society is the <u>Bondo</u>, with its own local head (<u>barigba</u>) and officials; under various names (<u>Sande</u>, <u>Bundu</u>) this society occurs widely in Sierra Leone. The Limba man's society is the <u>Gbanggbani</u> or <u>Gbanggba</u> society, which is controlled

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1. The societies mentioned are secret in the sense that certain rituals are secret from non-members. Their purpose and membership is not secret.

by the local smith and is much feared by the women; they run screaming to hide inside their huts whenever the spirit Gbanggba dances inside the village. One of the strongest prohibitions of Limba society is that no member of the opposite sex may trespass on the secrets of the other, and it is believed that illness, barrennes or death automatically follows a sin of this kind unless the culprit confesses and is cleansed, at great cost, by the society leader. Both societies initiate their members by circumcision and seclusion for a month or so in the bush. There are also dances and ceremonies by the societies at the burial of their members (in practice every adult Limba) and at a few special ceremonies throughout the year. The public parts of the ceremonies are attended by everyone and, especially the men's initiation dances, are important and crowded occasions. But the distinction is always observed, and there is always a point at which members of the opposite sex and unititiated children must perforce withdraw. Both men and women are thus separated into clearly organised groups which serve to make explicit and obvious the separation between them.

In the sphere of what we might refer to as politics

and law, men are expected to take the major part and women have only a secondary role. Women, for instance, are never chiefs of either chiefdoms, sections or villages. In this the Limba contrast themselves with the Mende of the south of Sierra Leone who have some women Paramount Chiefs; but for the Limba "Kanu does not allow a woman to be chief".[1] "Speaking" cases to reconcile or judge between opponents which is, in Limba eyes, the main function of chiefs at every level, is always thought of as appertaining primarily to men, not women. Women do take part in cases as disputants or witnesses, and nowadays sometimes sue vigorously in the Native Administration courts. But women are not generally expected to possess the ability to "speak" in the sense of settling cases with the rhetoric, authority and terminology appropriate to men, nor is it their primary responsibility, as it is that of the chief and elders, to decide local disputes.

However though women are not members of the hierarchy of local chiefs and do not take a central

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1. i.e. in the local hierarchy of territorial chiefs. Women of course have power as leaders in their own Bondo society, and, in the last few years, there has also been some attempt to appoint women as "Mammy Queens" to arbitrate cases between women in the chiefdom capital.

part in legal procedures, there are a few women who are significant in the organisation of the chiefdom, either personally or by virtue of office.

The senior wife (<u>bathɛ</u> or <u>bagbɔdɔ</u>) of the chief potentially holds an important position. She is the first wife he has married, usually before he became chief, and she is in charge of his large household, organising the wives' work, mediating in personal quarrels between them, and caring for and advising the younger ones; she is also responsible for the entertainment of strangers, so important a function of the chief's household. Any man's senior wife is relatively important; a chief's especially so. Because the chief's production of food and hospitality to strangers concerns the good name of his chiefdom as a whole, his senior wife is correspondingly thought of as essential. People expect her to be able to gain great influence with the chief and to be a suitable person to appeal to to settle quarrels between women associated with the chief's household. She can therefore have a great deal of influence but this depends rather on her personal use of the potentialities of her position than on any precise office held in the chiefdom as a whole. Her position is one recognised as a possible road to

personal power rather than a titled office.

In contrast to her is the basaraka, the "sacrificial one". This is a special position held by a woman on behalf of the chiefdom as a whole, one for each paramount chief. The basaraka is ideally a young virgin with a light or "red" skin;[1] "Kanu and the dead love red" and she is associated with rituals and sacrifices to them. She should always be near the chief, at home and abroad, and have to perform none of the usual women's tasks except for spinning and fetching water. She is the only woman who is allowed to approach the sacrificial victim when the men are praying over it, and through the "cleanness of her heart" and her pure intentions towards the chief, she brings peace and health to the whole chiefdom, the "cool spirit" that all Limba pray for.[2] She has no specific political authority or right to settle disputes, and, in fact, is little in evidence in the day to day life of the chiefdom. But her support is said to be essential for the chief and he cannot afford to incur her anger; for without

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1. Occasionally she is one of the chief's wives in the southern chiefdoms, where, some suggest, the custom may be dying out.

2. See chapter 5.

her "cool spirit" the sacrifices cannot be effective nor the chiefdom be at peace - and this peace is always the main aim of any chief.

These and a few other individual women, such as the chief's sister or his favourite wife, do take a certain part in the organisation of the chiefdom. But these exceptions do not invalidate the general view implicit in Limba thought that political authority and decision are primarily the sphere of the men.

Much the same applies to religious practice. The women have no access to the important secrets of smithcraft round which much ritual is centred; they cannot directly invoke the special curses called "swears", nor in general become expert in the skills of divination. In rituals for the well-being of the chiefdom, village or household, the women do not take a leading part, for though they do have certain rituals of their own which they alone control, all the public and representative sacrifices are accepted to be primarily the responsibility of the men to perform. It is the men who pray over the sacrifice, stretching out their hands to the sacrificial animal, whereas any women present must crouch behind the group, their backs to

the animal. With the sole exception of the basaraka, they may not approach or touch it. The women themselves say "we do not know about sacrifices - the men own that". Even the basaraka takes no active part in the ritual beyond her presence with "a pure heart", and the only positive contribution the women in general make is by clapping; this reinforces what the men say, and is an activity represented as both the natural function of the women and, in a sense, a kind of sacrifice in itself.

Though the women take little active part in the actual sacrificing, it is believed that they have the power to spoil (teti) it. If they are harbouring bad or angry feelings or if their "hearts are not clean to the men", this makes the sacrifice useless and the chiefdom or village cannot achieve the peace and health which the sacrifice has been made to secure. This aspect is felt to be so important that a special ritual is occasionally performed, supervised by the men, in which the women confess and so end all the quarrels they have had during the year, saying, for example, "my husband said bad words to me. All these bad words were in my heart; but today these words are finished.

It is forgiven."

In religious matters, therefore, the women can help to bring about the peace of the chiefdom or village by not allowing their hearts to be "unclean" to the men. But they do not themselves take a positive part in the rituals actively designed to achieve this peace and regard this as the duty of the men.

In the light of this description of the actual position of women in Limba society and of the economic, social, political and religious contribution they are expected to make, it is possible to discuss more fully the Limba view of the nature of women in general, and of the way women are often expected to behave and feel.

As has already been implied in much of the previous discussion, women are assumed to differ from men in four main ways: they cannot "speak" in the formal sense; they are less "hard" and steadfast than men; they do not take the initiative; and they are inferior to men.

Perhaps the most important point is the sense in which women cannot "speak".[1] It is true that women

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1. Gbongkoli. On "speaking" see chapter 6.

are often vociferous, enjoy gossiping and teasing, and in many cases are not afraid to speak for themselves or answer back in discussions or disputes; and the officials of the Bondo society and senior wives know how to make formal replies to the set thanks or praise they may receive. But the theme that "women do not know how to speak" runs through all aspects of the Limba woman's role and the concept of what it is to be a woman. Women do not "speak" in the formal sense of assessing or reconciling in a public dispute nor sit among the chief and elders when a case is being formally heard and decided; they do not "speak" in the sense of addressing Kanu and the dead in prayer; and it is the men who most regularly speak to or thank the women, who, for their part, often reply by clapping or singing, often in a group, rather than by long individual speeches. It is the women's place to support and honour those who "speak", in particular the chief who has the arduous job of continually speaking and reconciling disputes. As the Limba say "women have less sense than men; when something happens to them, they cry and fall down at someone's feet; they cannot speak".

Secondly women are represented as, in a way, more sensitive and emotional. A woman's heart is believed to "spoil" (teti) more easily than a man's from grief or disappointment; if, for instance, a girl has been given to a man she hates, it is said that she sometimes thinks and thinks in her heart (simɔkɔ ka huthukuma ha) until she thinks herself to death and dies one night in her sleep. Similarly, men say that women ought not to drink much, giving as a reason for this assertion the idea that women get drunk more easily so that their heads go round. Women are thought more liable to cry or give way to sorrow. When their sons or brothers go into the initiation bush, for example, the women are said to be sad or cry over the pain they know will be inflicted on them by the elder boys who are hardening them to make them men. Before the boys leave for the bush too their mothers are believed to suffer much as they helplessly watch their sons being bullied or beaten by the older boys. At a burial the women are expected to weep, and always do so whether they in fact feel sad or not, while the men shoot and "speak". Women weep and respond, while men take charge.

The Limba also suggest that men generally take the

initiative while women are more passive. This, it will be clear, does not completely accord with the facts, at least in the sense that women often take personal initiative, are not shy with men, and are quite prepared to organise their independent farms or marketing, or to run away from their husbands, thus at times initiating a divorce; a mother, furthermore, can ask her son to do almost anything for her in the full confidence that he will agree. However when Limba imply that men take the first step, what they have in mind is the constantly cited instance of initiating marriage - of wooing a wife, putting the token amount for betrothal, then enduring the long wait with continual visits and gifts until she is ready. Further, a man "marries" (_dɛng_) a wife, whereas a woman "is married" - (_dengo_, the passive). Only in a case where a man cannot afford bride-price and therefore goes to live in the woman's house and work for her parents is it said that "he is married", a rare situation and one considered shameful for the man. Normally the husband takes the initiative in giving the bride-price, in bringing the wife back to his own home and expecting her to obey his orders. "In our country, a woman has not yet ever said that _she_ will go

and marry the man". Because the situation of marriage and the procedure of seeking a wife is so constantly in mind, the view of man as taking the initiative in general becomes part of the whole picture of the nature of men as opposed to the more passive role of women.

The point that men are quicker to take action was also exemplified in a short parable or story told by one old man.

> "A parable (mbɔrɔ). Long ago people were brought out on earth. Chief Masala ("God") asked 'Of a woman and a man, which loves the most?' At once we, the men, stood up, 'I do!' Kanu Masala said "Oh! I had not been expecting you to answer so quickly!' You see now, how we the men are with the women. Long ago we were the first to say 'I do'; now we also give a token gift, saying that 'I love you'.[1] It is we who always give something to woo a wife. So Yenkeni [R.F.], you see now the function Kanu brought out for us. Long ago Kanu gave us those who do not talk quickly - the women. If you sleep with her, it is you who begin. It is finished".[2]

Closely connected with the idea that women wait for men to take the initiative is the assertion that women are less than men. This is said by both men and women. In many ways, though not all, this obviously fits the actual situation of women in that they do

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1. This refers both to the gift given as earnest of bride-price, and also to the white kola which is the accepted sign of furtive love.

2. For a different account of the origin of bride-price see The beginning of marriage.

not take a leading part in political or religious functions, they obey their husbands in certain spheres, fetching and carrying for them, bringing them water to wash and so on, and showing them honour by bowing or clapping. The men also have the right, in certain circumstances, to beat their wives and apply ordeals to test their fidelity. "A man is more than a woman, because he marries a wife, and can take her and beat her". Though it is known that women can individually have great power, and a certain amount of economic independence, it is accepted that in the public sphere of "speaking" which means so much to the Limba the women are less prominent. In day to day life, therefore, the role of women up to a point implicitly reflects this kind of inferiority.

The view that women are less is also sometimes stated quite explicitly. Men say, for example, "she is only a woman, she wears a skirt", "men are more than women", "the men own (bile) the women", or "a man is more than a woman; he can go everywhere, even at night, by himself, but a woman would be afraid". The women accept this view saying, specially in the context of sacrifice, "we are not equal with the men"

or "the men are responsible for us". Further, the number three is commonly associated with a woman, six with a man. This occurs in many contexts, such as the ritual washing to cleanse from disease or sin, or the speeches over the chief ordeal for witchcraft; these must be performed three times for a woman, six for a man. There are also references to these numbers in stories when the woman is struck three times, the man six (e.g. Kanu gives chiefship). "Each" according to the Limba "has its price, even with beatings: three for a woman, six for a man". In both story and real life women are also often compared with cats, animals considered amusing but of little use, and, furthermore, thieves of food; men on the other hand are likened to dogs, which are much valued by the Limba for their help in hunting and protecting the family against witchcraft and theft, and who are therefore, unlike cats, given names, food and affection. The idea of women's dependence on men also comes out quite clearly in some of the stories. It forms, for example, the concluding moral to the long tale of Sira and the monster, where the girl, Sira, is rescued from the disaster she had brought on herself by her younger brother Sara. She

falls at his feet and thanks him. "My father, I am less than you. You told me at the beginning, but I would not listen. Now I leave it all to you. You came and saved my life". In bringing the story to an end the speaker elaborates the moral.

> "Now for Sira, before she could find a husband, it was Sara that had to say 'here is the man you will marry'. Kanu saw this. That is what he told us in farewell, we Limbas. Even if it is only a small boy, and you are the first born, you the woman, if he says to you 'Here is where you will be married', you the woman - agree to what he says. Even if you are known to be the older, you the woman, you will not be able to stay in marriage by your own power ... Stand behind what the boy says. He is able to speak for you. Since Kanu told us that, all of us Limbas now we follow that. The boy says 'I am able to speak for you, to say where you will be in marriage' She will agree."

This is the general view of women: they are inferior to men, less enterprising and steady, and, unlike men, incapable of "speaking". However the Limba also have more particularised pictures of certain women who are in specific relationships, whether, that is, they are thinking of a woman primarily as a wife, a mother in law, or a mother.

The most common representation is of a woman as a wife. This is the primary connotation of the term for "woman", and all adult women are, or have been,

married. Also, in some dialects at least, the term for "woman" and for "wife" is identical (*yɛrɛmɛ*).

Therefore in their representation of a "wife" the Limba include all the general characteristics mentioned in the last two sections. A wife is someone who helps with rice and children, has her own specific rights and duties towards her husband, and is one of "the women" with all that that recalls for her general position and function in society, and the qualities constantly attributed to a woman. But in addition to this Limba men have a special view about wives in particular. This is, in sum, the view that a wife is at once good and valuable, and at the same time also "very bad" and "a very great trouble".

This ambivalent view has already been touched on in the discussion of marriage as conflict. On the one hand, the Limba men recognise, a wife is the greatest thing of all in that she is an essential prerequisite for higher status and the wealth in rice and people connect with this. In both story and actual fact, a wife is an important thing for any man, something that must be paid for, worked for and waited for often over many years; she is someone who must be

consistently thanked and honoured for her essential contribution. As one old man put it in a public speech "It is Kanu who helps men to get wives - without wives a man can do nothing", and an influential senior wife of a chief spoke of how she "helps her husband and draws people to him ... Kanu says that a wife should help her husband. If a wife doesn't help her husband, is that good?" In stories too the hero often sets out to win a wife, or is supported and helped by the love of the wives he has acquired.[1]

But there is also the other side to this. "Wives are bad" (lehe ta), "the women here are very troublesome" (a bangoi, referring to wives). The men complain that "as soon as you shut your eyes, they are out of the house after another man. You can't trust them at all". This attitude reflects the men's awareness that they are not fully in control of their wives. A mother or sister will stay close always; but a wife is always liable to run off to her parents, reject the marriage, quarrel with her co-wives, or take a lover

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1. e.g. The wooing of Sira, Two friends, The boy who got a wife from a bird. On women's love, see Kubasi, Four wives.

in secret. Wives are like cats, they are thieves; they are also liable to use witchcraft against their husband, sometimes discovered only through the husband's dying words "when I die, go to the diviner. I am killed by a woman (wife)". A wife is a woman who is not necessarily permanently committed to stay with you, in the way a mother or even sister will, but may at any moment betray you.

This view of wives as treacherous is also very common in the stories. The theme of the wife who tricks her husband for love of another man is a standard motif. Sara, for example, is promised the chiefship, but, because his wife betrays the secret, _Kanu_ mistakenly gives it to her lover instead. Finally however the virtuous husband triumphs and after all gains his due reward.[1] Another common theme is of the beautiful young girl who seduces or tricks a man into marriage with her, only to betray him. This comes out in, for instance, the story of _The man killed for a spinach leaf_, where the girl's attractiveness is described, then the way in which she wins over the chief to marry

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1. _Kanu gives chiefship_

her, all in pursuit of her plan to kill him in his sleep; when his son comes after her in vengeance she tricks him too by suggesting marriage, and so gets away quite free.

The references to wives and their actions, are not introduced into the stories at random; they can be seen to fit with the ambivalent attitude to wives held by the Limba. It is not surprising that in the stories a wife should be presented at once as the expected aim and support of any man, and, very frequently, as both evil and treacherous; both these representations have real point for the Limba who hear or tell the tales.

A man's concept of a mother in law (*thɔnɔ*) is less complicated. She is shown great respect, but, in general, little affection. One of the strictest rules of marriage is that a man must always be humble before his wife's mother, must bring her gifts, greet and welcome her, even if he has to get into debt to do this; he must continually be showing his gratitude for the great gift that has been given to him, something which he can never repay even with all his bride-price and service. Though he should of course also reverence and thank his father in law, it is his relationship

with his wife's mother that is always specially stressed, and the demanding mother in law who must be satisfied before a man can marry is a stock theme in the stories.[1] One of the most dreadful things that a Limba can imagine is to speak disrespectfully to, or abuse, a mother in law. This is one of the points in *The story of a hunter*, where the hero's involuntary laughter, apparently directed against his mother in law, nearly leads him to sacrifice his secret, and so his life, in an attempt to placate her. A mother in law can break any marriage, it is believed; for if a man is rude to her, she persuades her daughter to leave him, so a man cannot afford to risk insulting his mother in law for fear of loøsing his wife. People expect there to be a certain amount of tension between the two. A wife is always going off to see her mother, thus having an excuse to leave her husband and putting him in a position of inferiority if he comes after her; the irritation that this may give rise to is indirectly expressed by the song attributed to a bird: "*hɛng*, my mother in law, at

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1. e.g. *The woman who wanted to be greeted*, *The wooing of Sira*, *The spider woos a wife*, *The beginning of marriage*.

last she is ... hɛng". Where the word understood is "dead" (tuku). The story behind this, according to one informant, is that the bird (pɔpɔ) had married a girl who was always going to see her mother, who was supposed to be ill and likely to die; the husband therefore was always being left alone, and grumbling; when at last the mother in law was dead, he rejoiced, but could not ever say so in so many words; hence the incomplete and riddling song of the bird. A mother in law is reverenced but not, it is expected, loved.

Quite different from the concept of either wife or mother in law is the Limba picture of a mother (nanda). A man always speaks of his mother with great sentiment, pointing out the many months she carried him in her womb, her labour in bearing him, suckling and carrying him for three years, rearing him with constant care and affection, providing him with food and fighting for him against the children of other wives in the household. She spins thread for him to weave and win himself a wife, and supports him in the wooing. His mother never leaves him. She stays with him in the house even after his father dies, and cares for him and the household; "she makes the house sweet".

Certainly a Limba has also great respect for his father, specially for the essential part he takes in his son's initiation. But the relationship with a mother is expected to be much closer. Where a father may be stern or remote, a mother is always pictured as affectionate and loving, caring only for the interests of her own child and no others. "You may forget about your father but you will not forget your mother". Similarly a mother is represented as closer than a wife. When a man speaks with gratitude or affection of a wife, this is always to some extent affected by the accepted ambivalent attitude to wives who may at any point betray; but when he speaks gratefully of a mother, this always exhibits the greatest sincerity and emotion, unaffected by any doubts. Girls are also fond of their mothers and frequently visit them even after their marriage. But it is the son's close relationship to his mother that is most frequently spoken of, one marked by mutual affection and disinterested help. It is, indeed, impossible to exaggerate the picture Limba men present of a mother as a compound of complete unselfishness, consideration and affection. He, in return, is considerate to her and, usually in

practice as well as theory, accedes to her demands.

> "She is the one who bore me. It is good for me to do what she says, for she bore me ... A father if he talks you are afraid ... If we are not afraid, he beats us. We are afraid of our father. For your mother - you fear her too. The reason why your fear her: that is because she conceives you; she becomes pregnant, she grows big; she comes and gives birth; when she has borne you she brings you up. So when you are grown, you fear her a bit. For she bore you and brought you up. That is what we think of, and fear her a bit".

This image of a mother is not generally a central theme in the stories but is one of the basic assumptions lying behind them. In one,[1] the result of lack of affection for a mother is amusingly illustrated: the son, water, quarrelled with him mother, the earth; so he went off down country to Freetown to get a lawyer to conduct his case against his own mother. But "when the water wanted to return up country, he was not able, for water is always running along. Thus it happened, because the water's heart was angry. You see now, you should not bring a case against the person who bore you". In <u>The story of an orphan</u> the climax is where his singing and struggles at last actually

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1. <u>The earth and the water</u>, not included among the texts.

bring his mother back from the grave to protect him and confront the cruel step-mothers who had been maltreating him. The sufferings and discomfort attached to motherhood are also brought out clearly in the story of Two women, where it is made quite clear that only the one who shows unselfishness and love is able to bear a child. And, finally, in The story of Deremu, the tragedy lies in the fact that the hero was endangered by the one person in the world who should never injure him, his own mother; and that to save his own life, he had to take hers, his mother's. Even then the expected affection of mother and son is pictured as still existent as she dances with joy to hear that he is coming safely, and later in his sorrowful words over her dead body, and the magnificent burial he gives her.

> "He took her and put her in a chest, so that the earth would not touch her body. He took gold and put in on her mouth. He took more gold, he put it in her left hand. He took more gold, he put it on her right toe. He said goodbye, saying goodbye to his mother".

Only when one understands the Limba picture of a mother is it possible to grasp the full meaning which such a story could have for the Limba who hears or tells it. In the same way, it is only through some knowledge

of the Limba attitudes to wooing, marriage, a wife, or a mother in law that the many stories which refer to these can be understood in the sense in which they are told. It would be misleading to say that Limba beliefs and institutions to do with women or marriage are, in any simplified way, the direct cause or result of stories - but they form a relevant factor which any foreigner must know to assess the impact and meaning of such stories in the actual situation of story-telling.

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Chapter 4.

Chiefs and chiefship.

In The story of Kubasi, the hero goes off to discover "where chiefship begins and where it ends". He, like the hero in The four wives, succeeds in winning chiefship through the help of women. Others get it through their own virtue, like Sara in Kanu gives chiefship, or through a series of humourous and cunning tricks as in Koma tricks Sara and Sara and the greedy chief. Winning the chiefship is a common conclusion and climax in several of the stories, and is represented as the unquestioned aim or reward of many fictional characters.

The institution of chiefship is an important one among the Limba. However the actual position of chiefs is not as simple as that represented in the stories. There are various grades of chiefs, and their duties, aims, and organisation have undergone various changes over the last century, not least with the British declaration of the Protectorate in 1896. However certain attitudes to chiefship have not changed completely,

and though the picture given in the stories in many ways differs from the present reality, there are some themes in the Limba concept of chiefship which can either be ~~chiefly~~ directly related to those in story or which would be present in the minds of those Limba hearing or telling a story concerned with chiefship.

A brief account, therefore, of the organisation of chiefs and of the Limba view of the nature of chiefship and authority may illumine some aspects of the stories and give a further understanding of the essential basis of Limba society.

1. Limba chiefs in tradition and history.

In the period before the coming and rule of the Europeans, there were, according to Limba story and belief, famous and powerful chiefs ruling over great chiefdoms in the north of Sierra Leone. Many tales are told of their power and magic. Suluku, for example, perhaps the most famous of all, ruled from his centre at Bumban and trained his warriors in the plain between the two great rocky hills which guard the entrance to the valley. It is said that he had 100 wives, and that people from all over the north of Sierra Leone used to come to Bumban to "greet him",

have their cases settled by him, and bring gifts of rice and wine. He in his turn received them and gave them presents to take home. Many magic powers are attributed to him. He could, it is narrated, transform himself into some other shape in order to travel round and survey his chiefdom, and he is sometimes said to have been the son of the spirit Kumba who helped him to gain and keep his power. Stories of similar magical attributes are also told of many of the other chiefs who ruled in the old days. One, for example, is said to have had the power to transform himself into a woman and go to marry the chief of a hostile village; then, when he had learnt all the secrets of the place, he would resume his own form, and lead his followers in successful attack on the village. In the old days, according to many, the chiefs were masters of much magic, sometimes called "witchcraft of the afternoon"[1] because it helped rather than damaged the chiefdom. But few people nowadays, they say, are capable of such feats. Those were "the old days" (mabɔrɔ ma) before the "European times" (maporotho ma)

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1. On witchcraft etc.. see Chapter 6, sect. 3.

and wonderful things happened on earth then.

Suluku was, in fact, a historical chief, and up to a point it is perfectly true that some of the nineteenth century chiefs were greater and more powerful than their counterparts of today. The whole of Limba country seems during that period to have been dominated by three powerful chiefly houses - the Kontehs of Bumban in Biriwa, of which Suluku was the most famous, the Mansarays of Bafodea in the north, among whom Sumang is specially remembered, and the Banguras in the west (the present Tonko Limba) who had no settled capital town but whose chiefs had great power, always under the title of Bombolai. These chiefs are not only remembered and praised by their Limba descendants, they were also visited and mentioned by European travellers or administrators. Governor Sir Charles King-Harman, for example, reports that in 1901 he went to Bumban

> "to see the old chief Suluku, one of the most powerful and influential chiefs in the Protectorate ... Suluku gave me a cordial reception, and came to visit me in great state, gorgeously apparelled and escorted by sub-chiefs, headmen and two of his wives, who assiduously fanned him or wiped off the prespiration as it appeared on his face and neck ... In reply to a casual reference to the hut-tax, Suluku poohpoohed the idea of any trouble in the

> matter. 'I am Suluku' was sufficient to indicate his authority and position in the matter".[1]

These Limba ruling houses seem to have had many connections with the further north, and though probably only few of the chiefs were actually Muslims, they seem to have looked to Guinea in the north for inspiration and guidance as well as trade. The reverence in which they were, in retrospect at least, regarded by their mainly pagan subjects may have had some connection with the special powers attributed to Islam and to those connected with it, as were many of the early Limba chiefs through their contacts with the Fulas and the well-known country of "Futha".[2]

These spheres of influence in the north of Sierra Leone, then, were ruled over by chiefs from three leading Limba families, their great prestige drawn from their ability to keep peace, prosecute wars when necessary against other tribes, further trade on the routes through their chiefdoms up to Guinea, and keep contact with the wise men of the north. This position however was disrupted by two events in particular at

1. King-Harman 1902 p. 8.

2. i.e. the Futa Djallon in Guinea where was located the town of Timbo, capital of the Fula empire.

In this way, therefore, there is a certain truth in the Limba ascription of greater powers to the "old chiefs" and the assumption in many of the stories that chiefship is a high and dignified position. "The old days" are both the times when "the old people" lived, those who were, in Limba tradition and story, wiser and better than those now alive, and also the period when, in fact, the few actual chiefs there were had in some ways wider powers than nowadays.

Over the last fifty years, there have been further changes in the position of Limba chiefs. At first few alterations were explicitly made except that the chief's right to judge was in certain cases limited, and that he and his subordinates (now defined as "section chiefs") became responsible for the collection of tax and were supported in this by the government. With the introduction of the "Native Administration" scheme into Limba chiefdoms from 1937 and onwards, a systematic attempt was made to introduce local government with democratic representation, a Tribal Authority, and a chiefdom court and treasury. More recently a special "Court President" has been appointed to judge chiefdom cases and the judicial function thus - in

theory though not everywhere in practice - removed from the chief. Several of the chiefdoms have now been amalgamated so that Limba chiefdoms at present number seven, and vary in size from about 100 to about 370 square miles.

The present hierarchy of local chiefs includes the paramount chiefs of each chiefdom, each with four to six "section chiefs" or sub-chiefs (bayaha) to control a "section" of the chiefdom, and village heads (bathagba) who are responsible for the good order and tax of the village. The paramount chief is assisted by his deputy, the appointed "speaker" (a modern defined office for which there is no single indigenous Limba word), the President, now in charge of the local court, and the chiefdom police. In addition the local elders or "big men", many of them with special influence over nearby villages, help him constantly with advice and support; the full "Tribal Authority" of representatives from the whole chiefdom usually only gathers on a few special occasions throughout the year. The Limba term for "chief", gbaku, is strictly speaking only applicable to the paramount chief of a whole chiefdom, but it is also sometimes used more

loosely to refer to any sub-chief or village head, or even to all the "chiefs", that is the elders of a village who still commonly help the local "chief" to settle cases.

There have, then, been many changes in the actual position of Limba chiefs. These detailed changes, however, do not seem to be very directly reflected in the stories, and are not discussed at length here. There are few, if any, references in the stories to Speaker, President, Section Chief, Tax or Police, and it is usually the native and traditional followers and functions of the chief that are mentioned rather than the modern governmental officials. The stories picture the chief as surrounded by such people as "the sacrificial one",[1] the senior wife, his drummer, and his "cousin" or "mother's brother" (<u>sesa</u>), a man standing in a special relationship to the chief which gives him at once the duty to support him and the right to rebuke him. Governmental signs of power are not, in most stories about chiefs or discussions of the nature of chiefship, stressed so much as the traditional

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1. <u>Basaraka</u>, a young girl with mainly religious functions, see above, chapter 3 p. 161 .

symbols of authority such as the chief's drum, his chair, headdress, long gown, and, sometimes, whip. It is these which are most commonly spoken of as being given to the new chief in several stories.[1] The one European symbol which seems to have become fully accepted as closely associated with the position of chief, is the staff. Besides these symbols, the chief is also sometimes depicted as riding a horse, followed by bands of musicians, or having rich possessions of gold. This last picture is, for the Limba, probably an ideal one rather than reporting the actual position of any Limba chief; it perhaps belongs more properly to the influential kings and princes known to exist in the further north than to the smaller chiefdoms of Sierra Leone. The exaggeration of riches and numbers is a not uncommon trait in the stories and in this case serves to enhance one of the common images in story - the traditional chief, secure in his power and wealth, untouched, apparently, by the modern innovations of elections, tax or government administration; it is for this happy position of chiefship that the heroes of stories are so often pictured as striving.

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1. e.g. Kanu gives chiefship, The story of Kubasi.

2. Chiefship and authority.

"The chief owns us all" (gbaku bile mina foma) is a common and everyday Limba sentiment. The "ownership" or authority meant here carries with it certain responsibilities. In the day to day conduct of Limba life these are to be exercised up to a point by any "big man" or even any head of a family; but they appertain particularly to a chief, above all a paramount chief. The areas of this responsibility are primarily three: generosity, knowing everything that happens in the chiefdom, and "speaking".

A chief is always expected to be hospitable and "kind". In the story of Kanu gives chiefship Kanu is depicted as going round all the villages in disguise looking for a wise man to whom he might give the chiefship. He is turned away by all until at last he comes to Sara. "Sara welcomed him ... He greeted him very well. He brought out a mat, he spread it for him on the verandah ... He brought him into his room, he Sara. He brought Kanu in there. Kanu ate". So Sara is given the chiefship by Kanu. "Of all I found, you alone knew how to look after me. So I will give

you the chiefship. You will now look after the whole country in the same way. All the people will now stay with you".

This story brings out a theme very common among the Limba. "To give things is the mark of a chief", they say, "to help the poor people". And this ideal to a large extent fits with the actual practice of Limba chiefship.

In the first place, it is the chief's duty to welcome and entertain visitors who come to him. Almost anyone who comes to greet the chief, whether of a village or a chiefdom, is welcomed with fine words and a token gift, very often two kola nuts. A more honoured visitor is often formally presented with a hen, rice or even a goat, sometimes being told that this is his "sacrifice"; the normal procedure is then to kill the animal, after praying over it, and to eat the meat jointly with the others in the village. A chief's wife is normally asked to cook for strangers if they are staying long enough for food to be prepared, and this is always considered one of the delights of going visiting. If the strangers are staying for some time it is the chief's responsibility to provide them with lodging and food;

he likes to entertain them as lavishly as he can, even at the expense of his own family, and provide them with luxuries such as warm water to wash in the mornings. In all this he is often helped by one of several of his "big men" - this is one of their chief duties - and such hospitality is expected of anyone who is well off. The chief however should surpass all in lavish generosity.

In this way, he can receive honour from many people throughout the country. The generous chief's reputation is prized by both him and the people of his chiefdom, and a man would be ashamed to be known as stingy.

> "The chiefship - to give food to strangers. If not, when a stranger comes, if he is not well fed and well treated, when he goes back again far away to his own people, if he is asked about that chief, he will say 'Ah! He is not a good chief'. But if they are well fed, then that chief will be known. If your father is a good chief, when the son travels he will be known and people will go quickly to cook for him. If the father is not good, the child will not be so well treated."

For this reason the chief must have much rice, and should make a bigger farm than others, helped by members of his village. He often does not sell much of it but keeps it for strangers who come to visit him and for use at the big ceremonies of the village such as initiation.

> "The chief must have much rice to give to strangers. Then he will get a good name. Everyone will say, when that chief is mentioned, 'Yes, he is good, we got much rice, we filled ourselves'. But if a

chief has no rice to give people, then he will be ashamed, and everyone will know".

In addition to his duty of entertaining strangers and visitors, the chief should also be generous to his own people and help them. He should know how to "hold people" (bohiti bia), and look after those who are poor or without relations. If someone is caught in a difficult case he should be willing to support them, and perhaps help with the payment, and "if anything happens in the country, the chief binds an ox for sacrifice". When he eats he, like other people, should call in others to eat with him or give a handful of rice to those nearby. Eating with people and not shutting himself up in his house to eat alone is an important quality of a traditional Limba chief, and a literate chief who does not act in the traditional way is strongly criticised. He should also give his "big men" a share of the gifts that are brought to him - wine, rice, kolas and so on - and hand these round with honour and fine words. People praise him as well for "cooking" for them, in reference to the specially good food that he, like other household heads, provides for those who come to help him with work on his farm or his house; the food provided by the chief is expected to be the best and most

plentiful of all to suit the wealth and generosity ascribed to him. Because a chief is expected to be - and must be - wealthy so that he can discharge his duties of hospitality and generosity, candidates for chiefship like to go around before an election making ostentatious contributions to the funeral ceremonies of the last chief or gifts to the old men to show their wealth and intention of using it for those in the chiefdom.[1]

In order that the chief may be well supplied and able to exercise his function of hospitality, he needs to have a large household of wives, both to work for the rice in the farm and to see to its quick preparation and cooking when visitors arrive. Almost all paramount chiefs have five or more wives, and some have as many as thirty. In addition, people often give him special help with his house and compound so that he has room to lodge strangers. A chief has many people who either work for him occasionally, or are permanent members of his household, and his farms are usually bigger than others'. As well, people often bring him

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1. cf. the fine presents from the "chief" in The spider and the squirrel 1.

gifts when they come to visit him. These, they imply, are not a forced tribute, but a way of bringing honour both to themselves and to the chief. After the harvest, for example, people like to come to the chief bringing rice, and perhaps a fowl, to tell him "we have finished the harvest, and here is your share, for we have got it through your grace". There are many small token gifts, of, say 3d or 6d or 1/-, brought to the chief when people arrive to bring him news, ask him to arbitrate between them, or ask formal permission to hold some ceremony such as initiation. Wine is often brought to him in this way, just as it is, to a lesser extent, to the other household heads in the village, and a hunter gives a set portion of big game killed in the chiefdom to the local chief, as well as the skin and teeth of a leopard. In return the chief thanks him fully, sometimes with money.

Goods of various kinds are, then, continually coming to the chief, who is constantly pictured in story and discussion as wealthy and possessed of great riches. He in turn redistributes these among those of his people who are near him or in need of his help. Having many people around him, greeting him, working for him, bringing him gifts and being presented in turn, is

one of the marks of a chief or any man in authority among the Limba. This is what is referred to in the phrase that occurs so often in the stories, "to become well-off" (niŋ gbang). This implies both that a person is wealthy, and also that he is good and generous with his wealth and has many people around him to join in this. This relationship of chief and his people is very much a reciprocal one. Both sides have responsibilities, the people to help the chief and bring him gifts to honour him, the chief to show lavish generosity to both members of his own chiefdom and visitors from another. This dual responsibility of help and generosity applies to any Limba man who is "well-off". But it applies above all to a chief.

A chief is also expected to know everything that happens in his chiefdom. In this respect he is like a father, or head of a household, for anyone in authority is supposed to know about everything important that happens to those under his control because he "owns" them, is responsible for them. The chief, then, should be told of any important event in his chiefdom. Deaths for example should be notified to him; it is sometimes said that ideally he should be told of every death, but in practice, specially in the larger chiefdoms, less

important deaths are merely notified to the local headman or sub-chief, while the paramount chief is told of deaths among leading elders in the villages or of those near to his own centre; he then often gives a gift to contribute to the funeral. Any departure from the chiefdom, specially if permanent, should be told to him, and the man concerned should come to say a formal goodbye, often with a gift. Similarly, a stranger who comes to visit locally or to settle in the chiefdom must visit the chief to declare his presence and intentions. Someone staying for a short time in the village may be "shown" to the chief by his host, so that if anything happens as a result of the visit, the chief will know the people concerned and understand the reason for the visit. All special ceremonies are told to the chief, whether a big village sacrifice, a memorial ceremony in some remote village, the dedication of a specially fine house, or the imposition of a dangerous "swear" (or curse). The chief should also be told when any large game (such as leopard or bush cow) is killed in his chiefdom, when some accident occurs, or when, as not infrequently happens in the dry season, a village is burnt. Initiations must also be declared in advance to the

chief; for though he is not himself in direct charge of the societies of men or of women, his permission must be formally asked and given before they can perform the initiation of new members or any important ceremony - "the word of the chief holds the whole country". It is part of his responsibility and authority to know of all important occasions in his chiefdom.

In order to know this fully, the chief must be told what is happening by members of his chiefdom. It is not enough for him merely to know these things informally or through private enquiry, it is required that he should be formally "told" or "notified" of them by people who come specially to tell him of it, often bringing a gift to emphasise their words. They explain formally what has occurred, and he replies (me) with equal formality, generally in the form "I accept" (yang yɛrɔkɔi) by which he signifies that he has received the news, accepted it, and approved. It is now under his control.

In this way those in the chiefdom by their continual journeys to "tell" the chief what is happening at the same time continually acknowledge the chief's authority

over them, that "everything in the country belongs to the chief". Not to tell the chief of important events would be tantamount to repudiating his authority. This is why a chief complains if someone has gone away down country without saying goodbye to him, did not tell him of a quarrel and ask his help in settling it, or did not come to greet him on his return home. But when people come as required - which for the most part they do - then the chief's position is assured, people acknowledge that they act only "through his grace" (thɔkɔ ba kanama), and he is kept informed of what is going on in his sphere of authority. When the chief is "told" and formally "accepts" what he has heard, he has also accepted his responsibility to and interest in the people concerned - that he will help them if necessary, by giving a contribution to a funeral, aid to those whose village is burnt, arbitration between those who are quarrelling, or his presence, himself or through a representative, at an important ceremony. In "replying" to their announcement he admits that he now knows of it, and is himself now also responsible. It is in this sense that he "owns", is responsible for, his chiefdom.

Perhaps the most important of all the chief's

attributes is his power to "speak"(gbongkoli). This is consistently given as an essential quality of anyone with authority, and in the chiefdoms where the chief goes into seclusion[1] before his inauguration he is taught "how to speak, how to give honour to each person". In the old days, I was once told, "Kanu came down onto the earth because people then had no chief; if anyone did anything, there was no speaking. But now he does not need to come down, because he looks and sees that there is a chief everywhere, that people are living together in villages". At the beginning of Kanu gives chiefship, a similar situation is described. "Long ago ... we Limbas had no chief where we could meet together"; by this is implied the meeting together of people to hear the chief "speak" between them and settle their quarrels. Without a chief, it is often said, there would be fighting and quarrelling; his work is to "speak", and so bring and keep peace.

The most common form which is taken by the chief's "speaking" is the settling of disputes and conduct of cases. As already mentioned, certain offences were taken from the native chief's court in the organisation of the Protectorate

1. The Temne custom of kantha, seclusion, is followed in a few Limba chiefdoms. See V.R. Dorjahn, Changing Political System of the Temne. Africa 30, 1960.

administration at the end of the last century, and the chiefdom court is now under the control of special court Presidents distinct from the paramount chiefs. In theory, then, the Limba chief is no longer in charge of settling legal cases. Yet in the *Limba* theory of chiefship, this is still usually assumed to be an important function of the chief, and in practice some "speaking" in this sense still takes place outside the context of the official Native Administration court. This is especially true of the lesser local chiefs (sub-chiefs and village heads) in villages off the main roads. There the previous system is still very marked; morning and evening the old men of the village gather with the local chief in the verandah of his house to "speak" out any quarrel that has happened, and reconcile the disputants. The concept that this is the main function of the chief is one still fundamental to Limba thought, and, to a certain extent, to their practice. The following description therefore of the traditional procedure gives what is still in many places the common practice and the usual picture of how a chief or elder in authority should act.

The most common of the cases which are brought to

the chief are those to do with marriage, quarrels about property, and, in some chiefdoms, cattle damange to rice. Cases involving husband and wife, or their relatives, are very frequent; they may be in order to end a marriage, the man demanding his bride-price money back since his wife has left him; to persuade a girl to go in marriage to the man who has been putting bride-price for her but whom she does not like; to "beg" a wife to return to her husband; or to reconcile a quarrel between husband and wife. A small dispute between spouses or co-wives can usually be settled by a local elder who is called in to mediate, but a serious one often has to be dealt with by the local chief. Food, cooking and rice are also frequent subjects of quarrels in marriage, and co-wives dispute about the division of the work or the care shown to the others' children. People also summon others for debt or for property which they claim as their own - a gun, for example, or a dyed native gown - or for letting one of their cattle eat another's rice, thus bringing him serious loss. In addition there are cases about witchcraft, when the convicted witch must "beg" and pay compensation for the victim he has confessed to

have killed, the compensation due for accidental homicide or wounding, quarrels, often involving verbal "abuse" (yaki), and cases of adultery.

A case is usually begun by a man coming to tell the chief of some complaint. He "tells" (tepe) the chief formally, with some token gift like 3d, 6d or 1/-, or some kola nuts. The chief "accepts" (yɛrɵkɔ) the announcement formally and then asks the man whether he wishes him to proceed further with it or if he is telling him merely "so that he may know". If the man replies in the affirmative, then he must usually give a further gift so that theycan formally "call" (yongong) the other party. This second payment may be of, say, 2/-, sometimes more; once the chief has "accepted" this he sends a messenger to summon the one complained of. When he comes, the chief and the local elders gather together to hear the dispute. Leading elders are sent for, and other people flock in to hear what will be said. The defendant is then "told" (tepo) of what had been said against him by the other, and if formally shown the amount paid by the plaintiff and asked to pay an equal amount. The principle that they must pay equally is sometimes made a central part of the

case, and each may give a larger amount, sometimes of several pounds, as a kind of "wager", as it is often translated into English, staking the sum on their innocence. The defendant "accepts" what he has been told by the chief, and agrees to pay a similar amount.

Then, either at once or after an interval, the two parties are asked to speak, to explain what has happened. Usually the plaintiff begins, giving a long description of exactly what had occurred, what he said to the other, and the reply he received, all given in great and often dramatic detail. The defendant replies in the same way. Each should speak within the set framework of opening greetings to those who are there, mention those "by whose grace" he is acting and, if a man, end with the formal words "that is it, it is finished " (huna hoho, lɔngtha). Within those limites he can speak as he pleases provided he keeps to some extent within the bounds of relevance (wider in Limba courts than in ours). There may be some coming and going among the listeners, but on the whole he is usually listened to attentively, and the chief or one of the leading elders sometimes interrupts to clarify a point or ask a question.

After this, witnesses (baserɛng) are usually called, and questioned about what they had seen happen, and how each of the parties had been behaving to the other on the occasion of the quarrel. Sometimes a father or friend of one of the disputants intervenes to "beg" for one of them, or speak well of his behaviour on other occasions. When all these people have been heard and thanked for their words, the elders present begin to speak. They sit, stand, or move around in the centre of the crowded verandah, throwing back their long sleeves as they gesture, and using all the devices of oratory to persuade the two disputants to end their quarrel, explaining how wrongly one, or both, had been acting. They employ rhetorical questions to make their points, gesticulation, abrupt changes from harsh shouting to quiet winning tones, sitting down then standing up in excitement to emphasise a point, even walking right out of the court at the end of the speech. They call on the one party to "beg", the other to accept the "beg" and give up his anger, to "cease" (pɛa). They try to bring them to a sense of proportion about the quarrel, reminding them, for instance, that "Kanu does not like that". Those who are listening should support them by "replying" (me), that is by agreeing

with what they say, answering the rhetorical questions with murmurs or grunts of agreement, or emphasising the speaker's words by "true, true" (thia, thia).

When several of the old men have made their speeches, the chief finally sums up. He too speaks with full formality and rhetoric, and makes clear in what respect one or both of the parties have been wrong. Often they are blamed for not coming to the chief in the first place to complain and speak out the cause, instead of becoming angry with each other and quarrelling openly. He tries, often at great length, to compose the dispute and reconcile the two. One is usually asked to "beg" (theteke) the other, that is to apologise and, usually, to give a token, or sometimes a substantial, gift as part of the "beg". The act of "begging", admitting that one is in the wrong and accepts what the elders have said, is as important as the actual payment of the fine, and the amount paid over for, say, cattle damage of rice is very often considerably less than the damage known to have been caused; the main point is not arithmetical exactitude of compensation, - "for you are people living together in one village" - but the admission of guilt implicit in "begging". The chief also tries to persuade the other to accept the "beg"

to remember, for example, that they are all of one village, or of one descent, and that it is not right to continue angry when "begged" by the other and entreated by the chief and elders. In this way the chief helps the one who is declared wrong, who "was unable" (pungke ta; thamoi), to "beg" his opponent. If he agrees to "beg", and the other agrees to "accept," they are both thanked and told they have acted well. The one who lost the case is told that he should not feel bad or ashamed at what has happened, but should remember to act well for the future, and, when people offend against him, to come to the chief for help rather than quarrel on his own. If a large "wager" has been made, the money given by the one who won the case is handed back to him, with some of the other's wager as well, "so that he may forgive him"; the rest is divided among the chief and the old men who had been "speaking" the case.

In theory, by the end of the "speaking" the two disputants should be reconciled, and their anger and shame removed. This, in the Limba view, is one of the main purposes of the case; what is aimed at is not the punishment or full compensation of either party,

but that peace should be restored between them. Many of the important offences - murder, homicide, alleged witchcraft - are strictly no longer allowed to be tried by local chiefs, and these, and other, offences at times go to newer courts. But many Limba prefer their own system, for, they say, even if the verdict in a District Commisioner's or NA court is correct and even if it happens at times to be cheaper, still their "hearts are not cooled" there; only the long persuasive speeches of the traditional system can do this fully, and bring about the "cool spirit" in the village and chiefdom that will fully prevent quarrelling, anger and witchcraft.[1]

The main aim, then, in such formal cases is not so much punishment or decision as the basic reconciliation of opponents. The chief's part is usually referred to as gbongkoli, "to speak", though it is sometimes also called kɔsɔngɔng, "to judge". The emphasis is laid on the power to persuade shown by the chief and elders, to make the heart of each feel "cool", "good" and "clean" again so that there will be no

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1. cf. chapter 5.

further dispute, hidden or overt.

"Speaking" is thus regarded as a most important activity of the chief. By settling law cases in this way he keeps his chiefdom at peace, and the hearts of individuals "cool".

As well as this primary sense of "speaking" to settle cases, the chief also "speaks" in two other related ways, each, though to a lesser degree, partaking of the same kind of formality as that manifested in the full law case. One has already been mentioned. When people come to the chief to inform him of important events in the chiefdom, or show him some new thing they have acquired, he should "speak" to them in return using the same formal expressions of thanks, acceptance and reply as occur in law cases; much the same also applies to any formal discussion, whether about a marriage, sacrifice or exchange of information - in all of these the "speaking" of the chief, the leading figure present, is considered of effective significance.

The second sense in which the chief must "speak" well, is that he should talk freely with people, greet them honourably and not show himself proud or remote. If is common among the Limba to praise someone because he "greets you well" or "talks well with you" and this

quality should be manifested above all by the chief. He should take pains to greet people, thank them, listen and reply to what they say, and never keep himself far removed from them in the way, according to the Limba, that other people's chiefs sometimes do. By his good "speaking" to people in this way, the chief acknowledges their presence and shows them "honour" (yiki), a concept of great moment among the Limba. If you are not spoken to well, and praised, then you "are ashamed" (niɔkulahu); but if people "speak to you well" then you get "honour" and "your heart is good".

By his "speaking" in these three related senses - settling cases, taking part in formal discussions, and talking with honour to people - the chief is considered to perform an important function for those in his chiefdom. He shows that he "loves them", and helps to achieve "honour" and a "cool spirit" so that they may enjoy physical and moral peace.

This, then, is the Limba picture of what any chief should be. He should "hold them well", love them and help them in difficulties, take responsibility for them through his supervisory knowledge of what is happening

to them, and "speak" for, between, and to them. It is, of course, an ideal picture. For, though the main functions of any chief certainly do lie in the spheres mentioned, those of economic interdependence, general supervision, and settling of disputes, individual chiefs do not on every occasion act with the degree of fairness, justice and kindness ideally expected of them. Oppressive or greedy chiefs are mentioned by name as having existed in the past, cited in the abstract in illustration of wrong behaviour, and, brought into stories;[1] there a chief's wicked or stupid actions are often shown to result in his own loss, and the moral is drawn sometimes clearly, warning against such disregard of the Limba ideals of chiefship. In the past, before the recent definition of ruling houses by government, it was possible to appoint a chief from a new family rather than the son of a dead chief known to have been a cruel and oppressive one, and instances are cited of this having happened. By this means, as well as through the

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1. e.g. the chiefs in The man killed for a spinach leaf, A cruel chief, Sara and the greedy chief, The story of Kubasi.

special admonitions of the chief's "cousin" and his "sacrifical one", the _ideal_ of chiefship could be upheld even against those individuals who violated it. Whatever the individual behaviour in practice, the ideal in principle is clear: it is the chief who must take responsibility for his people, for "he owns them".

The main functions of the chief that I have discussed - generosity, supervision through knowledge, and "speaking" - also appertain in some degree to anyone in authority, whether sub-chief, village headman, or father of a family. The idea of "ownership" (_bile_) among the Limba carries with it the implication that the "owner" is responsible for looking after the one "owned" by giving him gifts, food, and support in difficulties, by taking note of everything that concerns him, and by speaking to resolve any disputes in which he is involved and so bringing him again to a state of peace. The "owner", in turn, must be recognised and helped by being told of important events among his children and depandants, given gifts, labour and honour, and being called in and recompensed for settling quarrels. Relationships of "ownership" and authority

occur at every level in Limba society - relations of kinship, marriage, secret societies, farming organisation, and between master and pupil, parent and child, and chief, sub-chief, elders, and people; all show the same basic pattern of mutual responsibility in the spheres of generosity, supervisory knowledge, and "speaking". Everyone in authority should to some extent exercise these virtues for those he "owns"; but the chief, and in particular the paramount chief of a chiefdom, must manifest them above all.

This concept of chiefship, authority and "ownership", and the actual working out of the relations between chiefs and people, those in authority and those "owned" by them, are of fundamental importance in Limba society. An aquaintance with these is common to all Limbas whether in daily behaviour, general conversation or formalised story, and is an assumed background to any story referring to chiefs or chiefly status.

Chapter 5.

Kanu, religion and cosmology.

In the stories there are many references to religious topics. Kanu not infrequently appears as a leading character, people continually seek advice from diviners, and sacrifices are made or spirits encountered by the heroes of the tales. This chapter therefore gives a more systematic account of some aspects of Limba rleigion.[1] This is both in order to explain what these references in the stories mean to the Limba hearing or telling them and to give some

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1. There is not space to consider Limba religion fully, and I have concentrated on those aspects relevant for understanding the stories. I have not, for example, directly considered the effect of the missions (mostly of the American Wesleyan Mission) working in Limba country; beyond the actual villages of the four main mission stations (Kambai, Bafodea, Bindolo, Kamakwie) there has been little direct effect on Limba religion and the vast majority remain pagans. In the west and extrememnorth of Limba country there are many Muslims and, as will be obvious, the indirect influence of Islam has been great; however the Limba do not anywhere seem to play a leading part in Islam and many keep to the practices and outlook of the traditional religion. I have here therefore spoken mainly of Limba paganism partly because this is in any case less well known than the precepts or practice of Islam or Christianity, but mainly because it is the pagan ideas which are most important to the Limba and most significant for the understanding of their stories.

idea of beliefs and practices which are important to Limba thought and day to day action.

In everyday life and ritual it seems to be "the dead" (fureni bé) who stand out as the most significant element for the Limba themselves. However since Kanu appears so very often in the stories, I shall begin my account with a discussion of this term, followed by a section on "the dead" and, finally, on the spiritual powers attributed to certain special individuals.

1. Kanu.

The Limba have no theology. That is, they give no systematic account of Kanu ("God"),[1] nor do they show any desire to speculate about his nature or powers. They have no special cults of Kanu, no priests, no church. They never discuss or argue about Kanu in the way they do, for example, about farming activity, hunting, or the various Limba dialects, and there is no explicit system of beliefs or dogmas about him which can be taught to children. It is true that Kanu

1. The full name is sometimes given as Kanu Masala, often abbreviated in the west to Masala, in the east to Kanu, the term I use.

appears frequently in the stories, where he is represented in various roles - as a chief, a stranger going to beg for wine, a judge - but such stories do not seem to be taken or offered by the Limba themselves as conveying any real information about Kanu's true nature or acts; though they illustrate certain themes characteristic of the Limba concept of Kanu, they are not "myths" in the usual sense of being implicitly believed or widely known either by the people in general or by any expert class as a piece of esoteric lore, nor are they associated with ritual. Many of the stories differ according to the story-teller or the locality, and there is no idea of an accepted authoritative corpus of tales concerned with Kanu. If one asks about Kanu's nature or acts this never evokes a story in reply. Indeed almost the only specific assertion the Limba are prepared to make readily about Kanu is that he is not directly known; he is far away up above and humans cannot see or know him. The Limba concept of Kanu, therefore, is implicit in their words and actions rather than abstractly formulated in explicit statements about him. The Limba themselves have no interest in this kind of systematic formulation.

It would, then, be misleading to begin an account of the Limba idea of Kanu by asking or answering abstract theological questions about his nature or qualities of the kind that we are accustomed to treat when speaking about "God". The Limba are interested in speaking of and analysing the world around them, not in speculative theorising about God.

Nevertheless the Limba frequently make use of the word Kanu. It occurs in exclamation, blessing, moralising, story-telling, commenting on some event or custom, or in explanation of some disaster or success; they also make prayer and sacrifice to Kanu jointly with the dead. From these usages it is possible to understand something of what "Kanu" means to a Limba, when used in a particular situation, and to grasp some of the underlying assumptions about him. In this section, then, I analyse mainly the various contexts in which the Limba refer to Kanu, and some of the implications of these references.[1]

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1. Sacrifice, prayer and ritual are mainly dealt with in section 2. below.

One of the most common mentions of the name Kanu is after a death. The women weep and people say with a sigh e Kanu, in a tone of sorrow, bewilderment or resignation. A son coming home from down country to find his father dead exclaims in the same way, of a young man hearing for the first time of a close friend's death. Sometimes the phrase is expanded further - "e Kanu, the power of Kanu is great" (sɛmpɛ ba ka Kanu a bɔi), acknowledging Kanu's power to cause unforeseen disaster so that men's plans turn out to be worthless. Similarly, in pain or distress, a Limba may utter the same kind of exclamation - e Kanu, or yao Kanu, yao Kanu (alas Kanu) to express his grief or anxiety. If a man finds his rice eaten by another man's cattle he may say e Kanu, and his friends utter the same words to show their sympathy for him, knowing that there is nothing that can be done now to undo the disaster. When a man has spent the whole day hungry and, coming home to his house in the evening after his hard day's work in the farm, finds no rice for him there either, he may say, sadly and resignedly, "a Kanu, I have had no food today".

This invocation of "Kanu" in a situation of distress is so frequent that a Limba asked about the nature or the

importance of Kanu often replies by referring to the way in which Kanu is mentioned when one weeps; "Kanu is for weeping" (ndε berino); "the work (or function) of Kanu - if a man dies, one weeps 'Kanu'" or, in reply to a question, "we don't see Kanu but we wail him" (a boki ning). A Christian Limba summed this up by explaining contemptuously what he considered the inferior pagan experience of Kanu - confined merely to crying: "they cry yao Kanu when a child dies or when there is some bad disaster (masibɔ); they know Kanu by (or through) hardship and difficulty".

The most serious and frequent invocations of Kanu, then, are in a situation of misfortune. But Limba also at times use a similar exclamation when they are happy or pleased. They sometimes exclaim with delight or surprise e Kanu or, when they have met with success in a difficult task or obtained an unexpected piece of good fortune, either "thank you Kanu" (ngwali Kanu) or what may perhaps best be translated as "hurray Kanu" (mbadeng Kanu). When a hunter shoots at an animal and kills it he may say "a Kanu, thank you". After a man has passed the night peacefully and has wakened safely the next morning he may describe this with the

comment "Kanu, thanks" or say "I spent the day with cool spirit (thɛbina lima); I spent the night with cool spirit. Thank you Kanu". In a similar way people often add "by grace of Kanu" (thɔkɔ ba Kanu) to assertions about good health or good fortune, as in the common exchange "how are you?" - "I am well, by grace of Kanu" (or, sometimes, "by grace of the dead"), or "the rice is plentiful this year by grace of Kanu".

Admiration or surprise also evokes a reference to Kanu. When, for example, they see or discuss European achievements, they often exclaim in an expressive tone e Kanu!, or "everything is Kanu" (foma Kanu) or "Kanu's power is great" (sɛmpɛ ba ka Kanu a bɔi), to show their awe and admiration. E Kanu! or, occasionally, Alla! are common phrases used to comment on something impressive such as a rainbow, some exaggeratedly funny narrative, or the touching gestures of an adored baby. When people describe or demonstrate something they consider very wonderful, like the amazing metamorphoses of the grub they find in a palm tree which "has its own dress and house" of palm fibre, or the intricate weaving of the palm bird's nest with its beautifully made "entrance and place to sit in", they sometimes

refer this to Kanu's power. A Limba hunter, too, as he looked up at a calm sunset sky behind the hills in the wet season was moved to exclaim quietly "Kanu is a chief!" (Kanu gbaku!) to express the depth of his appreciation.

Kanu is also referred to in blessings and prayers. A blessing is common in thanking someone for a gift or favour - "May Kanu help you to a long life; may your heart be well"; "through Kanu may you not meet any bad thing", or "through Kanu may you tread a cool tree" (i.e. when you climb a palm tree may you not fall but be successful). Prayers to Kanu and the dead are described below; they normally accompany sacrifice, and ask for a peaceful heart (thebina lima) and escape from disaster for the sacrificer and his family.[1]

A reference to Kanu is sometimes also used to recall someone to himself or to prevent or disclaim any further action. Thus if two people are quarrelling a bystander may call on them to stop: "Cease, by Kanu" or a man may try to soothe down an angry friend with "the power of Kanu is great, cease". Someone who has

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1. As described below, prayers are often primarily to the dead and only indirectly to Kanu.

wronged, as he considers, may say that he will consent to "leave it to Kanu"; this means that he will not pursue the matter or trouble people further.

These then are the common exclamations or remarks concerning Kanu which first strike a visitor to a Limba village, and which any Limba grows up to hear uttered around him. Almost all these usages have implicit in them an element which is also clear in other aspects of Limba language and action - an attitude of resignation and detachment. This habit of standing back from events and commenting on them dispassionately or resignedly by a reference to Kanu comes out in many contexts. A mother who has borne twins,[1] which she knows will cause her much extra work and trouble, will yet often say spontaneously "What is given you by Kanu, you cannot object to"; and people frequently say of some unpleasant or unlooked for happening "What Kanu has said, you do not refuse". A man speaking of the possibility that he may never achieve his ambition to get money and build himself a house, or admitting that perhaps he may never succeed as he wishes but will just have to

1. Twins are though to be powerful or troublesome, but are not objects of horror nor is there any tradition of twin-killing.

endure it, expresses all this by saying "It is Kanu" or "It is all to Kanu" (i.e. depends on Kanu only). So too in situations when great fortune or great disaster occurs, "It is Kanu" they say, meaning that in spite of all the efforts and precautions taken by men, there still lies behind everything the ultimate and universal cause, Kanu; they are relating their present misfortune to the general lot of mankind. Even the apparently more direct address to Kanu in thanks for good fortune seems also to involve a kind of generalised comment on the present situation and the way in which, with all a man's efforts, success is uncertain and is dependent ultimately on something beyond him , out of his control; the remark seems to be understood in this sense by the speaker and hearers in the actual situation, and not as a pressumption to any kind of direct personal communication between man and God.

In the situations, therefore, in which Kanu is most frequently and spontaneously mentioned, the Limba seem to be primarily concerned to make some detached comment on the situation itself. They are not directly putting forward formulated belief in Kanu as a personal being with whom direct contact or worship is conceivable or

about whom men can or should know anything in detail.

This impression is strengthened by answers Limba give when asked about _Kanu_ by a stranger - a question they are not themselves concerned to ask in normal circumstances. One of the more frequent statements has been mentioned already - that _Kanu_ is for weeping. Even more common than this is the twofold reaction that Kanu is "up above", and that he is unknown, "we do not see him, we do not know him". In this he is contrasted with "the dead" who are below, buried in or near the village, and who are known to their children for "they are Limba"; they were seen by their contemporaries, are known to love their descendants, and, even now, may appear to them in dreams, a thing which _Kanu_ will never do.

Kanu is always pictured as being up above. He is high above (_kabegede ka_, or _kathinthi ka_), probably in or near the sky (_kuthahine_) though the exact location is not made clear. In one story[1] the explanation

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1. _Kanu goes up above._

postulated for his distance is that he went far away because he was harrassed by the continual demands made on him. But this story does not seem to be universally known or cited, or even, by those who have heard it, taken altogether seriously as a definite historical explanation to account once for all for Kanu's distance. In other stories[1] various episodes are related in which Kanu "long ago" (nde) visited those on the earth, coming down for certain specific purposes and then again returning to "up above". Nowadays, is the implication, he does not come down to the earth or enter the village (mɛti) which is the abode of human being (wɔ mɛti); he stays far away up above where he can be neither seen nor approached by mankind.

The other attribute of Kanu about which the Limba are quite explicit is that he is not and cannot be directly known to them. When specifically asked, they say they do not know whether Kanu is good or bad, male or female,[2] white or black, or even whether or not he

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1. e.g. Kanu gave food to the Limbas; The stomach is chief of the body; Kanu and palm wine.

2. There is no sex differentiation in Limba grammar, though I have, for convenience, used the masculine pronoun when referring to Kanu. In stories he usually appears in the masculine roles of father or chief, and is referred to by the personal pronoun wundɛ.

loves people. The answer is always "we don't know"; or "a man cannot know that". Everything about Kanu is obscure. "We don't know him, we don't see him". One old man expressed this as "What is meant by Kanu: Kanu is up above, and we are down below. This is the word that was left for us long ago - we will not be able to see him. This was left for us long ago. That is why we always say by grace of Kanu. We cannot ever see him". It is vaguely thought that perhaps the dead see him, but those living never can. "Perhaps Kanu is where the dead are (katile ka) ... we don't know very well. We have heard that the dead see Kanu; but we don't know, we have not yet died. We don't know ..."

Besides this general attitude of ignorance about anything to do with Kanu, the Limba also at times explicitly contrast their own lack of knowledge with the certainty of Europeans and Muslims. Some Limbas have come into direct contact with Christian missionaries[1] and others have heard indirectly that the Europeans have "seen Kanu", and are greatly impressed by this. They

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1. In particular through the American Wesleyan Mission stations.

also admire the Muslims, of whom they have had longer experience, through the Muslim peoples who have travelled or settled in and near their country,[1] and accept their claims to authority in religious matters. Limbas like to ask a Muslim (a "moriman") to make them charms and prophecies, and are impressed by the learning of those who can read the Koran. This attitude comes out particularly clearly in stories[2] where the destiny of the white man is said to be read, that of the Fula (i.e. Muslim) to have the "Marabou" or Muslim writings, and that of the Limba to tend his rice, in ignorance of the wisdom of Fula and European. In contrasting themselves to these other people the Limba are quite open about their own ignorance of Kanu. "Perhaps some people have seen Kanu, but we have not". One old man in one of the larger towns[3] said ponderingly "We Limba do not know Kanu as you Europeans do; but we know the dead (fureni) which perhaps you do not know. We know

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1. Fula, Susu and Mandingo.

2. e.g. Limbas, Fulas and Europeans; cf. Koto and Yemi; The white and black brothers.

3. Kabala, a District Headquarters, where there are both a few missionaries and many Muslim and other foreign traders or settlers.

the dead very well ..." Kanu, they assume, is inaccessible to them and it is for this reason that they often pray primarily to their own dead who they know to love and care for them and stay near them; their own dead can then perhaps, they vaguely assume, communicate with Kanu on their behalf. The Limba recognise that Kanu is the same for all the peoples they have encountered, including the Muslims and the Christians, and they are prepared to believe that these other peoples, in this respect superior to the Limba, are able to see Kanu. So a Limba may, when asked, quite positively assert the universality of Kanu. "We do not know Kanu, only the name; but Kanu is one for the whole earth. We do not see him, we only imagine (simɔkɔ) ... perhaps it was Kanu who made the earth at the beginning and the people. If we cry, we call on Kanu; if someone is ill, or dead we say e Kanu. But we don't know him".

The main point, then, that emerges from explicit statements by the Limba is that Kanu is far away and not comprehended by men. They, in turn, have no control over him though they may use his name in grief or pain as well as in wonder, and invoke Kanu in

conjunction with the dead in sacrifice and prayer.

In addition to this, a further consideration of their actions and statements in the light of what has already been discussed may make it possible to elucidate another facet of the Limba attitude to _Kanu_ which is implicit in their outlook and practice.

The Limba conceive of _Kanu_ as in some sense behind everything, ultimately responsible for all that happens, both good and bad. This is inherent in the common phrase already mentioned "by grace of _Kanu_" (_thɔkɔ ba Kanu_), and in the Limba citations of _Kanu_'s name in especially intense situations, or in their assertion that "everything is _Kanu_" or "the power of _Kanu_ is great". This also comes out indirectly in many other everyday remarks.

Kanu is often spoken of as the ultimate cause of an event or situation even where there are known also to be other proximate causes over which men do have control. So, for example, one young Limba described how he had fallen from a palm tree and badly hurt himself when his climbing strap broke; since then, he said, he had always carefully inspected his strap and

if it was at all frayed he made himself a new one: "Since then I have not fallen; Kanu has helped me too. For even if you are very careful and you make the strap very well, if Kanu does not help you, you will fall. But you must look to your strap as well". Similarly a man should make all the proper offerings to the dead or spirits, and work hard on his farm; without that he cannot obtain a good harvest; but even if he performs all that is requisite "unless Kanu helps him the rice will not be much". Whether a man will do well or badly in his search for wealth, wives or mastery of a craft depends not only on his own efforts but, ultimately, on Kanu. When a man sets a trap, "if Kanu agrees" he catches an animal in it. The human precautions and actions are necessary for success but in themselves they are not sufficient for "it is all to Kanu." It is Kanu ultimately who decides what will happen to people - "his power is great - some people can build houses while others have nothing", and "it is Kanu who tells a man what to think in his heart".

Kanu then is ultimately responsible for everything, both particular events, and, as described below, the institutions and existence of mankind in general. In

addition to this he is also sometimes said to know and see everything that happens. When, for example, a "swear"[1] is laid, Kanu knows for "if we speak, he hears". When men sacrifice and lay their caps crossways on their heads to show their respect, "Kanu sees us, we don't see him"; and if you tell a lie "Kanu looks at you" (Kanu nεki yi). "Kanu is in the sky; he lives there; he sees us quite clearly in the light (i.e. in the world), all of us".

When such remarks are made about what we would call the omnipotence or omniscience of Kanu, the point for the Limba who say or hear this is not to describe some abstract quality of Kanu (as might be the purpose in a European context), but rather relates to the specific situation of the moment, and is a comment on that. To say, for example, that the successful acquisition of chiefship ultimately depends on Kanu over and above all human preparations may mean various things according to the context and circumstances of the remark: that a man ultimately receives chiefship from Kanu and not from himself, and so, since he is chief only by Kanu's will, should not act irresponsibly or break the rules implicitly approved by Kanu; that

1. On swears see p.288 below.

it is only Kanu and not man who can decide the time of the chief's death that marks the end of his chiefship;[1] or, as often, to remind the chief that man's efforts, even his own, are never certain and that the future remains unpredictable and out of his control. This sort of remark, then, serves the purpose of pointing to the general and universal element in some single situation, and of recalling the wider aspects of the particular event in which an individual is concerned. It is as a comment on an aspect of this world rather than on the nature of some supreme supernatural being that a statement about Kanu is often to be understood.

The phrase "it is Kanu" may therefore be used to imply something about the place of man and his particular actions in the wider scheme of things, sub specie aeternitatis as it were. As well as this it also often has the connotation that this is the right way for things to be. Kanu is sometimes spoken of as a kind of justification for something. A particular form of action is in this way related to some general

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1. The neighbouring Temne are said to kill their chiefs to end their rule. The Limba contrast themselves to this, declaring that they always "leave them to Kanu".

moral attitude approved by Kanu. I was told, for example, that it was wrong to ask for payment for plaiting another woman's hair; if you do ask then "you will meet her before Kanu - it is wrong"; or, when the Limba habit of "begging"[1] was being explained and justified, "the other will agree (to desist from his anger) when begged, since he looks to Kanu. It is wrong not to give in to begging - Kanu comes to us all. 'Looking to Kanu' - that means agreeing to the beg". Occasionally Kanu is even spoken of in a moralising tone as if of a direct agent helping an individual and rewarding right action; "if you do good now, Kanu will help you" or "Kanu helps a man who helps the chief". The duty of a son to help his father in the farm is explicitly asserted through the description: "if you forget your father, Kanu says "Why did you forget?', asking you. You go through hardship to bear and bring up a child. When he has grown a bit he should think of you". In these assertions too the point seems not a statement about any direct personal or particularised interference by Kanu in the world below but rather some generalisation

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1. See chap. 6.

about human potentialities or duties.

More often Kanu is explicitly mentioned as the one responsible for some important Limba institution on which a speaker wishes to comment, or to praise as right and natural. Traditionally the Limba have no women chiefs, I was told, because "Kanu made it like that". It was Kanu too who showed mankind housebuilding so that they could live in villages and be fully human - "if not, we would only have been like animals". It was ultimately Kanu who showed mankind how to grow their rice, and Kanu not any human being that said that men must not marry within the forbidden degrees.

The instituting of certain customs by Kanu is described in some of the stories.[1] Kanu is depicted as coming down onto the earth in the old days and beginning the customs and values of Limba society. He gave them the cycle of the farming year, showed them how to cook their food and tap palm wine, and taught them how to exercise their strength and skill. He travelled round to find a wise and hospitable man to hold the chiefship,

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1. See especially the ~~first~~ second group of stories in chap. 9.

and laid down the different locations and destinies of the peoples on earth. As discussed later[1] such stories could be regarded as in a sense about the wider dimension or justification of the present rather than a definitive description of certain events in an exact and chronologically defined past. For a Limba, an account of some institution would not necessarily have to start from its historical beginnings at some fixed point in time but is concerned with its purpose and nature rather than its historical origin. Thus chiefship was introduced by *Kanu* to show generosity to the poor and homeless and the present chief should always be kind and hospitable. For the Limba the moral of the story or its success in amusing or enthralling the audience is normally of more interest than any information about a chronological series of events in the past. *Kanu* in the stories is not envisaged as a "culture hero" or "mythical figure" who at a specific past date came down and in some systematic way performed a series of related acts in the world directed to ordering Limba society, nor are the acts which *do* come into the stories universally known or

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1. See chap. 7, esp. sect. 2a.

recounted by people as a body of knowledge about Kanu, nor related with awe or piety by the present generation. The place of Kanu in the stories is quite different from this. He appears sometimes as merely one character among several, perhaps in the narration of some amusing or exciting tale, sometimes as a term which gives force to the generalising commentary on present affairs inherent in the story.

Kanu is also sometimes spoken of as a creator, though there seem very few stories that touch on this.[1]

> "Kanu made everything there is - people, the women's and men's societies, everything that is in the bush, the animals, rice, palm wine, palm oil, he made them flow in the palm tree so that it would come out and be sold to the Syrians, and taken to England as oil - Kanu made it".

Just as with Kanu's instituting of social customs described above, creation by Kanu does not seem to imply that at a fixed point in past time Kanu is believed to have created the world from nothing. In the first place, his act is never described as happening at any specific time in the past which could be regarded as the set beginning. Secondly, the word used here for this

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1. The beginning of marriage.

creation is either *leheni*, to fix or order (*lit.* to make good) rather than begin from nothing or, more often, *fungutu*, bring out. It is usually said, not that *Kanu made* man, but that he "brought them out" (*fungutu bia*), apparently in the sense of bringing them out into the light of day, making them conspicuous, giving them a particular form; this word is basically the same as that used in the stories in such phrases as "a man came out" (*wa na funge nde*) where there is no implication that he came or was produced from nothing. Occasionally in the stories *Kanu* is vaguely referred to as having "borne us" (*kie mina*), but this is an unusual expression in everyday conversation. Generally the distinction is made that "*Kanu* brought us out in the old days, but the dead bore us". What is being alluded to in such remarks is in fact little more than the general belief, already discussed, that *Kanu* is responsible for the existence and qualities of everything in the world, both particular events, social institutions whose purpose and value can be emphasised in a given situation by explicitly reminding hearers that it originated from *Kanu*, and, finally and in a general way, for the whole world and everything in it. "We don't know *Kanu*, but *Kanu* brought us out, he owns us all".

Besides this general responsibility for all that exists and happens in the world, _Kanu_ is also said to have a special and direct responsibility for conception and birth and, often, for death.

In the birth and rearing of their children the Limba have only too frequent occasion to observe human powerlessness, and they are often led to speak of _Kanu_'s power in this context. In this context _Kanu_ seems to be conceived of as acting in a causal sense as distinct from the more generalised responsibility discussed above. It is _Kanu_ who causes (_ni_ - _lit_. makes, acts) children to be born, and thus makes human beings. He is the real cause underlying conception and birth. "He places the child in the womb" and gives it breath and life; "it is not the dead but _Kanu_ who puts the heart in you; he puts the heart into the child in the belly ... we don't know how. _Kanu_ makes it".

Part of what is meant by this description of _Kanu_'s action is the familiar point that _Kanu_ is responsible for everything - "without _Kanu_ you can do nothing" - but there is also the further meaning that in the case of child-bearing which is one of the things the Limba are greatly concerned for, they are in the last analysis

particularly helpless. In this context more than others they recognise that they cannot predict or direct. Whether or not any couple succeed in bearing a child is unforeseeable and uncontrollable, and depends on _Kanu_, something beyond human comprehension.

> "Some have no children; what _Kanu_ has said, you cannot reject. With other things you can make efforts to get them. But with a child, only _Kanu_ can help you. It is not the dead that stop you getting a child, for the dead like children to be born; but _Kanu_ may forbid it, it is _Kanu_ that says everything".

Even after conception and birth _Kanu_ for a while is still all-important. A very young baby is held solely "by grace of _Kanu_", and it is only later when it is a little grown and "can walk, see and hear, even talk, that it is a proper Limba". So in the uncertainties of birth and early childhood, when the Limba have observed many children fail to live, _Kanu_ is presumed to play a very significant part, and (in this situation) there is special occasion to refer to his power or mention his name.

For death too _Kanu_ is held particularly responsible. This is expressed both in a general attribution to _Kanu_ of all death, and in reference to some particular kinds of death as distinct from others. It should be already

clear from the Limba exclamations and references to _Kanu_ in the situation of death that he is especially closely connected with this extreme eventuality and is in this situation very present in people's minds. _Kanu_ is also explicitly connected with death in a peculiarly intimate way. He is held directly responsible for all death even where there are also other causes, such as witchcraft, for _Kanu_ it is said, will not let a witch succeed if this is against his will. When a close relative dies, people try to comfort the survivors by reminding them that "_Kanu_ owns us all", recalling to them the fact that _Kanu_ causes both birth and the death that is bound to come to all; "_Kanu_ brought us out and also kills us"; "in this way _Kanu_ is good, but _Kanu_ is bad".

Generally, Limba say that they cannot know about the process of death for "it is _Kanu_". But occasionally an individual is prepared to try to give some further explanatory account of what he imagines to happen in death.

> "When you die it is your heart that _Kanu_ kills, that is where the life is. _Kanu_ put the heart in you. But he does not take the heart away, when you are buried it is still there".

Another man pictures it in a different way:

"When you are ready to die, Kanu takes hold of you, but you won't know. He says - when your life ends - he says 'today you die'. He brings sickness, a little only. You will feel your body all sore. Then your head begins to be sore. You will say 'Ah I, I can feel my body all throbbing (na meremere), my head is sore'. It is sore, your body is all sore. Then he, Kanu, he finishes your life. You die, Kanu has come for you. Kanu comes for us, claiming a debt. It is as if I come to you and borrow, say, £1 or a cow; after much time I ask for it back, and you come and bring it. That is how it is with Kanu. He takes back the life in the end, only you cannot know. Kanu gives life in the beginning; he is helped by the dead, but Kanu is more, he owns the Limba (i.e. human beings), he gives them life and breath".

This account, though characteristic of the Limba attitude to Kanu, would be recognised as a kind of literary and imaginative statement rather than an accepted dogma.

Kanu then is said to have a close connection with all human death. But he is also in some contexts spoken of as being only one among several possible causes of death which are mutually exclusive. The Limba believe that though Kanu is responsible for all death, from another point of view there are four possible causes of any one death: from a "swear", a spirit, witchcraft,[1] or Kanu. If an old person dies, they say, there is nothing unnatural about this for it is

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1. All more fully discussed in section 3 below.

only what one might expect. Therefore "it is Kanu". But with a younger person's death some other agency may have been involved. After every death, a diviner is consulted to discover its cause. If he says "it is Kanu" then no further action need be taken and no further complications expected. But if it is attributed to a witch, spirit or "swear", then further action not only can but often must be taken, either to exact compensation from the murderer or to protect the rest of the family from the contagion resulting from the death.

The implication seems to be that any death brought by Kanu is what we would call a "natural" one, and no further causes need be sought, this is in contrast to the cases where there is thought to have been human interference with the natural order - someone has used witchcraft, laid a swear, or given the dead man to a spirit. These deaths are therefore caused by another's interference.

Kanu therefore is from one point of view regarded as a direct cause of death, as when an old man, or occasionally a younger one, dies "from Kanu" and not from a human. Part of what this means is that, from another point of view, there has been no cause. That

is, that there has been no known human interference with the natural course of events, and no further measures to be taken in connection with the death.

This use of the term Kanu to indicate that something is natural, unimpeded, unaffected by human activity, also occurs in some other contexts. That no human has taken a part is implied in such phrases as "Kanu taught that diviner; but the other diviner learnt from his father", or "it was Kanu who showed me how to tune the kulikitha stringed instrument" (i.e. "I tune it by ear and intuition and not according to any formalised system taught to me by another person). "It is Kanu" may also mean that no other human being has a prior right or responsibility. When someone says "it is Kanu who plants the yams" the meaning is that since they grow wild in the bush, anyone who wishes to dig for them may gather and eat them. In a similar way people complain of the way their rice is now eaten by cattle belonging to the passing Fulas, saying that "before it was only Kanu's animals" that destroyed the rice, that is, the wild animals who had always come there, whom "Kanu called out from the bush"; that, they imply, was only natural, but the new source of destruction is due to human activity

and may perhaps be removed in the same way, by law cases or trying to expel the Fula. Connected with this is the way in which it is sometimes implied that Kanu is the originator of all that is natural as distinct from the more recent innovations introduced by men, especially the white men. In one formulation this was explicitly stated:

> "Kanu made everything - water, earth, the animals in the bush, rice, the palm tree; but the Europeans make cloth, salt, food. The Europeans have spirits to help them ... yet they are not able to put in breath [i.e. give life] - only Kanu is able".

There are, then, many themes implicit in Limba references to Kanu, both in spontaneous exclamations or in the more considered but still tentative replies evoked by some query. Which theme is in mind depends above all on the situation which calls it forth. For the Limba these themes are never formulated in a systematic contextless abstract theology which could be stated neatly by the foreign student, nor are they interested in expressing them in this form. Even the stories ostensibly about Kanu are often concerned either to entertain or to set out some truth about human society or circumstances rather than to describe Kanu himself. Therefore to try to give some logical account of, say, the "Limba concept of the nature and powers of God" would be to

twist the evidence. All I have attempted to do in this section is, as far as possible following or quoting the Limba terminology, to allude to various implications apparently inherent in the statements they make concerning Kanu and describe the situations in which they refer to Kanu and what, in each case, they may mean by this. If we put it in our terms we could say that a reference to Kanu may do several things: it may postulate a particular explanation, or lack of explanation; it may claim that something is natural or traditional or right; it may suggest that something is beyond human powers of control of prediction; or it may point to the wider aspect inherent in some particular situation.

Kanu, the Limba imply, is the ultimate originator and upholder of everything in the world, he knows everything that happens on earth, he is universal to all mankind. Yet he is inaccessible, far away from mankind, up in the sky. Though they may pray and sacrifice to him jointly with the dead they are sceptical about his response, unless "perhaps the dead can tell him". He is beyond human beings, unknowable and uncontrollable, yet responsible for everything, above all for life and death and everything that is natural.

It is this concept of Kanu, then, which the Limba use in the particular situations in which they wish to refer to him - sometimes to express sympathy or blessing or to assign a cause when they do not know or do not wish to think of any other; to recall some angry or despairing fellow human to a sense of proportion in disaster; to express the accepted Limba diffidence and awareness of ignorance before disastrous or tragic or wonderful events; to drive home some moral by invoking the agency or wishes of Kanu; using him as a character in a story to amuse or to convey some lesson; and above all, in the detached and resigned manner so characteristic of the Limba, to express their awareness of the irony or tragedy of human affairs, the way in which their individual joys or sorrows form part of a whole common to all mankind. Where we would say "such is life" or "that is the way of the world", the Limba would say, with sad resignation, or affectionate irony or even an amused shrug, "it is Kanu". Though in the stories Kanu is so explicitly personified, the aspect of personification is not one that, in everyday life and speech, is constantly stressed. The Limba attitude about Kanu must be looked for not just in the entertaining or moralising stories about him, but in their common

references to him by which they set their individual actions and situations in a wider context.

2. The dead.

Although *Kanu* is admitted to be the one ultimately responsible for everything, in any Limba village there are in fact more references to be heard to the dead than to *Kanu*. Sacrifices and prayers are made specifically "calling the dead" (*yongong fureni be*), the traditional ways are "what we found from the ancient people" (the dead), and men speak of their ancestors as being near them, caring for them, and accessible to their prayers. They are in the village in contrast to *Kanu* who is far away in the sky, inaccessible to humans.

In the stories there are few references to "the dead". Nevertheless I intend to treat briefly of Limba actions and statements concerning the ancestors, partly because they could not be omitted from any attempt at a systematic account of Limba religion, partly to explain why it is that in spite of their central importance in every aspect of life, they yet would seem to occur so little in the stories.

The term that I have translated as "the dead" or, occasionally, as "the ancestors", is the Limba fureni be (sing. fure wo)[1] or, especially in the northern dialects, betiɔ be, (lit. the old ones). Limba who are asked about the meaning of these words, which occur frequently in conversation in reference to sacrifices, prayers or charms, often reply not with a description of their nature or acts, but with a statement about the details of death and burial - "and that is what 'fureni' means". I shall therefore follow this Limba mode of procedure and begin with a brief description of certain aspects of death and burial.

In the normal course of events a man, passing through the usual stages of the life cycle - birth, initiation, marriage, building his own house, becoming the respected father of a family - gradually as he ages acquires more prestige and influence within his village. His words have weight in the "speaking" of cases before the chief, and he has attributed to him the wisdom and authority always associated with old age. He is surrounded by "his people" - his children and followers - and these

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1. Possibly cognate with furu, a breeze, and various forms from the root fur - meaning to sleep, spend the night etc.

show him respect and come daily to greet him, work for him or, presenting some small token gift, beg for his help or support.

Then his time comes to die - "Kanu has come for him". Messengers are sent to the farms and neighbouring villages to inform his relatives and affines of the death. The chief is formally told of the event, and in the evening the women of the household file into the village in a long line with both hands on their heads as sign of mourning. They half-sing half-wail, and when they reach the chief or the house of the death, they throw themselves on the ground to express the agony of their grief. The men raise and comfort them, and themselves fire guns to show their sorrow. The women circle round the corpse singing mourning songs while the men dig the grave. The corpse is then carried out and buried by members of the same sex. The funeral ceremonies of a grown man are accompanied by the special dances and songs of the secret men's society, and its spirit, Gbanggba, while the women are strictly confined to their huts. A woman is buried with their Bondo society rituals. The graves are traditionally within or adjoining the village[1]

1. The British authorities encouraged graveyards outside the villages, but in many of the smaller and more remote villages, the dead are still buried in or directly adjacent to the village itself.

An important elder is regularly buried in the middle of the round compound of huts, others are buried near their own homes; an important chiefly line sometimes has a special burial place to one side of the village.

After a few weeks the site of the grave is not clearly distinguishable but the name of the dead man is remembered by his children and dependants, specially if he was an elder. They make offerings to him in the compound just in front of their own huts. This is thought to be the general location of the buried dead, and one of the ways of honouring the dead is said to be to keep the compound clean and hoed.

The first ceremonies are made on the grave itself. In the "3 day" and the "7 day" sacrifices the dead man is called on, and often a hen or possibly a goat is sacrificed on the grave. Later, for the "40 day" and the final "memorial" ceremony, the prayers and rituals are made anywhere in the compound without special reference to the exact site of the grave. In these later rites, the other dead too are calledoon.

At the 40 day ceremony all the children of the dead man should ideally be present as should all close relations by blood or marriage. For an important elder's ceremony visitors come from other villages, animals are slaughtered

and there is feasting and dancing. The memorial ceremony (huboka lit., mourning, wailing) is an even bigger affair, only performed for important or wealthy people, most often men. It takes place anything from about two to about ten years after the death. During that time he has been given offerings and prayers in just the same way as the other dead, but a son always feels a certain measure of "shame" if he cannot perform this ceremony for his father. He and his brothers or uncles need several years to accumulate the rice and cattle necessary to feed and present to the great hordes of visitors that crowd into the village for this important three day ceremony. The leading dancers from the area are all there, long moralising speeches are made by elders, and a sacrifice, usually of at least a goat, sometimes of many cattle, is performed in the centre of the compound. The oldest among the local elders calls on "the old old people" by name, and prays for peace and health. After the slaughter, which "the dead know and are glad for", the meat is distributed and the dancing continues.

This then is the process by which a man becomes integrated with the other dead, and the terms in which the meaning of the word fureni is described. As far as

accounts of the dead go, these often stop at the burial of the man, or at the 3- or 7-day ceremonies, when the dead person is sometimes said to reach katile, the indefinite place where the dead are. "Katile is when a person dies and is buried in the ground - that is what we mean by katile". By the time these small scale ceremonies have been performed, therefore, and even before the larger gatherings of the 40-day ceremony and the optional memorial ceremony come to be held, the dead man has already come to be regarded as one among the other dead, to be invoked and sacrificed to collectively with them, his name now added to theirs. The process is therefore in a sense a gradual one, and there seems to be no explicit clear cut theory about just exactly how long after death a man becomes fully one of the fureni. What is clear is that the Limba regard the dead not as a special class of distinct supernatural beings as opposed to mankind but as human beings who are now dead and buried, and who are the oldest of all; since they are old and "no longer in the light" they now receive offerings and prayers. But unlike the "spirits" discussed later, they are not a separate category of spiritual beings with some secret mode of existence completely other than humanity.

The Limba lay more stress on the basically human attributes of the dead than on any speculation about the kind of world they now live in beyond the grave, or on any imagined spiritual qualities appertaining to their changed nature. This is clear both from general descriptions and rituals and from explicit statements about this aspect. "The dead are Limbas", "they are us", "they bore us and taught us, for they are the old old people who were in the light in the old days", "of course they love us - does a father not love his children?".

There are many ways in which the dead are assumed to be fundamentally like the living, that is, "those who are now in the light". The dead, who are the oldest of all, like respect and greetings from their dependants just as does any old man during his lifetime; if the dead are forgotten and not "begged" or given food by their children, then, like any father, they are angry and must be asked for pardon. Being older, they are therefore wiser than other peoples they know everything that happens, but must yet be formally "told" about important events such as the arrival of a new wife in the compound, entering a new house for the first time, or the visit of an important stranger; they must be told in very much the same way that a living chief or

elder should be formally notified of important events (even though he may already know of them unofficially), the formal words often being accompanied by a token gift "to give them weight". A formal statement to the dead is similarly accompanied by an offering, the sacrifice.

Besides making statements, the Limba also pray to the dead, theteke. This is a term also used in other, non-religious, contexts, for example for the formal apology in a law case, and for the process of entreating a chief or elder for help or support. Prayers to the dead are thus in some ways regarded as basically like entreaties used among living people, and do not necessarily have the connotation, often implied in the English word "pray", of supplication to a spiritual power or powers utterly removed in nature and activity from the man who prays.

Another obvious way in which the Limba attitude to the dead resembles that to the living is the great respect everywhere paid to age. All "the dead" are, collectively, older than those now on earth; they are therefore automatically wiser, as all old men are wiser, and, in their wisdom, have handed down the traditional ways to their children. Just as men on earth are not

all equal for those who are old are likely to be able to speak wisely and have many people around them, they are the ones who gain a name (keng) and receive honour (yiki), so too among the dead some have special honour because they died whenalready old, leaving children to remember their names.[1] It is these names which are pronounced in prayers to the dead. A younger man's name is soon forgotten except by those of his own household, and unless he has left children he will not be prayed to. In a big sacrifice for the whole village only those who have been village chiefs or elders near the chief are named in the prayer.

"The dead" then, though often used to mean all those who have died, sometimes refers primarily to those who are known and remembered in prayers and sacrifices; it is even sometimes said that children and young people cannot become fureni for they are not truly "old people". In the same way the names of women are not so frequently included in the prayers, except within the women's

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1. In practice only chiefly lines are remembered by name beyond two or three generations.

society. Women are in general considered less able to speak wisely than men[1] and they do not collect round them the numbers of people that can be acquired by the polygynous head of a household. In addition, since Limba society is patrilineal and marriage patrilocal, those who are most closely associated with the village in that they are both born and buried there and leave their own children there to remember them, are the men, not the women. The men have direct ties both with those who came before them in the village, and with those who will follow them. It is they who when they are old become the important _fureni_ of the village, and they who, in life, utter the prayers; "they are near to the _fureni_, for they are old and will soon be _fureni_; they are old and know the names of the old ones".

It is, then, the old men, especially household heads, who, when they die, are regarded as the _fureni_, the "old people" who are due honour and offerings and who have the power to reply to the begging of their children. However there is one further exception to be made. It is not only young people and women who are not usually remembered, but anyone who is known to have died a witch, whether old or young, man or woman, is not included among the dead in prayer. A witch is said

1. See chap. 3 pp. 164ff

to be rejected even by the dead themselves, and is buried with ignominy and disgrace to show that he is disowned by the living. Dead witches are an object of fear, for their death may involve the living too in their contagion, and precautions are taken against them when they are dead, just as precautions are taken against living witches and a persistent offender expelled from the village.

The dead are not objects of fear or awe merely in that they are dead. As with living people, they are occasionally angry or malignant, but just as in normal life there are recognised ways in which to understand and cope with these situations, so too this is possible, in similar ways, with the dead. In general the dead are regarded as those who help and favour their children in the same way as chief or father should help and be responsible for his dependants.

In these ways the dead are assimilated to the living, not conceived of as beings of an entirely different nature from humans. They are in the village and "near us", unlike _Kanu_ who is inaccessible in the sky, or the unpredictable and fallible spirits in the bush.

This relates directly to what is perhaps the most

important characteristic of the dead in Limba eyes. They are accessible to people. It is possible for the living to communicate with them directly, and for them to reply to questions, signify that they have accepted an offering, and even appear spontaneously to their children in dreams. Much of Limba religious thought and practice is founded on this implicit assumption about the constant nearness of the dead; they will always listen to their children's prayers even though they are now hidden in the dark grave and "we in the light can no longer see them".

In the first place, the dead sometimes appear in dreams, and are seen by their descendants, something quite inconceivable in the case of Kanu. One of the dead, they say, may himself come in a dream, sometimes to give his son authority to drum or sing or exercise some skill. At other times he may complain that he is being forgotten and demand some sacrifice or indicate some coming fortune or misfortune. This way in which the dead, though buried and gone, can yet contact the living and continue effective through their descendants, was summed up by one old man who was prepared to try to theorise about the action of the dead.

> "Kanu brought us out. After long, we die and become a fure. The fureni - that is, the body

> [kupati, lit. earth, clay] is rotted in the earth; but the power to act [huni ha, lit. the acting; the abstract verbal noun from ni, do, act, make] comes in a dream. You will never again see the fureni. But when you sleep the fureni come round you. When you wake, they have gone. But they speak in the dream".

In the ritual and artistic expression too the dead are said sometimes to inspire a man directly, provided he is duly trained and performing on the required occasion. Thus it is the dead who inspire a man to sing the weeding song; he may not be able to think of the words when at home in the village, but in the farm while the women are weeding "the dead tell me it. They told me in a dream and also in my own heart (i.e. while in the farm); if I forget a bit while I am singing, the dead tell me. Kanu helps only a little. He does not know how to sing the song for weeding, but the dead are able to sing it". Similarly a smith who has learnt the right words and actions for preparing the medicine for certain rituals may at the set time momentarily forget the procedure, but "provided you are a smith, the dead tell you in your heart if you forget a little; other people just forget".

As well as direct contact with the dead through dreams and inspiration "in the heart", it is also possible to communicate with the dead through divination.

The most common ways are by casting lots (kola nuts) and testing a fowl with rice. If the halves of the split kola nuts fall with the flat side uppermost, this is said to mean that the dead agree, "they say yes"; if the round side, the answer is negative. The test with fowls usually accompanies the casting of lots; if the hens eat the offered rice, this also means that the dead agree, but if, as sometimes happens, the hens refuse, then the dead have also refused. This kind of divination is often part of a larger ritual; it is used, for example, to decide the right ground for action when releasing someone from a swear, or in the course of the masiang ceremony which discovers a dead witch and frees the living from his actions. In both these ceremonies the ritual preparation of liquid leaf medicine (mafoi) and the formal questioning of the dead through kola and fowl are prerequisites for real contact with the dead. In practice the questioner often merely continues to test until he reaches an affirmative answer, bound to occur sooner or later. As the Limba express this - "if the dead do not agree at once, the sacrificer bows down and begs them, yandi, yandi, yandi,[1] so that they will

1. The usual word of entreaty used for mollifying a person's anger or begging for some favour.

agree". The theory is quite explicit: it is the dead themselves who answer through the media of the kolas and the hens. This point is perhaps best expressed in an account given by an expert.

> "When you make a masiang ceremony, you split a kola to ask who is the witch. You give the names of the dead. Then if the kolas fall flat up, then that man is the witch. If not, not. With the hen too, you ask with it. If he is the witch, then the hen eats the rice quickly. But if he is not a witch, they refuse to eat. It is the leaves[1] and the dead that make the hen know, because the hen is near to the dead; the hen hears them. If the dead say 'don't eat' they refuse. But if the dead say 'eat' then they eat quickly quickly quickly quickly ... the leaves hear them, the leaves tell the hen to eat ... If he was a witch the hen eats the rice quickly. If he was not a witch, the hen will not eat."

In this way, through the hen, kolas and leaves, the living can learn the truth from those who are dead, and by this gain their authority for what is to be done. In a rather similar way the dead are said to signify their acceptance of an offering by sending vultures to pick at the remains of a sacrificial animal, or small ants to nibble at the gift of rice-flour. The vultures and ants always come. Thus the dead always give a sign to the living of their continued approval and care. Just as a father or a chief both accepts and approves the words and token gifts given him by his juniors, so too

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1. The leaves used to make the mafɔi medicine which plays an important part in the ceremony.

the dead approve the formal statements and offerings made by their children.

The most important way in which the living contact the dead has yet to be discussed. This is prayer and sacrifice to the dead. The living bring some offering to the dead and beg for peace and health for themselves and their children; they ask for a "cool spirit" or "cool heart", for freedom from war and quarrelling, from witchcraft and anger, and from all the physical and moral disasters that flow from these.[1]

Such offerings may take many different forms. I have already referred briefly to the ceremonies at the burial rites of individuals, at first performed for the single dead man, finally in conjunction with the other dead of the village in the larger-scale 40-day and memorial ceremonies when many visitors come and the whole village takes part.

A similar pattern of wider and narrower scale ceremonies is apparent in all Limba sacrifice to the dead. Sometimes the offerings are at a personal or household level, such as an attempt to deal with some

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1. On "cool spirit" see further in section 3 below.

sickness or misfortune prophesied by a diviner by asking the dead ancestors of that particular household for peace and aid; this kind of sacrifice is performed just outside his hut by the oldest man of the household on behalf of all the others there and usually involves the offering of rice-flour or the killing of a fowl. Apart from the set burial ceremonies and a few special occasions such as a marriage in the household, initiation, or the beginning of certain phases of the farming year, when the dead are formally "told" about the event, there are not prescribed times for such sacrifices, but they are performed in response to some particular fortune or misfortune or when the household head thinks fit. It is not good to neglect the dead too long. At another level, the dead are sometimes jointly invoked by all those belonging to a wider kin group (hungpo hunthe),[1] perhaps to help to free them from the effect of a "swear" or action by a witch. The various farming activities of the year are initiated by prayer and sacrifice at a

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1. i.e. the joint family of those living together in a compound, often of 6 or 7 huts; it may also include those connected by ties of marriage or fictitious kinship. Ideally the group has a common grandfather or greatgrandfather.

household, or sometimes a compound, level. ~~On a wider scale again, a sacrifice~~ is some~~times a compound, level~~. On a wider scale again, a sacrifice is sometimes made for the whole village or the whole chiefdom. This is quite likely to happen about once a year but there is no fixed rule. The immediate occasion may be some special disaster or success, the accession of the new chief, an accidental homicide, or at the suggestion of some diviner. It is most likely to take place in the dry season when food and wine are more plentiful. In all these sacrifice, of whatever scale, the prayer is always the same; it is directed towards the dead and asks for a "cool spirit" - peace and health.

A description of the conduct of one such chiefdom[1] sacrifice will give some idea of the sort of ritual and prayers involved. In this case the particular occasion for the sacrifice was that a young man of the chiefdom had been accidentally shot by his companion as they came back together from the farm. The sacrifice -

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1. Strictly now a sub-chiefdom, amalgamated 1950, but still regarding itself as self-sufficent in some ways. The Paramount Chief of the amalgamated chiefdom was also present, as were some of the chiefs of the other ex-chiefdoms which now are sub-divisions of the new bigger unit.

"a sacrifice because of a gun" - was so that they could pray to the dead to avert such disasters in the future and to give them peace. People had all been told in advance when the sacrifice was to be made, and on the day representatives came from the main villages and sub-sections of the chiefdom. They brought gifts of kola nuts, palm wine and money for the chief as their contribution to the sacrifice. Long formal speeches of thanks and appreciation were given by the chief and his elders aswell as by the visitors. There was also a prolonged discussion of the particular occasion for the sacrifice. The local hunters had been specially summoned and as part of the formal discussion the chief and elders reminded them all jointly to be careful, and remember that "a gun can kill a man". Part of the formal speaking also included some investigation of the history of other members of the dead man's family and the suggestion that so many early deaths might be due to the operation of a "swear"; it was decided to look into this matter fully later. At one point in the proceedings the mother of the dead boy came and lay on the chief's verandah, weeping and singing mourning songs for her son. The chief made a long speech to her in sympathy saying that now a gun had killed her only son; but she

was not to think that she was left all alone, for there were others by her; let her remember that her son was well blessed for many people had come to gather in one place for his sake. "You see on earth here - if someone is shot, it is what Kanu said. Even if he had not been shot he would sometime have died. But since Kanu said 'here he is', so he is dead, thus he died now; thus it was said by Kanu".

The long discussions and speech-making are a normal part of the preliminaries to the sacrifice, and a necessary formality. Meanwhile the sacrificial ox had been tethered nearby. After the speeches were over, the young men present, representatives of the various villages or household, were sent to drag the ox in, its legs bound together. It was laid down in the centre of the compound with its neck facing to the east, the customary direction.

Then the prayer was made, invoking Kanu and, in more detail, the important dead of the village and chiefdom by their names.[1] All the men crouched down

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1. The named dead of the central village of a chiefdom are normally also regarded as those most important to the chiefdom as a whole. Many of the heads of sub-sections or satellite villages of the chiefdom are members of the chief's family which springs from the central village.

and stretched out their right (or both) hands towards the animal. The oldest man held out his hands to the ox and prayed on behalf of all there, prompted and seconded by the chief, with some muttered repetition of the names and central formulae by some of the older men.

His prayer went roughly as follows.

"Attention Kanu! Attention you dead! (Ka bari Kanu, ka bari beng do fureni be) You Kongkong, you Sithane, you Singko, you Korombo, you Salifu, you Sanghang. May we have peace (thɛbina lima). The bad thing that came to us, may we not see it again. You Kanu, may we have peace; you the dead, may we have peace. That is why we are making a sacrifice. A man will not make a sacrifice to twist his neck upright [i.e. to live]. That is why we make sacrifice. Wherever people go - everything that is bad, may we miss it on the road as we go. Since Kanu said we should make this sacrifice today - so if one goes to the left, if one goes to the right, may he gain peace. If people go up, if they go down, may they gain peace. If there is anything that remains [to be said], you the dead, what remains, may you complete it for me; you Kanu, all that remains for me [to say], may you now complete it for me. That is the word - wherever the people go, may they be at peace. By grace of the dead. Longtha, longtha, longtha".

When the prayer was finished, all stood up and the ox's throat was cut. When the death agonies were over, the young men as representatives of their various villages skinned and cut up the carcass. The meat was carefully shared out under the supervision of one

of the elders, making sure that each village received a due portion of meat. The chief received his special share from the chest and one of the legs. Some of the meat was cooked on the spot so people could eat and dance, and the rest distributed to be taken back to each village, thus formally associating it with the sacrifice that had taken place.

Any big sacrifice, whether for chiefdom, sub-chiefdom or whole village, follows much the same pattern; the formal speeches and presentations; the joint prayer; and the killing and sharing out of the animal. The details may vary, and, apart from a few set formulae at beginning and end, the prayer differs according to the occasion of the sacrifice. But the principles and general framework remain the same.

Sacrifices also take place on a much smaller scale. As already mentioned, they may sometimes involve only part of a village, or a single household where the father prays for the peace of his own family offering not a goat or even a fowl, but merely rice-flour. This too is referred to by the same term, _saraka_, as that used to describe a large chiefdom sacrifice.

The word, saraka,[1] has also other applications. Though it is regularly translated as "sacrifice" by literate Limbas - and this is certainly one of its meanings - it is also used to refer to ceremonies which involve neither killing nor even offering of rice-flour. It may cover, for example, such ceremonies as the dedication of a new house, and the material white flag and bell that are erected on that occasion and left to guard the house; the ceremonial disposal of old climbing straps by the village as a whole; and even the material charms of various kinds which occur everywhere in Limba country to protect people - the white cowries tied in the corner of a red handkerchief or set into the handle of a knife; the kola nuts hung round a young wife's neck by her husband so that they may quickly have children; a ring given a son by his father or tied onto a young baby to protect it against witchcraft and disease; or the fine chain often worn round an old man's ankle. All these are saraka.

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1. This term occurs widely in the area in various forms (e.g. sala, saré, sale, sara, sadaka) among e.g. the Susu, Kissi, Temne, Mandinka. See Paulme, 1954, p. 173; W.A.A. Wilson, SLS 13 1960 p. 51. Paulme suggests it may derive from Arabic sadaqa.

What seems to be common to all these different applications of the term saraka, from the large chiefdom sacrifice to the cowry shells, is that a ritual has been performed in association with some material object; an old man (or sometimes a Muslim "Moriman") has spoken over it and prayed to the dead for a "cool spirit"; the object which is associated with the prayer also becomes saraka and brings about the peace that has been prayed for, freedom from physical and moral harm.

The Limba, then, assume that the dead are, like the living, in principle open to contact and communication. They have set ways of achieving this through prayer, sacrifice, and divination.

As well as believing that the dead can be contacted in a way not possible with Kanu or the spirits in the bush, the Limba also assume that the dead are normally benevolent and wish to look after their children. This is evident both in their general attitude to the dead, and in their explicit statements. I have already described how the Limba do not seem to regard the dead as spiritual beings utterly other from mankind, but as endowed with human qualities and, apart from the fact

that they are now in katile, the place of the dead, and so "no longer in the light", as differing from the living only in the great degree of their age and wisdom. The dead "who bore us" are thought of as like a father or a chief, and therefore, since "they own us" and expect duty and honour, they also have a corresponding responsibility to help their children, just as does a chief or father. If a Limba is asked whether the dead love people he may reply in surprise "but of course - does a father not love his children?" or "of course they love the Limbas - they are Limbas". The dead have passed on the traditions of Limba society to their children whom they bore and left in the light when they themselves were buried. "It is like the rice. It is buried and rots, but it comes up and comes into seed. It is the same with a man; he dies and rots but leaves people behind him". The dead may inspire one of their children in a dream or in his own heart, and help people to get rid of sickness when the due sacrifices have been performed. They may guard and support a man when "caught in the white man's court" so that he escapes "by grace of the dead" (thɔkɔ ba ka fureni be). The dead are specially concerned with two of the most important aims for a Limba - much rice, and a "cool

spirit". It was the dead who passed on to the present generation the knowledge of how to grow rice, and they have the power to help or prevent a good crop. So they are prayed to and formally told at the beginning of each new phase of the farming year, either in the village where they are buried or in the fields, for "they follow their children" to help them. "If we do not make proper offerings to the dead, they will be angry and we won't get rice. But if you give them good sacrifices, you get what you want, especially rice". For "cool spirit", or peace, both _Kanu_ and the dead are invoked. But, though the subject is obscure even to the Limba themselves, it seems often to be the dead in particular who are asked rather than _Kanu_, for _Kanu_ is unknown, whereas "the dead are near us and love us".

Because the dead are in the village and care for their children, they are sometimes said quite explicitly to intercede for their descendants with _Kanu_ who is far off in the sky. This is sometimes said to be analogous to the way in which a father may beg the chief of a village on behalf of his son. Though the Limba are clear that _Kanu_ is ultimately responsible for everything and, in particular, for birth and death, they sometimes imaginatively describe the dead too as playing an

important part by persuading Kanu on behalf of their children whom they are presumed to wish to help. Occasionally they are prepared to theorise about the way in which they imagine the dead to communicate with Kanu as in the following two descriptions:

> "Katile is when you die and are buried. Down below there, there are all the dead (fureni). You go to katile. There you are not in the light. There is no light there when you are buried ... We don't know very well ... we have heard that the dead see Kanu but we don't know, we have not yet died ... The dead tell Kanu after the sacrifice. But even if the dead tell him and us about many things - everything is Kanu".

> "Kanu and the dead - they are not near each other. Kanu is above, he brought us out. But if you have not yet died, if you speak he hears, but if he speaks, he Kanu, if you have not yet died, you will not hear. But if you die, you are far from Kanu, he above, you below in the earth. But if you think of something in katile, perhaps you wish to bring out something good for your child, you tell him, he Kanu, there where you are in katile. You speak there, saying 'I - my child, whom I bore long ago and he loves me and I love him, my child had not yet become well-off when I died. Now I, I want to bring out some good thing for him so that he may become well-off. But I am speaking [only] by grace of Kanu'. Well, if that pleases Kanu he says 'I, that pleases me'. He asks you 'Has he (the child) done no bad thing since you bore him?' The man in katile says 'Nothing'. Well Kanu says 'I too - that pleases me. I willhelp you'. Since he Kanu has agreed, he helps the dead man (fure) to bring out a good breeze for his child, for him to become well off. Well when they have brought out that good breeze for you, you the child become well off. That is it. The dead and Kanu hear (understand) each other".

The dead are essentially communal and social, responsible for the common inheritance of the Limba now on earth. Their graves in the centre of the compound or to one side of a village mark the unity of all that live there for they are either descended from those now dead in the graves, or related to them through marriage, adoption or friendship. The continuity of special groups is asserted in the prayers by, for instance, hunters, smiths or the women in their society, to the experts that preceded them. But most often what is stressed is the unity of, progressively, household, compound, village or chiefdom, each made up of those who are united in being sprung from the same ancestors. Even different parts of a big chiefdom or of several whole chiefdoms may be claimed to share "the same dead", "the old old people were the same". Different villages too may have special links, and these are expressed by sayingthat they are "one people", that is that they are descended from one grandfather or greatgrandfather even when the exact links are not known. On the very few occasions[1] when people speak of the unity of the whole

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1. Now becoming more common as the Limba begin to take some interest in national politics, and as communications improve.

Limba people, this is always expressed in terms of brotherhood and common parentage - "we are of one descent". This unifying principle represented by the dead also comes out clearly at a big sacrifice when people join together to call on the common dead - "they bore us all" - and representatives from the various groups of descendants are welcomed and recognised.[1] The dead are the common inheritance of those now on earth, and are accessible to human entreaties in the same terms as are living people. The Limba feel that they know how to approach them and pray to them; "We Limba are always thinking about the dead. We know how to beg them". These dead belong to the ordered life that is lived in the village, and are assumed to have more in common with their human descendants still living in the same village than with what might properly be called the supernatural beings that are outside the village - Kanu in the sky, and, in particular, the spirits in the bush.

It is now clear why "the dead" do not appear in the stories as supernatural beings, or ghosts, or demons

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1. Important men on the villages are often connected to the central ruling family by marriage or kinship.

forming a special category juxtaposed to humans. In Limba eyes the dead are not really a distinct kind of beings about which it is possible to theorise or narrate stories. They are human beings who were once alive and now are dead and buried, basically resembling those of their children who are now alive. From this point of view all the characters portrayed in the stories might be said to be fureni in that the stories are set in the past and the characters are by now among "the old people". Possessing essentially human qualities as they do, there is no point in introducing the dead into the stories as a separate category of beings. For in spite of the important part played in Limba life by prayers and sacrifices to the dead, they are at root not special separate beings at all, but the human beings of the old days - "they are us".

3. Individuals - witchcraft and contact with spirits.

Human beings, the Limba say, differ from animals in two main ways: they make farms, rice farms; and they live in villages. A Limba goes for the day to the bush or to work his farm, cutting down the growing forest in the way the dead did before him; in the evening he comes

home to his house in the village his ancestors owned and where they are now buried; there they have built themselves houses to live in, unlike the animals and spirits who are outside the village, of the bush. These two characteristics of humanity are implicit in the terms in Limba which can most plausibly be translated as "human being": first, the words wulimba, or limba mɛti, which, denoting merely "human", also have the connotation of one who takes part in the traditional social, economic and linguistic activities expected within the Limba social order; and secondly the term wɔ mɛti, literally one who lives in or belongs to a village (mɛti).

But within the Limba order of village life and humanity, common to all Limbas, there are believed to be some individuals who are in certain respects different from normal people. They are able to "see" into a dimension not visible to ordinary people. This power may lead them either to have direct personal contact with some individual "spirit" in the bush, with sometimes good, sometimes harmful results, or, if they become angry, to use their special ability to injure their neighbours with whom they live in the village by the malignant exercise of witchcraft.

Some consideration of these Limba beliefs about individuals is essential in order to understand certain aspects of their theory of causality, especially the causes of death, and their concept of human personality and motivation. Furthermore individuals who can "see" in this way, such as twins, smiths, or diviners, very often appear in the stories; so do the "spirits" with whom they and others make contact; some account therefore of the meaning of these terms to the Limba should help to elucidate the stories.

The Limba believe that there are a few individuals who are born with "eyes". Sometimes a child inherits these, or learns their use, from his mother; but one cannot predict or certainly know who has or will have these "eyes", for "it is Kanu who gives them". Twins however, and the next child following twins, are said always to have "eyes". Those with "eyes" are able to "see"; that is, they can perceive things that are hidden to ordinary people (pɔngpɔdi); they can see spirits, the activities of witches and themselves have the power to become witches if they choose. Such individuals are sometimes said to have "two eyes" (thaya thaale) i.e. double or extra eyes, or "four eyes" (thaya thanang),

i.e. both the two normal eyes and then two extra ones which have extra spiritual vision. Sometimes they are merely called "eyes" (thaya) using the normal word but with a meaningful inflection that makes the sense clear.[1] A man who refuses to use these "eyes" for the anti-social purposes of witchcraft is sometimes said to have "good eyes" (thaya thalɔhɔi) or to be kele, "clear eyed", the same word as that used to describe water that is clear and unmuddied.

Possession of these "eyes" gives a man the potential ability to encounter a spirit and he may through this gain the opportunity to become a diviner, a witch-catcher, a skilled dancer, a smith or some outstanding member of the village. Or, if "his heart becomes hot" he may turn to witchcraft. The following pages, therefore, give some account first of the beliefs held by the Limba about witchcraft, secondly about the spirits encountered by individuals, and the ways in which the Limba conceive these two to be related.

The Limba often speak about witchcraft and adopt various means to prevent, detect and punish it. It is held to be the most dreadful and anti-social crime of all,

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1. When used in this sense I refer to them in quotes, as "eyes"; similarly with "see".

because it involves killing or injuring another human by hidden non-physical means, perhaps smiling at a man in the afternoon "in the light" and then at night "going out" in secret to try to kill him and "eat his heart". In contrast to their attitude of ignorance to Kanu and even the spirits of the bush, about whom they profess to know little, the Limba are articulate and forthcoming about witchcraft, for witches are human beings who live in the village with other men, and they think it possible to know something about the people who practise witchcraft and how and why it is exercised.

A witch (bawɛthi or bayaku)[1] is believed to be someone who has "eyes" and decides to use his power to injure others. The immediate cause for his turning to witchcraft is envy. Often this envy is of someone close to the witch himself, as, for example, when one of two co-wives has children, the other has not; then the second, out of spite, tries to kill her companion's child by secret witchcraft. Sometimes a man is believed to use it against a brother who, though born of the same father and so starting with the same opportunities, has yet managed to build a house and acquire a large family while

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1. Bawɛthi is the usual word in Biriwa and related dialects, bayaku in the north and west.

his brother remains poor. Then the witch is said to look at his brother's child with greedy eyes and say in his heart "he is a fine child, he is grown well, let me go and kill him". Then the man's "heart rises and he goes out with eyes" in witchcraft.

Here is how one old man described the main motive of witchcraft and its procedure.

> "If you have, say, a fine gown or much rice or a child, witches are jealous and eat and kill or injure you. The [other] people who love you are glad when you do well. That is the difference between witches and other people. The bodies of all men are the same; it is in the heart (huthukuma) that the difference is. We cannot know another's heart. Witchcraft begins in the heart and goes through the eyes. Envy is the beginning of all witchcraft, it is witchcraft. A witch will kill anyone - a brother, a relative, even a mother or child."

> "We work, we go to the farm. We have children. We do well. But if someone hates you he kills your child. Sometimes when he is talking to you in the day he speaks well and greets you kindly - but then at night he comes out with his "eyes" for his heart is angry. The eyes are not the eyes we all have - but other eyes coming from the heart because it is angry. It is Kanu who gave the eyes ... We Limbas would be well off - if it were not for envy ... If you quarrel with a witch in the daylight he can do nothing; but at night, he comes out".

Once a man's heart is hot and angry from envy he "goes out" and becomes a witch if he has the "eyes" to do it. Though the Limba say that they cannot know the exact means by which a witch actually kills and "eats" his victim by secret non-physical means, they often

describe the actions they imagine the witch perhaps takes. It is always at night, they say, in the darkness. By day the witch behaves like any other person and does not dare to attack. But at night when all others are inside their huts asleep, he goes alone out of his hut. When he departs, his body only (kɔtɔ; or kupati, lit. earth) is left. If his companions wake they will see his body still lying there, though if they try to rouse him he will not stir. His heart (huthukuma) or power of acting (huni ha) has gone out of the hut to kill someone. He has "taken off his skin" in the way a snake can do. When he returns after his witchcraft he turns back into a human (limba) and becomes a named person again who can be awakened.

Once he has escaped from his own hut and body into the night, he is pictured as looking round for his victim, usually his enemy's child. He has to struggle hard to kill, for the charms hung over the door may kill him either as he enters in witchcraft or, more often, when he tries to return to his own hut. This medicine "fights" him, and only if he is powerful can he overcome it and succeed. "It is like a fight. One is stronger than the other". If he conquers the charms, he goes in and "eats the heart" of his victim. This is done in obscurity

"by his witchcraft only". As one typical statement put it,

> "We don't know how they come ... we only know what it resembles. If someone could go up a pawpaw tree and suck the inside out of the pawpaw fruit eating it all inside without breaking the skin - well witchcraft is like that. They eat the child inside, eat his heart. Then the child will die. Often he will be ill for a long time first, then he will die".

Ordinary people do not see the witch or know the cause of the child's illness for the activity of witches is "in the dark". They can only see the child fall ill and die.

This, then, is the characteristic picture of the way a witch acts: he goes out secretly at night to eat a child. Besides this standard description, there are also other modes of procedure sometimes attributed to witches. Some are said to have the power to transform (<u>kahe</u>) themselves into animals or birds.[1] A leopard, for example, who kills a man is normally assumed to have been activated by a witch, for, argue the Limba, normal leopards are known to run away when they see human beings; this one did not; it was, then, evidently

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1. Some famous chiefs of the last century are said to have been able to change their forms in order better to safeguard their chiefdoms, e.g. by turning into a bird to fly round and observe their people. This kind of good magic is sometimes referred to as "witchcraft of the afternoon" to distinguish it from the usual witchcraft which is always connected with the dark and evil.

a witch. Sometimes witches are said to change into birds who come openly or secretly to steal a neighbour's rice and transfer it to the witch's own farm. People who do this are sometimes referred to by the special term bangahing but are usually said to be fundamentally the same as other witches; they all equally try to injure another person through jealousy. Though the usual picture is that witches proceed by non-physical means, their "heart" only going out against their victim, it is occasionally said that they may also use something called a witch-gun" (pingkari, or sometimes kufangki)[1] or special witch medicine (sorokina). Sometimes, it is said, witches join together into a "company" (kune) for practising witchcraft; each witch must in turn provide a victim for the company to eat. Frequently too descriptions of a witch's activity refer to dreams. The witch himself is said to have "gone out in a dream", or to have been seen in a dream by another person. Confessions elicited from accused witches are regularly in terms of dreams dreamt by the witch; these are understood by both him and his listeners to refer to his

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1. More often spoken of in the south of Limba country, specially Safroko;

witchcraft.

The main means by which the Limba feel they can detect and combat the activity of witches is through those people who have double eyes but use them for good purposes. These include in particular the diviners of various kinds and the smiths. Someone who is *kele*, who has "good eyes", may be able to see the witch coming at night, perceiving him in a dream or with his "eyes" (these two media are not clearly distinguished). He may even see the witches standing outside his own house wanting to kill him but unable because of the charms or "things" over the door; he may hear them call him out by name, "come out, come out, we have come to kill you". He may see them clearly "but he doesn't go out. If he does, he will die, for the things will say 'we tried to help you but you refused'. But if you have no 'eyes' you will not know the witches are there". A man who has these "good eyes" will not join the witches in "going out" against his neighbours but will wish to prevent or detect witches.

Since witchcraft is considered the most criminal and dangerous of all activities, the Limba take many measures to try to prevent or discover it. There are many material charms, ceremonies and sacrifices to try

to avert witchcraft or the effects of witchcraft on the criminal's family. The most effective means, they consider, is for an expert, usually a smith, to make a "swear", a curse exercised through the medium of a material object, which is thought to detect and punish a witch. After every death a diviner is asked to diagnose the cause. If it is due to witchcraft further measures are taken to discover the culprit, to deter him, exact confession and compensation and punish him. There is, specially in the southern chiefdoms, a set series of ordeals, administered by experts with "good eyes". If after appeal to the final test the accused is found guilty, he normally confesses. Sometimes the confession is elicited by beating him until he admits his guilt; sometimes the confession is apparently spontaneous, either directly - "yes, I went at night and killed the child" - or allusively through the recounting of a dream. The witch then must pay compensation.

The Limba, then, believe that among those they meet and greet every day in their own village, some individuals may be witches and are therefore secret murderers. This is a sin worse than any committed in daylight, worse even than open quarrelling or abuse, for it is secret and hidden, and one cannot see into another man's heart

"All out bodies are the same, but our hearts are different - some are witches". This is why the Limba lay such stress on their prayers for "peace" (thɛbina lima), that is, on freedom from attacks by witches or temptation to practise witchcraft, and on the possession of "a clean heart" (huthukuma homɛthɛ) which implies the exact opposite of the selfishness of witchcraft.

Among those with "eyes" there are also people who use this power for good purposes, to help themselves ar other people. Because they fear the deterring medicines or because their "heart is cool" (huthukuma hothɛbɛ) they do not turn to witchcraft but use their power well.

Often this is exercised in association with a "spirit". The "spirits"[1] (mbaaling be, sing. waali wo, are always associated with the bush, in clear contrast to the dead who are of the village. They are basically un-human, and may even at times be spoken of as "animals".[2] But though they are in the bush there are certain ways in

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1. In Sierra Leone this is often rendered as "devil". This is misleading for mbaaling are not necessarily evil in Limba eyes; some are good, some bad.

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2. Especially Gbanggba of the men's secret society, often described as "the animal" (mama).

which human beings are believed to contact them, either by making sacrifice[1] or by an individual actually "seeing" a spirit in the bush. Unlike Kanu and the dead the spirits are generally capricious, unpredicitable and individualistic, and with the exception of the few well known spirits more formally associated with one special place or with a chiefly house, spirits are always represented as being connected with certain unusual individuals whom they severally happen to have met and liked.

Some spirits have names and are known widely throughout Limba country[2] (sometimes even beyond). But often they are known only locally and are sometimes nameless and featureless. They are often connected with some prominent landmark in the bush, a large rock, a river, a big tree, and are apparently thought of as indefinite in number. They can thus be brought into any story and referred to merely as "a spirit" in much the way we introduce "a fairy" in our own fairy tales. They are thought of as individuals who may on occasion make

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1. Damang, a term usually confined to offerings to a spirit in the bush, distinct from ni saraka, normally of sacrifice to Kanu and the dead.

2. e.g. Gbanggba, Bakangba, Sokoro, Koiyande, Kumba, Ningkinangka, Dingkangdingkangthengku.

contact with individual human beings rather than as having relations among themselves or as forming a kind of society of their own in even the vague sense in which the dead do. The Limba do not give any general account of the nature of spirits, nor do they speak of a "spirit world" in any sense. In the stories individual spirits appear only in their relation to some particular character in the tale and not as consistent agents with a joint or separate sphere of their own. In describing how the Limba speak of spirits it is simplest to explain how those with "eyes" are often said to individually contact them and make use of this ability. I shall therefore consider briefly first the special powers of diviners and of smiths, and then the way in which other individuals communicate with spirits.

Diviners are those typically cited as the best example of individuals with "good eyes". A diviner is able to "see" to take a spirit and to use this power for good ends. Diviners of various kinds play an important part in Limba life; they are also frequently mentioned in the stories, often appearing in the conventional form of a small bird, the finch. The Limba constantly wish to know things in the past, present, or, future which are

hidden to ordinary people but which diviners can see. There are experts to administer ordeals, detect and name witches or conduct certain rituals. The most common in day to day village life is the ordinary diviner (bamandi) who for a small present answers questions about the cause of a death, about "how a wife's heart is to her husband" or about what sacrifices are necessary to achieve peace.

A diviner should have "eyes" to see and take a spirit; otherwise he is thought not properly capable of exercising the art, even if his father had practised before him. But if a child has been born with "eyes" he can then also learn from his father how to throw and distinguish the stones commonly used in divination, for he can see the spirit which tells him the answer.

> "To a man who has no eyes, they seem only to be stones. If a child has eyes, he sees even when he is little, though he does not yet speak aloud to all the people. A diviner need not be the son of a diviner. It depends only on the eyes on whether the heart takes it".

A diviner, then, is always believed to have taken a spirit to help him. Because he has "eyes" he has been able to see the spirit in the bush and persuade him to be taken. In most other pursuits, say the Limba, an expert with a spirit will not admit this to ordinary

people. But divination is an exception, for there the diviner is known to depend on his spirit, and it is part of his skill to acknowledge his spirit's power in public.

It is the spirit rather than the diviner himself or his dead ancestors that is claimed to declare the truth, though it is the diviner, the spirit's "owner" who has chosen to "take" the spirit to help him. In general, the Limba believe, diviners speak truly - "they know how". Occasionally a spirit may mislead its owner so that the divination turns out to be false and the owner no longer trusted. But the diviner himself is not penalised for this.[1] For spirits are sometimes good, sometimes bad, and though they are at times helpful, they are undependable in that they are unhuman.

A second class of people to whom "eyes" are attributed are the smiths. Each village of any size has a smith (<u>bakurɛ</u>) or smiths who practise their art in the smith's hut (<u>kurɛ</u>) situated to one side of the settlement.

A smith must train for many years with a senior

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1. Except in the case of the special expert diviners who become witch-catchers.

smith in order to learn both the art of iron-working[1] and the special rituals of which the smith alone is master. He is commonly said to have "eyes" in that he has special powers, but he cannot use them for witchcraft for they are good "eyes in the light here" in contrast to the bad witches' "eyes" associated with the dark.

Smiths hold an important and respected position in the village. It is even occasionally said that the chief and the smith are equal to one another. The Limba often speak of the economic necessity of the smith's art, in particular his ability to make and mend the essential farming implements. "Everything a human being (limba) does is impossible without a smith. If there were no smiths no work would be done, we wouldn't eat, we would have nothing".

Even more important than this in the Limba view, is the close association of the smith and his kurɛ (his art, implements and hut) with the men's secret society and its

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1. This may have including some smelting in the past, but nowadays scrap metal is obtained from down country.

spirit <u>Gbanggba</u>.[1] It is through this association that the smith has authority to purify women who trespass on the men's rituals, and knows how to impose a "swear" to pursue anyone guilty of a stated theft, adultery or witchcraft. <u>Gbanggba</u>, and through him the smith, has the power to kill those who go out in witchcraft while he is in the village during the men's secret dances.

The smith has great power to "see" and act. But these powers, being potentially greater than those held by any other individual, are also said to be carefully controlled and checked. The spirit <u>Gbanggba</u> "helps people", it is true, but he is also dangerous and should only be contacted or temporarily brought into the village with the specified rituals and precautions known to a smith. The smith's power to invoke a "swear" or curse is also carefully controlled in various ways. In addition to this, say the Limba, a smith can never practise witchcraft; that is, he can never use his special powers to injure other people out of the selfish or spiteful feelings of his own heart. Any smith who tries to "go out" is said to die automatically through

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1. Often called <u>Gbanggbani</u> in the south of Limba country and by the Temne.

the power of the kurɛ (smithy etc.), in particular his hammer. "It hits the witch on the head so that he dies - he grunts, and gasps and dies. Thus a smith can never be a witch". Sometimes the smith's danger is described in imagined detail as in the account of two smiths who quarrelled over the elder's child.

> "That hurt his heart and he forgot about the smithy (kurɛ) and thought of witchcraft. He went out to kill the other. But he was killed. For when he went out - all right. But when he wanted to come in again, the smithy said 'No. You won't return' Quickly he died".

That is why, say the Limba, a smith will never be found practising witchcraft; for if he tries even once, he is killed immediately.

Smith and diviners, therefore, have "eyes", and practise through their contacts with spirits, the smith with the most dangerous of all, Gbanggba, the diviners with other individual spirits. Both smith and diviner use this for social purposes, and both, especially the smith, also pray to the dead practitioners of their own art, thus bringing their own individual actions into close connection with what is most communal and social, the dead ancestors.

Besides these two classes, there are also various

other individuals who are believed to make contact with spirits.[1] Anyone who is outstanding in dancing, singing, money making, or having continually large harvests is frequently said to have "taken a spirit", though, the Limba add, such a person will not openly admit to this. Good fortune or striking ability is thus often attributed to a spirit, usually hidden from other people. It is according to the same idea that Limba often say that the Europeans too must have spirits to help them for otherwise how could they produce money or invent such effective and mysterious machinery?

The Limba conceive of contact being established between such an individual and one of the spirits in the following way: Someone with "eyes" is wandering in the bush. He meets a spirit whom he is able through his special ability to see. The spirit likes him and agrees to help him to what he desires - perhaps to grow rich quickly, acquire much rice and many wives, become a

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1. This is not spirit possession in the normal sense (the man "takes" the spirit, not the spirit the man) Nor did I see or hear of any cases of induced trance or hysteria in connection with spirits. The diviner though said to be inspired by a spirit, does not speak with a special intonation or language nor deliver his advice in the name of the spirit.

famous speaker or excel in drumming, dancing or singing. If he agrees to "be taken to the village" he is carried home by the man in the apparent shape of a small round stone. His true nature is seen only by his owner who gives him gifts of, for instance, cowries and even the occasional slaughter of a fowl.. The spirit then helps the man, (though he too must work and cannot just sit back and rely only on the spirit) and over many years all his efforts result in success.

Here is how this process is pictured by a Limba.

> "If you see a spirit, you say 'I want to take you'. If he agrees, he says 'I accept'. You take him. If he is taken, he says, 'give me such and such a thing'. If the man is able he says 'I accept'. If not, he says so. If the spirit likes you, he asks 'What then can you give me?' You tell him what you are able to do, and if he agrees he says 'I agree'. You take him. Or again, if you meet him, you may say after greeting him 'I like you, I want to take you to make me well off'. The spirit agrees. He asks 'What do you want to become well off?' You ask perhaps for rice, or property or chiefship or for your family - you say what it is. If the spirit is able, he says 'I accept'. The spirit says 'If I help you with this and if you get it, do you agree to give me something?' The man says 'Yes'. ... If the spirit works hard at helping him and the man gets what he wants, the spirit asks for his payment. 'Now give what I told you; for I helped you; you got what you wanted, now give me my share'. If you can get it, you give it to him. If you are not able you tell him 'I cannot'. The spirit says 'If you are not able I will kill you'. He kills you. But if you are able and give to him, he won't kill you. He goes off and leaves you alone".

A "good" spirit may not demand payment at all. But a "bad" one insists, demands and threatens. He may come and ask, they say, for "a sheep". The man knows what this really means - a "Limba", a human being. The spirit is pictured coming again and again to the man to demand the payment. If he is continually refused, then he kills his owner. But if the man agrees to pay, he has to give some child to the spirit, and the spirit "eats his heart" in the same manner as a witch, so that the child dies. "He asks for a Limba. If you agree to give him you have killed a person, you are a witch".

So when people make contact with spirits, this may, on the one hand, lead to great success in the spheres the Limba value most; but, they sometimes suggest, it can also result in the most hated of all crimes, witchcraft. This is a paradox. For witches are most typically described, as I have discussed earlier, as those who wilfully try to injure others by witchcraft only — that is the action of a typical witch. Yet, paradoxically, those who are thought to achieve success through apparently innocent relations with a spirit, sometimes, it is implied, turn out in a different way also to partake of the nature of a witch. This danger is seen as the potential tendency of an individual who

greatly outshines his fellows, the price sometimes demanded for his success.

Some of those who can see and take spirits, therefore, use them for recognisedly good purposes, specially diviners of various kinds, and smiths, who detect or punish witches. But even in the good and helpful activities, the spirits themselves are apparently felt to be unreliable and dangerous, belonging basically to the bush outside, beings quite other than the human dead who represent what is intelligible and trustworthy for the children they have borne. And the "bad" or occasionally "bad" spirits can lead their owners to disaster. The spirits who make contact outside the village with individuals who are outstanding either for good or evil are thus always spoken of as quite different both from Kanu who is conceived of as universal to all men, and from the dead who collectively are the "old people" of the village and, ultimately, of all Limba society.

4. Personality and "peace".

From this account of what the Limba believe about "eyes", witches, spirits, and powerful individuals,

and from the terminology in which they express their beliefs, some idea should now have emerged of the way in which they conceive of a person and of how an individual may be motivated.

As already mentioned, a human being is represented as one who lives in a village and makes his farm. In this respect men are all alike; they are even similar in bodily form and in the way they greet each other and speak among themselves. But, say the Limba, where they may differ radically from each other is in their hearts. All other differences, even of skill in art or farming, are insignificant compared to the thing that really matters - the intentions of a man's heart. Whether his heart wills good or evil to his neighbours is what decides whether the family, the village or even the whole chiefdom will achieve a "cool spirit", the peace that Limba always strive and pray for. I conclude this chapter, then, with some account of how the Limba conceive of the "heart".

The word "heart" (huthukuma) is common in Limba, a language which is otherwise meagre in words referring to mental or emotional processes. Phrases about the heart are constantly occurring. Someone's heart is

"clean" (mɛthɛ), for example, "good" (lɔhɔ), "bad" (lehe ta, thangkɔ), "hot" (tɔkɛ), "cool" (thɛbɛ). To remember is to "put in your heart" (thi ka huthukuma); to worry is to "think in your heart" (simɔkɔ ka huthukuma); and a man who is "off his head" in English is in Limba someone whose "heart is not full" (huthukuma thinge ta) or who "has no heart" (ka ing huthukuma).

After our consideration of Limba religious beliefs it is now possible better to understand this concept of "heart" and its connection with "cool spirit", thɛbina lima. The heart is, is the first place, the will or motive power which decides what a person will do.

> "The heart - that is what is bad or good, what makes you abuse people or not ... the heart tells you to do everything. If the heart is not good, quickly you do witchcraft".

The Limba do not, as we would tend to do, separate the mind or brain from the heart. Though they have a word for "intelligence" (funung) they are clear that this is situated in the heart and not in the head (huya).

> "The head's work is to carry loads ... you think and intend in your heart". "The heart is more than the head ... if you are angry it is your heart first that is angry; it is hot. When it becomes cool, then you stop. If you love someone, it is your heart that first loves ... It is the heart that says if you are to like or dislike something,

> if you are to be a witch or a thief. The heart owns us completely".

The heart, besides being the basis of a man's intentions and memory, is also the seat of life or health.

> "If you run uphill, your heart is sore; it goes fui fui fui, it begins to die a little; but when you go and wash and rest, you are better. The heart owns your life. If it dies, you die and are buried ... When Kanu comes for your heart, you won't remain but will die. The heart owns people. If it goes, there is no intelligence (funung), you can no longer speak".

Thus it is the heart which Kanu is often said to put into a child when he first gives it life (sii) and breath (mahɛ ma); in the end the heart is taken away by Kanu in that he causes all death. It is a man's heart that is said to be eaten by witch or spirit so that he dies in the end however healthy he may seem from the outside. And if anyone's heart is "spoilt" (teti) by grief or bitterness, then this may result in his death.[1]

The Limba also use "heart" in rather the way we would use "character" or "disposition". A bad-tempered man is, literally, "short-hearted" (huthukuma hothurɔ), a

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1. Said to happen, for example, when a woman is given in marriage to a man she hates.

cheeky boy has a "broad" or "large" heart (*huthukuma hobukulu*). Old men are often said to have "cool" hearts (*huthukuma hothɛbɛ*) in that they speak calmly and without propensity to anger or partiality. Someone who likes to hurt his neighbours by theft, evil-speaking or witchcraft has a "bad" heart which is not "clean" or "good" to other people.

The heart then may, if evilly disposed, result in witchcraft or in giving someone to a spirit. It may therefore be responsible for someone else's death, either by killing them directly, or indirectly in that a man killed by a "swear" while practising witchcraft may involve the rest of his family in danger unless they discover and revoke it. People with evil hearts are a danger to the whole community, for they can injure others either by open anger and quarrelling, or by the secret means of witchcraft.

The Limba wish above all things to avoid this danger of witchcraft and death in the village. Since the heart can be both proximate motive and abiding disposition, they feel it important to try to prevent a sudden impulse of anger or shame from becoming a settled bitterness of the kind which will, in the Limba view, sooner or later result in the man's going out to

injure his neighbours by witchcraft. This is why they consider it essential to try to settle every quarrel by good words, usually from the chief or an old man, so that the opponents' hearts may become "cool" again. Unless the chief has succeeded in achieving this the quarrel is not ended, for even though the due compensation may have been paid or the "beg" offered, if a man's heart is still "hot" or "angry", or if the decision "hurts his heart" (thong huthukuma) so that he broods over it (simɔkɔ ka huthukuma), then the quarrel is certain to break out again, if not in open anger then in hidden witchcraft. This is also why in one religious ceremony the women are all asked to confess the evil feelings in their hearts, so that they may be uttered and so ended; to harbour a grudge in the heart may interfere with the efficacy of a sacrifice, the process of childbirth, even the success of a hunter. They should speak out and end the hotness of their hearts. It is, then, partly its close connection with the motivation and power of the heart that makes "speaking" so important to the Limba. The way you speak can make another man's heart "good" or "bad"; speaking out the evil in your heart may make it "cool" again; and the

chief must "speak well" to people so that their hearts may be "cool".[1]

The most profound concern of the Limba therefore is that people's hearts should be "clean" and "cool". This is the main aim of a Limba chief. It is also the chief purpose of religious practice and prayer. If people's hearts are not "cool" then not only is there fighting, quarrelling or angry words in the chiefdom, but people go out in theft, adultery and witchcraft to satisfy their own individual spite; and this must result, directly or indirectly, in death, loss and disease. The "badness" of an individual's heart necessarily results sooner or later in outward physical disaster for himself or other people.

So when the Limba pray for <u>thɛbina lima</u>, a "cool spirit",[2] this refers both to the coolness of a man's heart, and to the peace and health in which this coolness results. <u>Thɛbina lima</u> means both physical health - "it means you will not suffer" - and the inner cause of this,

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1. "Speaking" is more fully treated in the next chapter.

2. "Spirit" (<u>lima</u>) in the sense of heart or state; it has no connection with the supernatural spirits (<u>mbaaling</u>) discussed earlier.

a peaceful heart. It means that not only should there be no open fighting or quarrels, but that there should, equally, be no bad selfish feelings of the kind that give rise to this; it implies that there is no witchcraft, intended or active, for once witchcraft is practised neither victim nor witch have thɛbina lima. If people possess thɛbina lima then they are free from the evil results of death or illness that follow the family of a witch after he has been killed by a swear or the charms over a door. If they have thɛbina lima they will not die from any of the three causes that result from bad human activity (so, ultimately, from a person's "hot heart"), that is, from witchcraft, giving someone to a spirit to eat, or the effects of a "swear" - but die only "from Kanu"; that would be the natural way to die if it were not for the spite of people's hearts.

All Limba religious activity is directed to achieve thɛbina lima, a well body and a peaceful mind. The personal charms or amulets, medicines over the door or in the farm to deter witches and thieves, purifications from "swears" or trespass, and the various procedures for killing and punishing witches, are all directed to combating the evil activities and impulses from men's hearts which upset the natural order of peace and health.

The Limba thus hope to deter or punish the self-seeking individuals who try to injure their fellows in secret. In a positive way too they make prayer and sacrifice to try to obtain *thɛbina lima* for themselves and their children, that their hearts may be cool and their bodies well. For this they pray most of all to the dead, their own old people who themselves in the old days reconciled quarrels and brought peace; they pray that "by grace of *Kanu*" they may again grant *thɛbina lima* to their children.

This brief account of Limba religion has been presented in order to give some idea of certain themes which occur frequently in the stories - the many references, for example, to *Kanu*, spirits, diviners, morimen or smiths - and to show what such references may mean to the Limba who hear or tell the stories. It has also, I hope, served to fill out the picture of the Limba in general by describing how they think of themselves and the various expressions by which they indicate this: their awareness of their place in the universe and their common humanity with all people which they formulate in their expressions of resignation or acceptance when they have occasion to speak of *Kanu*;

their view of themselves as members of Limba society, common descendants of their own old dead; and their explanations of death, of misfortune and of outstanding success in term of individuals' actions through contact with spirits outside the village or by the secret malice of hidden witches within it.

P A R T II

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Chapter 6

Language and "speaking"

Language and speech are of the greatest significance in Limba life. They are themes which have had to enter constantly into descriptions in earlier chapters, whether in discussing the concept of women as opposed to men, the duty of a chief, or the right way to address the dead. For the Limba "speaking" well is an essential part of social activity and also something in which they take a delight, and an interest, for its own sake. In addition to this there are certain linguistic formulae which are of central importance in every Limba transaction as well as in their own descriptions of these transactions, and even in minor everyday discussion there are formal ways, marked by language, by which to make and accept offers or decisions, linguistic formalities which are considered essential to an ordered social life and are frequently referred to in the stories.

These topics form the subject of the present chapter. I do not intend to discuss wider aspects, such as the connection of Language and Society in the sense of relating the overall structure of the language to that of the

society, or analysing the general Limba classification of concepts in terms of language either in the large sense or in connecting such specific points as, for example, their apprehension of time with their use of certain tense forms. Here I am concerned only with the attitude of the Limba to their own language, and to "speaking", and the significance of certain linguistic acts in Limba society.

1. Language

In the study by Westermann and Bryan,[1] Limba is classified as among the "West Atlantic" languages. It falls into one of the two main groups (West Atlantic and Mande) of the fifteen or so native languages spoken in Sierra Leone.[2] As with other languages of the West Atlantic group, Limba has certain structural affinities with the Bantu languages in its system of voice and aspect formed by extensions of the verbal radical, and in the "class" system according to which each noun falls into one of thirteen categories each with its characteristic marks

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1. Languages of West Africa, 1952.

2. See T.D.P. Dalby, Language Distribution in Sierra Leone (with map) in Sierra Leone Language Review 1, 1962.

of agreement and concord.[1]

There are several dialects of Limba, an unwritten language. A Limba from the extreme north finds it difficult to understand one from the south. Up to thirteen different dialects are sometimes distinguished by the Limba. These can however be classed into four main groups: Safroko-Biriwa in the south and east; Wara Wara towards the north; Ke or Kamuke in the extreme north; and Tonko-Sela in the south west.[2] The main differences are in some terms of vocabulary, and in certain sounds which sometimes interchange, between or within dialects;[3] the intonation and the amount of nasalisation also sometimes seem to vary from place to place.

Those on the edge of the irregularly shaped area of Limba occupation are often bilingual, or at least able to

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1. See J. Berry, Nominal Classes in Hu-Limba, and A Note on Voice and Aspect in Hu-Limba, in S.L.S. 11, 1958, and 13, 1960.

2. The full list sometimes given by Limba usually follows the distribution of the old chiefdoms; they are spelt phonetically: Safrɔkɔ, Biriwa, Kalanthuba, Sɛla, Thɔngkɔ, Songko, Yaka, Keleng, Gbɔngkɔgbɔng, Thamiso, Wara Wara Yagala, Wara Wara Bafodea, and Kamuke or Ke. Most of the texts are in Biriwa and Yaka, and the terms used in Part I are mainly in Biriwa.

3. E.g. g/k; gb/kp; -ala/-aa, and, very commonly within as well as between dialects, the alternation of f/h; w/ng and ? sometimes ɛ/ɔ.

understand some of the language or languages of the neighbouring peoples, and the children there commonly grow up with an ability to interpret taken for granted. Within Limba country too there are occasional settlements of foreign peoples, mainly Fula and Mandingo, and in the two largest Limba towns Krio (or "Creole")[1] and native languages other than Limba are often spoken. Limba then are well aware of the existence of many languages other than their own, and frequently have a close acquaintance with one or more of these.

Their language is one of the marks by which the Limba distinguish themselves from the many peoples round them. In spite of the difference that they are constantly noting between their own various dialects, they still seem to assume that one thing that they all share together as distinct from other tribes is the Limba language. "The Limba language is one. The Limba are one." The native term is <u>hulimba ha</u>,[2] "the Limba language"; and the prefix <u>hu</u>- in this term is commonly used not only for most terms referring to speech, words or language[3] but as the normal

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1. See Dalby, <u>loc.cit</u>.

2. Wara Wara and Sela-Tonko sometimes have <u>huyumba</u> or <u>huyimba</u>.

3. E.g. <u>hutha ha</u> and <u>hulung ha</u> - word; <u>huthemine ha</u> - the Temne language.

prefix used to transform a root word into an abstract noun.[1] Hulimba ha could therefore easily be interpreted to mean not only the Limba language but Limbahood itself. My statement that I had come to learn about the Limba people was often passed on as "she has come to learn hulimba ha, the Limba language". Everything that connects directly with language is often assumed to be distinctively Limba, and I was therefore continuously and spontaneously instructed in new vocabulary, stories, songs, and the requisite greetings in the various dialects. Living as they do in a small country inhabited by peoples speaking several mutually unintelligible languages, the Limba recognise that many of their customs - marriage, for example, or some of the "secret societies" - are shared by various of these peoples, but that the Limba language is owned only by the Limba, and is their distinctive characteristic.

The Limba are self-conscious about their own language. They like to discuss linguistic matters, whether in comment on their language as a whole or in comparisons between their different dialects. This is perhaps a natural result of their experience of the many different languages around them, their own distinctive forms of speech, and the fact that so

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1. e.g. gbaku wo, chief; hugbakine ha, chiefship. Thari, run, flee; huthara ha, flight.

many of them speak more than one language or are well acquainted with the principle of interpretation from one language to another.

They sometimes comment on their own language in general. "The Limba language is old" said one, "the old people tell you stories and tell you what is forbidden and so on; you hear that. The Limba language is not new". Many Limba expressed pleasure that I had come "to understand Limba" (ba luya hulimba ha), and they sometimes contrasted their own language with others, giving imitations of the sounds of various languages; English, for example, was said to sound just like yɛng yɛng yɛng yɛng or ngɛng ngɛng ngɛng ngɛng.

More often the discussion is of the forms of the various dialects. This is a constant topic of interested conversation. Comparisons are made between the varying dialectal terms, how, for example, some words are quite different in meaning, others have different connotations, the regular word in the south implying an obscenity or curse in the north and vice versa, and the greeting terms distinctive of the different areas. They sometimes cause laughter by imitating or parodying speakers of other dialects, the high voice, according to one mimic, of the Wara Wara, or the rough badgering tone of the Safroko. Each group

likes to claim that its own dialect is the best or most pure of Limba and sometimes speak of other dialects as "bad" (*lehe ta*), "unintelligible" (*yi sa lu*) or "mixed up" (*fangitande*) with other languages; they also notice with displeasure when people use a greeting term other than the common local one. They say that they are continually laughing at the speakers of other dialects who "can't speak well" and are themselves in turn laughed at by them. In such discussions there are several terms which are used to describe the various characteristics of a language or dialect: it can be "deep" (*sungɔi* i.e. subtle and not easy to understand), "fine" (*mɛlɛsɛ*, i.e. full of small words, subtle, analytic), "broad" (*bukulu*, i.e. with longer words), "straight" (*thumbɛ*), "good" (*lɔhɔ*), "sweet" (*thimɔ*); according to one English-speaking Limba his own dialect, Biriwa, was the one that "is sweet and nice and straightforward". The Limba, then, are very aware of these various ways of speaking their own language, and of the possibility of having dialectal differences within one common language. As one old man answered in some surprise when I asked about the reason for the many Limba dialects "But why do you ask? Are not English and Krio the same language but with differences? Well, it is the same with Limba". The existence of dialects, with their basic similarity and

detailed differences, is something, they assume, which everyone can be expected to understand.

Beside such general reflections on the nature of their language and dialects, they also make intentional use of language for amusement and joke. They take great delight, for example, in words or phrases they consider particularly funny and bring them in to make people laugh. *Thɛngthɛngthɛruma*, for example, is a term used to describe humorously the kind of person not able or willing to carry loads on his head: *kutɛngtɛngbɛri*, meaning a hollow beneath a bank or wall, is a Biriwa word thought funny in itself and also used as a test word for strangers. Phrases may be introduced for no other reason but amusement, as with the rhythmic words a boy once used to express his hunger in fun, "Ho ho ha ha nothing in my mouth" (*ho ho ha ha ntha ka ka hothi*) or the punning phrase said to be used by mothers to answer a child's continual whines of *mbɛ*? "what?", with "what, goat?" (*mbɛ bahu*?), mimicking the ascribed cry, *mbɛɛ* of the goat. A form of reduplication in names - for instance the pair of fools called Dimping and Dampang or the spirits Ningkinangka and Dingkangdingkangthengku - or the repetition of words or phrases are also used for their effective ring rather than their sense. Nonsense or semi-nonsense words are enjoyed as, for example, in the chant

about a spirit, *kɛng kɛng kɛng kɛng kɛng kɛring kɛng*, or the alliterative words sometimes said to be chanted by the fishes "*thɔ thɔ thɔ* the wet season is ending, we are going to be killed" (*thɔ thɔ thɔ ~~th~~ thamɔ thɔi ba thɔye; hiri puthɔi ming se ba korio*) in which the little fishes are supposed to be stuttering *thɔ thɔ*, trying vainly to speak like their elders. They also take pleasure in representing some bird cries in words - the *kokoro koo koo* of the cock at dawn and the *kutangtangtangtaro* of one of the francolins. In addition to this, by the various devices of repetion, parallelism, imitation, onomatopo~~ea~~, mimicry and exaggeration of tone or length,[1] they have a recognised means of using language for calculated effect as well as in its ordinary use for the communication of fact.

The Limba take a certain amount of reflective interest in the analysis of their own speech. Discussion of separate elements and words is made easier by the common Limba word *na* which is used both to introduce reported speech and to put a word or phrase in, as it were, ~~in~~ quotation marks. Thus one term, phrase or sentence can be singled out for discussion or elucidation in its own right by prefixing it with *na*. People sometimes came to me spontaneously with the intention of explaining some word or phrase in this way, quoting it for the sole purpose

1. All more fully discussed below chapter 8, in reference to style in the stories.

of comment and explanation. This habit of considering their own words may also perhaps be illustrated by their common use of <u>hu</u>- to turn any word into an abstract noun, a device which the Limba employ frequently when they wish to refer to the general concept. The Limba are aware of the possibility of considering a linguistic formulation in itself detached from its direct social or personal context.

Even what has been said so far should show how far the Limba are from conforming to the still all too popular picture of the primitive as a being unreflective and unself-conscious, or even - the more extreme view - emotionally involved with the world around him, unable to stand back or analyse in any detached or abstract way.[1] This picture is quite untrue of the Limba, at least in the sense that they are aware of the distinctive nature of their own language as contrasted with others' and are greatly interested in the language they speak, intentionally using it for play, comment and analysis, not, as sometimes seems to be assumed, just for the straight communication of fact or the expression of feeling.

In addition to this, there are also three further ways in which the Limba are significantly aware of the possibilities

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1. Cf. e.g. the implications in Frankfort, 1949, pp. 12ff, Bowra, 1962, e.g. pp. 22, 234.

of language and speech.

In the first place their "oral literature" is an important feature of their culture. Story-telling is a pursuit that is, up to a point, practised by every Limba, and the hearing or telling of a good story is an activity widely enjoyed and valued. There are also other forms of "oral literature" in riddles and proverbs, and both stories and proverbs can be used to persuade people or to illustrate some general truth. Historical narratives, and any kind of excited narration or generalising comment are to some extent related in style and presentation to the more formal types of story. Songs, sometimes of nonsense words, sometimes describing a series of actions or expressing some moral, can also be classed as one form of "oral literature", sung either in the course of a story or for their own sake, often at a time of festival and dancing. In addition to these types of literature, more fully discussed in the next chapter, there also occur the formal prayers to Kanu and the dead,[1] where, though the actual wording may differ from prayer to prayer, the general framework is always much the same and there are certain phrases that constantly occur. Similarly invocations to impose a "swear", or in certain kinds of divining, use

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1. E.g. prayer to dead smiths, chapter 2, p.107; prayer to Kanu and the dead, chapter 5, p.269

constant forms and are uttered by an expert with set tones and expression. The Limba also have what could be called a type of oratory. This takes several forms. The speeches by chiefs and elders in deciding disputes or receiving messages have already been mentioned; so too have the formal negotiations and discussions over marriage and sacrifice. The most striking form is the long harangue regularly delivered at the memorial ceremony for a dead chief or elder; these often last up to twenty or even thirty minutes, and each sentence is usually repeated aloud by a crier to relay it to the large gathering of listeners; though each speech differs from others, they are all of the same type - full of good advice to young and old, with much moralising. In all these ways, then, the Limba frequently use their language for what we could term literary and oratorical purposes, a type of linguistic expression with which they are well acquainted.

Secondly, the Limba make significant use of language in their law cases and in formal transactions of every kind. In these situations, more fully discussed later, certain linguistic formulations are used in what could be called an operative and legal sense, to create, recognise or reinforce certain social relationships and positions.

Finally, the central part taken in both Limba procedures

and in their representation of themselves, by their term "to speak", is evident in any discussion of their social, political or religious institutions. This illustrates the importance the Limba themselves quite explicitly attach to speech and language in their everyday life, in the representation of this in their stories, and in their formal activities and relationships in a way further discussed later in this chapter.

2. Words and Deeds[1]

There are certain formal utterances which are of central importance in the conduct of Limba life - in inter-personal relationships, decisions, and formal recognitions. No Limba would describe the institutions of his own society without constant reference to these linguistic forms; as will be noticed, these have also appeared in quotations in earlier chapters and often occur in the stories. Nor could a student considering the forms of social relations in Limba society give a full analysis without some consideration of the use they make of language in this connection.

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1. The title of this section is taken from that of a stimulating series of lectures delivered by J.L. Austin (later published as "How to do things with words", 1962), in which he isolates and examines distinctive "performative utterances" such as "I promise", I bet", or "I name".

These linguistic acts are those described by Limba terms which can be translated as "greeting", "thanking", "saying goodbye", "accepting", "replying" and "begging". Such terms are constantly occurring in formal cases before chief and elders, in personal transactions, and even in much ordinary and less formal conversation; they are also often mentioned in the stories.

These words, and the actions to which they refer, are discussed in turn in the present section. First, however, I give one description by a Limba which shows the kind of context in which many of these terms may occur. Similar examples have been referred to or quoted in previous chapters, in particular those concerning the formal negotiations for marriage,[1] and in many passages in the stories. In the example given here, young boys are formally bringing fire-wood into the village to announce their wish to be initiated soon.

> "When the boys are ready to go to the bush, those who own them [parents] tell them to cut wood and bring it to the village to the chief here, to tell (tepe) him that 'we are ready now. We want this year to put on headdress' [i.e. be initiated]. They bring the wood to him. One older boy comes to the village with them, to announce their purpose (tɔng danthɛkɛ) to the chief, with wine. They come. They come and announce the wood. They greet (mang) the chief. The older boy whom they have brought, he names (yongong) all the old

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1. See chapter 3 section 1.

people in the village. He says 'they have come to announce their reason (tɔng danthɛkɛ)'. The old people greet (mang) you, they say that they have brought the boys to the chief, for they want this year to put on headdress. That is why they said they would bring wood to the chief - to come and tell (tepe) him that 'we are ready now'. So now if you see that I am coming with them, that is the reason. It is finished. (lɔngthang)'. They pass on the word (pɛngkɛti), they pass it to the chief. The chief, if it pleases him (wung thime ning), he thanks (kalangani) them, he says 'I thank you - it is by grace (thɔkɔ ba) of the old people, those in the village'. Then the elders speak. They thank (kalangang) them, calling (yongong) them by name. One speaks of the suffering - to carry wood in the sun and the rain; it is heavy. He gives them four kolas to thank (kalangang) them. Well, they have accepted (yɛrɔkɔi) it... Then if they wish to dance, the boys give a token gift (kɛmɛ) to the men to say (tepe) that 'we want to dance. Please (yandi) drum for us'. Well, the men agree (yɛrɔkɔ). They tell (tepe) the women to reply (me) to the song, giving them a token gift (kɛmɛ), saying 'Reply for us'. If this pleases them (mɛnɛ wung thime bindɛ) they say 'we accept (yɛrɔkɔi).' Well, the drummers come. The singers come. They sing - beautifully. The drummers drum. The dancer takes his stand. He begins to dance - beautifully. They dance - oh, for long. If they are able they dance all night... The boys from all the villages - that is what they always do. They bring the wood here, to the chief here. Well, that is what they do".

Mang, "to greet", is one of the most common Limba words.[1] The Limba attach great importance to the action described by this term both in their everyday practice and in their descriptions of themselves. They contrast themselves

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1. With its derivatives such as manande, greet each other; mania, greet many people one after the other; humana ha, greeting (abstract verbal noun); bamang wo, pl. bamani be, greeter

sharply in this respect with Europeans who, they find, are puzzling in appearing not to have the time or inclination to greet people. When I said that I wished to learn the Limba language and ways, one of the first phrases I was taught was "I have come to greet" (yang se ba mana), and the various ways of expressing these greetings. I was also continually being told at great length of the various greeting terms in differing dialects[1] and of the ways of greeting people according to the person addressed or speaking, or suitable to the occasion.

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1. See following page.

The following are some of the most[1] common greeting terms in two Limba dialects, Biriwa and Yaka, all to be heard daily in any village. For ease of reference I have included here some terms of farewdl and thanks, perhaps not strictly to be classed with greeting.

Biriwa.

Ngsske (or ngss'e or ngsse); ngsske o. plural ngsske bena (or ngsske bena dondo): "greetings". The most common salutation at any time of the day. The reply (me) is ng ng ngsske wui (or wiye). This is usually followed by e bali ka? "any trouble?" (lit. "any thing?), calling for the reply bali o ka: "no trouble"; bali o bali ka: "no trouble at all"; ng ng bali o ka: "no, no trouble"; or bali ka ngdss: "no trouble here"; sometimes there is the addition thoko ba Kanu: "by grace of Kanu"; kassthe Kanu: "thanks to Kanu"; or thoko ba fureni be: "by grace of the dead".

Mande. plural mang bena: "greetings". Usually on seeing someone after a long time. The reply is ng ng ngsske etc.

Wali (or wali o). plural wali bena: "greetings". Said to greet people returning from work, e.g. called out by those in the village when people come home from the farms in the evening. The reply is ng ng ngsske etc.

Sangkala (or sangkalaio). plural sangkala bena: "goodnight". Said when expecting to meet the next morning. The reply is sangkalaio or io sangkala io.

Nglingai. plural linga bena: "goodbye". Said when going away, e.g. leaving the village for some days or weeks. The reply is nglingaio, or some question such as e yi kai? "are you going?" with the answer ndo: "yes"; yang do kai: "I am going"; or yang do kubs: "I am setting off".

Yaka

Mande. plural mang bena: "greetings". The usual salutation, any time of day. Reply is ng ng ngsske (or ngsske wiye), followed by e bai ka? or e bali ka? "any trouble?" as in Biriwa.

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1. Other dialect terms are on the same lines even though the actual form may differ (e.g. Sela normal greeting is hsrsba yinge or hsrsba hure)

Ngsng: "greetings". Said to someone who has come from far, or has been away some time. The reply is ngsskε o (or ngsskε wiye), and the interchange is commonly followed by a series of questions and answers about where the stranger has come from etc.

Wali. plural wali bena: "greetings", to those returning from work, as in Biriwa.

Sangkaa. plural sangkaa bena: "goodnight".

Linga. plural linga bena: "goodbye", specifically when going away for some time. The reply is io lingaio. Occasionally bεlε, the Wara Wara dialect term for "goodbye," is used.

Many of these forms are also followed by extra syllables such as o, io, nε, wui or wiye. They are also very commonly repeated several times over between the two people greeting each other. When one "greets" (mang), the other should "reply" (me).

There are also many stock phrases that frequently follow the greeting terms. In addition to those already mentioned, people may say, for example, to someone setting out on a journey "I will meet you again" (yang si do bena pangki), "we will be seeing each other" (ming do kutande), "where are you going?" (kamε hε yi ke?). The one going often says "I am coming back" (yang do se), if he wants to convey that he is going only briefly, or "I am going" (yang kai); or he may tell the other where he is going: "I am going to chase birds [in the farm]" (yang do ke (kai) ka pama), "I am going to Bumban" (yang do kai ka Bumban), "I am going to wander round a little, not far" (yang do ke ka tharokε mathiani). A returned traveller is usually asked where he has come from (kamε ngale na pong?), and about the news from there: "any trouble where you came from?" (e bali ka ka yi ngale?), "was the chief there?" (ngako king kendε?), "was so and so there?" (wana king kendε?), "was it peaceful?" (e wuthεbε?). The traveller will reply, for example, "no trouble at all there" (bali o bali ka kendε), "the chief is there - he greets you" (ngbako king kende - a mang yina), or "it was at peace ~~there~~" (wuthεbε lima). Even someone coming back after a few hours away in the farm is customarily questioned by those in the village with, for example, "were the people there?" (bia be king kεndε?), and is greeted and thanked for the particular work he has been doing there: "greetings for reburning" (ngεskε ba kari o), or "greetings for clearing" (wali ba kuku).

These and similar phrases can be heard repeated many times every day in village and farm. Though a person passing in a hurry merely calls out and receives a single word greeting, it is common for greetings to take much time and be treated very seriously. Someone who failed to make or return an expected greeting and instead frequently kept silent (nguru)[1] would be considered odd or culpable; in fact this seems to occur only seldom. Limba as a whole take pleasure in giving and receiving the required every-day greetings.

Greetings are given and expected in many situations. In the first place, it is assumed to be a universal human obligation to exchange greetings with those you encounter in the village, farm or road. People who meet on the path between villages or farms normally greet each other (manande), and often stop to enquire about the other's home or affairs. In the village people greet each other in the morning before

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1. See below p366

leaving for the farm. Husband and wife too should "greet each other well" and a man must take special care to greet his wife's parents with courtesy and the prescribed term of address. Children greet their parents, specially their fathers, morning and evening. Friends and contemporaries are more informal, but even they greet each other when they meet. When people come home from the farm in the evening they greet and are greeted by those who have spent the day in the village, and they often comment or ask each other about how they have passed the day.

Even these minor everyday greetings between individuals are regarded as both an essential social obligation and a thing in which a Limba will naturally take pleasure. So when a story is being told the exchange of greetings between the characters - "any trouble?", "no, no trouble" - illustrates vividly their common humanity, and is also much appreciated by the listeners, sometimes repeated or filled in spontaneously by members of the audience. Someone wishing to set the scene in a story or a narrative of his own actions may rattle off at great speed a long list of the greetings exchanged, with obvious enjoyment both to himself and others in this typically Limba behaviour; or he may describe with pride and affection the way in which he himself "greeted someone very well" (<u>a mang wana</u>

wulɔhɔɔi) or "was greeted fully" (mano na feu). This interchange of greetings is among the pleasures of life; for one young Limba, for instance, the most idyllic occasion imaginable was to have a young girl smiling at him with her pointed teeth, bringing him food, and greeting him: "you meet, and say goodbye, and greet again throughout the day, and smile and drink wine, and eat again, and drink". "Greeting" is an essential factor in marriage - a husband can complain against his wife that "you haven't greeted me" or that she did not allow "his companions to come and greet him well". Exchanging words of greeting is both an obligation and, as well, "makes a man's heart good".

In addition to the regular everyday greetings expected of everyone as a matter of course, there are also situations where greetings have a special meaning or where a man makes a special expedition to greet someone with extra formality. The same word, mang, is used for this kind of greeting, referring not only to the brief interchange of the salutations themselves, but also to the whole act of going to visit someone in order to greet him, the time spent in the visit, and all the talk, and on some occasions gifts, that accompany this.

A minor example of this kind of greeting is when someone goes out of his way to visit within or beyond the village.

A man or woman goes to someone else saying "I have come to greet you" (yang se ba na mana) or "your greeter has come" (bamang wo kɛnda se); the honour brought by this visit should be answered by a full greeting in reply and, according to the relative status of the visitor, by an appreciative attention for a time at least, or gifts and hospitality. More important are the special efforts a man must make at times to go and greet his parents in law, specially his wife's mother. This is a very formal relationship and therefore one in which, according to the Limba, it is of great moment to greet very fully and carefully with the right term from both son (ngsɛkɛ thɔnɔ) and mother in law (ng ng lahɔi, ngsɛkɛ). Even before his wife has been given to him in marriage, the suitor must initiate or formalise the relationship by coming formally to greet his prospective parents in law. The importance attached to this particular form of greeting is referred to in, for example, the story of The woman who wanted to be greeted, all day and all night; only, it is related, the monitor lizard had the patience to continue greeting and so win the daughter as his wife.

Similarly an obligation to come to greet may be an understood requirement of a contract or formal relationship. Thus if a man has gained permission to tap wine from a tree

on another's land, it is assumed, though not stated, that about once a month he will come to "greet" the owner; sometimes he brings a hen or some money as part of the "greeting"; but in any case he must come to greet in words saying, for example, "we thank you, we come to thank you"; the owner should reply "it pleases us, we thank you, may you not fall from the tree".

This custom of coming specially to greet someone, often, but not necessarily always, bringing a gift as part of the "greeting", enters into many relationships, and is one of the accepted ways by which a man acknowledges the authority or responsibility of another, or his own obligations to him whether in the sphere of marriage, chiefship, personal seniority, or the mastery, and teaching, of a craft such as hunting or smithing. A "big man" is continually being greeted by those who come to acknowledge their indebtedness to and dependence on him and so in this way to bring him honour.

This is especially explicit in the case of chiefship, in which the "greeting" of people is an inherent part of a chief's authority. When he is first elected to chiefship, people come to see him, usually bringing gifts, to greet him, acknowledging him as chief. His own dependents and members of his village go regularly to greet the local

chief, and sub-chiefs or relations in other villages are expected to come at times specially to greet the chief; in this way they show him honour and demonstrate that, as before, they accept his authority. Any stranger who comes to the village is expected to go to greet the chief and is received and welcomed by him. In addition the chief has many people who are in one way or another specially dependent on him - to whom he has given a daughter in marriage, helped with money or food, or accepted into his household - and these people are especially scrupulous about bringing him full and frequent greetings. A chief or elder is important if he has "many people"; by this the Limba are not speaking just of the numbers of people, mathematically considered, who are bound to work for the chief, but of the numbers who can be seen crowding into his verandah to visit and acknowledge him, that is to "greet him" (ba ning mana). One of the main characteristics of a man who is "well off" (niɔ gbang) is that he should have many people coming to greet him every day. In The story of the millionaire, one of the hero's first triumphs was when be "began to see people coming to greet him", for it is in this that the honour (yiki) of any man, and above all of a chief, largely consists.

A chief or "big man" must accept and acknowledge these

greetings by "replying" (me) and himself greeting in his turn. This is part of the duty expected of any important man: he must not be proud, but must speak well to people. One of the highest compliments that a Limba can pay anyone is to say "he knows how to greet a man", and this is specially important for a chief. Someone who "knows how to greet you" is said to be more likely to succeed to the chiefship, while an effective accusation against a rival candidate is to say that "he does not speak well with people, he does not greet them". A chief should go to the farm so that even if he does not work there he can at least "greet" and "thank" people, acknowledging the work they are doing and making "their hearts feel good" by his words. Because of this, one of the reasons why the Limba are sometimes puzzled by the Europeans and Creoles they encounter in positions of authority, is that, in Limba terms, they seem proud and apparently unwilling to acknowledge their responsibility to the people under them in the way of a traditional chief by returning or offering protracted greetings. On the other hand, they were correspondingly delighted to follow out their own picture of authority, as involving greeting and kind words as well as dignity, on the occasion of the Queen's visit to Port Loko in Northern Sierra Leone in 1961; Limba visitors came

back overjoyed that she had acted in the way they had hoped of a chief: "in spite of her fine gown and all the honour she was not proud; she came down to greet the old chiefs who could not walk". According to the same ideas, a well-known Limba of chiefly family who had been to school was praised enthusiastically in another chiefdom many miles away because although literate he was yet not proud or removed from people - "if you met him you would not think he was one who could read - he greets you well and eats with you". "Greeting", in the Limba sense of the word, is a necessary part of the relations between any important man, specially a chief, and the rest of the people.

The sort of way in which people come to greet and are replied to with equally formal greetings has been illustrated by several accounts in previous chapters. Here is a final one, showing how the chief is recognised by the fact that the newly initiated boys are bound to come to greet him, and how he must reply to this with thanks.

> "When the boys come from the initiation bush, they must go to greet the chiefs. When they come to greet the chief here, he gives them a gift to thank them - 'greetings to you' (wali bena) - because they have come out of the bush with peaceful hearts. They say 'We have come from the bush; we did not fall ill. We have come to greet you, to see you. We are well'. He, the chief, thanks them 'thank you, thank you, thank you, it pleases me'. When

> they have announced this, he takes a hen saying 'here is a sacrifice for you, it pleases me'. The hen is killed and cooked and prepared. They eat. They say 'we are going. Goodbye.'. Well, he takes a small gift and gives it to them, saying 'greet your people. It pleases me'. They go back through the bush, they greet their own people.'

Their custom of greeting, therefore, is one way in which the Limba mark and recognise various relationships. Great stress is laid on the importance of explicitly greeting people, whether superiors, equals or inferiors, and by this greeting the position of the other is accepted. It is, in particular, in the careful visits of sub-chiefs and people to their chiefs that their authority is felt to consist, and the chief or "big man's" duty to greet people well in return is typical of the Limba insistence that the relationship between chief and people is a reciprocal one. He is responsible to and for them, just as they are to him, and this is made explicit in the constant series of greetings between them. The theme that seems to run through all these various usages of the Limba term for greeting, whether of quick off-hand exchanges of a word, or the formal visit, often with gift, to greet a superior, is the idea that to greet someone is to honour him and to acknowledge a relationship with him, often an acceptance of his authority. What is exchanged in these greetings is both a recognition of the

other's position and, as the Limba continually stress, "honour". It is "seeing people come to greet you" that brings a man honour and position, and greeting is, for the Limba, one of the most important factors marking any recognised relationship.

Much the same account could be given of the Limba words for "saying goodbye" and for "thanking". These terms are related to "greeting" in meaning and use, being in some ways merely special forms of salutation. "To say goodbye" (_sangkalang_), for example, is merely the causative verbal form of the common term for "goodnight" (_sangkala_) given in the earlier list of salutations. And in certain circumstances, for instance when addressing someone who has completed a piece of work, the correct way to "greet" is to use a term (_wali_) which could equally well be translated as "thank you"; a boy going to greet his father on his return from the farm may express this as "I am going to thank (_kalangang_) my father". For a Limba, "thanking" and "saying goodbye" are closely connected in meaning with "greeting". Following the analysis of "greeting", they can, therefore, be dealt with here rather more briefly.

"Saying goodbye" (_sangkalang_) is often a required and

formal stage in a ceremony or transaction. For several weeks before their initiation, for example, the young boys must travel round all their friends and relatives in their various villages; they come "to say goodbye" (ba sangkilina) and often give kola nuts as part of their goodbye, being formally thanked in turn for this. When a girl is told the date when she must finally leave her own home for her husband's, she goes round all her relatives to say goodbye: "I have been given, I am coming to say goodbye to you". A man intending to leave home to seek his fortune down country should - in theory - say a formal farewell with a token gift to the chief, and the occasion may be further formalised by speeches of thanks and blessings from the chief and elders of the village. This theory is not always kept to, for now that many more of the young men want to leave home, for a while at least, they sometimes go off secretly at night for fear that their goodbyes to the chief may not be approved; but even they themselves admit that this is a wrong thing to do and that the chief then has a right to be angry; the ideal is "to say goodbye well and ask the chief to agree; if he agrees, to thank him well". Similarly, a man should also say a careful and formal farewell to his father, his father's brother, and, if a smith or hunter, to his

master in that craft - to all those, in fact, with special authority over him, those who "own" him. In saying goodbye, he receives explicit or implicit permission for his new venture, and acknowledges that what he is doing is only "by your grace" (<u>thɔkɔ ba kɛnda</u>). The formal act of "saying goodbye" occurs constantly as a way of formalising the movement from one status to another or the ending of some stage, and often includes explicit recognition of the authority of others over the speaker.

As with greeting, saying goodbye is something which is also enjoyed for its own sake, and the utterance of the formal phrases of farewell and acceptance, thanks and blessing, are repeated with the knowledge that honour is thus exhibited from both sides. A gift is often given as part of the "goodbye". This is either merely a token such as a kola or 3d, or, occasionally, more substantial. When, for example, an expert is about to leave the village after conducting some ritual he is formally "told goodbye" (<u>sangkilino</u>); this is the point at which he expects to be rewarded for his services with, say, several shillings, a fowl and long containers of salt, as his "goodbye" (<u>kusangkalang</u>), and he makes obvious his unwillingness to leave until he is satisfied. Yet even this situation which <u>we</u> would express in terms of payment and bargaining,

is always in Limba spoken of as "saying goodbye" and must be accompanied by words of thanks and honour on either side. In a way characteristic of the Limba interest in "speaking", the central point picked out in any description of the end of a ceremony is in terms of the linguistic interchange - "he was thanked", or "he was told goodbye" - and emphasises the consequent relationship of honour and interdependence between the two sides marked by the exchange of formal words.

"Thanking" (kalangang) is strikingly frequent among the Limba. The most usual terms are ngwali or wali, plural wali bena, "thank you", sometimes expanded to the fuller yang kalangang yina, "I am thanking you" or ming kalangang yina, "we thank you". These phrases are usually repeated several times. A full thanking may also be accompanied by clapping, specially by the women, or by laying a hand on the other's ankle or by a gift. Sometimes blessings are also included such as "may Kanu give you a long life", "through Kanu may you have peace" or "by Kanu may you meet with no bad thing". Rather similar to thanking is the term mbadeng, an exclamation of joy or congratulation uttered when a man or his friend has met with some great success or good fortune; the women say this when they first see a new born child, or an owner

when the "company" of workers come to hoe his farm.

Such thanking terms are continually being used. Any gift that is given should be formally thanked for, ideally as publicly as possible, seconded by the dependants or relations of the individual who has received the present; sub-chiefs and followers join in thanking for a gift given to the chief, a husband comes to thank someone who has given a present to his wife. Thanking is also expected as a normal greeting to those who come home from the farm after a day's work, thanks are due from a husband or guest to the wife who has cooked for them, and a speaker often thanks those who are present when he is speaking: "thanks to all of you, you who have come" or "I give thanks to all you who are here".

Thanking is also used in a very formalised way to mark some explicit acknowledgement of interdependence or authority between two sides. A husband, for example, must take great pains to thank, with full honour and giving of gifts, the Bondo officials who have initiated his future wife into the women's society, and, later, the old women who have helped his wife in childbirth. He must also thank his wife for her contribution to the family farm, her cooking, and, above all, her bearing of children; any friends and relations who come to visit the new mother

always thank or congratulate her - "thank you for parenthood, thank you, thank you, thank you" - but it is the husband in particular who must speak well to her and bring her rice and palm wine "to thank her" (ba ning kalingina). In the same way, a person should thank those on whose help he is dependent in performing some work or ceremony; the bereaved son temporarily stops the women's singing at a funeral in order to thank them with a token gift, and the owner of a farm formally thanks those who come to help him and also calls out excitedly as they progress up the rice field: "Fine (mbadeng), fine, fine, fine, fine, fine; thanks (ngwali), thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks".

Another example is from an occasion when a "company for friendship" is called out. There are several formalities of thanking. The caller announces his presence to the owner of the farm.

> "I am Sanggbang. By my grace, by grace of my people, by grace of my companions who love me - now we have come to work for you... it is finished (lɔngthang)". The other replies, thanking them by name, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, you who have come, all of you, thank you. Maheni, thank you. Mabing, thank you. Kongkong, thank you. All you who have come, I cannot recount you all - I am thanking you now... Since I had no child to join in a "company", it is hard. That is it... You said please help me to do my work. Your companions came, by grace of your father, by grace of your mother, by grace of your brothers and your companions who have come to do the work. I accept it now... I thank you now. That is the word. It is finished. (Huna hoho, lɔngthang)

A further quotation will illustrate again how much the Limba stress the verbal acknowledgement of interdependence when they describe a transaction between two sides. This is a description of the apprenticing of a boy to a smith to learn smithcraft.

> "When the boy is about seven years old, his father takes him to the smith. He talks to him about the child. He takes a red fowl; his people pound rice; they get oil, they get salt, they get a mat and bring them. He goes to the smith and says 'here is a fowl; here is rice; here is oil; here is the child. We want you to teach him smithcraft.' The smith thanks him well. He says 'it pleases me'. He takes the child. The child stays there long, he teaches him... His people come and thank the master. They bring rice and a mat and a fowl and oil and money and cloth - everything. They come and thank, saying 'here they are. For the child we brought here, you taught him smithcraft; for us now, that pleases us. Here is a gift (kɛmɛ) thanking you. It pleases us. Here is a gift to (?) thank you.' The master, if it pleases him, he says 'I accept'. They say goodbye, fully."

The whole transaction here, as so often, is described and enacted in terms of the interchange of formalised verbal utterances, in particular, in this case, of thanking.

Thanks are particularly frequent between a chief, or other person in authority, and the people who come to him. Those who have received special help sometimes come in order to thank him formally, often with a gift; and those who arrive to announce some special event or success to the chief are thanked both for their coming, for the news they bring, and for the efforts they made to achieve the success.

This mutual thanking and the words of honour and blessing on each side point yet again to the reciprocal even quasi-contractual nature of authority among the Limba, where the relationship must be continually acknowledged on both sides, and the mutual responsibilities and interdependence are constantly voiced in their verbal interchanges.

The most formal occasions of thanking are accompanied by a gift, sometimes a substantial one, and a mention of "thanking" often implies that a gift has also been expected and given. But without the prescribed linguistic action, without, that is, the verbal utterance required on a set occasion between the appropriate people, the gift or payment would not in itself be sufficient to constitute the "thanks" nor would it be described as "thanking", whereas a mere verbal expression of gratitude, even though in practice less acceptable if given "with the mouth" only than when accompanied by a gift, would still be classed as "thanking".

"Thanking", therefore, an institution of such great importance to the Limba, is not to be defined ultimately as the giving or interchange of gifts. Nor is it to be analysed principally in terms of an inner <u>feeling</u> of gratitude, for this need not enter into the situation at all; though the Limba are clear that thanking is in fact

usually a source of satisfaction to both speaker and receiver, "making your heart good", this is the result of the thanking rather than its cause. Rather, Limba thanking can be interpreted as an institutionalised way of acknowledging some transaction or relationship between people. "Thanking" is regarded as a proper and constructive social activity and, correspondingly, as a suitable move or conclusion in a story.

The next group of terms to be considered are those to do with formal communication and decision - announcement, acceptance and acknowledgement. There are certain quasi-technical phrases to describe these actions, and the theme of formally "telling" people runs through all aspects of Limba society, whether within the family, between individuals and groups, or, more formally, in relations between defined groups or villages. Announcing the relevant facts is also required in almost any gathering or corporate action by a group of people and in formal relations with someone in authority, and in both story and everyday life formal announcements and dignified acceptance or thanks for these are of constant occurrence. Similarly "announcement" is

a frequent, and satisfying, conclusion to a story. The stress is less on the actual <u>content</u> of the communication, which may in fact often have been known to the participants before they were formally "told", than on the set declaration made of the relevant facts in the required manner and situation.

The most common phrases for this announcing is <u>tɔng danthɛkɛ</u>, to "announce", declare a purpose or tell important news. This is usually a very formal act and so is often accompanied by a gift, sometimes merely a token one. It often involves the explicit statement of the recognised purpose of some visit or ceremony. When, for example, visitors come to a funeral celebration, one required stage in the proceedings is the interchange of formal speeches between them and the relations of the dead; they all sit together in one of the verandahs and the visitors show or announce their purpose (<u>tɔng danthɛkɛ</u>) by saying that they have come to join in sympathy with their friends, relations or affines, and by giving the gifts they have brought with them. In a memorial ceremony too the formality of presenting a contribution by the visitors - "here is 4/-" or "here are kolas" - is also called <u>tɔng danthɛkɛ</u>. Similarly marriage negotiations contain several such formal announcements: a man going to declare his wish to marry a

girl or to ask for his promised wife to be given to him, takes a gift as "notification" (danthɛkɛ), and when the girl is brought to her husband, the escorters go specially to make a formal announcement to him of her presence; he too sends back a token gift to declare (tɔng danthɛkɛ) that she is now with him. In a law case, the various stages of the procedure are often formally marked by a "telling" of the chief or disputants what has occurred, usually with a gift. Another example, described more fully above,[1] which also illustrates the importance attached to formal notification, is that of the young boys who are due to be initiated. Everyone in fact knows that initiations are due to take place that year and preparations have in fact been going on for some months already and the necessary large harvest ensured by sowing extra rice. Yet it is also obligatory for the boys to join in a group to perform the ceremony of carrying in wood for the chief and elders as an "announcement" of their desire to be circumcised that year. One boy or young man is chosen to express this on their behalf, and he sits with the elders so that speeches can be made on each side and he can formally declare their purpose (tɔng danthɛkɛ) and hear their acceptance of this.

Such formal announcements according to the set usage

1. pp. 322-3

and response are thus employed to declare the purpose of some ceremony or action, or to initiate or cement some transaction between two parties. They are also used in recognition of someone's authority or ownership. Thus, as already described in chapter 4, one of the marks of a chief's authority is that he should know everything that happens in his chiefdom in the sense of being formally "told", whether or not he happens to know it informally already. When a visitor comes to the village, for example, he or his host must go to "announce" his presence to the local chief; or when a stranger wishes to settle in the locality, he must go and tell the chief formally of his intentions, saying, for example, "I have come here; I wish to live here, by your grace"; by such words and the offer of a token gift, he declares his intention (tɔng dɑnthɛkɛ) and by so doing makes clear his acceptance of the chief's authority. Similarly any other important event in the chiefdom such as a death, killing of big game, imposition of a dangerous "swear", initiation or accident - all these must be formally announced, preferably with a gift, to the paramount or local chief; and he in turn accepts and approves the news.

A chief is the one who must always be told of all important events with full formality. But the principle of announcing events or purposes occurs in many contexts,

sometimes with less formality when the term used is not the semi-technical tɔng danthɛkɛ but the more ordinary words to "tell" (tepe) or "ask" (thɔngthɔngɔng). A child should in this way tell his parents of his plans and his successes or failures, specially when he returns after a long absence; a husband should tell the old women when his wife is pregnant; and elder should be told of a dispute when his intercession or mediation is requested. A new wife, a new chief, a new chief's drum, or the initiation of a new phase of the farming year should all be shown and notified to those in authority, including those who are the most senior of all, the dead ancestors. Whatever the degree of these various communications, there is always some tinge of formality and of the recognition through the words of the announcement of some formalised relationship between individuals or groups, one in turn accepted and further reinforced by the formal reply and acceptance of the announcement by its recipient.

The formalised acceptance of a gift, an item of news, or a declaration of intention is described by the Limba term yɛrɔkɔ, "accept", agree, or approve.

This term has its most clearly formalised application in the conduct of a law case. The chief or elders trying

to reconcile the disputants "speaks well between them", persuading the one to apologise or "beg", the other to "accept" this. The aggrieved party may continue to refuse his acceptance for some time, reiterating, for example, "I will not agree" (*yang sa me*) or "I don't like that, I don't like that" (*yang thimo ta wung*, *yang thimo ta wung*). Finally, however, the case is normally brought to a close by his formal acceptance "it pleases me; it is good; I accept" (*wung thime yama; wung a lɔhɔ; yang yɛrɔkɔi*) or simply "I accept" (*yang yɛrɔkɔi*). In this context the words can clearly be described as having a legal or performative force in that it is the verbal act which formally marks the end of the dispute.

In many other situations too, the acceptance in words has the same function of marking a final stage in some transaction. In marriage negotiations, for example, after the formal announcements by the suitor, the parents, if they agree, declare "we accept" (*ming yɛrɔkɔi*), and even a friendly discussion between contemporaries is occasionally ended in the same terms. They also tend to use the same terms in discussion of religious topics; as already quoted,[1] a spirit encountered by a mortal is

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1. Chapter 5, p. 198

depicted as answering "I accept" to the man's proposals, and even the dead, who can no longer speak in the usual way, are imagined by the Limba to signify their acceptance of a request or notification accompanied by a gift (sacrifice), by speaking through the medium of hen and rice in divination, or by sending vultures as "witnesses" (<u>basereng</u>) to show their acceptance; "if they accept (<u>yɛrɔkɔi</u>), the vultures come". In every sort of context, then, story, song, public transaction, discussion and decision, the Limba like to use the formal phrase signifying acceptance; and they project the same term even into their discussions of religious topics.

The actual acceptance may not be given immediately. Those asked for it may hesitate, or may first make long speeches ending with <u>tindɛ</u>, "enough" signifying that someone else is now to speak, or "passing the word" (<u>pɛngkɛti</u>) to communicate the information to each other in turn, as the father does to the mother in the very formal context of marriage negotiations; or they may say that they are "holding the word" (<u>bohi thampa</u>) until a stated time, indicating that they have taken notice of the declaration and will give a formal decision later. It is expected that they should give <u>some</u> verbal reply at the time, for to "stay silent" (<u>nguru</u>) is the height of discourtesy.

They must "reply" (*me*), a term which often, but not always, has the further implication of acceptance, so that it is partly similar to *yɛrɔkɔ* in usage; it can also mean obey, approve, reply in song or chorus, or answer to a greeting or summons.[1] However the strongest and most usual phrase in which the transaction must be finally clinched is always the performative utterance *yang yɛrɔkɔi*, "I accept".

By uttering this required term, with or without a gift, a man can put the final seal of approval or acceptance on some offer or statement that is made to him, and is thus using the formal words quite explicitly not to express a feeling or describe facts, but to do something, to perform a quasi-legal act. In stating his agreement, the speaker is undertaking a certain responsibility and, often, adding to this a clear statement of the other people associated together with him in this responsibility or in authority over him by such common phrases as "by grace of my father", "by grace of the sub-chiefs". The whole social situation as well as the specific act or transaction is thus declared and approved.

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1. See further in chapter 8, section 2.

The final term to be discussed is the Limba word <u>theteke</u>. This means to entreat, apologise, pray, or acknowledge a fault; the usual rendering in Sierra Leone English, and the translation I have most often used, is "beg".

Some one "begs" by uttering one of the standard phrases which express request, entreaty or desire for forgiveness, <u>yandi</u>, <u>kuluho</u> or <u>ilɔho</u>, usually adding "I am begging you" (<u>yang theteke yina</u>). Sometimes this is followed by the pleader clapping or putting a hand on the other's ankle as a sign of humility, or, occasionally, in extreme cases, lying prone on the ground; another person may be begged to intercede as well on the pleader's behalf, and this is usually accompanied by a gift, or, in an important case, by a substantial payment. When someone pronounces the standard words in a prescribed situation, even without a gift, then the action is described as "begging".

Any quarrel should, ideally, be ended by "begging" on the one side and "acceptance" on the other. A dispute between two women, for example, or between a husband and wife, may be finished by an agreed apology, usually with the offer of a token gift as the "beg". People also formally beg for forgiveness if they have failed to fulfil some obligation to someone in authority over them;

society members, for instance, would have to beg their leader if they had danced without full and formal permission; and a sub-chief who is late in bringing rice due to his paramount chief brings a gift to apologise, "beg" for the delay, and it passes from hand to hand among the chief's followers who thank the giver in turn (wali, wali o), and finally goes to the chief himself who says "I accept". Asking friends or neighbours for help with some special task is also referred to as "begging"; a man goes round begging people to help him to build or thatch his house, or begging his friends to join him in a hoeing "company for friendship". Even a chief's special requests to his people should, ideally, be describable as "begging"; though there may be in practice no question of disobedience, he should always "speak well to people", thank them for their work and "beg them well". The normal word for praying is also theteke, and the words and actions of prayers are similar to those associated with other begging: people use the same terminology (e.g. yandi, "please", or ka bari bena, "attention", the usual start to a speech or announcement by the village crier) and may show the same signs of humility (in extreme cases, for example, lying prone on a grave to beg a dead father's forgiveness). People "beg" the dead for a "cool spirit", or a father

intercedes with the dead for a child in much the same terms that he would intercede for him with the chief "here is this child, please, I beg you (yandi ilɔho) may he be better, may he not stay ill, yandi ilɔho yandi ilɔho". In sacrifice too the dead ancestors are "begged" and the animal killed to give them "honour" in the same way as a gift accompanies a beg to living people; then the dead "accept" the beg.

Situations of various kinds are, therefore, continually arising in which the correct action for a man is "to beg". In doing this he is acknowledging his dependence on the other, his responsibility to him, and his respect for him, and, sometimes, his own inferiority or guilt.

Many further instances of this kind of begging could be given. Here is one, as given by a Limba, to describe the way a husband may have to "beg" for his wife's return; the various means he adopts to beg successfully are all standard ones.

> "If a husband has done badly, when the wife goes to her parents, the husband will come there for her and beg (theteke), so that the wife will agree to return. The husband will give kola to the wife's people. Then they go and question her about what it was that made her go away, about why the husband is begging. Sometimes the husband will ask the wife's younger sister to beg for him with their mother. The sister goes to the mother, saying that the husband has confessed to doing evil, he is begging. The husband must sit humbly. Even if they curse him and say bad

> words, he must not reply, he is ashamed, he can say nothing. Sometimes he goes to an old man, he gives him kola, he begs, saying that he will not do it again. So the old man goes to help the husband to beg the wife's family. However much they speak against him the husband must not reply. The old man may go in private into the room with the wife, and give her wine, and speak well with her so that she may agree to return... [Again] if a wife is beaten she will go to her people and tell them that 'my husband has beaten me'; then the husband will have to take a great amount of kolas, more than you can count, and give them to his wife's father; he will bring fine things too for his wife. He begs his father in law. If his father in law agrees and wants to say 'I accept', he takes a white kola and splits it - white to show that his heart is clean. He gives half to the husband, and eats half himself, or gives it to the wife or the mother in law. If they accept and eat it, then it shows that their heart is clean."

Besides these situations, "begging" is also used in the related but even more formal context of a law case. A man "begs" to make a formal admission of guilt, and this often includes the gift or payment he has to make in consequence. A witch, for example, must both "beg" (theteke), or "confess" (meteke) in words, as an initial and necessary acknowledgement of guilt, and also later "beg" further with material property - money, rice, live-stock. Similarly an adulterer must "beg" the husband by first admitting his guilt, often accompanying this by a token payment "to confess", and then later paying the fine of £2 - £4. These are extreme cases, for both witchcraft and adultery, forms of "stealing", are very

serious crimes. In other offences the amount of compensation or fine is usually considerably less, and the emphasis is primarily laid on the verbal act constituting the acknowledgement of guilt. If a man "begs well" it is considered right and justifiable that he should be let off some of the fine, and the European refusal to be "begged" in the Limba way, causes misunderstandings on both sides. The main principle in the Limba cases is not so much the exact amount of the compensation paid as the performative utterance of "begging", thus acknowledging the culprit's fault and, very important, his good intentions for the future; he also in this way admits the authority of the arbitrating elders and recognises the part he should be playing in village life and that he will now resume.

"Begging", then, is used in personal quarrels, requests for aid or forgiveness, and the formal apology or payment of compensation in a law case. When the "beg" has been made, the matter is then ended and ratified by a formal acceptance of it in the phrase "I accept" (<u>yang yɛrɔkɔi</u>), or, in the case of an apology, by "it is finished" (<u>wung pati</u>) or "it ceases" (<u>hung pɛ</u>), by which the cause of the offence is formally declared over. The culprit or pleader is sometimes also thanked for his words and gifts of

"begging" and told that he too has in that respect done well and shown the due honour to those he was begging. It is considered very wrong not to accede to someone's begging without a very strong cause. In this respect the Limba sometimes contrast themselves with others. Europeans, they commonly say, do not know about begging, and make no difference between a man who begs well and one who does not. This seems to the Limba quite wrong.

> "Begging is a big thing among us Limbas. You will send a friend to the other saying 'please, please', begging for you, asking the other to cease [from his anger]. The other will agree when he is begged - looking to Kanu. It is bad not to accept when you are begged. Kanu comes to us all. Looking to Kanu - that means listening to the one who begs."

Even if in fact great amounts are sometimes exacted in compensation (in the past culprits were sometimes sold into slavery), the theory and very often the practice remains that people should "beg" if they are guilty and they should then be forgiven or let off lightly.

By this public acknowledgement of guilt or the formal request for aid made through the Limba custom of "begging", something tantamount to a legal act is performed by the speaker of the words. He sets himself in a certain recognised relationship to those he is addressing. In the case of a formal court action and apology, this utterance is an admission of guilt, withdrawal of his own claims, and

formal acceptance of the elders' assessment and moral position; it is a necessary stage in the settlement of the case. By begging for help, the speaker is also formally acknowledging his dependence on another, and showing him honour. The theme that runs through all the usages is that in uttering the words for "begging", a man by saying something is also doing something. He is quite explicitly initiating or ratifying a certain relationship or situation.

The utterances I have been discussing could all be classed as "performative" in the sense that the voicing of the set words at the suitable time is in itself operative - it ratifies a decision, recognises a relationship, marks a stage in a law case. This is obvious in the case of "I accept" or "I apologise" where the performative force is clear in English as well as in Limba; in the case of "I announce" or, still more, in the earlier examples of greeting, thanking, and saying goodbye, this may not seem so obvious. But in a Limba context these phrases are all, up to a point, used in a similar way - to recognise or reinforce certain relationships or situations. The degree of formality varies (with minor greetings it is very little); but there is always some

idea of formality, some sense in which the set words are used not just to "state" but also to act.

3. "Speaking"

All the formal phrases discussed so far may be classed together under the wider term gbongkoli, "to speak", which also covers other kinds of formal speaking in addition to that containing these particular forms. How far the Limba are aware of the importance of formal "speaking" can be judged by the interest they themselves take in the subject of "speaking" and the many and various contexts in which the word is used.

The term gbongkoli[1] is used in various specialised senses and forms which in themselves indicate something of the wide range of applications of the basic idea of "speaking":

> Hugbongkila ha means "speaking" (the abstract verbal noun), as well as "speech" or "harangue"; it also refers to the act of arbitration performed by the mediating words of chief or elders as they attempt to reconcile the two parties by their "speaking"; hence it can mean a law case, a formal occasion when the old men hear and speak between the disputants who state their case with due formality; its plural,

1. In north and west often gbongkoyi.

thagbongkila tha, refers to cases or disputes. Bagbonkoli wo (plural bagbonkoling be), "speaker" refers to one of the several elders who jointly help the chief to speak successfully between two parties; they speak in turn endeavouring to make the disputants' hearts "cool" again, and support the chief's speaking by their presence, murmurs of agreement and interjections of "true" (thia). Gbongkiliɛ, "speak for" is what someone in a position of authority does for those for whom he is responsible; groups tend to have one person to "speak for" and represent them to others, whether the group is that of uncircumcised boys wishing to be initiated, of workers who make up a hoeing "company", or of adult men going in a group down-country to tap and sell palm wine; a father or elder also "speaks for" anyone under his control if he is involved in a law case; the elder's speaking and guarantee for him help the culprit so that he is more easily forgiven or let off lightly "by grace of" (thɔkɔba) the one who has spoken on his behalf.

Other forms are found outside the context of formal arbitration. Magbongkoli ma, "spoken words", can refer to the words of a song or to the spoken injunction attributed to someone in authority. Gbongkilitande, "speak together with", is a reciprocal verb which refers both to formal discussion and to mere conversation between two or more people; a capacity for this is a quality expected of any leading Limba - "if you are sensible you will talk well with people" - and a chief in particular must take pains to "speak well with others", that is, to greet them well, to listen fully to what they say and to reply to them with respect. Gbongkilɔkɔ, "speak to oneself", is a less common word; it refers to a man's grumbling and complaining to himself when things are difficult or when he considers he has been wrongfully treated; this is rather a bad thing to do, for, ideally, if one has been wronged, the right course is not to fight, abuse or complain but to speak out the complaint explicitly in the setting of a formal "speaking" before the elders.

The basic word, gbongkoli, "speak" is the most common of all. Though it is sometimes used lightly, meaning merely to talk, its root meaning seems to be to speak

formally, responsibly and carefully, most typically in the context of a formal law case or transaction. "Speaking" is the most characteristic quality of a chief in his role of reconciling people and thus bringing peace to individuals and to the chiefdom as a whole. It is also a desired attribute and activity of anyone with authority over others - a father "speaks between" his children, a household head between his dependents, an older boy among his juniors, a respected senior wife among her younger co-wives, a Bondo leader among her followers. Formality of speech includes not only speaking to reconcile people but also the whole series of interchanges of formal thanks, requests, offers, or announcements, between individuals or groups which occur at times in almost every recognised relationship. Formal "speaking" also includes prayer and invocation by the old men as they "speak for" (gbongkiliɛ) the other members of the community and "call on" (yongong) the dead "recounting their names" (kɔndi ngakeng nga); and what makes it correct to apply the term saraka, ritual, to a ceremony or material object seems to be the condition that someone in authority has "spoken" over it, specifying its purpose in achieving a "cool spirit" and calling on Kanu and the dead. Gbongkoli is also used of the formal interchange of speeches at the

start of ordeals for witchcraft, for the long rhetorical harangues during memorial ceremonies, and of speaking the words of a story. In all kinds of transactions, whether those to do with farm work, dances, initiations, ceremonies, or negotiations for marriage, formal "speaking" is an essential part of the proceedings.

"Speaking" therefore is a concept that is relevant in the analysis of many aspects of Limba society - in what we could call their politics, law, marriage customs, religion and even the way they conduct their economic activity. The importance of "speaking" in the organisation of all these spheres should have emerged from the descriptions given in previous chapters which it is not necessary to repeat here. Furthermore not only is "speaking" a formal activity constantly practised in many different contexts, but the Limba themselves also like to describe their own institutions in these terms. A Limba as well as a sociologist, for instance, will say that the main function of a chief is "to speak", or that men do not expect women to be able to "speak" well, only to cry, and people are praised for their ability to "speak well". It is also common to use terms referring to words or speech to describe relationships: two co-wives who are quarrelling are said not to be in "one word" (hulung hunthe), a wife is given to one chief

by another so that they will be in "one word" (<u>hutha hunthe</u>), orders are described as the "voice" (<u>thampa</u>) of the leader, and "the word (<u>hutha</u>) of the chief should hold the whole country". For the Limba "speaking" is regarded as one of the most significant activities of social life.

The Limba, it seems, further hold that "speaking" must take place at the right time and should be properly controlled. If there is a quarrel or disagreement, for example, this should be brought before the chief to be spoken out and reconciled in the right place and manner. To take individual action outside the context of proper "speaking" is wrong. There are two main ways in which individuals offend in this respect: by "abusing" others, and by "slandering" them, speaking unfavourably of them or showing them unfairness behind their backs.

"Abusing" (<u>yaki</u>) is treated as a serious offence. "Rather than abuse someone, strike him" it is sometimes said for "a blow hurts only the body but abuse hurts the heart". Though any verbal rudeness or negligence may be held to be wrong in a negative way as not manifesting the full honour due to another, actual "abuse" is thought to be a positive offence. People "abuse" others by using a wrong term of address on purpose (or so it is assumed by

the one insulted); a man, for instance, would be thought to have committed a serious "abuse" if he called his mother in law by her own name instead of the proper term of respect (thɔnɔ), or if he used a paramount chief's old name instead of his new title. Various words may also count as "abuses" - certain terms for "head", for example, for "man" and "woman", for "excretion" and for "the sole of the foot"; if one of these is used in wrong circumstances or by a wrong person, it is "abuse". The same sometimes applies to terms like gba! or gbɔ! which, said in a certain way, can signify envy or disgust; so too can the phrase "get out from there" (gbɔnɔkɔ kangka) specially if said by an inferior. It is not that such words are forbidden absolutely - those in the relationship of mother's brother/sister's son are allowed to use them, even to "abuse" each other freely - but that in certain circumstances they are quickly interpreted, and sometimes intended, as "abuse", and onlookers as well as the object of the words are shocked by them. The case can then only be brought to an end after a full "beg" and apology by the abuser, and through long speeches by an arbitrator; as the "abuse" has made the other feel "shame" (kulahu), this must be removed by speeches of honour and persuasion so that "his heart may be good again". Such "abuse" does not in fact

seem to be very common, but the Limba speak often of its dangers.

The other way in which people can offend by talking in the wrong way is when they "do slander" (yangfa). This offence, yangfa,[1] is the one that is, perhaps, the most frequently mentioned of all in the morals given in the stories; one of the conventional endings to a story is "and so you see, yangfa is bad; the one who did it suffered from his own yangfa". The word however has no exact translation into English. It can mean to act unfairly, secretly showing more favour to one than to another; to speak behind someone's back and slander him so that he loses his good name, his property or his job; to be a hypocrite or backbiter, speaking well to a man's face "eating with you, finding out your secrets, and then going to tell them to others". A man who practises yangfa was once described to me as one who "looks at your children and your farm with greedy eyes; he is almost like a witch but he has not the power".

The most typical description of one who does yangfa, a "slanderer" or "tell-tale" (bayangfa wo) is of his divulging someone's secret to an enemy;[2] for this, in

1. Also yangha or yaha.
2. e.g. the palm tree in Kanu and palm wine, the hen in The fish's loan, The sun, the hawk and the hen, the leopard in The goat, the leopard and the lion.

the stories, he is always made to suffer in the end. This fits well with the Limba attitude to "speaking" as a formal activity that must take place at the prescribed time and in the requisite way. A secret hidden talker behind others' backs does not act by the normal approved way of "speaking" but in secret and anti-socially for his own individual advantage. "Speaking" in the correct way is so highly valued among the Limba that it is not surprising that both openly abusive and secretly hostile talking are correspondingly strongly reprehended.

> "If a man thinks well, he does not abuse anyone. If he abuses people, he does not speak truth (thia) and people will say 'he does not know how to speak, he abuses people'; he will not get honour (yiki)... It is bad to do slander (yangfa) to a child; that hurts him. And it is bad to abuse elders."

Not only should people refrain from talking on the wrong occasion and in the wrong way; they must also speak out at the right time. To "stay silent" (nguru) or to fail to respond when greeted, called on or spoken to, is considered excessively discourteous; if a man could be accused consistently of this people might even start to wonder whether he was not perhaps a witch, brooding secretly over his wrongs instead of "speaking well" with his neighbours. Analogously people should "speak" out their complaints on set occasions. In one ritual, for example, all the women were asked to speak out the bad feelings in their hearts

so that the whole village might be "cool" again; before someone can be freed from the effects of a "swear", he must confess what he has done; and in difficult childbirth, both husband and wife are required to formally give voice to all the stored up anger in their hearts against each other, and so end it so that they may be cleansed. In a case before the chief and elders too the disputants should speak out their case fully so that it may be finished completely and their hearts may be "clean" after the chief has brought his formal speaking to an end.

As mentioned already one of the reasons why the Limba attach such value to the activity and effects of "speaking" is their view of human psychology. If a man's "heart is bad" from "shame", envy, or a secret grudge which he does not confess, he may turn to the most dangerous of all sins, witchcraft. By inducing him to speak this out openly and in the right context, or by speaking very well and persuasively to him "to cool his heart", this danger can be averted. This affects both the individual concerned and also the peace of the whole community.

"Speaking well to people", then, not only avoids offending them by abuse or slander and thus bringing them "shame", but also helps to maintain or restore the well-being of all members of the village or chiefdom. At all

important crises, whether a violent dispute in which the leading men must arbitrate, a transaction over marriage, initiation or rice, or the period of pregnancy when a husband should "speak well to his wife so that her heart may be good", formal "speaking" is, for the Limba, a significant means by which "the heart is cooled". Without "speaking", it is assumed, the Limba could not attain the end which they seek above all others, the physical and moral peace signified by their phrase thɛbina lima.

4. Conclusion

When formal "speaking", or the specific acts of greeting, thanking, announcing, etc., are being performed in the most formal way, they are usually accompanied by a gift to "make the words heavy" or to "draw attention". The normal word for this gift is kɛmɛ which often means merely a small token gift of very little economic value. The most common token gifts are kolas. These are used in many contexts - a kola is given to "tell" someone a thing formally, to "beg" a wife to return, to put on top of a sacrifice of rice-flour, to show someone honour. Kola nuts are a common way of welcoming a stranger, usually with one red and one white kola, the white one in particular.

indicating that the giver's heart is "clean" to the other. An offer of a token gift, whether in the form of a kola or a small amount of money, is a frequent component of such formal actions as "begging", "announcing", "saying goodbye" etc. In the formal wooing of a wife, for instance, the man may "give 1/- as a token gift (kɛmɛ) to say 'I love the girl', and then 3d as a token gift to announce 'I have come to woo the girl'".

The material gift is in certain cases much larger and is then rather more like a fine or payment of compensation than is the token gift usually referred to by kɛmɛ. These payments include such things as brideprice and the compensation, to "beg", by a confessed witch or homicide; these are described as "bringing out property" (fungung nahulu). Making of sacrifice is also similar, for though the material object - the sacrificial animal, rice-flour, kola nut - is not referred to as either "token gift" (kɛmɛ) or "property" (nahulu), the principle of offering a gift to emphasise the words of "begging" is exactly analogous to the way in which the Limba so frequently use a gift to give special formality and force to their verbal utterances.

However, though the giving of a gift, token or substantial, so frequently accompanies the verbal actions discussed, it is not the actual giving or exchange of the material object in itself that creates or ratifies the

required transaction so much as the utterance of the required words, "I accept", "I thank you", "I beg" and so on. The whole action of such interchanges is described by the Limba primarily in terms of "speaking" and of words referring to language, and someone using the correct words in a suitable context would still be spoken of as "begging", "greeting", "thanking" etc. even if no gift was in fact also given. The giving of the gift is in order to give extra force to the words which, in themselves, are what create the required situation.

Among the Limba, then, there are certain set verbal formulae which are understood as ratifying some decision or situation in rather the way signatures and seals ratify contracts in our society. Formal "contracts" among the Limba, however, are mostly, unlike ours, not so much separable items as a theme which runs through much of their social life. That is, the formalising contractual element is inherent in very many contexts, ranging from a clear cut form, as in negotiations over marriage or a systematically conducted law case, to the verbal interchange of greetings and thanks between chief and people, man and wife, or two acquaintances. In all of these the contractual and reciprocal aspect of a relationship is emphasised and reinforced, and the relationship as a whole, often an enduring

one, is thus recognised. In all of these contexts, as I have continually pointed out, the interchange of certain words is one means for linking people together in recognised ways; it can involve the initiation of a new relationship between two sides, an explicit settlement of a dispute, or the recognised acknowledgement of authority and its reciprocal responsibilities.

Language among the Limba, therefore, sometimes has a performative quasi-legal function. When a man utters certain words he is doing as well as saying. In a sense one could say that this is perhaps partly true of all use of language. But it certainly applies in a particularly explicit way to certain terms among the Limba for thanking, greeting, accepting and so on. In the light of this formal terminology, it is quite clear that, contrary to what is sometimes implied of primitive, or, indeed, of more sophisticated people, the Limba use their language not only for inter-communication (in the narrower sense of communication of fact), for expression of feelings or attitudes, and for entertainment or artistic expression, but also, in a quite specific way, for social action.

Besides using set phrases in this performative way, the Limba are also up to a point conscious that this is being done. As described above, they take a great interest

and delight in their own language, and tend to describe many actions in terms of "speaking", either in general or in its specific quasi-technical forms. A sub-chief's formal visit, a man's careful appearance before his mother in law, the quick greetings between friends, are all included together under the term "to greet" (mang), the term which also describes the situation in its aspect of an interchange of words. Similarly the giving of a gift in gratitude, the speeches of thanks and honour, and the set response to an expected service, are all equally called "thanking" (kalangang). These acts are all described by the Limba in terms of language. Besides their awareness of the significance of language in these situations, the Limba also take a great pleasure in performing these linguistic acts and "speaking well" on every kind of occasion, the less as well as the more formal. The small children begin early to imitate their elders in formal speaking, and use the set phrases to make decisions, accept apologies, or return thanks; and even when exceedingly drunk a Limba continues to derive enjoyment from the usual linguistic formulae - "you're to beg me", he may insist even if hardly sober enough to sit straight on his chair; when the verbal beg is given he "accepts" it at great length, with the usual formality and thanks - "may you be well, it pleases me, may

you have a cool spirit". All this interchange in language, the Limba are clear, brings honour to the speakers, recognition for the authority and responsibilities of others "by whose grace" the words are spoken, and, finally, "makes a man's heart good". These formal utterances are alluded to in the central term, "speaking", an activity by which people are given their due "honour", individuals and groups are linked through a continual series of verbal interchanges, and a "cool spirit" achieved and maintained, with people in the right relations to each other.

Three related points have emerged from this discussion. First that certain set words or phrases have among the Limba a performative function, ratifying certain transactions and relationships. Secondly that it is possible to regard these and similar verbal exchanges in rather the same way as did Mauss[1] with gift exchange - as a systematic means of bringing about and maintaining certain social relationships. And, finally, that the Limba themselves are aware of these two aspects of speech, and attach great value to "speaking" and to the performance of these required linguistic actions.

It is against the background of this attitude to

1. Mauss, 1954.

language that Limba oral literature exists, and that the people in the stories are so often depicted as thanking, greeting, accepting or speaking with the formality expected of any Limba agent. It is their knowledge of the significance of such utterances that, to the Limba, give such moves in story (or real life) their effectivmness and full meaning.

Chapter 7

Stories and story (mbɔrɔ)

1. Limba artistic expression

Story, song and dance are of daily and recurrent importance in Limba life. All such artistic expression and inspiration, whether of singers, story-tellers, dancers or drummers, is thought to come from essentially the same source - the dead, the "old people" - and speech, song and dance are closely linked in both concept and actuality. In the Limba view this inheritance from the dead includes within its range such, to us, various elements as the rhetorical and winning force inherent in the words of some pleader in a law case, the songs sung by a story-teller in the course of his narration, the persuasive and detailed prayer to the dead for peace and health, the weeding songs of the drummer in the fields as he calls to the women to show their skill and speed, the complicated sung words and gestures exacted by the young men from the boys they are bullying, or a song of thanks spontaneously sung and danced by an old woman on the farm when she sees an

unexpected and honoured visitor approaching. Language, song and rhythmic movement form one complex of artistic expression, and one in which, diffident though they are in a European context, the Limba are convinced of their own competence, wit and profound wisdom, of "the sense we found from our ancestors".

Within the cultural inheritance which they refer to as "Limba things" or "Limba times" (malimba ma), they distinguish different elements. In a wide sense the term can include all their traditional customs, including, for instance, those to do with chiefship or farming, but malimba ma seems at times to refer primarily to certain aspects of artistic expression; it covers drumming (fang), dancing (kang), and singing (sɔng) as well as the telling of stories (fungung mbɔrɔ). Before discussing the stories at length I shall therefore say something about these three first activities.

Drumming is an activity that takes place very frequently. Everyone can drum a bit and is ready to do this on any occasion. However it also has a specialist aspect, and many occasions have their own special kinds of drums and drumming. These include, for instance,

the large chief's drum (huthabale), the sign of his authority, used for summoning people, not for dancing; the cylindrical hubang often used for the pɔrɔ dances; the long cylindrical women's drum (sambure) played for dances and ceremonies in the women's society; the ngkali wooden gongs used for many dances, but specially important in the farming "companies"; and the long kusung drum, sometimes regarded as the most senior of all, beaten for big farming occasions and, in many places, for the important boys' initiation dances. Though in practice people sometimes dance informally to clapping or singing or to such other instruments as gourd rattles, sansas or whistles, the ideal is to have a proper drum or drums, and for important ceremonies, especially those of initiation or memorial, this is obligatory. Apart from the drum of the women's society, all drumming is done by men, and in the case of the ngkali and kusung drums there are recognised experts who receive honour and gifts for the exercise of their skills.

Dancing too can be a specialised activity with its own experts. The most famous of these are the gbende-kɔlɔing who train for many years, have a special dress

of a leopard skin cloak, and a metal headdress which is said to be the abode of the spirit who inspires them; they are given presents, payment and great honour for their dancing. A man can only become a full master on the death of a previous specialist. They dance accompanied by drum and song, at the memorial ceremonies of chiefs, village heads, or one of their own members. Other dancers too sometimes appear at memorial ceremonies in addition to or instead of them: the bakɔntha, second only to the gbendekɔlɔ in skill, who wears a special indigo cotton headdress and accompanies himself by beating a hollow metal clanger as he sings the long memorial songs; the pɛndiɔkɔ, half acrobat half clown, who runs around with funny gestures as part of his dance to make people laugh; the bawosi, a female dancer clad in long trailing strips of cloth; and the bakantha, a woman who performs a very fast dance (kukanthang) in time to her singing and her movements of the animal's tail she holds in her hand as part of her secret skill. These dancers are not professionals, in that they all rely primarily on rice-farming for subsistence and dance only in their free time; but they are considered to be experts who deserve honour and reward, and they are often so famous

for many miles around that they are specially invited to come and dance at important ceremonies in and beyond the chiefdom. People are always excited when one of these experts is due to appear; they boast to each other about the dancer's skill or magical powers, and rush to the spot as soon as they hear the first sounds of the dance within the village.[1]

Besides these expert dancers, there are certain forms of dancing in which all Limba are competent. Male and female initiations are preceded and followed by dances. Before being taken into seclusion the girls perform their Bondo dances, circling round with bowed heads and bodies, and clapping as a sign of their humility; when they emerge from the bush as women they are made, at one of the ceremonies, to dance two by two in turn before the fire to demonstrate the skill they have learnt in the bush, while the elders look on appraisingly. The boys' dancing on the night before they go to be circumcised is thought even more striking and provides an occasion for hundreds of visitors to come and watch. Their characteristic dance is the gbondokale for which

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1. Other dances include e.g. the northern masande for memorial ceremonies, the old men's popo, probably mainly in the west, and the southern mathong danced at the time of hoeing.

the Limba are famous in the north of Sierra Leone.[1] This is a very athletic dance, involving leaps, hand-springs and cartwheels, but at the same time stylised and controlled, in strict time to the beat of drums, blasts of the boy's whistle, and songs of the women. The boy wears a special dress of native cloth with flying strips of cloth, woven bead bands, a plumed cap and wool tassels, all of which swing around him as he revolves in the dance lit by flickering lanterns or a bright moon. Such a dance is always very much admired by the Limba, and this occasion is felt to be a specially dramatic one, one of the highlights of any boy's career.

In addition to these very special occasions people are liable to start dancing at any time of festivity. The women may join in one of their Bondo dances, in a group apart from the men, who are nervous about approaching. The men too have their own secret society dances, performed in the night when no woman is present, and the special hunter's madonsia danced by the men to celebrate the killing of some big animal such as a bush cow. Most often the men choose to dance the slow dignified pɔrɔ mende, which is considered particularly suitable for old

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1. As are also the neighbouring Loko peoples.

men and for chiefs, though any man, or even a boy, is entitled to dance it if he wishes; the women usually take part in this dance too, moving slowly in a circle round the main performers, and singing the chorus. This follows the usual pattern apparent in all Limba dancing - that the most skilled perform singly or in small numbers in the centre, the most honoured position, while the others gather round them in a ring singing in chorus, or, specially in the Bondo dances, dancing around the central experts in an anti-clockwise circle.

Besides these named dances which are performed on ceremonial occasions, the feel for dance and rhythmic movement runs all through Limba work and leisure. People are likely to break into the step of a dance on any occasion, sometimes apparently quite unconsciously, and even the ordinary day to day farm work often recalls the rhythm and movement of dances specially when the work is organised to the accompaniment of drum and song. In moments of joy or surprise people often break into a dance; a woman may dance to show gratitude for a gift, or a mother jog her baby up and down in a half dance as she soothes or admires it. Small children too adore dancing, and try to dance even before they can walk;

later they may join together in groups to learn or practise some dance, often critically advised by their seniors; or one may go off by himself, like the small boy who danced for hours in the moonlight just for the joy of it.

All these dances are accompanied by singing (sɔng), sometimes by the dancer himself, merely echoed by spectators, sometimes primarily by the whole group as it circles round the central performers. Singing is always closely associated with dancing, so that whenever anyone sings at all, he in a sense necessarily half dances as part of his song, even if only by small movements of his head or hands.

There are many different types of songs (kulunga; keng). Most dances have a special class of song to accompany them. Thus, for example, in connection with the dances referred to above, there are special songs for the Bondo, pɔrɔ, kukanthang and ghondokale dancing respectively. There are also songs to go with various phases of farm work, and the songs which boys and girls must learn as part of their initiation rituals. In addition, songs also occur in the course of some stories.

Songs are most typically led by a soloist, usually the dancer, drummer or story-teller, and are then taken up in chorus by all those who are watching, working, dancing, or listening. But up to a point everyone is able and ready to sing, so that singing is constantly occurring in an informal way in all aspects of Limba life; people are always liable to break into snatches of song - out of spontaneous happiness, to lull a child, or, specially by a woman, to express respect or thanks to someone. Singing therefore resembles dancing in that each both has stylised forms mastered by specialists, and is also a general form of artistic expression which can be, and is, exercised by all members of the society.

This discussion of the importance to the Limba of singing, drumming and dancing has been introduced in order to suggest something of the complexity of these other modes of artistic expression. In view of the main subject of this chapter, it is essential to realise at the outset that the stories, however integrally connected with it, make up in fact only one facet of Limba culture. Indeed in the sphere of music and dance the

Limba both use a more specialised and differentiated vocabulary and lay more explicit emphasis on expert skill than they do in respect of the stories. In the case of the Limba at least, therefore, (and possibly for many other West African peoples), it would be quite wrong to assume that spoken art (stories, proverbs etc.) is to them the only or even the most important medium of artistic expression, merely on the evidence that the main bulk of description by the European student is of verbal utterance (an element about which it is relatively easier for a foreigner to write than about music or dancing). Among the Limba, then, it must be remembered that the stories, however important, are not necessarily what they themselves would wish to present as the most important aspect of their culture.

Nor can their story-telling be altogether divorced from those aspects of artistic expression described above; my discussion of it in this chapter therefore in some respects isolates it from its true context. In the actual performance of the stories, for example, songs often form part of the narration, and in practice it may often be those expert in the musical skills who also tend to be the best story tellers. Furthermore, the

Limba hold that their stories, like their songs and dances, are part of their own traditional ways (malimba), and belong to an integrated culture which is both infinitely old, since inherited from the ancestors, and reenacted through the skill and memory of each individual performer.

Finally, this brief description of Limba music and dance should have helped to illustrate the way in which in these spheres, too, artistic expression is not primarily a matter of private enjoyment or emotion, but a dramatic activity into which individual performer and audience join, in a manner very similar to the dramatic activity of both telling and listening to the stories.

Within this whole complex, then, of their cultural inheritance, the Limba do distinguish as a special class that of the "story" or "parable" (mbɔrɔ, pl. mbɔrɔing or thabɔrɔ). The most common application of the word mbɔrɔ is to a story, in the sense of the narrative tales which form the majority of the texts translated here. It can also mean a proverb, a wise or imaginative saying, a historical account, a riddle or an analogy. The wide range of meanings is summarised by Clarke[1] who gives:

1. Limba-English dictionary 1929. She adopts a rather different orthography from the one used here.

"nbɔrɔ ki, n., pl. en ki or taboro, adage, fable, legend, parable, proverb, riddle, story, anecdote". This general concept and its various applications are discussed later in this chapter. The Limba themselves are quite conscious that "stories" form an important and definable part of their cultural heritage, and one of which they are proud. In the field I found that while they were sometimes puzzled by the purpose of my investigation of, for example, religious or social customs, they at once appreciated the significance of questions about their stories. So once the first few texts had been written or taped, the flow of offers to tell more stories was at times almost too great to be coped with. My friends would often proudly tell strangers of the numbers of stories I had now recorded, and so conscious were they of the value of their stories, that, in one sense, I had no choice but to collect them; for once they had grasped the point that I had come to learn about their language and about the "wisdom" or "sense" of the Limba people (funung ho ka Lèmbaing be), they soon made it clear that if I was to be regarded as serious about this research, I must both be prepared to take infinite pains with linguistic usage and formulae and also be ready to spend

much of my time and theirs recording their stories on tape or from dictation. The wisdom of the Limba people could be observed in a general way, seemed to be the implication, and in many contexts, such as sacrifice, rice farming or the customs of chiefship, but one special source where their wisdom was exhibited was their stories. Admittedly, they said, I would never master all these stories, for their numbers are sometimes represented as infinite - "even if you stayed for 5 years and heard several stories each night we would not have reached the end" - but unless I was willing to learn some of them, I was, they implied, quite manifestly insincere in my claim to wish to understand Limba ways.

I have so far tried to sketch in something of the general background, not only of language and speaking, but also of the way in which spoken and sung art is in general important to the Limba, and the place in this of the particular class of "stories". This should now become clearer through a more detailed account of these stories - of the types, purpose, and content of stories, the concept of <u>mbɔrɔ</u> in general, and in the following chapter, of when, how and where they are told, by whom, and of their style, form and genesis.

2. Types and classification of stories.

Within the broad class of story (mbɔrɔ) the Limba themselves do not make any further clear division. In most dialects the same word, mbɔrɔ, is used to cover a wide range of formulations, from folktales in the normal sense of the word, to much shorter formulations such as riddles and morals, as well as what we would distinguish in our terminology as historical accounts. None of these classes are strictly differentiated by the Limba. The primary and most common application of the term mbɔrɔ, however, is to stories such as those which make up the greater part of chapter 9 - tales of Kanu, of twins, of individual human heroes, and of animals, chiefly the spider. Though these shade into other formulations to be discussed later, they can from our point of view be broadly distinguished as a class on their own. In Limba terms however one cannot draw up any definitive typology either between these stories and shorter forms, or among the stories proper themselves.

One obvious classification to adopt might be that in terms of the chief characters of a story, and this, in fact, is a division I have roughly followed for convenience of presentation. Some stories are about Kanu

and origins; some are about people; and some about animals. This division however is not intended as an attempt at scientific classification of the stories in either Limba or more theoretical terms, for the amount of overlap between the various groups is too great for any strict differentiation in these terms. Many stories, for example, include references to several of these three classes at once. The story of Sara and the guinea fowl, for instance, includes a long account of Sara's actions in the manner of other stories about people, and ends with explaining the origin of certain birds and animals. The story of Koto and Yemi speaks of the origin of the differences between white man and black and brings in Kanu as one of the characters; yet the plot and tone is almost exactly the same as another story of two twins with the same names which clearly should be included among the stories about people in that the episodes about Kanu and origins happen to be missing in that version. In the story of Bayo the actors include both animals, a human child and a spirit, and the tale ends with an explanation of the present relations between humans and animals. The same applies to The dog and the wheel which includes Kanu, a white man, and several animals.

In several cases therefore it was almost impossible to decide in which group to present any given story, for either the characters overlapped, or a very similar story, in one sense the "same" story, appeared at another time with a more or less identical plot but different actors. The divisions I have made, therefore, have been purely for convenience and not for the sake of postulating any theoretical typology.

Other suggested differentiations would also appear not to fit the Limba stories very well. Prof. Berry, for example, in discussing the prose narratives of West African peoples suggests tentatively that

> "a first and generally valid dichotomy would appear to be between fictional and non-fictional narrative. Under the latter heading I would subsume what have been variously considered as myths, legends and chronicles. These are distinguished from tales proper, that is, from fictional narrative, by the fact that they are regarded in context as true ... Myths, chiefly stories of the deities and the origins of natural phenomena, are especially important throughout West Africa and a large body of mythology has been recorded. Legends which recount the origins of families or clans or explain the ritual and taboos of the ancestral code, are less well documented ... Fictional material includes in the main serious explanatory and moralizing tales, humorous trickster tales, and tales developed wholly or essentially in human society". 1

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1. Berry, 1961, pp. 6-7.

This may certainly be a fair enough division in the case of many peoples and acceptable as a general dichotomy over the field as a whole. However it does not fit the detailed Limba situation. The most easily differentiated group in Limba narratives is that of the historical account, and it is true that this can be roughly distinguished from more fictional tales as far as the occasion and purpose of telling is concerned. However even these accounts are not completely different from other narratives, the style and often the tone are very similar, and the same term, mbɔrɔ, is applied to them as to other kinds of narrative. In the case of myths, "chiefly stories of the deities"[1] the difficulties in the way of separating these off clearly among the Limba tales are overwhelming. As already mentioned the characters of stories overlap, so that one story may contain references to Kanu, to spirits, to animals and to human beings at once. The other criterion advanced by Berry for his non-fictional division is that they "are regarded in context as true". But this again does not provide a clearly differentiating characteristic in the case of Limba stories. For all narratives, from

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1. Op.cit., p. 6. There are few or no Limba stories about "the origins of natural phenomena".

an obvious fantasy, as we would class it, about the original dispersal of the various peoples of mankind, to a careful account of a chief's ancestors and their exploits, or an amusing animal tale, could all equally be called _this_, "true", the word also used to approve the "truth" or rightness of someone's speaking in a law case of argument as well as in the more obvious factual sense. It could be said that clearly in the case of historical narratives the accounts _are_ regarded as "true", in a way humourous animal tales are not, and people are certainly specially concerned to dispute what they consider a wrong account of historical facts. But whether or how far the stories of _Kanu_, or of origins, supposedly belonging to the "non-fictional" cate ory, are regarded as "true" in a similar sense is very doubtful. Certainly there are several different tales about the origin of, say, death or of palm wine, and those who knew more than one version did not generally seem to be embarrassed by their apparent contradiction; they were "good stories", and expressed some truth about the world or about "us Limba people" (_ming do Limbaing be_). It would be a mistake, therefore, to try to press Berry's distinctions in the case of the Limba material; certainly there is

something to be said for some distinction, albeit not a very clear one, between stories proper and historical narratives; but beyond that, any clear fictional/non-fictional distinction breaks down whether defined in terms of the subject-matter and characters of the stories, or in the degree of belief accorded to their "truth". As far as "myths" go, we must say either that the Limba have no myths in the proper sense of the term, or, if it is conceded that their stories about, say, Kanu and origins may, in some sense, be given the title "myth", that it is impossible clearly to distinguish these from other types of story.

Another possible basis of division might seem to be that of purpose or point. In the case of the Limba this seems tempting. Historical narratives, unlike stories in the usual sense, are told partly at least so that the descendants of a ruling house may know their own genealogy and be able to make a strongly argued claim when their turn comes to stand for chiefship. Proverbs are particularly frequently used to try to persuade two contenders to cease from a quarrel or to rebuke or plead for an offender. By contrast the tales about Kanu, people and animals seem to be told

much more for their own sake. However if one tries to take this distinction further and differentiate between the stories themselves, the distinctions become very arbitrary and artificial. On the face of it, to settle whether a story is, say, basically an explanatory or aetiological tale, a dilemma tale, or a moralising tale should seem to be very easy; stories do often end up with explanation, question or moral, and a classification on this basis should be simple. However when many stories have been studied it is clear that the moral or explanation is often not an integral or diagnostic feature of the story at all, but merely seems to be tacked on as a neat stylistic device to bring it to a fitting conclusion. Thus in the closely analogous tales of The man killed for a banana, and The man killed for a spinach leaf, which, as far as plot is concerned, are merely versions of "the same" story, one ends with a moral, the other with an ascription of origin. The same applies to the two similar stories about The finch's loan and The finch and the eagle: one ends with a moral - "slander is bad"; the other with an explanation - "that is why hens are carried off by eagles". Which kind of ending is adopted in the case of a particular narration

seems to depend on the story-teller or on the special circumstances in which the story was told, rather than being a defining mark of the special type of fixed story. Rather the same point applies to the statement of a dilemma in a story. There are certainly some stories in which a dilemma always occurs at the end. The dilemma about three smokers is an obvious example; so are the several versions of the very popular tale about a pregnant woman and the bones, all of which end up with a question to the audience about which of the two main characters was "more". In some other stories, however, whether or not a dilemma is explicitly stated seems to be a matter of choice for the teller rather than an inherent characteristic of the story. In the two very similar stories of Three twins and an elephant, and Three boys and an elephant, the additional episode tacked on in the second version meant that a dilemma was never stated at all, yet it had seemed an integral part of the first - "of those three ... which one was the most in cunning, that is what I ask you". In several other stories, such as the stories of Two friends or Sara miser and Sara scrounger a dilemma could perfectly well have been added onto the main action as an explicit question

for the audience (in fact I think I have heard this done in one telling of the Two friends), but in the narrations I recorded they are left implicit and not stated. Another difficulty is that if the addition of an explicit dilemma was made a diagnostic feature, this would lead to classing together of stories that were otherwise very different indeed. The plot, for example, that is used in The story of Kubasi and The four wives ends with a question about which of the children of the wives should inherit the chiefship; but these stories, long and elaborate, bear very little relation to such brief forms as The dilemma about three smokers, and in the former the actual dilemma in fact seems to be a very minor part of the story.

The difficulties encountered in drawing up any exact typology in terms of purpose or any other element illustrates very well one of the characteristics of Limba stories to be discussed further later - their "unfixed" nature, the sense in which the exact form of a story is not laid down once and for all but varies more or less according to the occasion and teller. There is no one prototype or "correct" form which could be regarded as the unit for classification. To insist on a definitive

typology would be to blur this essential feature of the tales. Certainly many of them may end with a moral, an explanation or a problem; but these are not so completely fixed that they cannot be varied at will. It would be truer to say that all stories, to a greater or a lesser degree according to circumstances, can contain some or all of several elements - moralising and generalisation; explanation; comparison, whether implicit or stated as an explicit dilemma; and, finally, an intention to amuse and entertain by an interesting plot, a shocking episode or character, and a vivid style and delivery.

Though not positing any strict classification of stories, I shall however discuss various groups under certain headings merely for the sake of convenience. The amount of overlap, it should now be clear, is considerable. I first discuss some aspects of stories about, respectively, people, Kanu, and animals, and the ways in which these can be treated; and later[1] consider other forms which can be more clearly separated off yet in the Limba terminology are also classed as mbɔrɔ - historical narratives and shorter formulations such as

1. Section 4.

proverbs, riddles and analogies. In this way something of the wide range of application of mbɔrɔ should emerge. Other types of formal speaking which might seem to be related - prayers and invocations, and legal andmemorial speeches - are not classed by the Limba as mbɔrɔ and so will not be considered.

a) Stories about people

On the whole stories about people seem to be the most popular and often the most elaborate among the stories. The longest tales I was told tended to be those primarily about people rather than about Kanu or animals, and it is possible that it is in this kind of story that there is the greatest scope for innovation and variation by individual story-tellers. However it is not easy to come to any clear conclusion in this matter, as this group of stories shades into the others both from the point of view of plots, encounters with the supernatural (spirits), and the constant possibility of the addition of morals, dilemmas or origins to form the endings.

There are a few stock heroes and heroines. The most common is the man called Sara. It was he, for

example, who was taught by _Kanu_ to tap palm wine, who rescued his elder sister from the monster she had married, who tricked his brother in law and became chief. However it would be misleading to speak of these tales about Sara as forming a "cycle" in the sense of being concerned with the adventures of some definite mythical hero thought of as possessing a continuous existence and individuality from story to story. That this is not so is clear when the various adventures and roles are compared - in one story Sara is greedy and stupid and dies from his own obstinacy (_Sara and the guinea fowl_), in another his goodness and hospitality win him chiefship from _Kanu_, in a third he is a poor man who gains chiefship by his cunning. The point is made quite clear in the story about _two_ Sara's - _Sara miser and Sara scrounger_. These clearly, then, are not a cycle of tales about some one character. Sara's actual nature becomes clear when it is realised that Sara is the name the Limba say should be given to an eldest son; in the north it is even sometimes used as the general noun to refer to an eldest son. Sara, then, might be described as a kind of prototypical Limbaman, the stock human being to whom adventures happen in stories, the representative of humanity.

The other commonly named heroes are three twins of whom the eldest is Tungkangbali (or Tungkangbei) "daring things", the next Palongbali (or Palongbei), "fearing things", and the youngest variously named Yisinua, Yisahosaho or Wunekeria. These stories are all marked by their light hearted tone and rather far-fetched and shocking character; they are always greatly enjoyed by the listeners. Tungkangbali is represented as completely headstrong, irresponsible and ungrateful, while his two brothers often try to restrain him.

There are few other names in the stories. Sira often appears as a girl's name in the way Sara does of a boy. In several of the longer stories, the hero is given a name such as Deremu, Kubasi, Bayo, but these names do not recur. Occasionally a character may only be given a name in passing at a later stage of the story as in, for example, Bush cows witch the rice. The only other common names in the stories are those of twins who, in story as in life, have their own special names, particularly Koto and Yemi; other names for twins are Siema, Luseni, and Saiong, the youngest.

Other Limba stories are about unnamed characters, and commonly begin with such phrases as "a man came out",

"a man married a wife", "three children were born". However, even within this anonymity there are some stock characters.

One of the most common characters is that of a hunter. Hunters are, after chiefs and smiths, among the most important figures in a Limba village. They train for many years with a master hunter to learn not only the techniques of tracking and shooting, but the secret leaves and medicines by which they can succeed and also gain the protection of the hunter's spirit. A hunter is attributed with special powers, and he, alone of human beings, is imagined to be confident and experienced even by himself in the bush at night. The several stories about hunters, therefore, are about a figure which is in any case an important and slightly mysterious one among the Limba.

Twins have already been mentioned. They too are commonly believed to possess special powers, for they are "clear-eyed" and able to see spirits and witches. They are said often to become famous as great hunters, diviners, or witch-catchers. They are therefore especially suitable protagonists in stories about some fantastic or far-fetched topic, such as the three twins who

revived their long-dead father or the twin who visited a world below to bring back a wife for his brother. The number of twins in a story is very commonly three. This accords well with the Limba view that the child following twins, usually called Saiong, is himself a kind of twin, so that they are three in all. Most twins in story, with the exception of Tungkangbali and his brothers, are normally represented as acting together and helping each other.

Other fairly standard figures also occur from time to time such as that of the motherless and helpless orphan, or of the childless mother who wishes to conceive. However very often the subject of the tale is identified merely as "a man", "a woman", "a child", or "a chief" and referred to merely in these terms throughout the story, in the same way as the animal characters discussed later.

Stories about people therefore could be said to fall into several very rough groups - stories about Sara (and Sira), about the irresponsible Tungkangbali and his brothers, about twins, hunters, and anonymous characters. These stories also possibly differ from others in their potentialities for elaboration and

composition. But such distinctions are very rough ones, and each group shades imperceptibly into the others.

b) Stories about Kanu and origins

Kanu figures in many stories, several of them also about origins. The Limba concept of Kanu has already been discussed in chapter 5. He is the one ultimately responsible for everything, but is far away in the sky, inaccessible to mankind. However in many of the stories he is pictured as coming down to earth, often to institute the present customs or facts of Limba society, or as being approachable in his own dwelling by those who have the cunning to seek him there. That is, the opposite character of Kanu is portrayed in the stories from that most usually presented in common talk about Kanu as he is now. All these stories are set in the past, a past that is now no longer repeated, and part of their effectiveness as stories in the Limba context lies in their complete contrast with what is known now to be the inaccessibility of Kanu.

Stories about "God" or far-off origins are commonly in the anthropological literature referred to as "myths".

Certainly as far as subject matter is concerned this is an appropriate term for these Limba tales. It is however a term which I prefer to avoid here, as many of the other characteristics commonly implied by the word "myth" are absent in the case of the Limba tales. It may remove some possible misconceptions about the nature of these Limba stories about Kanu if I briefly discuss the senses in which I find "myth" a potentially misleading term here.

In the first place, as I have already discussed, the Limba themselves do not make any clear differentiation between these stories and others; nor is it altogether easy to force such a distinction on them from the outside. Stories in which all the emphasis is on the interest or excitement of the plot may end up with some tacked on ascription of origin without this being at all an important part of the story as a whole; it is difficult, for example, to decide whether the story of The man killed for a banana, or Two women should be classed with origin stories, or stories about people - one ends with an explanation of the origin of women chiefs (and an obviously unlikely one), the other with an account of the origin of certain kinds of death and

barrenness. The story of The dog and the wheel brings in humans, animals, Kanu and origins, and the fact that Kanu appears to set the scene of the story at the start does not in fact seem to be very important: how therefore should this story be classed, as a "myth" or a mere fictional tale? In the sense of being obviously distinct from other tales, the Limba stories of Kanu and origins are not "myth".

Furthermore the term "myth" often seems to carry the connotation, perhaps because of our familiarity with Greek and Roman mythology, of an accepted and more or less systematic body of knowledge about religious topics or deities, known either to everyone or to recognised experts. In this sense at least, the Limba tales cannot be accorded the title of "myths" for they do not form part of any systematic theology, philosophy or mythology. Some of the tales contradict others; thus there are several accounts, some much the same, others very different, of the origin of death, the first discovery of palm wine, the reason for the differences between black and white men, or the institution of rice farming by Kanu. Those who knew of both accounts did not seem to be worried by this diversity, or wish to

discuss anxiously which was the true one. Nor were such stories well-known throughout Limba country or produced as relevant or significant evidence to describe the acts or nature of Kanu. The story of the separation of Kanu from men (Kanu goes up above) might seem to be the obvious foundation for any systematic account of Limba religion - yet it did not seem to be widely known or of any particular interest to the listeners on the one occasion I heard it told; it was merely one good story among several. In the Limba stories there seems to be no accepted picture of the nature or acts of Kanu as we might expect if we were to class them as "myths". Sometimes Kanu is presented as like a chief or a father, as in the rather more serious stories which describe how he came down to institute chiefship or rice-farming or wished to send medicine to prevent death to mankind; sometimes he is like a chief or judge, as when he speaks between the two jealous mothers quarrelling over a child; sometimes he is like a poor man going round begging for wine; in yet other stories he seems to be merely one character like any other, necessary for the action of the plot; he differs from any other chief, say, only in living in some other world under a pool or above the

sky, as in Koto and Yemi, or The girl taken by Kanu. In one story there are even two Kanu's introduced into the action as Kanu above, and Kanu below - an idea that clearly does not fit with the usual Limba concept of Kanu but is yet very serviceable for the plot of the story. The stories, then, are not interpreted as sacred tales giving systematic and accepted information about the nature or actions of Kanu, or describing once and for all the first origins of the natural world or of Limba society.

These stories about Kanu and origins are not, it seems, taken particularly seriously by the Limba merely in that they are concerned with these subjects. Certainly some were very serious in tone - specially those to do with death and rice-farming. But here, it would appear, it is not the introduction of the character of Kanu that causes the difference in tone, but the serious nature of the topics with which the narrator is concerned in the story. There are many other stories which are as light hearted as any among Limba tales, and yet include Kanu among their dramatis personae. The girl taken by Kanu is an obvious example, or the second version of Kanu gives chiefship, which on that occasion at

least was told in a high-spirited way to an amused audience. Stories about Kanu, then, differ among themselves just as do stories about other characters - some are serious, such as those about death, food and, on occasion, chiefship; others are light-hearted and full of action; yet others resemble rather a meditation than a narrative, especially those by the moralist Bubu about the world as it is. From the point of view of tone therefore there is no one category of stories which could be distinguished as "myths" because taken seriously in a sense that others are not.

Furthermore Limba stories about Kanu are not told on any particular occasions, nor do they seem to serve any special function in the society that is not equally served by stories on other topics. They are not associated with a ritual, endowed with any specially deep "meaning", nor repeated identically on different tellings. It would then be an artificial division to separate them off sharply from the rest of Limba oral Literature as a class of their own, whether under the dignified term of "myth" or any other.

There is one sense in which these stories are rather different in degree from other Limba stories. This is

in their force as a commentary not, paradoxically, on the nature of Kanu, but on the nature of the world. To relate some institution to its origin or to Kanu is, in a specially marked way, to comment on some special characteristic of it that the story-teller may want to bring out, or to praise some particular element as having been given and approved by Kanu. Thus chiefship, in one version, is said to have been instituted by Kanu after he had gone round in the guise of a poor and unattractive beggar asking for hospitality; this brings out the point, implicitly or explicitly, that chiefs should be kind to strangers and poor people, for this was the reason and occasion for its being given by Kanu. Similarly the stories of Kanu and rice-farming point not so much to certain actions by Kanu in the past, but to the present situation, the way in which the farming cycle fits with the climatic year and both is and has been the right and honourable destiny of the Limba people. The meditations by Bubu Dema on the nature of man and his incapacity to struggle with the endowments Kanu has given him, or the paradoxical way in which the vulture eats what is wrong and yet acts naturally and rightly in so doing because "this is what he was given by Kanu",

are comments not on Kanu, but on the present situation and actions of men - not about the nature of God but the nature of the world. There are few stories about the origins of natural phenomena. This in itself is significant, for what is often being described in the stories about Kanu and about origins is not primarily some attributed historical event in the past, but a comment or detached generalisation about the relations and purposes of human society. The stories do not provide an explanation of causes in the past, but an explication of the present occupations and preoccupations of mankind.

In this sense, therefore, some (not all) of the stories about Kanu differ somewhat from other stories in being able to lay more stress on the element of explication or commentary on the world in its wider context. However in this they differ only in degree for this is an element more or less inherent in most stories, either in the form of an explicit moral or generalisation added, with greater or lesser relevance, to the end of a tale, or less explicitly inherent in the tale through the actions and situations described there. The interests and relations of social life are imaged

in the stories about people and about animals as well as in those about _Kanu_.

c) _Stories about animals_

The stories about animals are liable to be rather shorter than tales about people, and, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, are not, in fact, the most common type of story. They tend to be marked by rather more humour and obscenity, and, perhaps, rather more of a stress on parallel structure than in some of the more elaborately constructed tales about human beings. Here too, however, these stories cannot be clearly separated off from others, for the subject matter and _dramatis personae_ of the various groups overlap, as do the stock endings which occur in every type of story.

The most common character in these tales is the spider (_wosi_). He is most frequently represented as stupid, gluttonous, selfish and irresponsible, consistently outdone by his wife Kayi who is both bigger and cleverer than he, but whom he continues to try to outwit. The relations between him and his wife represent everything that is wrong and upside down - the spider acts in an anti-social and unfitting way in trying to trick his wife

of her due food, of telling lies about her, of insulting his mother in law, and of turning out weaker and more foolish than a woman. Occasionally he is represented as a cunning trickster, getting the better of bigger animals like the elephant or the leopard, but this picture of the spider is less common. All the stories about the spider tend to be found specially funny by the listeners and are told in a vivid and uninhibited way by the narrators. The spider seems to be conventionally a figure of fun, unlike some of the stories in which he occurs elsewhere, and is never represented as a creator or culture hero.[1]

A few other animals also come into stories with stock characteristics. The antelope[2], for example, is always represented as small, shy, but very very clever, able to escape even the lion, the leopard and the greedy spider, using his wits to save himself not injure others. The goat too is clever, and outwits bigger and stronger animals, but is pictured as more egoistic and deceitful than the retiring antelope. The leopard is dangerous, unscrupulous and full of deceit,

1. As he is among some other West African peoples, perhaps including the Pa Nes of the neighbouring Temne.

2. A small animal, probably the royal antelope or water chevrotain, contrasted often to the bigger duller deer.

but liable to be outdone in the end. The small squirrel also is very clever and comes to the help of his bigger brother. These characters are well-known ones, and spoken of in other contexts as well as that of a story; sometimes a mention of one will provide a suitable stimulus for someone to tell a story in illustration.

Rather different is the picture of the finch (probably a species of fire finch) who very often appears in the stories in the role of a diviner. One of the chief characters, human or animal, goes to him to consult him about the future, and the finch throws the stones he was left by his father, utters his special cry of se se, se se, and gives an answer in much the same manner as that adopted by the diviners known in real life. The finch in this role is never the protagonist of a story, merely a secondary character essential to advance the plot.

Dogs are also fairly common in the stories. They too differ from the animals that appear most often, in that they are closely attached to human beings, specially hunters, with whom they live and are not one of the "animals in the bush" who form the subject of the most typical animal stories. Dogs are introduced as a foil

or counterpart to human action rather than as actors on their own account.

The effectiveness of many of these animal stories in the actual situation of story-telling depends very much on the audience's actual knowledge of the behaviour or appearance of the animals concerned. Thus, for example, the shyness and caution known to be characteristic of the antelope makes its triumph over the spider or leopard all the more telling; the spotted skin known to belong to the leopard is the amusing pivot of the plot in the story of The goat, the leopard and the lion; and the point of the joke in The monkey and the chameleon is that it was so very extra clever of the monkey to accuse the chameleon of having stolen the wine because when a Limba is drunk "his eyes turn round" - and the chameleon's eyes do, literally, seem to turn round. Such attributes are well-known to the audience and make such stories peculiarly effective, specially when accompanied by the mimicry of a clever narrator.

Many of the animal stories end with the statement of some moral or with an account of the origin of some characteristic or behaviour of a bird or animal, or with the present distribution of animals, some in the bush,

some in the village. But these conclusions, as with similar endings in stories about people, often do not seem to be taken very seriously as an integral part of the story. Often the emphasis seems to be rather on some general attribute of the species or on the way in which they illustrate some situation than on any serious concentration on the moral or the origin.

In presenting these animal tales I have not, as is often done with African folktales, used capital letters in my translations of their names into English. To say, for example, not "the leopard" and "a leopard" but "Leopard" or "Mr. Leopard" would, in the case of the Limba, be misleading. With the very doubtful exception of the numerous spider stories, the animals referred to do not seem to have any separate existence as individuals, so to speak, over and above their appearance in each particular story, so that to give them a specified proper name would be inappropriate. In addition the introductory phrases, such as "a lion came out" (yadi na hungɛ nde) or "a chimpanzee once reared a goat" (pɛthi na tɔlɛ nde bahu) are, in the Limba, stylistically reminiscent of the similar formulations in stories about people where to use a proper name would also,

analogously, be unsuitable; one is not, for example, tempted to write in English "Woman was once married" (hatinalo na dengo nde) or "Hunter came out" (badonso na hunge nde). Both here and in the animal stories the general term ("a hunter", "the leopard" rather than "Hunter" or "Leopard") is preferable. This is specially evident in the clear cases where more than one individual is concerned - e.g. in "two women were married to one husband" or "two pythons caught a deer". Finally the motive which may have led many translators to use terms for animals as if they were proper names does not seem quite to apply to the Limba situation. Presumably the point that the translators wished to bring out by their use of capital letters was that the animal stories are not just pointless or sentimental fantasies about animals told for their own sake, but in a sense abstractions or generalisations, so that what is being spoken of is not just any elephant but the type or idea of elephant - Elephant. However this does not apply to Limba animal stories, for there what abstraction is made seems to be not of the animal but of a certain situation, so that it is the implication for human society that is exemplified by some story ostensibly about animals.

In the course of this discussion of certain characteristics of various groups of Limba stories it must seem that I have laid more stress on what they are not than on what they are - tales about Kanu are not "myths"; animal tales are not about Mr. Elephant; the stories cannot be strictly divided by subject or purpose. This however has been necessary. Much has been written or implied about African folktales that, when applied to the Limba at least, has been misleading, so that it is necessary to clear away certain misconceptions before the tales can be allowed to speak for themselves. It is only in the stories about people, in fact the most common group in Limba oral literature, that the literary aspect is at once evident to an English reader - perhaps owing to the happy chance that fewer of such stories happen to have been recorded from Africa and that therefore less confusing commentary has been introduced. In the stories about people at least it is clear that it would be artificial to assert that they are basically to do with the utilitarian statement of morals or the validation or stabilising of social structure. They are self-evidently akin to our literature and need not be subjected to any far-fetched interpretation

so as to be seen to be intelligible. I suggest that once certain confusing preconceptions are removed, the other groups of stories, those about Kanu and about animals, can be seen to be of fundamentally the same nature as those about people, and to fall equally within the category of Limba literature.

3. Topics and treatment

So far I have discussed the various groups of Limba stories as roughly differentiated by their central characters. I now want to discuss several general points that apply to stories of all kinds, whatever their character, with regard to their setting, topics and treatment.

The topics of the stories are not on the grand scale. That is, they do not consider such subjects as wars, seiges, great historical changes, or long-drawn out and sustained events. The tales themselves are relatively short, and the action is also usually presented as fairly brief. There are several exceptions, mainly in stories of people such as The man killed for a banana, Parents are closest, and Deremu,

where the narrative may be thought of as covering the events of several years, but on the whole this is less usual. In a few of the more elaborate stories the narrator speaks of simultaneous events in two different places as when, for instance, in The story of Deremu, he switches from the mother up-country to her son in Freetown and back again; and in Sira and the monster the girl's brother at home is pictured as beginning to worry about his sister who has just been described as the prisoner of the monster far away. Very often however, perhaps specially in the rather shorter animal tales, the plot is simple in that there is little change of scene throughout and we follow the actions of the various protagonists as they come into contact with each other. In all stories it is common for the action to take place in a series of parallel episodes so that even where there is change of scene this is not in terms of a flash back from one place or event to another unrelated one, but a following up of the hero as he travels in successive moves from one place to another. This is what Kanu does, for example, as he looks in settlement after settlement for a wise man (Kanu gives chiefship), or the girl who goes from chief to chief to

search out her father's murderer in The man killed for a banana. In the sense therefore of its setting in time and space these stories are relatively uncomplex.

The geographical setting is that best known to the Limba themselves. The action is usually based in, or moves between, the central village where the chief or elders live, the farm, the farm settlement and the path between them[1]; the various chiefdoms between which people can travel; and the bush, with its clearings for palm wine tapping and farming as well as its depths where animals and spirits live. There are also occasional references to Freetown (Kakampi) as the place where young men may go away for work and money, and to the far-away magical country of England.

Some kind of other world is also sometimes introduced into the action. This is sometimes entered through a deep pool into which the hero dives, as in the country found by one twin in Koto and Yemi and Two twins. At other times it is located in the sky where, for example, the various animals go to find The girl taken by Kanu, or in a cave through a series of doors as in The hunter with three dogs, or completely unlocalised as with the

1. See chap. 2.

magic world in which The orphan child finds himself. These worlds are intentionally presented as fantastic. They are not seriously believed to exist by narrator or audience, but are suitable settings for far-fetched events in story. However even these magical places are represented as very much the same as the setting with which the Limba are best acquainted - that of village, farm and bush. It was "a new world" but in many ways basically the same as that known to ordinary people here, with, often, a chief, houses, entertainment, formal speaking and all the other social relations to be expected in a normal context.

Sometimes the geographical setting is explicitly related to that around the audience by the common device of comparing places in the story to actual villages or chiefdoms. "As far away as Kabala" (a Limba town) is a fairly common motif, or "like from here to where the roads meet". Sometimes actual names of people are introduced "He went like to Sabena here" comes in one story, referring to a sub-chief in the narrator's village, and in another the heroine is pictured as travelling round various chiefdoms in and near Limba country through the teller specifying the names of actual villages and

chiefs - "She came like to Bumban, to Pompoli". In this way the action is the more vividly set within the geographical context closely known to the audience and they can more clearly picture the various moves of the journey or the sort of distances envisaged. Here again the setting is basically that of village, bush and farm, the context within which Limba social and economic life is carried on.

In the stories as a whole it is true to say that the supernatural element is not the dominant one. Certain stories, as already mentioned, take place in a far-off magical world, and certain kinds of fantastic exaggeration are common. A chief is pictured as having vast amounts of gold, possessions and magic, magical acts and transformations sometimes take place, a human is able to understand the language of animals, a child enters into a farming company with the animals of the bush. Encounters with various supernatural agencies are also included - with Kanu in the old days, or, more often, with one of the spirits of the bush, with a "monster" (a kind of spirit) or a "great witch". But the central characters are nearly always humans, or animals acting like human beings; they are never super-

natural beings acting and reacting among themselves. Even where the action is, as often, removed from direct reality by the common device of setting it in the past, in a far off land or in the guise of animal characters, the basic situation depicted is fundamentally a human one, belonging primarily to this world and not to any other grand heroic, supernatural or mythical stage.

The stories are in the main about individuals. That is, they are not concerned with large scale actions, such as wars or councils, in which the long-term concerted acts and plans of many people must be depicted. The only partial exception to this is in the few stories in which twins are represented as acting jointly to, for example, discover and revive their dead father, or in the series of successive and cooperative acts taken by the animals who go to retrieve a girl from the sky. But even in these cases the stress is not on the plan and execution viewed as a whole, but on the series of actions by individuals in a series of parallel episodes; each individual in turn is pictured as coming forward saying "my time has come now", performing his part, and then giving way to the next character. The stories, then, are primarily about individuals and not movements.

The individuals that appear in the stories have already been partly discussed. They are either humans of various kinds, animals, or some kind of supernatural being (Kanu, spirits, a monster). In a sense, there is not much individual characterisation of these actors. The heroes are often just "a man", "an orphan", "a chief", and some stock image of these figures is evoked rather than a distinct and individual personality. Even in the case of the named heroes - Deremu, Bayo, Kubasi, Sara - the part they take in the action of the story is more emphasised than, say, their individual attributes or dispositions. The actors are regarded, so to speak, from the outside rather than looked at in terms of their individual experiences or inner feelings - an aspect for which there is in fact only a limited vocabulary in Limba. Some characters of course are introduced only in a secondary role, to serve the exigencies of the plot; but even the leading characters often seem rather shadowy if regarded as individuals, apart possibly from the stock figure of the irresponsible boy Tungkangbali and perhaps the few standardised characters attributed to animals, such as the greedy and anti-social spider, his strong and competent wife Kayi, and the timid but intelligent antelope.

In one sense, therefore, there is generally little characterisation in the normal sense. This is certainly the impression that one receives when reading over the stories included in chapter 9. But it must also be remembered that these stories were delivered to be seen and heard as a performance, and were not composed to be read from a written page. The impression given by the actual narration of a story is often very different from that given to a reader, for the characterisation is then often seen to be vivid, particularly perhaps in the case of animals. Their way of speaking is portrayed by tone and expression, their action half-imitated - the shy perceptive way in which the antelope peeps round and sums up the situation, the blustering tones of the spider, the little light bat swinging patiently to and fro in his hammock smoking his little pipe, the cat pouncing on its prey and tearing away at it, the helpless way in which the tricked leopard lies under the tree self-centredly imploring for help and making fine, shallow, promises, the ludicrous way in which the gluttonous and stupid spider is dragged along behind the pot of rice he has tried to keep for himself, obvious prisoner to his own greed but even then trying to salve

his dignity by pretending to walk or implausibly claiming that he had brought the rice with him on purpose. The portrayal of such episodes is delivered with an effect of vivid and individual characterisation in each particular performance. The same tendency is also sometimes evident in stories not primarily about animals. A sympathetic and fatherly character was clearly attributed to Kanu in both Kanu gave food to the Limbas and the later parts of The stomach is chief of the body by the strikingly gentle and kindly tone in which he was made by the narrators to utter his directions to the other characters - the vividness of this portrayal was even such as to be quite moving both at the time and in retrospect. Similarly in The vulture the narrator, by his tone even more than his words, conveyed the character of Kanu as that of an old man who had seen and understood much, who could appreciate at once what was wrong about the vulture's way of eating and yet see the necessity of this habit, and with compassion and understanding could allow this from the remote place where he lived and saw everything. This particular picture of Kanu was a favorite portrayal by the individual story-teller in question, Bubu, and one that he presented in other

stories too. Again, in The story of Bayo, the despair and lack of confidence of the rather humble and self-effacing child who was, it seemed, fated to be destroyed by the powerful animals he had become entangled with, was indicated throughout the story by the narrator's effective manner; it was particularly evident in the way in which he did not at first dare to reveal himself to the monster - a common motif, used here effectively to illustrate a particular character - and then finally did so by saying "Me" in so quiet and timid a tone that the audience could scarcely catch it. Sira's over-vehemence was also drawn vividly in the story of Sira and the monster, first by the breathless and uncontrolled way in which she was presented as bursting forth when she saw her chosen suitor gleaming in the distance, and then by the final outburst where she throws herself at her brother's feet to thank him for delivering her. It is the part of a good story-teller to give drama and vividness to the characters which in a written version sometimes appear lifeless. It is for this reason among others that any authentic account of oral literature - certainly that of the Limba - must include some description of its style, delivery and technique for without this

the effect, even the nature, of the literature is obscured.

So much for the setting of the stories in time and space, and the partial characterisation of the various individuals portrayed as actors in the stories. We can now briefly discuss or recapitulate some of the most common topics of the stories, many of which have already been touched on in the earlier chapters.[1]

Perhaps the most common situation described or alluded to is that of marriage, or of love. This topic comes into stories of all kinds, whether about humans, animals or origins. In these tales about diverse aspects of love or marriage, it would not be true to say that any one moral was being enunciated. There are particular morals in particular stories, various facets are emphasised from time to time, and there are implicit comments on the kinds of ways people are known at times to behave, the sorts of things that are liable to happen or that might happen if customs were otherwise.

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1. In Part I, where, however, the emphasis was on describing the background commonly referred to in the stories; here I am approaching the material from the point of the view of that of the stories themselves.

But no one lesson or picture is being drawn. Wives or potential wives may be portrayed in one story as good, willing perhaps to suffer death, loss or bereavement for their husbands (*Four wives*, *The story of Kubasi*); in another as bad, ready to betray a husband's closest secret or one chance of real success to their secret lovers (*Sara, the spirit, and the palm tree*; *Hare gives chiefship*). Just as in Limba experience and philosophy women are known to be faithful or unfaithful, imagined to be loyal or disloyal, thought of in their different roles of mothers, wives, lovers, sisters, according to the point of view of the individual at the time - so too in the stories there may be stock situations or characters, but these are open to a similar variety of treatment and emphasis. Similarly a girl may be pictured as innocent and attractive, with lovely clothes and beads, a young girl's breasts, fresh from initiation - "like the dew" as it is said in one riddle, or "standing there in her blackness with only her beads round her loins" - and yet, in a story, the apparent innocence may turn out to be counteracted by the fact that she is secretly plotting her husband's or lover's death (*The man killed for a spinach leaf*, and *The story of the great witch*).

One girl may be pictured as obstinate and resistant to her parents' wishes for her marriage thus leading either to her own father's loss, as in The story of a millionaire, or to her own misery and repentance, as with the girl deceived by a spirit in Sira and the monster or The girl and the spirit. Or the situation may be reversed so that it is the man, not the girl, that is misled by a spirit, seemingly a loving wife, whom he followed to her home where he nearly perished "Ah" he says when he knows the truth, "it was love that put me here. If it had not been for that I would not have come here" (The hunter with three dogs). Sometimes the earlier situation is portrayed from the opposite point of view again and a girl's betrayal of father or chief or child may be pictured as praiseworthy, leading to the triumph of the hero whom she loves and for whom she sacrifices every other tie: "I love you beginning from the world here as far as the place of death. So let us go together you and I" (Story of Kubasi). Sometimes, alternatively, the situation of love is used to amuse. Thus the actions of The woman with four lovers are portrayed as ridiculous by the narrator's showing them in their over-numerous succession; or an intentionally ludicrous

effect is created by the way in which the normal sweet talk between two lovers was interrupted by - of all things - the excrement the girl had tried to leave behind her in the forest; it rose up demanding to join in "your talking that you are talking ... both of us are to embrace the girl" (The forbidden forest). Thus love, within or without marriage, may be pictured from many different points of view: as something dangerous and untrustworthy leading to death or loss; as sacrificial and able to save a man's life; as exciting and pleasurable as in the amused description of the origin of sex (The beginning of marriage) or as something potentially laughable and far-fetched as in the amusing series of formalities performed by The woman with four lovers.

Marriage itself is portrayed in various lights, or its potential paradoxes made plain. It is always, for example, assumed in the stories that, as in life, men must work to win a wife. Perhaps the hero must greet a mother in law all through the day, risk death or blindness to help a friend get his wife, climb up a pumpkin that reaches to the sky, or perform near-impossible tasks like clearing a huge farm in a single night

or picking up basketfuls of minute millet seeds in the dark (*The woman who wanted to be [illegible]*, *Two friends*, *The spider woos a wife*, *The wooing of [illegible]*); and stories often end with the hero's success in acquring a wife; "the wife was given" is always a suitable conclusion to a story. And yet after all, the opposite point is made in one story, perhaps one wife is *not* really worth risking death for; as the hunter's dog said "Are there no other wives in the world? Are there no other wives? If it happens that he goes hunting and kills meat will he not sell it and look for another wife? Will he die for this one wife?" (*The story of a hunter*). Marriage is a man's [illegible]. And yet, it is shown in several stories, marriage too has its drawbacks. The strife and competition between husband and wife are depicted in the standard quarrels of the spider and his wife [illegible]. He acts in a way that it is known a husband never should do (but sometimes perhaps actually does, or wishes, to act), and tries to trick his wife or get more food than he is due. While she, as a wife should never be (but sometimes, as even men occasionally admit, really is), is stronger and cleverer than her husband, and actually defeats or surpasses him. There are many other possible

difficulties in marriage. Sometimes there are no children and, as in life, the couple must sacrifice and seek help to obtain them (e.g. The story of Kubasi); or the most loved wife may not conceive - "I and my husband have travelled much" say one woman "but we have not yet got children" (Two women); or even if she succeeds in bearing and rearing a child he may grow up only to die still young - "she found the boy now lying there, dead. She stood there, she wept, she wept" (The chief's son). If there are children the co-wives may quarrel jealously over them, even, in one story, to the length of murder (Jealous mothers) or support their own children against the others (Four wives). Many wives and many children are what every man, in story and in life, most desires. Yet this too may have its bad side - "quarrelling will not end. One wife to one husband - they will not quarrel. But two people, three people - they will not love each other. For having children - when they have children in the marriage they will disagree" (Jealous mothers). Again, if there are several wives the tension between them may lead to one wife insisting on her exact cold justice, as illustrated by the one who demanded back her bead - the precise same

bead, no more and no less - swallowed by her co-wife's child (Two co-wives).

All these many points of view on marriage and love must of course be seen in the context of Limba marriage and the Limbe view of women described earlier (chapter 3); only then can the associations and effectiveness of, for example, the infidelity of a wife or the labours of wooing be fully intelligible in the sense they would be to a Limba listener. In the whole context well known to both narrator and audience all these comments on the behaviour of men and women can be effective and meaningful, whether wry, ironic, perceptive or plain ridiculing. One of the significant points about such comments is their diversity - in marriage and love there are many diverse situations and aspects which can be depicted in the stories. It would be a mistake to suggest that the stories are to represent any one moral, or that they all have some clear-cut message on the subject, as a foreigner who had encountered only half a dozen of these stories might be led to assume. Rather - once given the social background and common experience of the teller and listener - they can be seen to be full of varied comments, insights or amused and far-

fetched generalisation on the kinds of ways in which people actually behave or would like to behave. If this is to "moralise" then Limba stories do in a sense moralise. But this is not the kind of literal and unitary moralising so often attributed to African folk-tales, assumed necessarily to possess some utilitarian and clear-cut function or message.

Much the same point applies to other common topics in Limba story. Many stories are about, or refer to, various types of family relationships other than those of marriage. Parents are closest makes the comment, in this case explicitly, that whatever a man has done, only his parents will stand by him through thick and thin, and others stay only in time of success: "Fortune is not like the time of difficulty ... the parent accepted for he bore him, everyone else refused. That is it".[1] Other stories touch on similar aspects though without asserting such an emphatic generalisation. The relations of mother and child are often illustrated. The close contact known to exist between mother and daughter is, in varying ways, important to the plots of The man for a spinach leaf where the daughter is brought up to

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1. Contrast this to Kubasi and Four wives where the parents, unlike the girl, refuse to risk death for their son.

the sound of her widowed mother's lullaby about her dead husband, and in _The story of a great witch_ where the mother tries to stop her daughter's marriage - "for a long time they had quarrelled, the girl and the mother". The very close affective bond that exists in both ideal and practice between mother and child is exploited in both those stories that stress a mother's care for her son, as in _The story of an orphan_ where she rises from the grave in answer to her need, or depict her as rejoicing ecstatically to see again her sons and her husband (_The hunter and the three twins_), and, perhaps even more effectively, in the stories where the opposite side is shown - a mother is depicted as going to the extreme and shocking lengths of plotting against her own child (_The story of Deremu_; _The story of witches_).

The position and fortunes of an orphan are a specially popular theme in story. His lot is one that is expected to elicit pity, so that his triumphs, whether in recalling his mother or in gaining chiefdom and riches have a particular meaning through their paradoxical nature - that a child beginning from such well-known disadvantages should yet achieve success. (_Story of an orphan_; _The orphan and the little bird_; _The orphan and_

the goats) Another fairly standard theme is of the help given by a child or younger brother. This gains part of its point from the usual assumption in almost all social situations that the elders are the leaders, as is also explicitly asserted in *The eldest of three twins*. Yet in several stories, paradoxically and effectively, it is the small child who follows far off, spurned by his elders, that in the end saves them by his cleverness or insight (*Three men, a boy and a cow*; *The girl and the spirit*). This figure of the helpful child however is not itself a definitively fixed one; a child in story may also be troublesome and a disadvantage in certain circumstances, and this point is once made quite explicit "A hunter, even if he loves his child, will not take him hunting" (*The child and the hunter*). Relations within a family are therefore frequent topics in the stories and plots are sometimes brought to a quiet end by the hero's returning home and giving an account of his actions ("announcing" them) to his mother or father. But there is no one rule for how these relations turn out in story, and though the topic is obviously a meaningful and important one, no one message or image is being asserted to the exclusion of others.

Another very common theme is to do with yangfa, which is the most frequent motif in the stories that end with an explicitly stated moral. This is the malicious action of a slanderer or tale-bearer which has been described earlier.[1] Sometimes a character is depicted as motivated only by the desire to injure another, as the "trouble-maker" (bayangfa) who told malicious lies to the chief to hurt The boy that talked with animals; but, in the end, "you see now the trouble-maker was killed by his own trouble-making" (yangfa). This kind of situation, however, in which a character's bad intentions are stressed from the outset is rather rare, and in fact Limba stories rather seldom contain a clear human villain. More often the act of tale-bearing is presented as a necessary turning point of the plot by which one character learns another's secret. The act itself is in the first place introduced as an apparently perfectly reasonable gesture of help to someone who is being deceived by another. Thus the hawk is helped by the hen against the finch who had deceitfully promised to repay a debt when "he grew big - but he does not grow, that is his size" (The finch's loan); similarly the hawk

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1. Chap. 6. p.366

is told how to recover his own money from the sun who so constantly frightens him off by his heat (The sun, th hawk and the hen). Yet in each case this apparently helpful act is classed as yangfa and explicitly deplored. The expression of this moral is a standard ending to a story. Occasionally this stock conclusion seems to be added onto a story which, on the face of it, might not necessarily have been expected to give rise to it; in the tale of The spider, the elephant and the hippopotamus, another narrator might well have been content with a different ending, perhaps describing merely the origin of the spider's presence with human beings, or his clever power in outdoing the other two; but on that particular occasion the narrator was an old man particularly fond of adding morals, and so emphasised that this too was a case of yangfa: "so you see, someone who is good at talking behind people's backs destroys people ... so too with a Limba [human] who has nothing in the village himself - he makes two people fight". The effects of tale-bearing, then, form a constant theme in plot and moralising, but are brought into different stories in various ways - sometimes the central interest of a tale, sometimes a neat and satisfactory moral conclusion.

Friendship and cooperation - or lack of cooperation - form another common topic. This is treated most obviously in the well-known story of Two friends, each of whom was willing to sacrifice himself for the other, giving up his sight or a first born child. Such stories commonly end with the implied dilemma about which of two extreme cases had helped his friend more. A series of parallel episodes in which one after another of a group of people or animals performs "his part" is also fairly common, often ending with a dilemma about which individual had contributed most (The girl taken by Kamu; Three twins woo one girl; Three twins and an elephant). Sometimes, on the other hand, companions are depicted as not helping each other. This seems to be particularly common in the standard situation of travelling, a time when an individual is away from home and family, thus specially dependent on his companion. To injure someone in this situation is often blamed in the stories - "so do not act badly to your travelling companion" - and the one who begins the injury is commonly shown as being paid back in the end. There are many stories which open with two individuals, usually animals, "going on a journey"; they describe the interested trickery

of the one, then the final triumphant revenge of the other. The chameleon, for example, was accused of theft by the monkey at the beginning of the journey, but by the end he had in his turn invented a similar plausible lie against the monkey so that "they beat the monkey till his tail fell out" (The monkey and the chameleon; cf. The spider and the bat; The spider and the squirrel etc.). Failure in due cooperation is also portrayed in other contexts, especially that of the formation of a "company", an institution of great importance to the Limba.[1] Here too the one who begins is conventionally the one to suffer in the end. Thus the greed of the animals who formed a "company" with the child Bayo, hoping to eat him, was frustrated in the end by Bayo's triumph (The story of Bayo). A similar theme of revenge also sometimes comes, in a more complicated way, into a longer and more elaborate story such as The man killed for a banana. Most often, however, it is introduced in a simpler parallelism where a "company" (kune) of ill deeds is embarked on by one character, then equally returned by the other. This is the theme of the typical "company" between the monkey and the fish;

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1. See chap. 2.

the monkey said that the fish must sit on a chair to eat the rice - the fish could not, "he has no bottom, when he tried to sit on the chair it was slippery"; but then the fish said the monkey was only to eat if his hands were clean - he scrubbed and scrubbed his black hand but "it did not come clean - the blood came out". (The monkey and the catfish) Such stories commonly end up with the success of the one first injured in taking equal revenge, and this, sometimes with the addition of a moral stating that one should not try to take advantage of another, is a stock ending for such a tale. However wanton injury does not, in some cases, necessarily lead to the punishment of the culprit. Tungkangbali is depicted as acting irresponsibly and anti-socially throughout; yet in the end he is rewarded and even praised. (Tungkangbei, Palongbei and Yisiaua). Similarly the selfish spider is often frustrated, but once at least his aggressiveness escapes quite free by virtue of his lies and hypocrisy with the leopard (The spider and the leopard). Friendship and cooperation are generally approved in the context of Limba society and are often praised or exemplified in the stories, just as selfish injury and lack of cooperation are often blamed.

But this is not explicitly and necessarily stated in every single story that refers to these common themes.

As mentioned in chapter 4 chiefship is also a common subject in Limba stories just as it is in Limba life. There is no one way of representing a chief in the stories. Sometimes he appears as a judge (The spider and the squirrel make a farm), sometimes as a kindly and sympathetic father (specially in cases where Kanu is depicted as acting his role of chief, e.g. The vulture, The hen is made the sacrifice). More often he is presented as powerful and wealthy (e.g. Sara and the greedy chief; The man killed for a banana). Many different aspects of chiefship are referred to or illustrated. Sometimes chiefs are presented as primarily concerned with their duties to the poor and orphaned, and exhibit wisdom and hospitality (Kanu gives chiefship 1, The stomach is chief of the body); sometimes they lose their tempers over something trivial (The man killed for a spinach leaf); sometimes they are harsh and oppressive (The cruel chief; The story of Kubasi). The struggle for power is another common theme represented in the stock setting of a race for chiefship between various animals (The hen wins; The dog and the tortoise), or in a contest between individ-

uals in cunning or wisdom, where the winner gains the chiefship (Koma tricks his brother in law), and one of the standard endings of a story is when the hero wins or inherits the chiefship. No one aspect, then, is continually singled out, but the various possibilities of which the Limba have had experience in both stories and reality are used in the narration of many and diverse tales.

Rice and food frequently appear in stories. Sometimes they provide not so much the subject-matter as the setting and background. As described in chapter 2, the rice-farming cycle can provide the chronological framework within which a series of actions takes place covering the typical farming operations well-known to every Limba. The various stages are often gone through – clearing, hoeing, chasing, reaping, then the drying, pounding and cooking of the food (e.g. [illegible]oto and Yemi; Kanu gave food to the Limbas; The boy who talked with animals; Two twins). Sometimes a struggle for food provides the central episode of a story, particularly in the tales about the spider and his wife. This couple are frequently pictured as competing in this way. An ending in reconciliation is often pictured in terms of

eating: "they sat there and they ate" (_The spider tries to cheat his wife_), a satisfying ending with all the overtones to eating as one of the central themes of Limba marriage.[1] The opposite ending to a story or section of a story may be the protagonist's hunger, that is, his complete failure and distress (e.g. _The spider and his wife Kavi_). Competition for food also enters into the many stories about rivalry and revenge, where, for example, one travelling companion cheats the other of his due share of the food so that he has to look on hungry while the other eats (e.g. _The spider and the bat_), or where the various stages of a "company" are marked by some or all of the participants eating together before the next stage of the story. Eating is also a motif which may be presented as something amusing in itself. The competition in eating, for example, between the goat with its delicate sideways nibbling at the grass, and the elephant's huge consumption, was considered very amusing, specially the final trick by which the goat frightened away the elephant by chewing his cud (_The elephant and the goat compete in eating_). In stories about the spider his stupid gluttony is a stock cause

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1. See chap. 3.

for amusement, and even the mere vehement assertion that "he _ate_" is usually enough to raise a laugh. The fantastic lengths to which - it is humourously suggested - some people may go in their desire for rice is illustrated in the amusing story of _Sara miser and Sara scrounger_, where the avarice of the one led him actually to (pretend to) die and be buried to stop his friend sharing his rice, and the greed of the other made him persist in staying by the rice even through the supposed death and funeral of his friend. Greed for meat is found a specially funny topic. Even the mere word which refers to this (_thebede_) can produce laughter by itself, and various stories about this proceed through a series of ludicrous actions perpetrated by characters trembling with excitement and stupidity at the thought of the meat - but always ending up without it. The most popular tale of all is that of the woman so intent on her meat that she ignored the pains of childbirth, and her child who devoured the remaining bones by himself though newborn and toothless (_The pregnant woman and the bones_). In many stories, therefore, a reference to some aspect of eating - whether food, cooking or hunger - is considered a sufficient and pleasing theme and conclusion.

Cunning is another common subject in the stories. The most frequent word, hugbanang, means not only cunning, but also special powers, irresponsibility, and the capacity for extreme and far-fetched actions. It is asked, for example, who was the greatest in cunning of the three twins who, respectively, shot an elephant four days' journey away, skinned it all with a finger nail, or packed it into the body of an insect (Three twins and an elephant); or of the three twins who tracked, reassembled and revived their long dead father, and their mother who cooked every food for them in a minute pot and then served it separately - which was "the most cunning" (The hunter and the three twins). Stories about cunning or other similarly far-fetched action commonly end with an explicit or implicit problem about which character was the most surprising (e.g. The woman with four lovers; The pregnant woman and the bones). Sometimes various clever tricks are shown by which the hero finally succeeds in winning chiefship. The most common trick here is for the hero who has been shut up in a bag in order to be thrown into the river, to cajole someone else into taking his place, only to return himself in triumph (e.g. Sara and the greedy

chief; Koma tricks his brother in law). The stories in which this kind of cunning is desplayed are usually markedly humourous and light-hearted, and are frequently about twins, specially the trio made up of Tungkangbali and his brother.

Other kinds of cleverness are also depicted - the clever wiles of the spider against the leopard, the timid intelligence of the antelope, or the ingenious reversals in some of the stories about competition and revenge (The monkey and the chameleon etc). Here too the actual trick is appreciated and its final triumph considered as a suitable and enjoyable climax. But this kind of cleverness is not felt to have the extreme humour associated with the amazing "cunning " of the more far-fetched stories.

Some element of amusement, or at least entertainment, is present in various degrees in practically all stories. But some topics are thought to be particularly funny. The effect depends partly, of course, on the style of wording and delivery by the narrator, but certain subjects are found amusing just in themselves and recur in many stories. One is that of greed, especially, as already mentioned, greed for meat, of

hunger, and of gluttonous eating. Another cause for amusement is beating when described in a story. One of the highlights, for example, in the two tales of the fight between _The spider and the chimpanzee_, was the way in which the spider was knocked down and defeated. In this case a story which in itself might seem to be of little interest can give the greatest delight to a group of listeners through the narrator's vigorous imitation of the blows given by both sides, and the vehemence of his description. Extremes of astonishment in the characters are also found amusing, specially if enacted by a clever narrator, like the amazement shown by the people when Sara was thought to have killed his own mother (_Sara and the greedy chief_) or the bewilderment of those who could hear but not see the bird who was singing its sweet song (_The orphan and the small bird_). Excretion is another topic which, in a story, can be thought very funny. Several of the stories about the irresponsible spider include this (e.g. _Spider and bat; Spider and leopard_), and people tend to burst into delightedly shocked laughter at these points. Sex is not a subject that generally seems to be brought into stories as a topic that could in itself cause either

amusement or interest, and though there are many stories about love, licit or illicit, the humour and point there lies not in any description of sex in itself but in the characterisation or situation - such as the woman who painstakingly went through all the formalities of cooking and greeting as many as four lovers one after the other (The woman with four lovers), or the brilliant way in which the adulterous goat escaped from the deceived husband and turned the tables on his informer (The goat, the leopard and the lion). Sometimes the amusing impact of the story for the listeners turns not on some conventionally amusing topic - greed, beatings, astonishment, excretion - but on some incongruity or paradox in the situation. A hunter, for example, is shown dancing the famous hunter's dance which is performed only over some great killing - and over what? Merely a bush that waved in the wind (The hunter and the bush). A cat and a vulture, of all things, call each other by the honourable title of "master" - yet there are rather specially despicable creatures and anyway too far away from each other to communicate at all (The cat and the vulture). A man set out to work for his lover, but instead "dozed" - and "in that doze, he dozed for a whole

year!" (Tiro the great sleeper). And an old woman killed and paradoxically struggled and struggled to dispose of the one thing that had been protecting her from death, her dog (The old woman and the dog). Similarly the whole point of the miniature tale about Sara and the jackal is the ludicrous mistake made by the animal in regarding a hunter with his deadly gun as a pitiful sick man with a staff, and the sad results of this ridiculous piece of stupidity. Amusement may therefore in varying ways be produced by many different devices and topics - by the technique of the story-teller's style and delivery discussed in the next chapter, by the conventionally popular topics of beating, excretion and, most of all, eating, and by the nature of some unexpected or paradoxical situation or action.

The final standard topic or theme to be mentioned is the rather different one of Kanu. This has already been discussed several times in an earlier chapter and section. Here the relevant point is to repeat that though Kanu comes into stories of many different kinds and subjects, his introduction into a narrative often has the function of expressing some explicit commentary on the world and on the kind of way that things are seen

to happen in general, or that people tend to behave. Man lives in the village below, the animals in the bush, but Kanu inaccessible in the sky (Kanu goes up above, The dog and the wheel); the white and black men are different and yet somehow fundamentally the same and their different destinies and the aptitudes given by Kanu are accounted for in several stories, yet "we are full brothers" (Koto and Yemi; Fulas, Limbas and Europeans). In various ways, the world is full of paradox: the vulture eats disgustingly, yet that was the destiny given him by Kanu (The vulture); the toad was the one who betrayed us and brought us death and the snake loved us, yet "the one who loved us then, well, when we meet him now, we kill him. We do not kill the toad. Well, Kanu looks at us for that" (The toad did not love us); and - a common Limba sentiment - a man may work hard and deserve well, yet if Kanu has not given him aptitude and success his toil is useless (Kanu and the star; Kanu scatters his children). In such stories or parables, a kind of generalising commentary on the world can be effectively expressed or, often, made quite explicit in the conclusion of the narrative.

This long discussion of conventional topics, favorite themes, and standard conclusions, has been introduced not only to clarify certain general tendencies in stories, but also to illustrate one important point. This is that there is no one moral being put forward, explicitly or implicitly, in the stories as a whole, nor is it possible to draw up any one crude "philosophy of life" which is in any simple way laid down in the stories. Even the very popular and common topics such as marriage, family relations, or chiefship are not always treated from just one set point of view. Many different insights and comments are brought in at various times. It is true that there are certain basic presuppositions which one must recognise to understand the meaning of the stories in context - the common acceptance of certain institutions to do with marriage, farming, chiefship, and religion, all subjects discussed in Part I - and the existence of certain literary conventions, as it were, about the kinds of figure that can be introduced (the poor orphan, the gluttonous spider, the deceitful wife), the most likely topics for entertainment (food, beating, excretion, paradox, extreme actions and situations), or the most acceptable conclusions

(eating, marrying, returning home, succeeding against another, winning chiefship, or the statement of a moral, dilemma, origin or generalisation). But within this accepted framework there are many possibilities. It would be misleading to say of Limba tales, as is sometimes implied of African folktales in general, that there is any one message or purpose conveyed in the stories, or that each story must somehow have some fixed and definitive lesson which it is primarily intended to communicate. It is true that several stories do end with an explicitly stated moral. But, as already pointed out, even in these cases, the moral is not always an essential element of the story, is sometimes not very harmoniously tacked on, seeming rather like a kind of afterthought or neatly imposed conclusion, and is sometimes omitted altogether in otherwise very similar stories. Furthermore an explicit moral is only one kind of conclusion among several possible ones. In the stories given in chapter 9 under a quarter of the total number actually end with the statement of an explicit moral. Therefore to pick on this element alone and assert that it is the central and most significant point of the stories would, at least in the case

of Limba tales, be a vastly over-simplified and distorting view.

Yet it would be equally misleading to assert that the stories are told "merely for amusement", or that they would therefore be assumed to be irrelevant in any systematic account of a people's life and outlook. Entertainment is certainly an important element. But so are other aspects - the comments, insights or amused and ironic remarks about certain situations, real or imaginary, that are so evident in Limba story-telling. These aspects are also a real part of their whole view of the world and clearly relevant for any rounded understanding of, say, their general outlook on marriage, chiefship or personal relations. The sort of attitudes expressed in and moulded through the complexities of the stories are relevant to a balanced study of Limba society in almost the same way that a full account of English society must also take note of the complex influences and formulations of our own literature.

In the case of Lima oral literature, then, it is not necessary to be forced into either of the extreme positions which have sometimes seemed implicit in remarks about African folktales: that they must <u>either</u>

be interpreted as in some way utilitarian with a clear-cut social function, or with the expression of set moral lessons or philosophy tied to each tale; or, if they are not that, that they must be treated as irrelevant, mere amusing by-play, and best to be left out of account, however intrinsically charming, in any serious study of the society. But one need not choose between these two extreme alternatives. It is just as plausible to see Limba folktales as something more akin to our own literature. They have no one simplicist message to get across, but, since there is no reason to assume that life is seen as a simple matter for the Limba any more than for ourselves, form instead a complex medium through which certain comments or detached generalisations are expressed or hinted at. Though we must certainly understand certain facts about the social background and the existence of certain conventional figures and topics in the tales, there is no need to go further than this and try to reduce all the stories to one single formula or function or category. Once this preliminary knowledge is acquired, the stories can reveal themselves to a reader not as reduceable to social structure, moral values or vagrant by-play, but as a

form of literature in its own right, designed, in varying degrees, to ~~do~~ achieve many of the purposes traditionally associated with literature - to amuse, entertain, comment, amaze, puzzle, scandalise, moralise, and, in its own context, to reveal something of the universal through the mask of the particular.

4. The range of mbɔrɔ

Having clarified something of the types and topics of Limba stories, I now proceed to indicate the wider range of application of the Limba term for story, mbɔrɔ. So far I have only treated the stories proper, in our normal sense of the term. This has been justifiable in that narratives of the type given in the first three sections of chapter 9 - stories about people, Kanu, and animals - seem to be the most common or even the primary examples of mbɔrɔ; in one dialect[1] I believe, other forms are clearly distinguished from these in the terminology. However in most dialects[2] there are also secondary applications of the same term, covering

1. Tonko.

2. Certainly in Biriwa and Yaka, the two dialects I know best, and probably also in Wara Wara and Safroko.

historical narratives, riddles, proverbs, and even informal analogies or verbal jokes.

Some consideration of these other forms and of the wider scope of the term should throw further light on the basic concept of mbɔrɔ from the Limba point of view, and add body to my interpretation of the Limba mbɔrɔ as a serious form of literary comment on the complex nature of the world and human actions within it.

a) Historical narratives

Historical narratives are both like and unlike the kinds of stories discussed so far. How far they resemble them varies to some extent with the nature and purpose of the particular narration, whether it is told, for example, just as a good story about some famous far-off chief, or as a serious account of the ancestors of a particular line to someone who is a member of it.

The similarity in tone, style and effect to an ordinary tale is most marked in the occasional narratives about exploits of great chiefs of the past which often recall stories of fictional heroes. The famous Suluku of Bumban for example is the subject of many tales.

It is described how he had the power to transform himself into an animal, or to go out secretly at night while all other slept, and wander the length and breadth of his great chiefdom to see that all was at peace. Another story I heard dramatically described the trick by which he is said to have defeated the invading Sofa armies; in a series of dialogues Suluku is related to have sent his messengers to the enemy offering them gifts and food in welcome; but when the bundle of mats was opened it contained, not rice, but swarms of bees; before these the Sofas fled in terror, leaving Suluku triumphant; he had succeeded through using the kind of clever trick that Limba always admire in stories, whether it is by a spider, a human hero or a historical chief.

Such marvellous stories tend to cluster round the names of famous chiefs, and are narrated by ordinary people with much the same kind of tone and effect as the more usual stories about people, Kanu or animals. The actual members of the chiefly houses hand down the traditional genealogies and histories with more seriousness and dedication, tending rather to avoid tales of magical exploits, for a knowledge of the actual (or

supposed) genealogy and history is essential not just for its own sake but so that the descendants of a chiefly house will be able to make good their claims to birth and dignity when the time comes for them to contend for chiefship.

Such histories are, like stories, said to be old and traditional, and are about "the ancient days" (*mabɔrɔ ma*) which the teller has heard about from "the old people" (*bebɔrɔ be*). Such accounts are often referred to by a periphrasis such as "speaking about the old days" or "about the old people", but sometimes the same term is used as for "stories" - *thabɔrɔ tha* (the plural of *mbɔrɔ*). One account, for example, of the early history of the Biriwa chiefdom opens "Now I am coming to tell you the history [or "old things" or "stories" - *thabɔrɔ*] of our people in the old days (*bia ntu be nde*), and where they came from up-country." Such historical accounts of the founding of ruling dynasties or their exploits in war are told of all the traditional chiefly houses throughout Limba country, and are handed down from father to son within the house.

These narratives in general have a certain amount in common with stories and are sometimes referred to as

thabore, but fall into a rather separate category from stories proper. The delivery differs in that there are no songs, and it is rather more serious in tone than other stories, though it may also cover amusing or exciting incidents or details and include many of the normal characteristics of style and delivery discussed in the next chapter, such as dramatic dialogue, imitation, swift narrative and vehement diction. The topics and treatment also tend to be different, and historical narratives do not usually conclude with any of the stock endings for stories - morals, dilemmas, attributions of origin and so on. Historical narratives have the general purpose of perpetuating certain memories considered as useful to members of the chiefly house. They therefore also differ in being much more a matter to arouse argument than stories proper. People sometimes dispute violently about what actually happened in the past, who, for example, first founded some village or welcomed the original European missionaries, and they feel strongly that it matters to describe what happened correctly - that is to have their own version of the truth of which they are convinced accepted by other people. Thus people from different villages or

families often find themselves in strong disagreement, and are indignant when a version is suggested which differs from their own. It is clear that one reason why they are so much concerned to establish their own account about, say the founder of a particular line, is because of its significance for their present position and status. Historical accounts therefore, while differing from other stories in some respects, do in a way, perhaps, resemble them in that they too provide a kind of perspective and comment on certain present situations.

b) Shorter formulations - proverbs, riddles etc.

Mbɔrɔ and thabɔrɔ ~~are~~ also refer to many of the briefer sayings which to us would seem on first sight to belong to a quite different category: a riddle, proverb, moral, wise or imaginative saying, an elaborate verbal play, or an analogy.

Simple riddles are often asked among children. Examples are[1]: "I have tied water into a parcel", to which the reply is "Orange"; or "What child is older than its father?", where the answer is "A wicker fish-

1. The Limba texts of the riddles and proverbs are given in chap. 9.

trap" because the end called the *hatong* (*lit.* a child) is woven before the rest of the trap, so that the child is thus "the older" (*thanthɛ*). A rather different type in which what is suggested by some *sound* must be identified, may run "*Kikiri kɔkɔrɔ* - do you know that?" - "A pregnant woman will not carry another", where the point is that the two first words are supposed to suggest to the intelligent listener the great projecting size of the pregnant woman's stomach.

Sometimes the riddles are more elaborate, as in the series which open with the stock phrase "the children of the old man" or "the children of my father"; these "children" have then to be identified through some resemblance or analogy to the original statement. Here are two examples:

"A story (*mbɔrɔ*) for you. The children of my father they once went on a journey. They went far, the two of them. When they were coming back, you could not count them - hundreds, hundreds, hundreds, thirty of them. It is finished". The answer is "groundnuts", because when you put the two parts of the nut in your mouth and chew, the pieces become so many you can no longer count them.

"A riddle (mbɔrɔ). My father's children when they once came out, going on a journey, as they went on the journey they talked. When they were coming back - dumb. What is meant by that?" The correct reply is "gourds" because they make no noise once something has been put into them; that is, when the palm wine tapper is returning home with his gourds now full of palm wine.

A standard way of indicating that one does not know the answer, thus "giving up" and wanting to be told, is to say "see the spider" (ya wosi) as in the following exchange:

"The children of the old man - from the time they killed the goat right up to this day the blood lies there. Who knows that?" "We don't know. See the spider!" "Haven't you seen the seed? From the time when the fire was taken there, there the grass does not come up. Well, that is it." The reference seems to be to the effect of the farmer's burning of the bush; and once the rice seed is sown, the women weed away all the extra grass throughout that year(?).

Such riddles may perhaps be seen to be akin to the dilemma stories to which there is no given correct

answer but a problem is set which may lead to long discussion and argument about the principle involved. However the main point is generally that some analogy of sound, nature or situation is expressed which then has to be correctly identified by the listener.

A proverb or stock saying can also be called mbɔrɔ. "The female hen shall not crow in Biriwa", for example, is a saying in which the Biriwa Limbas assert that they will never allow the Mandingo strangers to gain the chiefship there; for, though many Mandingoes are now settled in Biriwa and often take Limba wives, thus being related to the Limba ruling house through their mothers, the country, it is implied, belongs of right to the Limbas who have inherited the rule there through their fathers. Another such saying runs "You want a big thing - like an ant-heap getting a felt hat. It did not go to Freetown". The reference here is to the black ant-heap, shaped rather like an umbrella so that it can be imaginatively seen as having a hat on its head; this also recalls the fact that when a Limba makes an expedition down-country to Freetown, if he prospers there he always tries to buy certain objects

to manifest his wealth when he reaches home again, including, very commonly, a broad-brimmed felt hat. The meaning of the proverb therefore is that there are some people who are ambitious to get fine clothes and possessions as a sign of wealth and experience; but that this may be at bottom only empty show; they are only like an ant-heap which seems to be wearing a felt hat, the mark of the travelled man, and yet has in fact never travelled at all!

Proverbs are frequently used in the context of persuasion. Thus if two people are quarrelling a by-stander may try to bring them to a sense of proportion by showing them the wider aspects of what they are doing. Or when a case is being heard by chief or elder someone may plead for the offender, saying, for example "Do not blame the chimpanzee for his ugliness". The purpose of this proverb is, by an analogy, to make the general point that however bad a child may be, it is not right to go to extremes in scolding or punishing him, just as to go on complaining about the notorious ugliness of the chimpanzee is both useless and unreasonable. By means of the particular analogy, therefore, a general truth is being put forward implicitly, and

the actual occasion and fault put in a wider context and perspective.

Occasionally the moral or generalising element in a story or proverb is so drawn out that it more or less absorbs the whole statement, and it is not really clear whether we should count it as a proverb or a story. In Limba of course they are equally called mboro and the two seem to shade into each other. The amount of overlap is a matter of degree. A few stories, perhaps specially those by old men, accustomed to moralise, reconcile, and bring others to a sense of wider proportion, seem to consist almost as much in didactic generalisation as in narrative in the English sense of the term. One such mboro can be quoted here in illustration. It is interesting because, though told by an intelligent and respected elder, the actual course of the narrative is confused, and the identity of the speaker sometimes not clear (i.e. whether Kanu or the star), yet the main point of the "story" as far as the teller was concerned was expressed forcefully and unmistakeably: that is, the generalisation that it is futile and ridiculous to try by human means to struggle against one's destiny, the innate qualities or weaknesses with

which Kanu has endowed one. The narrator was, as it were, standing back from the actions and ambitions of everyday life in which both he and others were constantly involved, and looking at human endeavour in a sense *sub specie aeternitatis*, expressing this analogically in terms of the dialogue of Kanu and the star.

> "A story (mbɔrɔ). A star up above was once laughing. Then the chief Kanu Masala asked it 'What are you laughing at?' - 'The people I always laugh at - [they are] if Kanu makes a thing so, to say they will fix it [differently] - it is those people I am laughing at'.
>
> "Well then, [a star] down below also got up. It laughed. Chief Masala asked 'What are you laughing at?' - 'The people I always laugh at - when I have straightened a thing, the one who would undo it'.
>
> "When you see someone like that who would straighten something, then we Limbas say he is a fool. Even if you help him with something, whatever it is - Kanu has said once and for all that he is not good. 'Those are the people I always laugh at, who would straighten something I have spoiled, I Kanu'. So the one up above says 'Those are the ones I am laughing at - well, that when I have fixed a thing, I Kanu, the one who would undo it, it is those Limbas I am laughing at'.
>
> "For thus we live here, every one of us. Kanu has made something; they try to disfigure it. You will not be able. What Kanu has made bad - if it is your wife, if it is your child, even if you sew them a fine dress, if Kanu just makes them bad - well, they will not know how to speak. Kanu makes a person so". [1]

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1. Text given in chap. 9.

Sometimes, on the other hand, a shorter form or analogy is used to make a point tersely and allusively in the course of some argument. This is also called mbɔrɔ. Thus, for example, when the chief's emissary to a memorial ritual was insulted by one of the visitors there, he replied briefly, smiling and full of relaxed humour: he had once heard, he said, of a man who pointed rudely at a dead man's face, but found that in return the dead man bit him. This was a mbɔrɔ to recall the visitor to his senses without any open quarrel or overt rebuke. Similarly a chief responded simply to my mention of the government's proposal to move the chiefdom headquarters from his historic town of Bumban to one he considered vastly its junior - that would be like, he said, taking away aman's outer robe and leaving him with only his inner clothing; he needed to say no more as the implication was clear to all his listeners: this, just like removing the prestige of the chiefship from Bumban, would be self-evidently too great a shame for any man to bear.

Informal analogies are common in arguments, jokes and persuasion or instruction. They are sometimes referred to as thabɔrɔ, "stories" or, perhaps a better

translation here, "parables". I therefore conclude this section with some indication of the way in which these are used in a Limba context.

Analogies are frequently brought in to convey to a listener some point that seems to be obscure to him. In my case, for example, Limba of every kind often tried to elucidate some unfamiliar custom or concept for me by trying imaginatively to posit some situation they thought I would be familiar with, and then arguing by analogy from that. Thus, to give one very simple example, it was explained to me how it could be that the ruling house of the Biriwa Limba chiefdom which had originated, according to the current account, from another people far up country in the distant past, was yet a truly Limba family: if my father was English, they said, and my mother was Limba, and if I came among the Limba and settled there and was brought up in their country speaking their language, would I not then be Limba? Again, a hunter-traveller was once trying to convey to me how the Limba think of the "heart" (huthukuma); drawing on his own experience, experience which he knew I shared, he spoke of a lorry: the lorry is always there, he said, but without its driver it cannot

go, can it? or move in the right direction? well, the heart is like the driver; without it a person does nothing.

People often tried to explain things to me by using a comparison to a "book", a thing commonly taken to be one of the distinguishing possessions of white men. It was constantly being put to me that "farming is our book" i.e. that to the Limba farming is as economically and affectively important as they suppose reading to be to the European. "Our hoes are our books", they often say, or "when we hear something, we put it in our hearts; our hearts are our books". A longer version of a similar analogy ran roughly:

> "we cannot write - hoeing is our writing. With you, you write on paper; if you forget the day after tomorrow, you will look. If your children want to know about the old days, they will look. But with us, if we teach a child, he puts it in his heart (thi ka huthukuma) so when we die he will know. If his father did bad things, he will know. That is our writing".

By such analogies with books, several points are being made simultaneously. Firstly, this implicitly though not perhaps altogether consciously, recalls the stories[1] about the destiny of the Limba - hoeing or farming - as

1. e.g. White and black brothers; Limbas, Fulas and Europeans.

against the Europeans with their books. Secondly there is the two-fold implication both that Europeans are of course superior in that they are able to write, a quality constantly associated by the Limba with European wealth and mechanical efficiency, and at the same time that the Limba too have a system of memory and tradition which is, in its way, comparable to the European, or, at least, not to be despised.

This kind of analogy therefore, like many of the stories, can also be used as a vehicle for some generalisation or detached comment on the present world, and may merge into what might in English be more properly called a proverb or moral. Thus the rice, according to one old man, is "like a child; you bear it and then leave it to grow big - it is all [due to] Kanu". Here again many different points are being conveyed connected with the Limba philosophy of life: the paradox that of course nothing can be equal to the value of a child, " a Limba person"; and yet the rice somehow is, for our life depends on it and it is our main occupation and interest so that in spite of the hard work and pain "our hearts are happy when we are in the farm"; it is part of the ancestral cycle of Limba yearly activity.

Furthermore, the analogy suggests, just as with a child it is well known that you struggle with all your might to preserve and rear it, yet, unless _Kanu_ wills, it will not survive, so too with the rice all your pain and labour will have no result unless you are, in the last analysis, helped by _Kanu_. Some analogies, therefore, overtly directed to convey some particular point to a listener by comparing it to something else which is well known to him, may also often have many implicit associations and overtones of wider generalising comments on the nature of the world and man's part in it.

Analogy is also often used to convince an opponent in some argument. In this context it is often expressed in the form of a rhetorical question. An old village headman, for instance, was early in 1961 objecting strongly to the idea of Independence as he then understood it: the white men had "pity" for them, he said; but if they were left to themselves without Europeans, it would be like a child trying to walk for itself before it was able, and so falling down and hurting himself - and is that good?

The outline of one longish argument I witnessed may help to bring out how persistently an analogy may

be followed through in discussion. The particular analogy used, that of a school, may well have been suggested, as is not uncommon with an effective Limba *mbɔrɔ*, by the nature of the audience (in this case including me); but the use made of it was a typical one. The discussion was conducted in a friendly and laughing spirit, purely for the joy of argument, and at the same time with due formality. The listeners were expected not to interrupt until a speaker had finished except for the formal rejoining (*me*) or "yes" "no" or "mm" in answer to telling points of rhetorical questions.

> The point at issue was the behaviour of two boys, Kumaru and Koloi, who instead of learning the usual vigorous and exacting *gbondokale* initiation dance preferred the quieter *pɔrɔ* dance as they were perfectly entitled, but not encouraged, to do. Karanke said that all the other boys had been able to master the *gbondokale*. It was as if I had sent a child to school, he said appealing to me as one of the audience; at the end of the year it had turned out that the child had not learnt well, but all the others had learnt well; was that good? The listeners murmured that it was not good. Kumaru replied that this was not analogous (*sinthi te* - lit. not one; and *a fakande* - different). He was working all day at hoeing, he did not refuse to do his work; it was just the *gbondokale* he avoided, he did not dance that. In any case was he not thinking fully about his *work* throughout the whole day? His listeners were forced to acquiesce. So in the evening

he continued, his body was tired and sore
from his work; why should he then be criticised
for not learning a dance when his work in the
farm was the main thing he was thinking of?
This argument went down well, for any appeal to
the importance of rice-farming is always an
effective one. However Karanke replied by
saying that it was Kumaru's position that was
not properly analogous. In school he said,
turning to me, did I not learn other things
besides reading (i.e. he meant besides my main
work, which was reading, just as hoeing is the
main work for the Limba); did I not also learn
perhaps sewing and dancing? "Yes" I replied,
the expected answer. So too, he went on, in
this country also the boys both work during the
day at farming and learn other things besides.
The other boys who also work all day are able
to dance as well; do you not see them practising
the gbondokale at night? "Yes". There are
only these two who are unable to do this - are
they then doing right? Karanke's argument was
then finally more or less admitted by Koloi and
Kumaru who ended up however by saying that any-
way they just preferred the pɔrɔ dance as "their
hearts were not in the gbondokale".

Such discussions and arguments are often conducted
with great spirit and delight to both listeners and
principals. This Limba propensity for analogy or
conscious metaphor can now be further exploited by the
more skilled among the candidates in the modern context
of election to chiefship. Each candidate is normally
allocated a symbol by the government officer in charge
and a picture of this is put on his respective ballot
box while he holds an identical picture in his hand so

that his supporters will know into which box to put their votes. The candidates brandish their symbols and often use them to draw morals and persuade the people to vote for them. In one chiefdom election I witnessed, the candidate who had as his symbol a picture of a "cutlass" (one of the most common farming implements), displayed it vociferously to the crowd with

> "Here is the cutlass; we use it to clear the bush, to do our hard work, to keep going. Here is the cutlass - hard work. If you don't work hard, you won't get anything [a sententious saying frequently heard among the Limba] - you won't get anything good ... here is the cutlass".

The holder of a house as symbol used this subtly against this junior contender by implying without openly stating that perhaps that man would, with his cutlass and the impetuosity of a young man, keep them too hard at work:

> "See the house. When many people go to the farm, when they come back in the evening after their hard work, they rest. The house holds them and keeps them well".

A third candidate who had a lamp as symbol spoke more quietly

> "Please support me, me with the lamp. I took the lamp because my father, the last chief,

> was very kind to you all. His kindness spread all round like a lamp. If I gain the chiefship I will help the people to get light; let them remember my father's goodness".

Sometimes an analogy or "parable", as mbɔrɔ is often translated by literate Limba, is purposely used as a kind of joke, naturally specially popular and amusing when, as so often, some of the participants have been drinking. Thus, for example, I was subjected to a prolonged harangue, involving a mbɔrɔ about the hand, by a party of men who were very preoccupied with the problem of palm wine. Why, they insisted to their own great amusement, is it that when the palm tree grows in the bush common to all, that some people agree to drink the palm wine and some do not? Why? The Mandingoes and the Fulas (Muslims) do not drink, the Limbas do. There are four lines on the hand. Which line is the right one? or why then did Kanu not make one line only? does he intend there to be one way or many ways? "Answer that question for me! Why is it? Ask that question for me from all the many people in England. Is there the same way for all people? is there one way or many?" The party then went off in a mixture of laughter and indignation at the intricacy of the problem,

to look for more wine. Another exchange characterised as _thimbɔrɔ_ ("parables") was with a man who was drinking the very potent locally distilled spirit. He joked with great mock solemnity that the bottle in his hand was not, of course, of spirit but of paraffin; he was _forced_ to drink it, he said, because he had to have light; and inside his stomach there was a little light, complete with lamp and wick and everything; so he just _had_ to sit there all evening, alas, drinking his bottle of paraffin to feed his lamp! All this was uttered with a dead serious expression while, as he had intended, the whole group round him were helpless with laughter.

Such verbal joking and analogies shade into a kind of minor verbal play or punning. Though this is not explicitly referred to as _mbɔrɔ_ it would seem in some ways to be similar and it is perhaps worth including a few examples here. They sometimes enjoy teasing a companion by pretending to take some figurative expression literally or in a sense in which it was clearly not intended. This can, for example, be used to poke fun at some simple-minded person, such as an ethnographer or a child. I was ridiculed for apparently having taken at its face value the statement that "the vultures

are the dead coming to accept the sacrifice"; they pointed out scornfully that <u>of course</u> they didn't mean that the vultures are identical with the dead; how could that be when the dead are buried in their graves? In exchanges carried on among themselves, they may, to take another example, laugh at a child for taking seriously the idea that the heart must get smaller and smaller as a man gets older until it finally vanishes away completely at the moment of [illegible]. He seemed to have got this odd idea, the more thoughtful pointed out, because he was misled by the common phraseology according to which it is often said that when the heart perishes, life perishes, or that someone's heart is "bad" or "spoilt" (<u>lehe ta</u>; <u>teti</u>) and he is therefore likely to die, or that witches "eat" a man's heart and so kill him secretly. But the physical, literal, heart is still in the body. In the same sort of way people consciously play with the ambiguities of such words as the verb "to eat" (<u>thɔng</u>) which can be used to mean either material eating, or the spiritual consuming by a witch or spirit, or the spending or wasting of goods, specially money. Thus a child who came to her grandfather to say shyly that she had "eaten" the penny he had given

her, provided an occasion for an elaborate play, enjoyed by all the adults, about how ludicrous it was to hear anyone claiming to have actually "eaten" a hard inedible metal coin.

Such minor punning and word play may seem far from the more elaborate analogies, stories, and parables described earlier. But they serve to illustrate once again the significant part played in Limba communication and use of language by such elements as metaphor, analogy, and figurative expression. Their feeling for the importance of such aspects is merely part of a whole outlook which finds its expression in their love of song, analogy, parable, moralising and generalisation, a love which is not confined to the various types of story proper, but all through their attitude to and use of language.

5. The concept of *mbɔrɔ*

I have described various aspects of Limba stories and the wide range of applications of the Limba *mbɔrɔ*. The word *mbɔrɔ* is used for many formulations that to us would seem to demand quite different terms, and a *mbɔrɔ*

may, on different occasions, be used for varying purposes - for amusement, generalisation, tactful means of persuasion of advice, related to dramatic and artistic expression in song or dance, or for all of these at once. Yet the concept of mbɔrɔ is in one sense ultimately a single one. I wish, therefore, to conclude this chapter oh Limba stories, by pointing briefly to the two main strands which seem to run through all their applications of the term mbɔrɔ. These are, first, the attribute of age and tradition, and, secondly, the idea of analogical comment which has been the main theme in the preceding discussion.

In the first place, mbɔrɔ seems to be connected with the root bɔrɔ, old. Mabɔrɔ ma are the "old times" or "ancient ways", bebɔrɔbe the "old people", usually a synonym of fureni be, the dead. Various forms of bɔrɔ occur as the ordinary adjective meaning "old". Mbɔrɔ ki would then be translated as literally meaning "something old", with its plural mbɔrɔing ki and thabɔrɔ tha meaning "old things", or, specially the latter form, "old sayings" or "old words".[1] In any case, whatever the linguistic facts about the word itself, the idea of

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1. Tha- is the usual plural prefix of the hu- class in which fall most terms to do with words.

tradition and age seems generally to be stressed in the concept of mbɔrɔ. As was evident from the discussion of religion in an earlier chapter, the Limba are very conscious of the wisdom and presence of the "old people", the dead, who, buried in the village where their descendants live, know everything that happens to their children now in the world. The general Limba respect for the authority of the dead is consistent with the emphasis they seem to place on the basically traditional and enduring nature of mbɔrɔ however much its particular expression through individual story-tellers may vary from time to time, and with the value they attach to their traditional stories and sayings. It was from the old people that they first learnt their traditional culture which they now keep "in their hearts" to "bring out" on a particular occasion. It is "by grace of the dead" that story-tellers can now perform the stories before a group of listeners according to the traditional canons of style, theme and form.

Secondly a mbɔrɔ, of whatever kind, is a kind of reflection on, or interpretation of, the world or the present situation in some kind of analogical terms. As I have said, the idea of analogy is a common one in

examples of mbɔrɔ, and, in their use of language, the Limba seem to be consistently aware - though without apparently feeling the need to state this attitude explicitly - of the possibility of reflecting on, or seeing the wider implications of, some actual or fictional event. It is this aspect that makes every mbɔrɔ, whatever its subject, in a sense "true" (thia), a term used to assent to someone's advice, exhortation or presentation of some moral or generalising point of view. In this way, therefore, a mbɔrɔ, from the Limba point of view, is not just some simplicist message, or piece of haphazard amusement, but a complex representation of life and action, in analogical terms removed from the direct involvement of the present situation, most often through the narration of particular actions represented as happening long ago, or in a far-off place, or in the form of animal agents.

This view of the nature of mbɔrɔ also fits with other aspects of Limba life and outlook. Though there are many topics on which they feel passionately, one of their marked characteristics seems to a foreigner to be

their air of detachment, their tendency, as it were, to stand back at times from the heat of the situation and comment on it reflectively, sometimes indirectly. In a minor way this comes out in their frequent use of certain grammatical forms such as subjectless verbs (e.g. *a thari*, running) and abstract verbal nouns (e.g. *huwɛndia*, brotherhood; *humana*, greeting). This goes further than a mere grammatical formulation. In day to day conversation one frequently hears such comments as "that is how we are" or "that is how we, the Limba people, act" (*nina ming do Limbaing be*), which refers both to the Limba as distinct from others and to the sense in which they share the common humanity of all peoples; or "that is what chiefship is like" (*nina hugbakine ha*), "we Limba have much suffering" (*ming do Limbaing ing thɔrɔ a bɔi*), or even, in semi-humorous reflection on some mistake of unexpected eventuality "oh people!" (*e bia be*), or "oh me!" (*e yang*). Similar to these are many of the references to *Kanu* discussed in an earlier chapter, by which the present situation is put into a wider context. Such remarks may be made with amusement, irony, sadness or resignation - but always with an air of detachment which in various degrees

underlies much of their speech and outlook.

It is this same idea of reflecting on and from the particular events that comes out more explicitly in certain formal speeches, and, in particular, in the stories, proverbs and morals that are the most common application of the term *mbɔrɔ*. The idea of detached or analogical comment on the world, the reflection of what is universal in the medium of the particular, is, then, both an essential theme in the Limba concept of *mbɔrɔ*, and also one which links that concept with their whole outlook and behaviour, and with their use of language and literature to express this. This theme is at its most formalised in the instances of *mbɔrɔ* as story or proverb; but these forms, it can now be seen, are not unconnected with other aspects of Limba life and attitudes.

Chapter 8

Story-telling

If Limba stories are to be regarded as a form of literature, they are also, it must be remembered, oral literature. The performance as well as the literary composition is an essential aspect of the art. This means that one must consider the style and techniques of story-telling, the dramatic presentation, the occasion and the audience in a way that is not necessary in the case of written literature designed to be read in a fixed form and away from the actual context of narration. To ignore these aspects in a discussion of oral literature would give a very incomplete and misleading picture of the impact of the stories in the context in which they were actually told. The teller is a performer as well as an author.

1. Occasions of story-telling

Limba stories are most frequently told in the evenings. There seems to be no explicit rule that they should not be told in the daylight hours, but in practice people are usually occupied during the day, whether in farm work,

weaving, collecting produce or "speaking" cases, so that the most common occasions when stories are told are in the dark in the home village when the day's work is finished.

Occasionally stories are also told for amusement or distraction by those who spend long hours in the farm away from the village, either on the open platforms where the children scare the birds from the growing rice, or under the scanty shelter of the rough huts in the farm. At other times the old men tell the children stories at night in the dark huts when the door has been shut against strangers and witches.

The most typical occasions however are when people are sitting around together soon after nightfall, the day's work finished, full fed after the regular evening meal, often drinking palm wine, the cup going to each of the listeners in turn. Then something may stimulate a story. One man, high-spirited and relaxed, may say "I am going to tell a story" (yang ko ɠungung mbɔrɔ) and come out with a story. Or a hunter recounting the events of the day or night may provoke some further story about one of the animals he had mentioned, illustrating, say, the intelligence of the little antelope or unscrupulousness of the leopard. The sight of a vulture, or a moth, may give rise to some story about these creatures, or the mention

of some chief remind someone of a story about some fictional chief. Some particular occasion or event may be exploited - the presence of a European may stimulate a story about "England" or the respective destinies of white and black men. Someone lighting a pipe suggested the dilemma story of the three smokers. Then when one story has been told, this may be taken up and capped by others as they sit around by the light of the stars or by a fitful and smouldering fire or lantern, the wine still, if possible, going the rounds. Sometimes a group of people gather still later, specially at the time of full moon when people go late to bed. At first they sit around chattering or breaking into intermittent snatches of song or dance, with someone desultorily beating at a drum. The children run around, dance or chase each other; then one may begin to tease a friend by asking him a riddle (mbɔrɔ). This may in turn be taken up by one of the older people. Then ~~longer~~ stories begin to be told, at first, perhaps, the simpler and shorter ones, finally the long elaborate ones which often include songs and chorus, led by the teller and echoed by his listeners. People fall silent and listen attentively or join in the song and replies in response to the teller, and follow up the stories either with another similar one or by

discussion of a dilemma posed at the end of the story or delighted repetition of some of the striking points.

Such occasions happen most frequently in the dry season when people are not so tired from hard work or scarcity of food. When, in the dry months, rice is again plentiful, people have eaten well, and can sit around at leisure with the palm wine that is once again easily obtained and sweet, then they meet together informally, exchange stories, and take pleasure in the enactment of story and song, in what Malinowski once called an "act of sociability".[1]

2. The audience

Something of the nature of the audiences for the stories has already been hinted at in discussing their occasions. They vary according to the circumstances. Riddles (a kind of "story") are told by one child to another, perhaps in twos, perhaps in a larger group, quite informally. Proverbs and analogies are occasionally introduced by a speaker to illustrate his point in a lawcase which is attended perhaps by 30 or 40 men, or even as many as 100 or more in an official Native Authority

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1. Malinowski, 1926, p. 36.

court. Old men tell attentive children stories at night in their huts.

However the most typical occasion, as I have already mentioned, is as the wine circulates among a group sitting outside at night, perhaps at first 6 or 8 of the younger men, later attracting a larger audience of their friends, including some women or children.

It is hard of course to know how far my presence affected the behaviour of such a group; and naturally the only occasions I directly observed were when I was present. But judging from the many informal occasions I saw and the mixture of spontaneity and formality with which people seemed to react to the narrations, whether outside in the compound or in my hut, I think the following account of the behaviour of audiences is not unrepresentative.

The audience is very much a part of the whole situation and activity of story-telling, just as it is in the related activities of speech making or singing. If there are women present, their set reaction is to clap at selected points during the story and at the end, showing honour to the speaker; this is also sometimes done by the younger boys, especially to accompany a song. All present react immediately to dramatic points, jokes, funny words, exaggerations or mimicry, and there are always likely to

be murmurs of agreement or sympathy, the taking up and repetition of phrases in the story, such as the exchange of greetings, exclamations of surprise or horror, and loud laughter, specially in the more far-fetched or indecent stories when even the teller may not be able to control his laughter. Such participation by the listeners occurs on all occasions of story-telling from the standard traditional situation even to the much more unusual one of a Christian and literate Limba preaching to a Limba congregation in Freetown.

The telling of a story may, as I have said, arise out of some particular event or discussion so that in this way the listeners are directly concerned in the subject of the story. They also often participate personally after the narration has been completed, in the sense of discussing what has been said, impressing the moral on each other, re-enacting the high-lights, humming the song, or entering into light-hearted controversy about a problem posed at the end.

Besides this general participation by listeners, there are two special ways in which members of the audience formally take part in the story-telling.

The narrator may choose some special friend of his and designate him as the "answerer" (<u>bame</u>), to "reply" (<u>me</u>)

to the narration. In Sira and the monster, for example, Karanke opened the story by calling on his younger cousin Konia, a close friend of his "Well, cousin Konia, well, listen to me carefully, you hear? I am going to tell Yenkeni (R.F.) a story. If it pleases her - all right. If it doesn't please her - all right. But reply to me (be ma meyɛ) won't you? By grace of all who are sitting here". In The story of the great witch, Karanke offered to reply to Niaka who was telling the story. "Shall I answer you?" (be yina meyɛ?) "Yes" "All right". "Reply then. You will reply to me, won't you?" "I accept". "All right. Well now - a witch once came out on earth..."

Once appointed, this "answerer" must then interject phrases like "yes" (ndo), "mmmm", "fancy that" (woi) "really!" (ee) at appropriate moments, and react quickly with laughter or exaggerated amusement or dismay at the events related in the story. He often repeats the important points or proper names of the characters in an undertone to emphasise them, or interpolates clarifying words such as the name of the character speaking or acting at the time, specially if the audience seems at all confused, with reiterations ofkey phrases at dramatic moments, brief questions when the point is a little obscure, or

prompting if the teller appears to hesitate for a name or sequence. This formal practice of "replying" often gives an extra impression of speed and intensity to the telling of a story, and is one of the set ways in which a member of the audience may formally take part in the actual narration.

The second common type of organised participation is when all, or nearly all, of the group of listeners takes up the chorus of a song. The narrator sings the first line, which is then repeated or added to by the rest; sometimes they merely fill in the chorus, sometimes they take up the song completely while the story-teller gets his breath and lets them sing alone for a few moments before finally breaking in on them in a raised voice to continue his narrative. At times these songs may possibly be standard ones, well known to all his listeners; more often they seem to be introduced and first sung by the teller alone until grasped and tentatively repeated by his listeners. In _Sira and the monster_, for example, the narrator half-chanted the song of the dogs as they ran, "you are called, you are called", and then interjected the sung word _sɔyɔng_, which represents the sound of the dogs' leaping and jumping as they ran. This sequence was repeated eight times, and after the first two times, the

audience grasped the improvisation and sang sɔyɔng while the narrator continued with "we are called, we are called". In another example, ɔara and the guinea fowl, the teller sang the beginning of the bird's song about its name, interrupting himself for an instant to encourage his audience to join in - "answer!"; then all repeatedly sang in chorus the bird's reply to the question "Tambarenke, Tambarenke" while the narrator rhythmically put in the higher notes which asked the bird "what is your name?"; the song was then repeated by him and his audience at intervals throughout the rest of the story.

This practice of "answering" or "replying" (me), by which the audience is said to assist the speaker, is one that is adopted by the Limba in many other contexts too. It is used of someone who gives greeting in return for greeting according to the formal set exchange, as when one man calls out mande, the other replies (me) with io, mande o. Me can also be used to mean "admit" or "confess" in the context of a law case. Formally admitting one's guilt or liability is one of the required steps in the settlement of a dispute; and a witch is not generally unbound until he has "confessed" both his own sin and the names of his accomplices. Me is also used in a situation

where one man is making a speech or propounding an argument; in theory the listeners should not interrupt the flow of his presentation but should "reply" to his argument, perhaps by echoing his words or answering his questions, perhaps by only a grunt at suitable intervals; they thus "answer" the speaker in the sense of accepting or noting his main points as they are made. Connected with these usages is the sense in which _me_ carries a slight connotation of inferiority, of someone following the lead of another in some situation. Hence it can almost be translated as "support" or "obey", as subjects, for example, obey their chief. It is, indeed, typical of Limba concepts of authority that the word in their language which comes closest to our term for "obey" does not in the least carry the implication of a silent unquestioning carrying out of orders, but of an explicit replying in words, answering as well as acting when called on, and a verbal support of what a chief, leader or spokesman has said. The idea therefore that political obedience or obligation is a two-way relationship is thus quite clearly inherent in the Limba word, _me_, with its implication that accepting someone's authority is in certain respect like the way in which a man replies to someone's greeting, answers when addressed or summoned, gives consent to something, pledges support or

verbally acknowledges liability.

In the light of this, one can consider the concept of "replying" in song or story. One of the most common applications of the word is to the way in which the women as a group reply in their chorus to the song of a soloist, who is sometimes female, more often male. This, it is sometimes said, is one of the main attributes of women - to reply in song. One of the striking occasions of this is in the company of women weeders. One man stands in front of the line of women to drum and sing out the resonant weeding music; to each line of song the women reply by a line of their own, sung in chorus, sometimes with a higher and a lower part, rhythmically coordinated with the movement of their hands as they pluck up the weeds, and with their swift progression in a long singing line up the rice field. Their "replying" to the lead set by the drummer is an essential part of the whole activity. Another occasion is the crowded gathering for the boys' initiation dances; these continue most of the night, and while the men drum and sing a little, the women take up the words, which they repeat over and over in chorus. It would be inconceivable to the Limba for this ceremony to take place without both the drummers and the presence of the women singing in a close circle within which the boy

performs his athletic dance. The boys normally start practising this dance when they are still quite young, often by themselves in the farm or some dark corner of the village, but even then they try, where possible, to persuade some of the small girls to gather in a ring to "reply" for them.

Though it is particularly a woman's quality to be able and ready to "reply", the boys and younger men too may also reply to a song, specially while working in the farm. When the rice is being threshed, for example, a soloist's song is often taken up and answered by the men who are rhythmically beating out the rice with their long sticks in a tight half-dancing ring.

Women, children and younger men are therefore those who are most typically in a situation which calls for this sort of "replying". Old men, though in practice taking pains to reply to greetings or arguments or acknowledge their chief, are not so characteristically thought of as being in the position of having to reply, in particular to a song, with the slight implication of inferiority that goes with this; for old age should be listened to, served, and answered rather than itself answer.

Those who "reply", then, are from one point of view

looked on as inferior; at the same time they are quite clearly considered as making an essential contribution to the activity as a whole.

"Replying" to a story has similar implications. If one friend has been chosen out to reply in particular to the teller, he is therefore in the position of showing him respect, recognition and the ready support of one who is both intelligently listening (as in the situation when one notes and thus "replies" to an argument) and also acknowledging the other's right to lead. Similarly all those who reply to the story-teller, either in the generalised sense of merely reacting to his narration, or the specific singing in chorus in answer to his solo, are felt both to give their support to his telling of the story, and, as well, make an essential contribution to it. Not infrequently the narrator recognises this; as he ends his story he expresses gratitude to those who have listened or replied to him; he thanks both his special "answerer" by name, and also all those who have been present and taken part, concluding for example "by grace of you all (thɔkɔ ba kɛnda) who are present here. That is it. It is finished."

It is clear then, from an examination of the concept of "replying" and its connection with the actual behaviour

of an audience, how far the situation of story-telling among the Limba is thought of as a kind of joint activity by both speaker and listeners, the one leading, the others replying and supporting. This contribution by the listening group is a requisite part of the drama of story-telling, one which must be understood to grasp the nature of the Limba stories themselves; this is all the more necessary when, as here, the stories can only appear bare on a cold page without the constant warm interplay between speaker and listener which is so central to the actual Limba situation.

3. The story-teller

The Limba have no word which means an expert story-teller. Stories can be and are told by anyone of whatever age or status, and without payment. However, as described later, some individuals come to be recognised in practice as more experienced or skilful than others in narrating stories or leading the accompanying songs.

In general women do not seem to tell stories so much. This may be, in part, related to the fact that the men, though they work very hard at times, generally enjoy a more complete leisure at certain seasons and at the end

of the day, whereas women are always occupied with continual household tasks like cooking, cleaning, tending children. The men tend to sit around more in groups, and make more of a formality of handing out the palm wine. At another level, it is understood that it tends to be a specifically masculine quality[1] to be able to "speak" well and thus make effective use of rhetoric, parable or illustration, whereas a woman is more likely to sit and listen, clap to show her respect and appreciation, or join in the chorus of the songs. However women know the stories and sometimes tell them, though in fact the main cases I encountered of story-telling by women were by those in a relatively urban context - by the wife of a wealthy and literate paramount chief, and by a free-lance woman trader in the biggest of the Limba towns. In general it seems to be assumed that story-telling is an art more frequently exercised by men.

Apart from this qualification everyone is potentially able to tell stories, with various degrees of skill. Even children can tell them, partly because of the fact that they are widely interested in riddles (also <u>mbɔrɔ</u>) and these shade imperceptibly into puzzle - and other stories. Some of the stories told by children[2] tend to be more

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1. See chapter 3.
2. E.g. <u>The spider and the squirrel 2</u>; <u>The spider, the whip and the pot</u>; <u>The spider woos a wife</u>.

sketchy and less complex, sometimes emphasising the basic plot or the joke or just one incident rather than the dramatic and vivacious effects stressed by a more experienced narrator, or the moral or explanatory aspects sometimes favoured by the oldermen. But every Limba of whatever age would be expected to have some acquaintance with the traditional stories, and some capacity to tell them. Fanka Konteh, for example, who dictated many of the stories given in chapter 9, would probably not be considered by most Limbas as a particularly skilled story-teller; yet he was able to remember and dictate texts night after night, stories which were recognised and approved both by other members of his village and further afield.

That some individuals are more skilled is quickly obvious to a visitor, and at times clearly recognised by the Limba themselves, in such approving phrases as "he knows how to utter stories" or "so and so certainly knows how to speak" (wundɛ a thɔ funguna mbɔrɔing; wa na thɔ gbongkila). But they do not have a specialist vocabulary to describe this art.

This skill seems to be partly a question of mere memory and organisation - of remembering the possible plots or topics, and attaching the suitable moral. Some people cannot cope so well with this and get muddled; they may

drift unintentionally from one episode to another, or mistakenly transpose two incidents in their excitement, thus confusing the listeners. Others occasionally tack on an apparently inappropriate moral, which may, from our point of view, quite spoil the impact of the "story" itself. However in general those admired by the Limba do seem to impose a firm structure on both plot and the moral, problem or explanation with which a tale often ends, though this is not an aspect of story-telling which the Limba themselves are articulate about analysing.

A second aspect in which some people are, in this case quite explicitly, thought to excel, is that of the manner of their narration. This is discussed more fully below in terms of the "style" and "genesis" of the stories, but briefly includes both the narrator's capacity to embroider the skeleton theme of his plot with subsidiary details, pieces of vivid description, and songs, and also the actual skill of his delivery - his gestures and mimicry of people or animals, his use of dramatic repetion and characterisation, variations in speed and tone, his vocabulary, and his skill in singing and persuading his listeners to join. Vividness and drama in the actual telling is something that excites Limba, and it is this they seem to praise in a story-teller more often than the

content or structure of the specific story he has chosen to relate.

In view of the close association between story and music described in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that those who are in practice recognised to be good story-tellers are also often skilled in singing, drumming or dancing. This seems to be partly because those with the artistry and experience to lead in music are also likely to be able to master the delivery or the singing in a story and have the necessary memory and feeling also necessary in spoken art. In addition those who are known to be expert in the specialised forms of drumming or singing are so much admired and generally given so high a status in Limba society, that they perhaps in practice tend to be more confident than are other people both in their ability to perform before an audience, and in their general mastery of the culture of the old people, a culture which includes, among other things, the stories.

Instead of generalising further on the character of "The story-teller", for which there is no specialised word or role in Limba, I shall describe two of the story-tellers I encountered during my stay, who dictated or recorded many of the texts given in chapter 9. These were Niaka and Karanke Dema. Both belonged to Kakarima, a village of

about 300 inhabitants and the capital of a small chiefdom recently amalgamated under another paramount chief to make up a larger unit. The ex-paramount chief remained in the village as head of that section, keeping some of the insignia and rituals of paramountcy.

Niaka Dema was a brother of this chief, though many years his junior. As is now not uncommon among the younger men, he had spent some years down county where he had learnt a certain amount of Krio and worked in one of the shops in Freetown[1] in order to earn money towards the bride-price he would have to pay for his wife. Once he had succeeded in this and so was able to marry, he seemed to settle down with complete content to the old life and culture of his home village; this is what he had aspired to all along, he said: to have a wife, children and farm of his own, and so be able to "keep up his father's compound" in his own home. He with his wife and three children shared a house just behind the chief's with his older brother, though Niaka probably hoped, as do most Limba, that one day he would acquire many wives and children and have a household and "many people" of his own.

Besides his standard work common to almost every Limba - rice farming - Niaka had special skills practised by some only of his contemporaries - weaving cloth and

1. A shop run by Indians, an experience he made use of in his story _Kanu scatters his children_.

making the large baskets for storing rice. But his special fame lay in his drumming. He was a "master" in the art of playing the _kusung_ drum, and was known for this even beyond the boundaries of the sub-chiefdom. In this part of Limba country at least, the long _kusung_ is thought to be superior to all other types of drum, and, correspondingly, very difficult to play well. Niaka had spent many years as an apprentice before mastering the art of beating this drum and singing the songs that go with it. He was perfectly aware of the respect (and presents) he might receive when, for example, he was begged to play for some important farming "company" or the great gathering of the boys' initiation dances when a _kusung_ player is obligatory, and he might earn as much as £2 during a single night in the continual small presents from the onlookers. He was proud, as befitted his skill, and so it was only for important occasions and when the sky was clear that he consented to play.

It is worth quoting in full his own account of how he decided to learn to play this drum. This illustrates the pride he felt in his mastery of this traditional art form, and the way in which such skills may be represented as having been directly approved by one of the dead ancestors. His father, he describes, used to play the drum for the

farming company; but even when requested by his friends, he himself felt that he was unable to play until he was more or less forced to do so because the other expert, Singko, was not available.

> "I went in the evening. I looked. They told me 'you will be able.' I said 'I will not be able.' When the sun rose, Singko did not go. They said I was to go today. He had left me the finger ring which usually beats the clanger. [part of the drum] I took a stone and tied it onto my finger with raffia. For long I beat the drum. They said 'Ha! we have found a drummer now'. When the sun set, I took home the ring. That night I came and dreamed this dream: my father, my own father, who used to play the kusung drum, brought me a ring, saying 'This is your inheritance. This is what you will eat.' [i.e. get money and presents from] I said 'What am I to do?' He said 'Only take it'. I told my mother Boi 'My father has brought me a ring'. 'Oh! that is good!'. When the sun rose she pounded rice-flour [for sacrifice] and said 'Work hard at it'. So I was there when the sun rose. I was able. Of all the drummers that are here, I was the best of them all... The chief bought me a clanger, I carved out thedrum so that I would learn well. But by now I am skilled beyond all the other drummers. I am the master for anyone who wants to learn, I alone."

The second of the two was Karanke Dema, the junior smith. He had never been outside Limba country, and spoke no other language besides Limba. Though a member of the ruling clan, Dema, he had no close relatives alive apart from his mother of whom he was exceedingly fond. His father had died when he was still a small child, so he had then (rather unusually) attached himself to his mother's brother, Dokitha, who was a senior smith. But Dokitha

too soon died, so that Karanke was once again thrown on his own; indeed it says much for his skill and ability that Karanke in fact held a rather respected position in the main village instead of living and working at one of the inferior farm settlements, for the loss of a father is a serious social and economic disability; it was for this reason that Karanke, though about 35 or 40 years of age, had as yet no wife and thus was in this respect junior to such married men as Niaka. Karanke had finally attached himself to the senior smith then in the village, the chief's brother, and this man was teaching him smithcraft and spoke of one day giving him a wife.

In training to be a smith, Karanke had chosen the most difficult career open to a Limba, and, after chiefship, the most honoured. A smith has to labour as hard as anyone else on his own rice farm, and, in addition, hammer and work the heavy iron when others are resting. But he learns the skills of a smith, and the power to make invocations, cleanse people who have trespassed, take a leading part in the men's secret dances, and recognise the ritual leaves for the traditional purifying medicines. In that he was a smith, therefore, Karanke could command general respect. He was also himself perfectly aware, though with full personal modesty, of his special access

to the esoteric rituals and crafts of the honoured smith's art.

He was also rather admired for his technical skill in other respects and, in particular, for his artistry in music and dance. Among most of his contemporaries in the village, he was outstanding with his hands - he was a fast weaver, a maker of large baskets, carver of wooden mortars and drums, sewer of native cloth, and a strong worker in the farm. He always laboured with great industry and sense of responsibility; he would be "ashamed" not to. On many occasions people hoe or thresh in the farm with movements which implicitly or explicitly recall the steps of a dance. Of Karanke this was always even more true than of others, for he was at all times full of the rhythm and form of music or movement. In the evenings when work was over he used to come with his own plucking instrument,[1] singing and half-dancing, while the children ran alongside dancing delightedly, shouting "Karanke is come, Karanke is come". He was also one of the two best players in the chiefdom of the ngkali drum, and the year when I knew him he had just for the first time been begged by the women to be the singer and drummer of the special kugbɔkithɔ music for their weeding company - a great honour

1. A sansa-type instrument with nine bars mounted on a metal box.

he was at first diffident in accepting. He was also one of the chief drummers at the important boys' initiation dances where his ngkali drum was considered essential, junior only to the kusung.

Here is how he summarised the gist of a conversation he once had with me about his drumming, thus illustrating yet again how strongly such an art is felt to be a traditional one, handed down and approved by the dead.

> "I was talking about who taught me to beat the drum and to sing. So you said that I was to tell you [sc. again]. I said that no person taught me. That it was the dead who told me to drum, and my heart. That my father used to drum for the kugbɔkithɔ music. But when he died I was only small, I was not yet grown. If I had been grown, he would have taught me. But I had not yet grown. When I had acquired sense [sc. was older] a little, he came to tell me to drum the kugbɔkithɔ - he came in a dream. I said 'No. I will not agree. Also I am learning smith-craft'. He said 'Here is the ngkali drum', giving it to me. Well, that is how I have learnt it a little. As you ask me, well, this is the extent I have learnt - during this year only; I am looking to it a little. If it is good, people tell me. If it is not good, people tell me. But this year I am learning..."

Karanke therefore was paid general respect for his artistic achievements. He was still regarded as a young man, so had as yet no weighty voice in the discussion of law cases and formal reconciliation of opponents. But he could already "pull people's hearts" a little by smoothing out quarrels between the younger boys or clarifying some point of dispute among his contemporaries. He himself

described his early attempts to contribute to a formal discussion of a dispute before the chief - "my heart was afraid to speak, but I dared a little, for I knew a little how to speak". In addition Karanke had the socially recognised power to "speak" in the context of the important smith's rituals; he could, for example, invoke the dead owners of a "swear" with the correct formulae and intonation, and, with appropriate phrase, gesture and control, set it to pursue its victim.

These details about the drums or speeches of two story-tellers may seem rather far from the subject supposed to be under discussion. But story-telling also involves the ability to speak skilfully, and to lead people in song, so that the qualities which make a good speaker, drummer and story-teller seem in practice often to be connected. The Limba, as I have said, themselves associate together spoken and sung art, and the latter in particular is immediately related to the notions of drumming and dancing; songs occur in the stories, and people tend to move a little in a rhythmic way as they sing. Since the Limba in both practice and intention associate together these different aspects of artistry

and the mastery they involve of "Limba ways", it is not surprising that those skilled in one aspect may also sometimes excel in another.

The description of these two individuals has also touched on certain ideas which are discussed more fully later. When treating of the genesis of Limba stories two facets in particular must be taken into account. One is the way in which the Limba themselves seem to describe what we might refer to as the respective parts played by traditional material and individual inspiration or addition. This, in Limba terms, seems to be referred to when they speak of the contribution made at once by "the dead" and their own "hearts" - in much the same way as that described by Niaka and Karanke when explaining how they took up drumming and singing. The second important point to emerge is that the tellers are all individuals, individuals who perform on a specific occasion. There is no joint "folk" common authorship or performance, even though naturally the stories are composed within the limits of the social background of Limba life and literary conventions, but each individual performer has his own idiosyncragies and fund of experience or interest. A full account of the stories should

really include a further treatment of all those who told them their background and their individual manner. This is impossible here, both because of length and because I unfortunately did not fully realise the importance of this point in the field so that some of the data is lacking; however a few further remarks on individual story-tellers are included later.[1]

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1. Appendix

4. Style and technique in story and story-telling.

Since the style and delivery of each story form an important part of its impact, some account of this is called for here. Questions of style cannot be kept completely distinct from some discussion of the potentialities of the language and the set ways of heightening effects, but within these limits the individual story-teller can embroider, expand, dramatise or exaggerate by the various means at his disposal within the context of language and technique.

The vocabulary of the stories seems to be much the same as that or ordinary speech whether in the sense of day to day conversation, reporting of some special event, or the formal speaking at law cases or funerals. In this respect the spoken narrative is in contrast to the songs interpolated into the stories, and, even more so, many of those sung independently. These are often in obscure or unusual language, which may include foreign words, often in nearly unrecognisable forms. Sometimes only a few people know their real meaning, sometimes, so it seems, there is no clear meaning at all even for those singing, the attraction being in the sound, rhythm and dance rather than in the sense. In story-telling however, the vast bulk of the actual words used seem to be those of everyday speech in the sense that there is no specialised technical or esoteric vocabulary introduced into the stories apart from the songs.

Similarly the syntactical structure of the stories seems to differ little from that of ordinary speech. The stories very frequently include direct representation of the greetings, remarks and conversations of the characters portrayed, and this speech is exactly like that which can be heard at any hour in any Limba village as people go about their work or stop to greet or argue. Reporting or explaining of events also takes place in the same manner as events described in stories, and does not seem to differ in any fundamental way. The closing sentences in a story sometimes seem to be rather more complex and long drawn out; but this too resembles the similar diction used in generalising funeral harangues or the comments made by moralising elders in summing up law cases.

There are, therefore, no striking differences in the speech of the stories from the vocabulary or structure of other forms of speaking. However there are certain ways of heightening effect which are used by a good story-teller by playing on the potentialities of the language and sentence structure or by using various dramatic techniques.

Before discussing these various devices, it may be helpful to make a few points clear about the general structure of sentences in Limba.

The framework tends to be paratactical rather than compound. The sentences, that is, tend to follow on one after the other as parallel formulations complete in themselves rather

than comprising long periods of complex subordinate clauses. The sentences are therefore in a sense rather short, but they are also often spoken very fast, one straight on after the other, so that just how one should separate them up, whether, say, by a comma, semi-colon or full stop, is not clearly formulated; the whole idea of "sentence" in Limba can only be one of degree.

Parataxis, therefore, is a typical Limba feature, and most of the stories are made up of what could be regarded as short apparently abrupt sentences. However these are bound together by various connecting devices. People often, for example, use words like <u>wuna</u>, that is why, therefore; <u>ksna</u>, in that place; <u>mena</u>, then; <u>nina</u>, thus, and so on. The interjection <u>awa</u> is also found very useful in story of argument: it carries the implication that since we have now finished with some topic, we can now, with that in mind, move on to the next point. Other ways of making clear the connection of a new sentence or move with what has gone before is either by short interjections such as <u>huna</u>, <u>wuna</u> (that is it, that is why) at the end of a piece of direct speech to show that it is now complete, or the common word <u>kumang</u>, a term I have translated as "behold"; it is really a brief and vivid way of indicating something like "they were therefore trying to do such and such a thing - but all the time (<u>kumang</u>) they did not realise that the situation was in fact quite different from what they had assumed".

An explicit connection is sometimes made by taking up a phrase in the previous sentence and repeating it, in such examples as "she went in. Going in, she said....." (wunde bii. Wunde mabii na, wunde dome); "she struck herself. As soon as she had struck herself, Yemi went and said 'it is she father'"(nde fangokoi. Nde thong mafangoko, Yemi kai na nde na wo papa). Another way of pointing the sentence structure is by the device, sometimes called epanalepsis, by taking up with a pronoun some noun that has been previously referred to, as, for example,"that boy, no one must now see him" (na hato wobena, na wumo wumo sa nda ning kutioko). Certain other particles are also used to clarify or point the sense in Limba though they cannot usually be directly translated into English. These include such words as nde, in the past, before; thong, just, immediately; si, in the course of; thung, only, just; nong, which suggests great length of time, or comparison; nene which adds a new point but with some emphasis on the person acting; and nda, which is used in rather the same way as the Latin iam, to mean by then, by now, or still. These ~~connectives~~ may be used more carefully in story-telling, but they are also a common feature of every kind of Limba speech.

Two further ways in which words or phrases are commonly grouped together or picked out for emphasis are through the use of "classifiers", particles which enclose the words and phrases pertaining to one central noun, and, more importantly, by the widespread use of "stabilisers", particles which emphasise

single words. In Limba these are na (positive) and te or kute (negative), which stress the preceding word thus making it possible to point the meaning of the sentence more simply and effectively than it can usually be expressed in translation. In the story of the Four wives, for instance, when the hero is found dead beeause he had disobeyed the prohibition to see a stranger, the girl who was found the next morning with his dead body replies briefly to her questioners with the simple mathimo na bile bali, literally "love na owns thing"; in an English rendering the economy of the phrasing is lost and one has to choose between such unsatisfactory alternatives as "it was love that caused it", "the real reason was love" or just "love".

The Limba also tend wherever possible to report direct speech.[1] This construction can be very simply represented in Limba. Direct speech is introduced by na, and this word is repeated before each clause, group of words, or even single emphatic word of the speech, so that the fact that the words are still part of the speech is never for a moment lost to the listeners, and even where no verb of speech is explicitly included, there is no confusion. People are always reporting others' direct words or suppositions in both everyday conversation and story, and, as described later, particularly effective use of this construction can be made by story-tellers.

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1. See the many examples of this in the quotations given in earlier chapters.

There are many contexts in Limba where the syntactic features mentioned above can be observed in use. In formal speeches, reporting of news, and the everyday interchange of information, Limba make use of the mainly paratactical form of sentence, interspersed with connectives of various kinds, stabilisers, and the quotation of others' direct words. Parataxis, it is clear, need not imply a confused or unpolished diction, but can be pointed and embellished by the various devices described above.

These basic features of Limba are also to be observed in the stories, often used with vivid or intensified effect. When further elaboration still is required there are also various further ways in which a skilful story-teller can add to the basic structure just described to express special vehemence or emphasis. Though up to a point these occur in all kinds of speaking, the most extreme use seems to be in the telling of stories.

Repetition is often employed. Often this serves to bring out some point in the story more dramatically. In The story of two women, for example, the exacting nature of the examination of the first woman is indicated by the questions being asked twice over in the same words, eliciting in each case the same reply. Excited and indignant refusal can be similarly shown, as in the story of the Four wives, where the first wife rejects another woman's plea to join them with her vehement repetition

"No, no, no, I won't agree!" (<u>na hali hali hali, na yang sa me</u>). Repetition of a long phrase or sentence may bring out not only the dramatic importance of a certain episode or saying, but also suggest the length of time it continued, or the concentration of the actors. One example of this might be cited from <u>The hunter and the three twins</u>. Two of the brothers, Koto and Luseni, go into the water in their long search for their father, while the third, Siema, is left on the river bank to breathe for them. One is given a picture of his long wait there in the light, steadily breathing and thus supplying life for his two brothers, as he is pictured murmuring in a monotone, half-chanting, over and over again, "I breathe for Koto, I am breathing for Luseni, I am breathing for myself as well. I breathe for Koto, I am breathing for Luseni, I am breathing for myself as well...." (<u>yang femie Koto na, yang femia Luseni na, yang femioko na fe. Yang femie Koto na, yang femia Luseni na, yang femioko na fe.</u>) Great excitement too can be directly expressed by the use of repetition. Later on in the same story, the mother sees her three sons coming back with their father whom they have now recalled to life. "She rejoiced, she rejoiced, she rejoiced, she rejoiced. She thanked them much, she thanked them much, 'thank you my children, thank you my children, thank you my children, that pleases me'". (<u>wunde yetokoi, wunde yetokoi, wunde yetokoi, wunde yetokoi. Wunde kalangani binde, wunde kalangani binde, na wali bena mpating be, wali bena mpating be, wali bena mpating be, na wung thime yama</u>).

Sometimes a phrase is repeated again and again at various key points in the story. In the two stories, for example, where Kanu is shown going round on earth looking for hospitality, his perseverance and weariness are hinted at through the continual repetition of exactly the same words after each episode -"he went on" (nde dangande).[1]

In a much less elaborate way, and one which commonly occurs in every kind of speech, single words are themselves often reduplicated. Sometimes this is really a standardised form which can properly be written as one word, though it may be pronounced with special expression or effect by a skilful story-teller - e.g. digidigi, try; gbokogbokong, rub in; ngkinikini(ng), pity. Sometimes there is reduplication of syllables within a word, as in verbs such as lukututu, tie up bit by bit (distinct from luku and lukutu, to tie in one or few actions); bilititiande, bring in by many single journeys (contrast biliti, bring in). Certain superlatives are also commonly expressed by repetition of the words, often separated by the particle o which is sometimes stressed or prolonged for effect, specially in story-telling, thus giving yet more emphasis to the superlativeness already inherent in the phrase: e.g. mbe o mbe and bali o bali, everything; kame o kame, everywhere; name o name, however, by every means; wo o wo and wume o wume, everyone, anyone.

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1. On structure and form in stories see section 5 below.

In addition to these minor examples, there is also in the stories a repetition of some single word or root to create certain effects. This sometimes gives a more extreme sense: thus yete means "small", whereas yete yete yete means "very very small indeed"; wunde ke means "he went", wunde ke ke ke ke ke ke is a conscious exaggeration, as in The story of the great witch, meaning that she perservered in going over great time and great distance without stopping even once; piripiri means "all night", piripiripiripiripiripiri in The hunter and the bush conveys the idea that the hunter continued in his struggle for absolutely the whole length of the night without ceasing for an instant. This sort of exaggerated repetition is a favourite one among some story-tellers, and always creates an effect among those listening.

Besides repetition of words, phrases and syllables, constant use is also made of parallel phrasing. This also involves repetition of a sort, but with variation of certain key words.

Sometimes this occurs in a very minor way. The two brothers, for example, in The white and black brothers are described as "the one white, the one black" (woi wo fufe, woi wo bolo), and the names of three twins are given as "one Luseni, one Koto, one Siema" (wong Luseni, wong Koto, wong Siema). Even these minor examples can at times be used in a purposeful and expressive way to set the scene or produce an impression of the opposition or

interdependence between the individuals thus introduced.

Lists of objects or events using this device of parallel phrasing are very popular. They are often recited with a conscious air of comprehensiveness or climax. This may be an enumeration of exciting events, as with "The man killed for a banana, where the Limba is so much more terse and rhythmic than any possible English translation: "he was seized, he was thrown down, he was killed, he was skinned" (nde boho, nde tongo, nde koro, nde sengo). The idea of the care and single-mindedness with which a difficult task was meticulously completed is indicated in the list of actions taken by one twin to revive his father in The hunter and three twins: "he took the funnel, he dripped the medicine on him with it; he dripped it on his ear, he dripped it on his nose, he dripped it on his eyes, he dripped it on his brains, he dripped it on his mouth, he dripped it on the soles of his feet, he dripped it on his arms. Their father got up". (wunde segithe kutoto kobena, nde thondonue ning kung; wunde thondung ka kuyuha ko, wunde thondung ka mpereng ki, wunde thondung ka thaya thang, wunde thondung ka mabuku mang, wunde thondung ka fothi hang, wunde thondung ka kunangka ko, wunde thondung ka gbekeng be. Fanda meng ngaye.)

Long lists of people or objects are also appreciated. These too manifest a type of parallel phrasing, and are delivered as lists, with an intentional stress on any parallelisms of rhythm, tone or meaning. In Kanu and palm wine, for example, the various

tapping instruments brought by Kanu are carefully enumerated. In The stomach is chief of the body, the various parts of the body in the story are listed at both the beginning and the end. Sometimes a list of items carries a conscious hint of exaggeration or over-emphasis, and ends up with a summarising superlative or climax, as when the mother in The hunter and the three twins is depicted as looking for all the different kinds of food to welcome them back: eight varieties are mentioned by name, and this is then summed up by "every kind of food that there is at all for Limba people, she looked for that" (ha nin muthong mu ka Yimbaing, wunde dethi mung). Similarly in A story of witches, the climax is introduced after a list of parallel phrases: the boy concealed in the cotton tree has his attention called to those dancing round him in witchcraft, with "You see your mother? you see your father? you see your brother? you see all your relatives? - to kill you!" (ying kute nanda na? ying kute fanda na? ying kute wenda na? ying kute bia nda hoona? - na ba kora yina)

In a more extended sense parallel phrasing is also used as part of the wider structure of a story, and the same patterns of phrases or sentences may recur over and over in the various episodes of the story. This feature is referred to in the following section on style and form.

This structural device of placing successive episodes side by side, as it were, each showing development in one

aspect only while the rest remains unchanged - this device may in one way seem far from the "parallel phrasing" with which this section began. But, from another point of view, it is analogous both with the common use of parallel phrasing in the more restricted sense, and with the paratactical structure of Limba in general. Each episode is related as a unit, and this full repetition of nearly similar events is one among the several means by which a skilful story-teller effectively heightens the tension and climax in his narration.

A certain amount of imitation or mimicry is also used to make the narration more vivid. This may involve direct imitation of what is understood to be the sound of animals speaking. The words of an insect were pronounced by the narrator in a kind of buzzing voice to represent its sound, and the monster's sniffing of a human in Sira and the monster was depicted as inf inf and the breathy snuffing iteration of furu yumba furu yumba ("a human's smell, a human's smell"). The sound of dogs is imitated in various ways: krrr krrr for their growls, wo wo wo for their barking. Formalised representation of bird song is not very common in the stories, with the exception of the set remark always made by the finch (as diviner): "se se se se, put good, put bad" (se se se se, thia balohoi, thia bathongkoi), where the words are also said to indicate the sounds of the stones he is shaking in divination. Personal

representations of the sound of birds' voices or flight sometimes occur. The vulture in Two friends, for example, was made to speak in a kind of high monotone. Some of the songs in the stories are said to have been sung by birds, but I do not think these are intended to represent actual bird songs directly.

Mimicry is also employed in the sense of imitative gesture or expression. The Limba are always ready to use this in many contexts. I have, for example, had it indicated to me which of several birds was meant by the quick light pecking movements made by a white-bearded and otherwise very dignified paramount chief; the pouncing and playful motions of a cat around a hut were illustrated in the course of a normal conversation; and hunters frequently imitate the stance and walk of the animals they are describing as they tell tall hunting tales to entranced audiences. This kind of mimicry therefore is readily imported into story. The shy nervous peeping out of the antelope was simulated in one story; so too was the staggering walk of the spider as he was dragged along by the ropes that bound him to his bowl of rice. Imitations of human protagonists are also common. Sara's action, for example, in Kanu and palm wine was portrayed by the narrator's mimicking the way Sara tapped sharply on Kanu's knee to wake him up; and the teller vividly depicted the way in which the father and mother of the dead boy went up eagerly to the fire to save him, but each time were

driven back against their will by the fierce heat of the flame (Four wives). Characterisation is also often conveyed by facial expression or gesture, as, for example, with the obstinate and rather sulky daughter in The story of a millionaire.

Gestures in general are often used. The Limba have several stylised gestures, but since these are commonly used to convey information *without* words, they do not occur particularly often in the stories. A few such gestures do, however, occur in story-telling, for example the representation of eating by making as if to take a ball of rice in one's right hand; the click and downward sweep of a hand to indicate anger or beating; pointing by pushing out the lips and moving the head; pushing the elbows slightly out from the body to suggest chiefly dignity and pride. Other less formalised gestures by story-tellers include pointing to the sky to show the angle of the sun (hence the time) at a certain point in the action; indicating the height of a child or of the rice by holding the hand a certain distance from the ground; or illustrating the size of a knife by measuring off its distance on the arm from the finger tips.

Besides mimicry, a story-teller often uses a form of *onomatopoea* to embellish his narration. This in part overlaps with the imitations mentioned earlier. In addition there

are certain words which to the Limba always represent some particular sound. These include such obvious examples as *bingkang* and *gbang*, resonant represenations of the sound of a shot; *prrr* the whirr of a bird's feathers in flight; and *gbing gbing gbing gbing*, the loud beat of a chief's drum calling the people. Sometimes the words which to a Limba self-evidently express some sound are to us strange and unsuggestive; thus *digbi digbi digbi digbi* is said to be the noise, rather like a great wind, made by the spirit Kumba in passing, and *doing doing doing doing* is the sound made by a rat as it runs. Sometimes the expressive auditory words are used with a verb of the same root, thus apparently making the basic action more vivid or more amusing. A donkey is said to shake itself (*yikinoko*) as *yiki yiki*, a spider crunches (*gbɛgbila*) a bone *gbɛgbɛlɛ gbɛgbɛlɛ*, a man knocks (*gbagbasi*) at a door with a *gba*. Perhaps related to this is the way in which some words are occasionally used which are thought in themselves to have some funny sound without necessarily being imitative of any particular sound, and such words are always likely to make an audience laugh – *kuyakayakang*, a useless stupid man, *dɛmpɛngthɛng*, a scrounger, *yumumumu*, secretly and furtively, and *matukutu*, looking like half-dying.

In addition to these words, mainly used to create some direct aural effect, there are also in Limba apparently set phrases which seem to qualify a verb and, by their sound, are

thought to represent certain actions. Sometimes the actual sound of the action is directly represented. Sometimes the phrases are used to suggest some related quality such as sharpness, suddenness or completeness.

These phrases are introduced by na followed by the term representing the sound or quality. Na tiring and na tirang, for example, indicate the splashes made by two people as they dive successively into a pool; na tiing is the quiet, intent and prolonged way in which an leopard or lion is frequently made to regard its prey; na raa gives the long diminishing sound as a galloping horse or runnung bush cow covers the distance. When a leopard scratches at the ground, the awesome effect of the scrapes is conveyed by na ruki ruki ruki ruki, while na kelsthe represents the light way in which the spider soundlessly lays himself down. Na yirong, pronounced on a high sustained tone, which conveys the impression of utter silence, for example when all are asleep at night or when a man is pleading his case among listeners who are all silently intent on his words. There are several phrases which frequently represent the sound of a blow in various circumstances: na tau of the resonant sound of a farm implement in the fields, na gba of a girl striking at a fly on her body, na gbi of a thrown stone finding its mark. Yet other common phrases of a similar type seem at times to suggest some impression of sound to a Limba listener, though to a foreigner it may seem rather to refer to some quality which we

would not normally associate with sound at all so that, for us, it does not serve to make the description vivid in the same way. Thus na kudu, "all night", in Limba seems to suggest the whole long length of the night; na fuu or na gbuu are used to represent the slithering movement of a snake coming towards one, na bode something stealthy and quiet, na bia the sudden and unexpected encounter of two people face to face. The normal phrases for "completely" are verbally of the same form (na le, na fere, na feu), but are so commonly used that they usually seem to have no special auditory or visual flavour of their own, though they are occasionally pronounced with great emphasis and effect. Na gbeti, however, though almost as commonly used to mean "precisely", is always uttered with a sharpness that suggests to any listener the sudden sound of cutting something exactly, an abrupt refusal to include one single item more or less - thus, in Limba, "precisely" seems to be used as an auditory word. Phrases such as these are used both, to some extent, in everyday speech, and, to a much greater degree, in the stories, and are often used and pronounced with a vehemence or exaggeration that brings a delighted response from the audience.

Tone or pitch is important all through Limba speech, but it is sometimes used in a special and exaggerated way for effect, specially in the stories. This is normally thought very effective or amusing by the audience. An exaggeratedly high and

prolonged tone is not infrequently used by a clever story-teller to represent some absolute extreme. Thus, whereas wuyete means "a little", wuyeéete is used to mean "very very little indeed - minute", and, as well, serves to make the audience laugh or react. Bemandi means "many" people, bemaándi means "very very many"; in, for example, the first story of Two friends, the teller uses this method to hint at the vast number of suitors who were, one after the other, and with no exceptions, and over many years, killed by the powerful spirit: all this is conveyed merely by the high long tone in the clause "many people were killed there" (bia bemaándi binde koro nde kende); this, then, is another example of the way in which any written version, or English translation, misses the impressive yet economical flavour of the original narration.

The superlative force of a high long tone can be applied to other words besides such adjectives of quantity. One common term, for example, is hang which means "for a long time" or "over a long distance". In the stories this is frequently heightened and prolonged to give the idea of a great length of time or distance. "He went haáang" means that he travelled for a long long time, he went a long long way, for far. Gbeng, "the whole day" is often similarly treated: gbéeng stresses the great length of the whole day, dawn until dusk. Other impressions given by a high tone may be of completion or effectiveness

So wundé kái, "he went", if with a short high tone, gives the idea that he not only went away but went off completely, disappeared, was no longer to be seen; where kai is more prolonged but still on a high tone, this may bring out that he also travelled for far and long, with perseverance. Similarly a thari, "ran away", can be pronounced by the teller with an exaggeratedly high tone, as often in the stories, to indicates that they ran right out of sight, right away, precipiteusly.

The question of tone and length in verbs is probably in part a grammatical point, for it is possible that some of the tenses of the Limba verb may be differentiated tonally. But the examples I have given, though possibly related to this, are also special ones in the sense that the high pitch given to the verb is clearly felt to be an exaggerated and unusual one, suitable for a story, and for this reason causing interest and amusement among the audience. Such high tones have clearly much in common with the exaggerated force thus given to such words as wuyeéte, haáng, or hithíibií (very very early in the morning), or the special violence comically given in story through the pitch or length of such common exclamations as ee or ha, a vehemence impossible to convey in written translation.

Such differences in tone, and the use of mimicry or onomatopoea are all means by which a story-teller in various degree produces variety and colour within the framework of story and

language. Other ways of producing effect through variety are also evident in the use of unexpected interpolations or exaggerations as well as in variations of tempo or volume.

An unexpected remark can cause great effect. In the story of The hunter and the three twins, the magnificent enumeration of the many different kinds of food prepared by the mother is ended by saying that she had cooked the vast abundance in - a sixpenny pot. The joke here is that this is the smallest of small pots, utterly unsuitable for family cooking. In a rather different way, a sentence beginning with kunang ("behold"), thus introducing some fact as yet unknown to the characters, is often used to produce a reaction from the audience, as it often interrupts for a moment the consistent flow of the narrative with some aside. Similar changes in pitch, speed or volume to produce variety are treated elsewhere, but it is worth adding here that other unexpected exaggerations too about events or objects in the stories are also appreciated - for example the references to a "thousand boxes", the "hundred thousand people" killed by a witch, the vast number of golden ornaments, or even, in one story, to "one million of money" and a "millionaire". "England" or an "Englishman" seem to be in the same category, representing some exaggeratedly far-away land suitable for a fantastic story.[1]

Variety is also produced by exaggeration or alteration in

1. This is also evident in what is felt to be wild and effective exaggeration in what I was told was a common Limba saying if you are angry with someone: "Get away from here, to anywhere you like - even if it is to England, I don't care".

the tempo or rhythm. The way in which changes of speed may be used for emphasis has already been mentioned in the sense of prolonging or pausing over certain words such as hang, "for long". In a more elaborate way speed seems to be used to suggest excitement, as when a succession of dramatic events is narrated with great speed in a story about a slanderer: "he was seized, he was knocked down, he had his throat cut" (bayangfa boho, wunda lopitando, wunda fayo), or in a straight list of events or items which is sometimes run through very quickly, as in "I abuse people, I beat them, I tie them up" (a yaki, a dagbi, a luku bia). At other times, a sentence is pronounced slowly and lingeringly to give better expression to its meaning, as in phrases like "he wept" (wunda bereng) or the slow pathetic tones in which Sara complains that however often he goes to try to find Kanu asleep, he has never yet succeeded. The sad opening of Sangbang's story about the toad bringing death was spoken very slowly and sorrowfully - "thetoad, ah, the toad did not love us". An abrupt stop in mid-sentence is also sometimes used as a most effective means of violently stressing the following word and riveting the audience's attention on it, as, for instance, with "they ran away" (binde - thare), or "he dashed him down"(nde-lopitande ning), where the violent emphasis gives the implication that he both hit him very hard and caused him sharp sudden pain. This emphasis is conveyed both by the stress on the verb itself, but even more

by the abrupt pause before it.

Changes between loud and soft are also carefully used for effect in both public speaking and story-telling. A few sentences may be practically shouted, with great vehemence, then the voice suddenly dropped to little more than a whisper. Timidity, for example, may be expressed by a very quiet tone, as when the narrator describes how the wife went and peeped in at her dead husband (The man killed for a banana), or when the boy Bayo nervously replied almost inaudibly to the monster's challenge to disclose himself.

The atmosphere of a situation is also often vividly suggested by alterations in the speed or tone. This can best be illustrated from part of one story, told by Karanke. At one point in The story of Deremu, he gave a clear picture of the hero standing alone on the far bank of a wide river, with all his followers now on the other side, as he waited isolated and in suspense for the fateful moment. The slow quiet way in which this picture was drawn, as if with breath suspended, then suddenly gave way to the loud, rapid, violent narration of the struggle between hero and spirit when all was blood and turmoil, and Deremu had to draw knife after knife before at last conquering. Then the story returned again to the slow prolonged hushed suspense felt by those waiting on the bank, how they began to weep hopelessly - then their sudden breathless realisation that Deremu was safe; the tense quietness of the

description is violently broken by the loud and vigorous representation of their noisy relief as "they began to dance now with joy". A similar contrast in speed and tone of narration was made as Karanke went on to describe the sad anxiety of the mother as she waited at home, replaced first by her quick excitement and obsreperous happiness when she heard that her son was safe, was coming home, and then by the rejoicing and dancing and playing by all the villagers and the followers of Deremu. The vigour of this dance and the excited description of the mother's ecstatic joy are then momentarily interrupted by the story-teller's sad reflective interpolation which is then seen to underlie the noisy rejoicing, "behold she is to die. She the mother was very glad. Behold she is dying... they came out to dance outside. His mother was rejoicing..."

The use of <u>direct speech</u> introduced by <u>na</u> has already been mentioned. This is especially popular in the stories, and is a means by which the action can be advanced and presented through a quick exchange of greetings or questions. The voice, character, and bearing of the protagonists can be dramatically represented, and effective use made of the common exclamations of surprise, shock or admiration - <u>ha</u>, <u>e</u>, <u>ɛ</u>, <u>iyo</u>, <u>awa</u>, <u>ye</u> - which are often delivered with great vehemence and effect. Through this simple device of merely prefacing the remarks by <u>na</u>, the action can be portrayed as a kind of drama rather than a mere straighforward description. Thus, for example, a

a character's feelings at some point in the story are very seldom conveyed by any direct statement about his inner experience,[1] but by some exclamation put into his mouth. To express surprise, the story-teller says not "he felt puzzled, confused etc", but gives merely the aghast exclamation ee! Similarly the pleasure of meeting after long separation is shown not by any description of feelings but by the direct exchange of greetings, "Father", "Oh", "Greetings", "Yes" (na papa, na o, na mande, na ng ng - The hunter and the three twins) where the narrator can convey by his delivery all the drama and excitement that is missing in the written version. The thrill of surprise and joy felt by the girl who had refused all other suitors when she saw at last her ideal husband shining in the distance is not expressed through any account of her emotions, but by the uncontrolled excitement of the actual words she is portrayed as uttering, ecstatically calling her mother: "Mother mother mother mother mother! The man I was talking about, the one I was talking about, he has come it is he will marry me; I said before that the one to marry me must have no blemish; now he has come, he isthe one I want, he has come" (na ya na ya na ya na ya na ya, na wunde yang dong, wunde yang dong, na wunde teng, na nde na ma deng; yang tepe nde ba doma na wo na ma deng na wo ka ing hubima; na

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1. Exceptions are references to the heart (huthukuma), to fear, and to rejoicing(yetoko). The latter however seems to refer primarily not to an inner feeling of joy but to its outward manifestation in dancing, singing or greeting.

na wunde teng, na wunde na thimo yang, na wunde teng)(Sira and the monster). Sometimes, as for example in Sara miser and Sara scrounger, or The finch and the eagle, much of the story is presented through the conversation of the chief characters, so that their aims or successes or disappointments are dramatised through the content and tone of what they say rather than described from the outside by the narrator.

As already mentioned, songs are commonly introduced into the stories, to be taken up and repeated by the listeners.[1] Often the exact meaning of the words seems obscure even to the singers themselves, and even to be without any real sense at all. This is a characteristic of parts of songs of all kinds. They often open with, or include, such more or less meaningless sounds as o ye o, ya wo ya, ye yo ndo, woya, iyo, awaio, often sung in rhythmic chorus by the audience, spectators or dancers. Even where the words do have a meaning, this may be expressed in difficult or obscure language. However where they occur in stories, even where the precise meaning of the words is difficult, the general purpose of the song is usually clear. In The story of an orphan, for instance, the boy sings to his dead mother; the point of his song is clearly to bring her out from her grave to help him, and he sings and

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1. Songs in stories are normally more common than would appear from the texts I give, as people rather tended to omit singing when dictating. However they do not occur in by any means all stories.

sings the song as she rises gradually from her grave in answer. In The story of witches, the witches are depicted as replying with the chorus yo yo yo, which is then taken up by the audience, while the narrator, representing the woman Kamakoto, sings "in the nook, in the nook" (ka ngkumba ka ngkumba) as she tells the truth to the boy hiding in the cotton tree watching the witches dancing and singing. In other stories, for example Sara and the guinea fowl or Kanu scatters his children the words of the song are more intelligible, though rather difficult, and have an explicit connection with the action at that point; each of the parallel episodes is marked by a parallel stanza. As remarked before, a story-teller's skill in singing is an essential part of his art and one which is highly appreciated by his audience who both listen and take part in the music.

Sometimes also quotations from characters in the story are intoned or repeated in such a way that they seem almost a type of song. The sentence, for instance, semi-chanted by the mother to soothe her fatherless child "hush child hush, your father was killed for a spinach leaf" (kontoko oo kontoko, fanda nde koro ba ngkerengkereng) calls to mind the songs commonly used by Limba mothers to amuse or lull their children. In the story of Sira and the monster both Sara's call to his dogs and their reply as they come bounding to his rescue are half-sung, and repeated several times by teller and listeners. These too, then, have the effect of decorating the narrative and enhancing its effect.

From this, as from other elements in the style and technique of delivery, it is clear how impossible it is to convey in a written version the vivid and varied representation of scene or atmosphere which can be evoked by the spoken narration and enactment, particularly where the story-teller is skilled in this art. This illustrates once again the point continually stressed here, that any bare synopsis of plot, or any written translation, whether literal or paraphrased, can never catch the flavour of the actual occasion when the story was performed with and to a group. Nor would plot or written word ever fully represent what, for a Limba, is assumed to play such a large part - the actual dramatic process of story-telling.

5. Style and form.

The question of form or structure in Limba stories cannot be wholly divorced either from the nature of style and presentation just discussed, or from the account, given in the last chapter, of topics and treatment in the stories. However some more direct discussion of some of these points here may help to illuminate certain aspects of form in Limba oral literature.

The openings and conclusions of most stories are marked by certain formulae or stock phrases. Occasionally these are not used, but in most cases the story seems to be very clearly

presented as a unit with clear beginning and end marked by these conventional phrases.

The openings vary to some extent. Generally these do not in practice include the teller's name or village, for the most common occasions of story-telling are to friends and contemporaries, and the Limba, unlike some peoples, do not seem to have well-known story-tellers who would tour the country and thus wish to include their names for identification or prestige. The relative frequency of names in the texts I have recorded arose from the field situation where at first people needed to explain their correct names to me, and this habit then persisted, specially when recording on tape, after it had in fact become unnecessary. The inclusion of names however is not typical.

Very often there is no formal title,[1] and the teller either plunges directly into a sentence about one of the characters, or opens formally with the announcement that he is going to tell a story: "a story" (mboro), or "a story for you" (mboro bena). Sometimes there is a kind of title, though this in practice can be closely bound up with the following sentence which begins the narrative proper. Thus, for example, a story may open "Kanu and we in the old days, we Limbas had then no food" (Kanu ing ming nde ming do Yumbeng ming ka nde ing muthong); "a story of hunger - the spider and his wife and all his family..." (mboro ki ta kontho, wosi ing yereme nama ning kohe nama foma); "a

1. Titles in the texts in Part III are my own.

monkey and a chameleon they went travelling" (bako ing yongko bindε kai huthahine). Such quasi-titles are usually a refere-rence to the two or three main characters of a story, most commonly in this case animals.

Very often the story opens directly with a sentence about one of the characters, usually the hero. He may be specified only by some general description such as "a man", "a hunter", "a woman", without any more exact name. Thus typical introductions to a story are "someone was once born" (wa na kio nde), "a chief once had a child" (gbako nde kiε nde hato), "a hunter once came out" (badonsε na hungε nde), or "a man once came out in the world" (wa na hungε nde kahai). Sometimes this general introduction of a character is followed by the proper name, as in "someone once bore a child. That child was called Deremu" (ndε na kiε nde hati. Hato wobεna ndε na doma Deremu), or "twins were born; one was Koto, the eldest; one was Yemi; one was Luseni" (bathemeng bina kio nde; wong Koto, wothanthe wong; wong Yemi; wong Luseni). Occasionally the name of a character is not introduced until later in the story, in parenthesis, but here either the name or the particular character do not seem to be of great importance.

In these introductory formulations, the verb hungε (or fungε) "he came out" is very commonly used, and some comment on it may be of interest. It is a frequent term in Limba, in various forms. In practice it can also be translated as "was alive"

"lived", "existed in the world". It also seems to have the implication of being "in view" or "in the light" (wang ba), as distinct for example from those who are dead or unknown. Various modifications of the same root (e.g. the causative forms fungung, fungutu, "bring out", "make to come out") occur in many contexts, notably of the way in which Kanu is said to have given or created certain objects and customs for the Limba - "he caused rice to come out for them", "he brought out chiefship", or "he made the Limba people to come out". Similarly Kanu "brought a man out into the light", or "a man came out into the world here", that is, was born, lived, became known, was active, perhaps became famous for some skill like hunting. It is in this sense that a character in a story is introduced as "coming out".

The word that I have translated as "once" in these introductions is the Limba nde. Nde is commonly used with a verb to specify that an event took place in the distant or fairly distant past. In the stories it is quite often used just once in the first sentence to place the whole tale firmly in the past where the events of stories belong, and the subsequent narrative then often runs on without further specification of time. However at the outset of a story nde seems almost obligatory and occurs in every kind of opening formula - "an elephant once called together the animals "(Kampa na thun kunande nde mamang be), "there once lived a man called Sara" (wo na dongoi

nde ko doma Sara), or "a story: Kanu and we - in the old days (nde) we lived together with Kanu and the animals..." (mboro: Kanu, ming do nde kathabanthe ing Kanu Masala ning mameng be).

The closing phrases of a story are in some ways usually more formalised than the opening. In this stories resemble set speeches where the speaker also ends by complimenting his listeners, and stating that his words are finished in the same way - "that is it, it is finished" (huna hoho, longtha). A woman may not condude with longtha but formally claps instead. In theory no one should interrupt the speaker until he has uttered his concluding words, though people often "reply" to him, and react to and prompt his remarks.

Often a very brief phrase concludes the story. "The story is finished" (mboro ki pati), "it is ended" (king pati; wung pati), "that is it, it is ended" (huna, wung thangki), or, most commonly, longtha(ng) which I have translated as "it is finished".

Sometimes a more elaborate sentence is used, referring either to the audience in general, to certain people by name, or to the generalised "you" used for pointing a moral or generalisation. Frequently the narrator says something to the effect that since he had heard the story, he wanted to tell it to the present company - "as I had heard it, I had to tell it to you. It is finished" (ba nde hung luye, yoko a tepe yina. Longtha); "Since I had heard the story about.., that is it; as I have finished it, it is finished (mene yang yue nde... huna hung; mene yang thangkang

hung, longtha), or "that was why Sara long ago (nde) gained chiefship. Since I heard that story from the old people, that long ago Kanu brought out chiefship, I, Yenkeni, well, I have told you it. It is finished" (wuna doma nde Sara kong kutu hugbakine. Bena yang yuye hung ka beboro be, na hungute nde Kanu hugbakine, yang, Yengkeni, awa tepe yina wung. Longtha)

The listeners too are sometimes thanked for hearing the teller with patience, or giving him support in their "replying" by song or word. "Since I heard that story, I told it. Kapoingpoingbang [the friend who had "replied" to him], you patiently heard me. Karaio [the narrator's brother] who is sitting there, by your grace too I told the story. I told it to Yenkeni. It is finished by me, it is finished." (Bena yang yue nde mboro kibena, Kapoingpoingbang e ma thungka yuya, na awa, thoko ba ka Karaio wo dongei wong, mboro kibena a tepe ki Yengkeni na. Bena hung thangke ma, longtha).

In these standardised ways the story is verbally brought to an explicit ending and the speaking of the narrator formally conluded.

The kinds of situation with which stories end have been discussed in chap.7. (section 3). These include such situations as returning home, winning a wife or chiefship, eating, announcing or thanking, outdoing another in cunning or revenge. These are often accompanied (or replaced) by a moral, generalising comment, ascription of origin, or dilemma. All these are felt to be natural ways for a story to end, and the action is thus brought to a pleasing and final conclusion.

Apart from these ways of marking the unity of a story by verbally standardised phrases or situations, stories also often exhibit an inner structure. This question connects closely with remarks I have already made in the last chapter about the topics and treatment in Limba stories. At times, it will be clear, the actual topic of the story provides its framework. Thus in the stories about Kanu teaching the Limba how to cultivate rice (Kanu gave food to the Limbas; The dog and the rice) the operations of the rice-farming year provide a firm structure to the action of the story, each new episode opening with a reference to the next phase of the year. Similarly in stories about a "company" of deceit and revenge the story often begins with an episode about the ill deed performed by one of two travelling companions or acquaintances resulting in the distress of the other; this is followed by another, similar episode in which the second pays back the first in much the same coin; and the story is then closed by some moral or comment about the dangers of trying to hurt a companion (for example The monkey and the potto; The monkey and the chameleon). In other stories the action falls within the framework of a series of cunning acts performed one after another as in, for example, Sara and the greedy chief or The spider and the leopard. Or each of several characters

will in turn do "his part", then retire to make way for another to do his; this is especially marked in stories about the various cooperative actions performed in turn by each of three twins (as, for example, in Three twins woo one girl, Three twins and an elephant), but it occurs also with animal characters in The girl taken by Kanu. Rather similar series of actions in stories are also described in the framework of a character's successive efforts to win (or cheat) a wife, trying to get the better of someone in regard to food, travelling round from one place to another, or the successive efforts made by the competitors in a tale such as Contest in strength.

Sometimes, then, a series of successive and comparable actions, the framework within which the narration is presented, is imposed by the standarised topic of the story itself; form and content are here necessarily and closely intertwined. However even in cases where the theme of the story as a whole does not necessarily give rise to this framework, presentation in the form of a series of parallel episodes is still very marked. These may be on varying scales. The wider framework I have mentioned already is itself a series of parallel actions. So are the smaller scale repetitions by which, for example, the hero calls his dogs several times over (Sira and the monster) or the

episode within the story of Kubasi in which first the mother and then the father go to throw themselves into the fire and fail, finally to be followed by a similar but successful attempt by the girl. In a general way, each story whatever its main topic, tends to move through a series of parallel actions which provide the main structure of the story. This is a typical feature of Limba folktales at every level, from the syntactical use of parallelism discussed in the preceding section to the wider framework of the presentation of the action as a whole.

This characteristic form in Limba stories has to some extent been made clear in the texts in Part III by my use of paragraphs which clarify the underlying structure in a way not always made explicit during the oral narration of the story. However there are also various characteristic ways in which new parallel episodes are introduced or linked on which it may be worth noting here.

The most clearly marked structural points in the stories are those indicated by the introduction of songs. In Sara and the guinea fowl, for example, each of the series of parallel episodes in which Sara progressively cuts up, prepares and eats the guinea fowl, is marked by basically the same song by the bird, with the chorus taken up by the group of listeners; when that is finished, the next move

in the story is then presented. Similarly in _Kanu scatters his children on earth_, _Kanu_ sings a song to accompany his action as he takes each of the peoples on earth, and then the clans of the Limba, to be hurled in turn to their present dwellings. In a lesser way a half-chanted phrase can recur as part of a minor series of parallel actions within a complex story, as with the phrases interchanged between Sira and the bumps as she gradually realises her husband's true nature in _Sira and and the monster_.

There are also standard verbal ways in which a new move is introduced. This is often a reference to time. The stories abound in phrases like "the sun rose" (_kang wo puthɔi_), "in the morning" (_sangkala ba_), "the night passed" (_wung furu_), "after some time" (_wung nambe_), and often the episodes in a single story are each introduced by an identical phrase throughout. Often these introductory phrases are to do with travel or movement - "he went on" (_ndɛ dangande_), "he went" (_wundɛ kai_), "he got up" (_wundɛ ngale_), "he began to go" (_wundɛ thunung ba saa_), or serves to bring in a new character in the form, for example, of "the bush cow came... the leopard came... the chimpanzee came..." etc. (_tati se_... _thambile se_... _pɛthi se_...), the element of a series of successive actions of characters

being brought out both by the similar phrasing and, sometimes, by adding "also" (h*ɛ*l*ɛ*ng) to the later moves. In a corresponding way the ends of episodes are often marked by someone's going away, returning, eating, going hungry, being formally thanked, or by some other phrase that keeps recurring throughout a given story. In all these detailed ways, then, the basic form of the story is made clear as it moves in the main through a series of parallel episodes.

Within this very common basic framework however there is great opportunity for the narrator to expand or compress. Stories can be longer or shorter according to the number of such parallel moves introduced by the teller. One person, for example, may be content to say merely "every animal came" without any further detail, another may recount what happened to two or three animals in turn, another still may bring in as many as six or seven. In, for example, The spider and the bearded cave the story could have been told by introducing just one or two animals to be killed by the spider before the final episode of the triumph of the antelope, or it could have gone through ten or twelve - yet the basic structure would have remained the same.

Besides the possibilities of expansion or otherwise, the basic form can be made more or less complex, more or less embroidered by the narrator. Apart from questions

of style, mimicry, etc. that have already been mentioned, there is what might be called a common fund of standard events, turns or runs which occur in many stories not, usually, as part of the basic plot or form but as a potential elaboration of it. This includes such common elements as, for example, the trapping of an enemy up a tree by persuading him to go further and further to pick some leaf or fruit so that he is finally stuck at the very top; the series of increasing demands for payment by a group of musicians, proceeding through the list also common in other contexts, of a hen, rice, a goat, an ox, and a wife (or occasionally something even more), the articles increasing in value as the story proceeds; a girl running away from a man who may marry her if he can catch her; a travelling Fula tricked by the hero into being thrown into the river in his place; someone dying, then being revived by leaf-medicine; a character who helps some animal or spirit and then hides, too fearful to discover himself. Sometimes the standardised elaborations are of a much smaller scale: the blood on the floor after someone has been killed, or the flies buzzing over it; the surprise when someone is apparently sleeping too long in the morning; someone sharpening a sword, the stock way of indicating a dangerous situation to come for the hero; or a character's being

marooned in the cane-grass, a place of barrenness or despair; the interchange of words and greetings. All these, and many other short events or turns occur and recur in different contexts in many of the stories, elaborating or embroidering the basic structure of the tale.

There are, then, various senses in which Limba stories have a clearly distinguishable form imposed by the action and the plot itself, by a succession of parallel episodes, or by pointing through certain stock openings or conclusions. This can be embellished or made more complex in various ways - by the choice of character and content, by the style of delivery, by expanding or contracting the course of the narrative, or, finally, by introducing one or several of the stock turns which, in various degrees, can be built into the basic outline of the story. The basic form may be similar in many stories or performances, yet the treatment and content may be very different.

In this discussion of the structure and potentialities of Limba tales, I have been forced to write as if there was in some way <u>the</u> basic form or structure of any given tale which, once laid down and learnt, could then be improved or expanded. This of course would be to give a totally false impression. There is no <u>one</u> form of any Limba story that could be called the fixed or "correct" one, and even

if some tend to recur more often than others in roughly the same form (The pregnant woman and the bones would be one example of this), yet even there each performance is in a sense a unique composition by the narrator. There is a common fund of plots, stock openings and conclusions, actions and characters, but, as will appear more fully later, the exact nature of the story itself in each case depends on the individual occasion and individual narrator. Similarly, I have written as if there was a fixed structure which must be imposed strictly on every Limba tale, from which there is no escape any more than a poet could write a sonnet of more than 14 lines. But, in the Limba case, the kind of form in which the action is presented in a series of parallel episodes, or opens and ends in certain ways, is a tendency which may be seen in many aspects of the stories rather than a fixed and definite rule which could be taken to apply in every case. It is a kind of form which a Limba who has grown up hearing many stories will, when he tells stories himself, tend to adopt as a natural way of presenting the actions he is portraying. But there is not the kind of scientific necessity about it that could be expressed in the form of any fixed law or formula. This indeed will be immediately obvious to anyone who considers the complexities of the many stories given in Part III.

6. The genesis of Limba stories

Limba stories must be treated, it is evident, as involving two aspects - both literary composition or authorship, and also the actual performance and enactment of the story before an audience. These two aspects are not separate processes which could conceivably be carried on in isolation from each other, as could, by contrast, happen in the case of <u>written</u> as distinct from oral literature, but are two facets of one complete work of art - the story as actually presented on a particular occasion by an individual performer.

There remains the question of how far there can be individual variation, innovation or creation within the traditional framework of these two facets of the stories. This question has, in a sense, been confused by much of the writing that touches on the subject. Assumptions of "folk" or "common" authorship" tend to obscure the investigation of <u>individual</u> narrator in non-literate societies in favour of what was - or was thought to be - common to all the folktales. Similarly too easy ascription of crude psychological or sociological explanations for the content of oral literature means that questions about the scope of variation tend to have been neglected for what seems fixed

or traditional. The analysis of texts in the abstract has further contributed to this neglect. Even the investigations of the origins of particular stories, plots or motifs have in part been misleading owing to the apparent assumption of a fixed prototype or model of the "correct" or "original version", as if items of oral literature could be fixed and traced back in the way that is feasible in the case of a manuscript tradition in written literature. The discussion of the importance of style and delivery as an essential part of Limba stories should make it clear that this approach ignores certain aspects of the stories that are of real significance when they are treated as living art and not just an abstract frozen "text". Even apart from questions of the techniques of delivery, it will be clear from any study of the stories included here that there is no exact verbal correspondence even between different versions of "the same" story; the concept of word perfect verbal identity is not, in fact, one held by the Limba at all.[1]

However, when I refer to the "genesis" of Limba stories,

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1. This became very obvious when I was trying to transcribe from a tape-recording with their help. Their lack of interest (and ability) in giving the exact words they heard without expanding, abbreviating or paraphrasing was significant, however infuriating.

I am not intending to treat general questions about the origin of their content. It is quite clear that many of the stories I have recorded in Part III also occur in various forms in many other parts of West Africa and further afield. But how where or why they first came to the Limba is not a question I intend to raise here. All I am concerned with is to distinguish something of the way in which, given the present way of life, current interests and literary conventions of the Limba, stories are in this context produced, changed and engendered, the contribution made by individual narrator within the traditional limits, and the way in which the Limba themselves view this process. This question will necessarily involve some repetition and recapitulation of points already made.

The area within which individual creation is possible is twofold, covering both style of delivery and content. Though it is impossible strictly to separate these two, it is clear that as far as the oral performance of a story goes each occasion is a unique artistic creation in the sense that the narrator enacts the tale, depicts the action with more, or less, characterisation, mimicry, exaggeration and effect through the use of tones, length, speed, singing or onomatopoea in order to make his narrative vivid, attractive and amusing to his audience. The means

at his disposal for producing these effects are traditional onees, laid down by convention or by the potentialities of the language itself. But the use a particular narrator makes of this on any given occasion is an individual one. The dramatising part taken by the teller and the answering participation by the audience are essential elements in the narration, and viewed from this angle each performance is an original and wholly individual creation.

A more complex but related aspect is the content, in which I also include questions of plot, theme, treatment, and the framework in which these are naturally expressed. As already pointed out there are certain literary conventions about the kinds of topic that tend to occur in stories - those about, for example, wooing a wife, cunning, a "company" of revenge and so on - certain conclusions that are generally found pleasing, various stock characters (in particular some of the animal ones), and a kind of framework within which these tend to be presented. This, then, is the background, the fund of common literary materials from which an individual story-teller creates his own story on a single occasion. He can choose one stock character rather than another, or invent one with an otherwise unknown name; he can include many or few episodes; he can embellish the basic structure with special

details that attract him or some extra episode that another teller might have avoided; he can choose to bring out one or another aspect of the narrative as a whole by his free choice of the kind of conclusion, whether a moral, explanation, comment or question, and by the exact forms in which, on each occasion, these are expressed. As will be clear from the texts I give, certain plots seem to recur in a rather more fixed form (as far as content is concerned) than do others. But in all of them, and perhaps particularly in the longer stories about people, the material seems to have some degree of fluidity, and the story to be not a fixed product which could be classed as a "Limba Folktale", but as the individual creation of a particular narrator on a particular occasion.

The way in which material, treatment and, even more, delivery may vary, can best be illustrated from discussing some individuals, stories and occasions in a little more detail.

After one records several stories by one individual, their own idiosyncracies of style, interest and emphasis begin to become apparent. The elder Bubu Dema, for example, always tended to tell stories in which the generalising or meditative element was paramount, being sometimes as long as the narration of the plot itself. He used to

stress in particular an image of Kanu that was a compound of fatherliness, understanding and resignation, and point out often, in general conversation as well as in many of his stories, that without Kanu a man can do nothing, without Kanu you cannot predict how things will turn out. His habit as an elder of speaking quietly and persuasively between people to reconcile them came out too in the stories as he ended up time after time with an emphasis on some moral or generalisation illustrated by the events of the story. By contrast, Fanka Konteh, a younger man who had had more contact with Europeans but with no particular position of authority in his village, and less interest in moralising, seemed to lay more stress on the actual course of the plot; he enjoyed portraying exaggerated surprise, amusing episodes, mimicry of animals, the dramatic representation of eating, hunger, or beating, yet on the whole his tone throughout was rather quiet, consonant with his own personality. Suriba Konteh (or Nevertire) differed yet again. When he exaggerated the superlative force of some word or phrase (in particular his favorite "everything" - mbɛ oóo mbɛ) this was done with immense force and effect; his narrations were the extreme of vivid and vigorous dramatisation, full of vehement surprise, clever characterisation, and, at the end, passionate and committed

generalisation or moralising. Niaka and Karanke Dema have already been mentioned earlier in the chapter. Both tended to prefer longer stories and used the possibilities of expansion and embroidery, including, very often, singing or chanting. Niaka on the whole seems to have particularly enjoyed repetition, whether of episodes, sentences, or, as very often, of single words, as in his story of the "great great witch", and made much use of his favorite phrase "it is good" whenever he hesitated for the next word or sequence. Karanke, on the other hand, was in general rather more fluent, and his stories tend not so much to conclude with a long elucidatory comment tacked onto the end, as to contain the comment within the framework and emphasis of the story itself, giving an impression, perhaps, of a more integrated unity than in the case of some other tellers.

Much more could be said about individual characteristics; people varied, for example, in fluency, some hesitating for words and having to fill in with the stop-gap of "someone", "something" (wanini) or being inconsistent in detail in a way not surprising in oral composition. Others tended to stress particular aspects or topics - the element of paradox or reversal in a situation, the amusement connected with hunger and food, the didactic element, or the imitation of the animals portrayed. To assume, then, that the

performance and composition of stories could be treated as something so fixed and traditional that they are not significantly affected by the personality or originality of individuals would be to misunderstand the whole nature of Limba oral literature.

It would have been possible to have included many different "versions", each in a sense unique, of what could be regarded as the "same" Limba story as far as the basic plot was concerned, though this is clearly a matter of degree with more, or less, similarities between many of the stories. The best commentary on the degrees of variation is the texts themselves. However a brief discussion of two stories in which the plot was very similar may help to illustrate how far, even in this case, variations of details and emphasis occur between different narrations.

"The man killed for a spinach leaf" and "The man killed for a banana" are clearly, in one sense, merely detailed variants of one basic story. They were told to me by two story-tellers (Karanke Dema and Dauda Konteh) from adjacent chiefdoms in rather different dialects (Yaka and Biriwa). In the first version the girl consults only her mother about her plan to avenge her father; in the second she goes to the finch for advice through divination. In one her various

suitors are called by the names of actual chiefs in real chiefdoms, in the other not. In the Banana version, she first prays to Kanu to forgive her before killing her new husband, and after his death there follows the episode about the children peeping into the hut and treading on the blood, then the discovery by his senior wife, and the girl's ruse to trick one of the chief's followers who was pursuing her by her pretended advice about the best way to kill her.
In the Spinach version, there is no mention of any prayer or of the children; instead, in a vivid piece of description, the chief's cousin is made to find him lying dead with the flies buzzing around him; when the chief's eldest son gallops after the girl, she beguiles him by her beauty into giving up his plan of revenge in order to marry her. Even the concluding remarks are different.
In one, the story is used to give a justifying explanation for the fact that the women now have their own special women chiefs - a custom introduced into the Biriwa chiefdom to which the teller belonged not more than two years before: "if you should hear now that a woman has been made chief, well, that was through the girl, it was she began it".
In the other version, the conclusion is not to do with the girl herself at all, but gives advice to a chief not to take violent action against someone who has committed only

a trifling offence: "even if you are a chief, don't kill him for that".

Another similar example is of the two versions of the brief story about how death first came to mankind through the toad (The toad did not love us, and The toad and death). In the former case, the whole story was told with great sadness and without many of the usual effects of vivid dramatisation or mimicry. Sanggbang's interest seemed to be mainly fixed on the present tragic situation by which people are so continually dying, and the paradoxical reversal by which "the one who loved us then, well, when we meet him now, we kill him. We do not kill the toad. Well, Kanu looks at us for that". In Fanka's version, on the other hand, it was told with the main emphasis on the actual action of the story, the interchange of words between the characters, the way in which the toad put the medicine on his head, jumped, and spilt it. The interest seems to be concentrated much more on the animals concerned than in the previous story, and less stress was laid on Kanu's intentions and the sad result of death for human beings. Even though the two stories are in one way so close, the tone and emphasis were noticeably different in the telling.

Many other instances could be given of the way in which "one" story continually appears in different guises, with varying concluding comments or different emphases, determined by the personality and interest of the individual narrator. These variations can also sometimes betraced to the particular circumstances of the occasion or the audience. At times a whole story may seem to be partly just an excuse to bring in some special moral appropriate to the occasion or on which the teller wishes to expatiate, so that the plot may then be kept to the minimum; or, alternatively, the speaker may wish to amuse or shock his audience and may, specially if rather young, lay great emphasis on some one funny episode without much thought for any moral or generalisation. Some apparently ridiculous conclusion may be drawn from a story just to provoke laughter in some particular group of listeners. Thus, to give an example, in one version I heard of the common story about a chief's killing his own son after a forbidden knock at his door, this was told with riotous success to the group of which I was one, because instead of resting content with an expected moral at the end, that it is wrong, say, to be too fussy, the story teller made everyone laugh by adding with great rapidity and mock seriousness "and that is how the man got much money from

a dead body, and that is how the Europeans got their money". The next story, told by the same man, illustrates the same point. It had the common theme of a race. But the race of this story was not for the more usual rewards of Limba tales, i.e. for honour or chiefship, but "the first to reach England will live with the Queen"; the chameleon was depicted as the cleverest in this story, because he held onto the deer's tail as it ran all the way to England, and so won the race, "and that is why the chameleon is now always in the village not the bush; and he lives with the Queen in England". These two occasions, then, illustrate well how a particular form may arise from a direct desire to exploit a special occasion (in this case the presence of a European), or to amuse or tease a particular group of listeners. Such elaborations are admired as a manifestation of the teller's ability to exploit a particular situation, and would not be thought of as involving any "incorrect" rendering of some original tale.

Each story, then, is expressed in the actual narration which to the Limba is so important and so has its genesis in a particular situation - the audience is such, the teller is such, and the occasion is such - so that in one sense one could say that each telling of a story, each rearrangement

or embellishing of the traditional themes, is itself the creation of a new story.

This is even more evident in the stories which have a modern setting or refer to the more recent innovations. It would be quite wrong to wish to exclude these from a collection of Limba stories as if they could be regarded as in some sense "foreign" or "unLimba". They are, after all, what Limba stories have presumably always been - expressions of traditional themes and styles, using details which are of current interest to teller and listener. In, for example, the story of The dog and the wheel, the whole flavour is most certainly Limba even though the plot is concerned with the invention and behaviour of lorries. As in many stories, it begins with Kanu and the varied qualities of certain animals, then goes on to account for certain attributes of man, or of white man, with an amusing interpolation, to make the audience laugh, about his propensity to go bald on the top of his head. In yet another story about a race, (The dog and the tortoise) the traditional theme is used to refer to a contemporary incident, and for this reason was received with extra interest by the audience; in this tale a senior wife was, as all realised, analogically referring to her husband's

long and finally successful struggle for the chiefship, through her parable about the two animals' race and the songs they sing. The story of a millionaire is yet another example of what might seem a "new" story but is yet neither unLimba nor untypical. Certainly many of the actual things referred to in the story, like diamond, bank, cheque, millionaire, are ones which arise out of certain modern circumstances, and may not, in fact, have been directly familiar to the bulk of the audience, even though with the recent rush to the diamond-digging in the south many people have heard of such things. In addition to these references to the modern means of wealth, the story is set in England. This is mainly because England is a good far-away land in which to set a fantasy, partly also perhaps in compliment or response to my presence. But in spite of these elements, the basic manner of setting out the story with its parallel episodes, vivid dramatisation of the dialogue with its exaggerated replies, and the amused and delighted reactions of the listeners - these are all characteristically Limba. So too is the constant theme which it contains, of the obstinacy of "our young girls now", a common complaint among older Limba people, represented in the story of the chief's daughter's far-fetched demand for six diamond combs before she would be

married to her husband. Furthermore in this story we can see the characteristic Limba desire not for mere money only, but also for "honour" and people to come in greeting. In spite of certain elements in the content, then, this is clearly very much a Limba story and must be classed as such.

The way stories arise and are formed into a Limba framework may also occasionally be observed in the treatment of biblical and other foreign stories which they may hear. Schoolboys returning home for a short visit, for example, may tell their friends some of the Christian stories in Limba and these may or may not be taken up and remembered; in the remote village in which I stayed, for example, the young son of a sub-chief had told his friends the biblical creation story, which they recognised when I mentioned it later; it was, they said "very beautiful" but "rather hard to remember"; however my reference to it did immediately set off a train of thought which led directly to my being told another story about God "coming to earth in the old days" to help mankind (Kanu gives chiefship), a story clearly felt in some way analogous or complementary to the story they recalled hearing from the schoolboy. Several of the other stories included here have plots which in some ways directly

recall certain biblical themes (e.g. The white and black brothers, and The jealous mothers), and may well have arisen from similar contacts though there is no means of ascertaining the date or details of this. In any case the way in which these are treated in a Limba context is all the more interesting if these stories were in fact originally prompted by Christian teaching. In the first story, for instance, it is typical of Limba story-telling that stress should be laid on the very common moral that yangfa (talking behind someone's back) may have far-reaching results, in this case affecting the whole destiny of white and of black men. In the second, there is the characteristic reference to quarrels which are likely to arise between co-wives over their children, and the direct reporting in a Limba way of the spirited argument between the two mothers in the presence of Kanu in his role as Limba arbitrating chief.

Sometimes a more deliberately Christian reference is used to create the desired effects of vividness or amusement in what may be, in some other ways, a traditionally Limba situation of the enactment of a story. In one version of Kanu and palm wine, for example, the teller described Sara's final success in at last finding Kanu with the vivid little picture of how he came on Kanu asleep,

his eyes shut, sitting with the big Bible open on his lap. On another occasion I witnessed, a pastor preaching in the Limba Church in Freetown gave a dramatic rendering of the story of Elizabeth and Zacharias to a spellbound congregation who were reacting with interest and interpolations in a way not untypical of Limba audiences to story-telling. He first read the passage from Luke in both English and in Limba, then told the story in his own words; he was speaking in English accompanied by a simultaneous sentence by sentence translation into Limba by an interpreter who imitated his gestures, tone and expressions. He recounted how there was this poor man who had no child, alas, his wife still had no child (a standard tragic situation in Limba story and experience), how the wife prayed and prayed to God (Kanu) to give her a child; when her husband went to the temple to see if it was his turn to sacrifice "the lots all lay down flat" (a common term in Limba divination of the thrown halves of kola nuts), but because he doubted this answer he had received through divination, when he came out he was dumb. The people then all began to talk about him, saying he must be a bad man: "he has no children", "now he is dumb" "surely he is bad". But in the end his wife got a child; so did Mary too because she trusted (ni lania) in God. Therefore, he concluded,

one ought to be kind to others and (again a typical Limba moral) not speak bad about them behind their backs. The whole occasion of this sermon strongly recalled that of any other Limba story-telling: the pastor used many gestures, shouting excitedly, then dropping his voice to be very low, quiet and moving as, for example, in the description of Elizabeth's final triumph in having a child, and Mary's awed question "how should this be?"; the whole was portrayed with great effectiveness, stressing rather the drama of the narrative than any distinctively biblical moralising, and the listeners were clearly intent on the story.

Unfamiliar stories from other sources too may be taken up and repeated or changed by one of the hearers. The story of Kanu and palm wine, for instance, was immediately retold with great vigour by an old man who had just heard it for the first time from a fellow Limba. And when on one occasion I related to several Limbas the Greek story of Perseus, this was, as soon as I had finished, at once enthusiastically retold by one of them in a much more Limba idiom, with full exploitation of motifs common in Limba stories - e.g. the child who was once born, the diviner's warning, the chief's fear for the peace of his chiefdom, the power of the dangerous monster or "spirit",

the fight, and the inclusion of a touch completely absent in my version but characteristic of the Limba delight in children: that when the chief went to kill his grandchild his heart was touched and he could not but have pity (ngkiningkini) because of the way the baby "made to smile up at him" (fɛthiteke - a word fondly used of the way a baby cannot smile properly (fɛthi) in the way adults do but seems to try, and to succeed in a rudimentary way). What was therefore originally an unfamiliar plot became in the telling in many ways a truly Limba story.

In practice then one could almost say that in this sense too each story has its own genesis in the occasion on which it is told as well as in the participation of audience, actual performance, and manner in which the story-teller improvises, rearranges or expands the traditional themes. Any one Limba story is not immutably fixed and the repertory is continually growing and changing as new episodes, situations or jokes are bound into the traditional material, topic, form and style.

The contribution made by individual story-teller and occasion is quite clearly recognised by the Limba. As already pointed out they stress the artistry of any particular performance rather than any "correctness" of

verbalisation, and they more often praise a narrator for the verve or drama of his delivery than for the content of the story itself or his accurate memory of it. A thoughtful story-teller himself may occasionally say that he has been "thinking about" (simɔkɔ) a story for several days while working or chasing birds in the fields before he attempts to tell it in the evening; or he may say that while he heard the story in the first place from "the old people" (bebɔrɔ be), he had himself "added a little" (thi wuyete) or, meaning the same thing, "I was taught by the dead and my own heart". Mase Kargbo said that she thought of her stories "in her heart" (ka kathukuna).

Nevertheless the Limba are at the same time quite clear that the basis of the stories is a traditional one. The Limba word I have translated as "story" (mbɔrɔ) may literally mean "something old", and the stories in general are sometimes said to come from "the dead" (fureni be) or even, ultimately, from Kanu. If a Limba is asked about the origin of any particular story he most commonly replies "I heard it from the old people". In this phrase "the old people" may be either those elders now living in the village who tell the stories to their children, or, more often, the bebɔrɔ be, who are, primarily, the

dead, "those who lived in the old days", "our ancestors". As discussed in chapter 5, it is above all the dead who, to the Limba, are the oldest and wisest, who know and love their children alive now "in the light", and who have taught the present generation everything. It is they who, in the last analysis, are regarded as responsible for the existence of stories, for they handed them down through their descendants who heard the stories directly from them, until finally they reached the present generation; and that is how an individual now may be able to hear and retell a story, and how one of the most common formulae for ending can be "since I heard it, I had to tell you that story". In addition to this, it is possible that the Limba also think of the dead as more directly responsible for story-telling in that they inspire in a man's heart the desire and ability to tell old stories, in much the same kind of way as they are thought to do in the arts of singing and drumming described earlier. I have never in fact heard so explicit an attribution of direct intervention by the dead in story-telling as in musical performance; but these spheres of artistic expression are felt to be in many ways related, and the telling of a story, like the singing of a song, is sometimes said to originate from the "heart" (huthukuma) which

to the Limba is the seat of both memory and inspiration. It would never be said of a Limba narrator that he had "created" or "made" (leheni) a story in the sense that, say, a smith either makes or adjusts a tool. A story-teller either "speaks" (gbongkoi) or "brings out" (fungung) a story. He "causes it to come out", in the sense in which a man may "come forth" from obscurity into the light or people or institutions are "brought out" by Kanu rather than created from nothing. Each time, then, that an individual thus "speaks" or "brings out" a story, an "old thing" (mbɔrɔ), he is able to do so "by grace of the dead" (thɔkɔ ba ka fureni be) or "by grace of the old people" (thɔkɔ ba ka bebɔrɔ be).

The Limba therefore recognise what we, in referring to the genesis of their stories, might call their dual nature: that there is both continual re-creation and improvisation, and that this takes place within the framework of traditional style and theme. For, at the same time as being strongly aware of the significance of individual performance and artistry in the current performance of any story, the Limba quite definitely make the continual claim that their stories are old, and form a part of their traditional heritage, a heritage which they explicitly assert is an ancient one which should be

acknowledged as a manifestation of the great reverence one should have for all that is ancient and, above all, for the dead. This conjunction between the exhibition of what may be new and personal in the practice of story-telling with what may in fact be old and traditional and is always claimed to be so, is expressed by their attribution of the stories on the one hand to the old people from whom they were first heard, on the other to the individual performer and composer, who speakes them and thinks them out in his heart.

7. Conclusion

These chapters have formed only the introduction to the oral literature that follows in Part III, the stories that are constantly being produced, changed, enjoyed and experienced by the Limba. The stories included here are only a small sample of the innumerable tales that, within the context of the traditional settings, are all the time being told, performed and enacted using the experience of both new and old to entertain or enlighten the group of listeners. To regard the texts collected here as in any sense definitive or complete merely because they happen to have been recorded in writing

over some months in the year 1961, would be to miss the fluidity and life of the actual practice of Limba literature as it really exists.

The setting in which this literature is composed and performed has been discussed in these introductory chapters. The social background which gives meaning and point to the stories and from which the materials and effectiveness of the themes are drawn has been indicated briefly. There is no simple or crude one to one relationship between background and story; the two can only be seen to interreact and give meaning each to the other.

Regarded as literature, and not merely some kind of cause or result of social structure, the Limba stories can be seen to have their own literary conventions about the kinds of characters, topics, form and conclusions that are acceptable. In their concept of mbɔrɔ, a term with a wide range of applications which all more or less connect with its central meaning, there seems to be suggested a view of literature that is not unfamiliar to us - as a reflective comment on human life and action in terms in some way removed from reality. Besides this familiar characteristic, Limba literature, being oral, possesses the additional attribute of being dramatically presented by the narrator in the very act of his simultaneous

composition and performance. Hence the importance to Limba stories of the aspects of style and technique of delivery and the part taken by the audience to make up the whole situation of a dramatic story-telling.

It is within this setting of the social and physical background, and the set literary and dramatic conventions that the individual story-teller composes and performs with the help of those who hear and "reply" to him. The stress is on the importance of the traditional and age-old nature of the stories; but using these aspects each narrator produces on each occasion his new and individual creation.

Language and literature are topics worth study in themselves, and not merely as a crude tool by which the fieldworker progresses to other, more material, studies. In Limba life the importance of speech and language is significant in many aspects of behaviour and outlook, and their public and everyday speaking has a very peculiarly close connection with their literature that it might not have had in the case of a written literature. The two can only be studied together. In their exercise of language in both speaking and in the more literary, oratorical or dramatic forms, the Limba meet together in groups to pursue the joint and pleasing activity of formal

speaking in its various aspects, and also possess a conventional medium through which, in the traditional manner, individual speakers formulate and mediate their experience in the form of literature.

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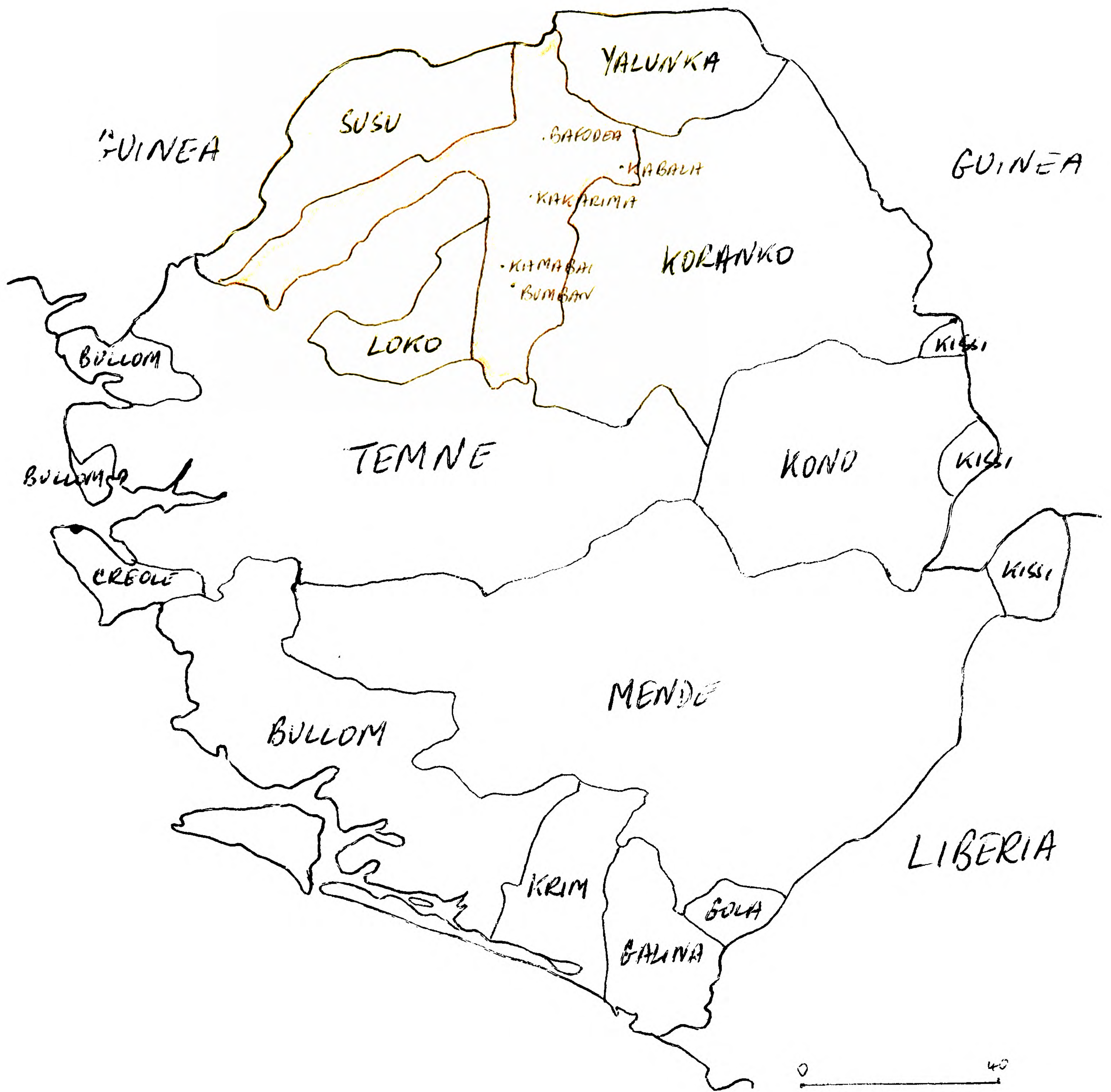
BSOAS. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

JAF Journal of American Folklore.

Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion

Sierra Leone Language Review.

SLS Sierra Leone Studies.



ETHNIC MAP OF SIERRA LEONE

Limba country outlined in red.

[adapted from Atlas of Sierra Leone 1953]