

## EDIBLE ANIMALS OF THE ITURI FOREST, AFRICA IN THE ETHNOZOOLOGY OF THE EFE BAMBUTI

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**ABSTRACT.**—This article presents ethnographic data about the ethnozoology of the Efe Pygmies, hunters and gatherers of the Ituri forest (Northeastern Zaire). It deals particularly with categories of edible animals. The Efe system is compared with that of their Negro neighbors, the horticultural Balese.

### INTRODUCTION

This article presents data concerning the ethnozoology of the Efe Pygmies of the Ituri forest (northeastern Zaire, Africa), collected during two periods of fieldwork: July-August 1981 and November 1982-January 1983.<sup>1</sup> I worked among some groups of bow-hunting Efe Bambuti in the zone of Andifere, between Mambasa and Nduye. The Efe are traditionally linked to the horticulturalist Balese through a complex relationship of interdependence. This symbiotic relationship results not only in economic transactions, but also in intermarriage, common ceremonies and, above all, shared knowledge, beliefs, and values (Schebesta, 1938-1950). Anthropologists who study Pygmies are faced with the problem of discerning the contribution of each ethnic group to this common cultural inheritance. It is a difficult, in some ways impossible, operation.

In the specific case of ethnozoological classification, however, there is little doubt it is an original product of Pygmy thought. I extended my research work to the Balese and discovered they have a classification almost exactly akin to that of the Pygmies, with only a few significant differences. The Balese themselves are aware that they have assimilated Pygmy Knowledge about the forest. They maintain that the Efe introduced them and guided them in the unknown, hostile forest and taught them names and uses of animals and plants. In this article I will point out similarities and differences between the Efe and the Balese classification systems.

The Efe and the Balese speak two very close dialects of the same language (Vorbichler, 1974). The Pygmies call their own language Efe or, less often, Kimbute, and use the term Kilese for the language of the Balese. Moreover, both groups are completely bilingual in Kingwana (a Swahili dialect introduced into this area by the arabized tribe of Bangwana) and they generally use Kingwana in a wide range of contexts. It seemed to me, however, that the attitude of female Efe toward Kingwana is different from that of male Efe. Women speak and understand Kingwana, but they are less willing than men to use it, particularly in their camps.

In the study area several other ethnic and linguistic groups live together. The most important are the horticulturalist Babira and the net-hunting Basua Pygmies. The Babira and the Basua are linked by a close bond, in the same way as the Balese and the Efe, and both speak Kibira. In a Pygmy camp of Efe it is possible to meet some people who speak Kibira, mixed with the majority of Kilese speakers. These people had generally moved into the Efe band after marriage. On the whole, the permeability between linguistic groups is strong and sometimes it is difficult to ascertain if a term is Efe, Kibira or Kilese. I will note in this article the terms which are used interchangeably by Kibira and Efe speakers.

## METHODS

I carried out my research using Kingwana, with the assistance of a bilingual interpreter (Kingwana-Kilese). Kingwana has undergone adaptation to local situations. In regard to the Pygmies, this process resulted in an almost complete correspondence between Kingwana and Kilese terminology.

Only one of the Pygmies I met had gone to school. He was about 35 years old, had attended a primary school for two years, but could read only with the greatest difficulty and was unable to write. On the contrary, in each Balese village there were two or three people, usually men, who were able to read and write quite well, and were able to speak a little French. I found that the level of education of informants is a very important point in ethnoscientific research. The anthropologist must be aware that it can affect the quality of his or her work. Indeed, I noticed, for example, that Balese education people immediately grasped the idea of the taxonomic tree and afterwards tried to force all given information into this structure. Fortunately, they contradicted themselves and each other frequently enough to make me understand that they were just playing with an appealing new idea. As a matter of fact, non-educated Balese and Efe people either did not grasp or simply refused the taxonomic tree model.

The Pygmies do not like to work as informants individually and regularly. Only two people—one of whom was the educated man mentioned above—agreed to work with me in this way. In each camp, people preferred to gather and talk with me as a group, consulting each other before they answered. I discovered that this was a very fruitful method. From the questions they put to each other, and from the answers to these questions, and from the doubts they expressed, I got more information than in my work with regular informants.

In contrast, I worked often with single Balese individuals. They prefer to be alone, I suspect, because they are very proud and do not like to be found to be at fault by other people. Among the Balese, only children were ready to start collective conversations.

In a few cases I tried to talk with the Balese and the Efe together. I noticed that when the conversation took place in a Balese village, the Balese assumed an attitude of superiority toward the Efe, preventing them from speaking. However, in a Pygmy camp in the forest they agreed to talk on the same level.

In the first stage of my research work, I put forward tentative questions, at the same time showing them the pictures of some animals, just to start a conversation about the matter I was interested in. Both the Efe and the Balese were enthusiastic about pictures and would always begin talking to each other or to me endlessly, trying to identify each animal exactly, and thus giving me much information about names of single beasts, main categories, and identification criteria.

A final methodological remark is necessary. I present my data in a descriptive way, without systematizing it into any model. In fact, I think that at present there are not enough comparative data to allow generalizations about universal principles of ethnozoological classification. Indeed, my data do not fit any of the models proposed up to now (Berlin, Breedlove, Raven, 1973; Hunn, 1982). So, this paper is intended to be a strictly ethnographic contribution to add to the knowledge of a so far neglected aspect of Pygmy culture.

I do not use the terminology prevalent in ethnotaxonomy proposed by Berlin, Breedlove and Raven (1973). Instead, the similarity between my data and that collected by Morris (1976) among the Hill Pandaram, a hunting and gathering people of Southern India, convinced me to adopt his terminology. I use the term "taxa primaria" or "classes" or "categories" to indicate all the groups of organisms which are not included in other taxa, "intermediate taxa" to indicate all the taxa included in taxa primaria and including other taxa, and "taxa terminalia" all the taxa included either in taxa primaria or in taxa intermedia and not including any other taxa. The terms "genus", "generic" and "species", "specific" are used only in the biological sense.

## ANIMAL REALMS: EDIBLE VERSUS INEDIBLE ANIMALS

There is no term for 'animal' either in Kilese, Efe or Kingwana. As far as I could ascertain, the Efe do not recognize via terminology or in any other way the existence of one unitary realm, including all those living beings which we consider to be animals. They lack what Berlin, Breedlove and Raven (1973) call 'unique beginner'.

The most comprehensive term they have is *uura*, which is exactly translated in Kingwana as *nyama* (best, meat).<sup>2</sup> This term, as we will see below, has many different meanings, the most important and explicit being all edible animals. There is no corresponding term in Efe for all inedible animals, which, therefore, constitute a sort of residual category.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the Efe use the Ngwana word *vilulu* to designate them, which is usually translated as insects, but which includes also worms, spiders, and more generally all little animals. The Balese have the same term *uura*, but they also have a term, *baasi*, which covers all inedible animals, with only a few exceptions which I will consider below.

It is important to point out that this distinction between edible and inedible animals is a very precise one and none of the categories into which the Efe put animals include both. So, we can say that in one sense edible and inedible animals constitute two separate realms.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF *UURA*

The Efe use the term *uura* with at least three different meanings. The first, as stated above, is all edible animals, and is the widest and also the most formal and explicit. Not only are hunted game thus considered to be *uura*, but also fish, crabs, and small animals such as turtles and snails. When I asked people to tell me if a certain animal was or was not *uura*, they always answered me: "It is *uura*: we eat it", or "It is not *uura*: we do not eat it."

In a more limited sense, the term is used to designate mammals. This use is not explicit; I have inferred this from the answers of people. When I asked them to tell me all the *uura* names they knew, they always started to list the main hunted animals—antelopes and wild boars—and then added monkeys, leopards, mongooses, genets, and so on. No one gave me spontaneously, in his list, any names of fish, snakes, snails, etc., except for one person, who included the name of a snake. However, when I tried to test their awareness of the semantic field I had inferred, they refused to accept it and insisted that *uura* were all edible animals.

Finally, the main hunted animals I have just mentioned represent, more or less a category of *uura par excellence*. This meaning also is implicit and I have inferred it. As stated above, all lists of *uura* I elicited begin with the names of the most common antelopes and wild boars. I noticed also that they always hesitated before adding to these names those of other animals, for example, monkeys.

To the term *uura* can be added some modifying words. So we have, for example, the expressions *uura meli* and *uura ubopo*, which indicate, respectively, the *uura* living in the forest and the *uura* living in the villages, such as goats (*meme*; in Kingwana *mbuzi*) and chickens (*ibabu*; in Kingwana *kuku*). Another expression, *uura ogbu*, is used, more commonly by the Balese, to designate all big game.

The Balese use the term *uura* with the same basic meanings. However, it covers a narrower total field, because the Balese do not eat all of the animals that the Efe do. In formal contexts of elicitation, some educated Balese people were inclined to limit the use of the term *uura* to the two more restricted meanings. However, in informal conversation they contradicted themselves often. The dietary restrictions placed upon boys during the ceremonies of initiation and upon pregnant and post-partum women show that the widest meaning of *uura*—all edible animals—is correct and in common usage also among the Balese. As a matter of fact, the forbidden animals are called *uura inda* (an expression which was translated in Kingwana as *nyama mbaya*: bad beast, meat), and include also fish, birds, etc.

### UURA CATEGORIES

The Efe subdivide *uura* into six larger taxa primaria, five of which have their own name, while one is unlabeled. The five named categories are: *osa* (birds), *uua* (snakes), *ufu* (fish), *odi* (monkeys), and *aja-aa* (a mixed category which includes felines, rodents, etc.). The last unnamed category corresponds to the third meaning of the term *uura*, I stated above. In this paper I will refer to it as *uura par excellence*.

To these must be added five smaller categories: *bea* (turtles), *arigba* (snails), *echu* (termites), *aruja* (a kind of worm), and *ei-ei* (the larvae of some kinds of Coleoptera). Finally, there are small number of animals which are considered *uura*, but are not affiliated in any of these categories, or ambiguously affiliated.

The Balese have exactly the same categories. However, it must be pointed out that one of these cannot be considered *uura*. As a matter of fact, the Balese consider snakes disgusting and do not eat them. This introduces an element of disorder into the Balese system of classification, to which I will return later.

In addition to these well defined categories, I elicited a term which labels a group of animals with no precise boundaries and which crosses other categories. It is *uura uiebolu*, which indicates all aquatic animals except those included in the *ufu* category. All the categories mentioned above are discussed in more detail below.

*Uura par excellence*—This category includes antelopes and wild boars. Wild boars are considered to be brothers of antelopes and are in no way separated from them. All Pygmies, enumerating animals falling into this category, grouped them according to size, so that wild boars were put together with large-sized antelopes. Both the Efe and the Balese say that these animals are akin because they have the same hooves (*ija*).

It is noteworthy that no Pygmy ever mentions in this class elephant (*uu*) and rarely buffalo (*tupi*), although both are hunted in the area and their meat is highly appreciated. When I asked if they considered these animals "brothers" of antelopes, people seemed a little puzzled. Some of them told me that buffalo was almost the same size as the biggest antelopes, especially *oapi* (*okapi*), so it could be considered akin, but not really "brother" because of its wildness. The elephant, on the other hand, was considered to be on its own, because of its enormous size.

On the contrary, the Balese state that both elephant and buffalo are very similar to other animals in this category, into which they also put oxen, which are not present in this area and only recently were introduced by missionaries in its northern part.

The category is subdivided into a small number of taxa terminalia (I elicited 10 terms for antelopes, 2 for wild boars), all labeled by unanalyzable primary lexemes (Berlin, Breedlove, Raven 1973). They are all specific taxa directly included in the category. For example, in this area a few species of the genus *Cephalophus* (duikers) live. Each species has its own name.

It must be pointed out that some of these terms are used both by Kilese and Kibira speaking Pygmies, for example, *soli* (*Boocercus euryceros*). Also Harako (1976:49) records this name among Kibira speaking Basua. He reports also the term *buluku* for the little *Cephalophus monticola* as a Kibira term. The Efe call this antelope both *medi* and *buluku* or *mboroku*, but they told me that the last word was Kingwana. This information agrees with that of Schebesta (1941:98), who also records both names, *medi* and *mbo-loko*. The little antelope *befe* (*Hyemoschus aquaticus*) is also grouped with aquatic animals (*uura uiebolu*).

*Aja-aa*—This category includes animals of many different biological families, belonging for the most part to the order Carnivora (Mellivorinae, Viverrinae, Herpestinae, Pantherinae, Fossinae, etc.), but also Rodentia and Insecivora. The Efe say that all these animals are similar because they have the same footprint, which in turn is very different from the footprints of all other *uura*.

*Aja-aa* are subdivided into a small number of taxa terminalia. Informants agreed

upon only 14 taxa. They are all labeled by unanalyzable primary lexemes. Some of these taxa are definitely specific, as, for example, *au*, leopard (*Panthera pardus*), *chamu*, african civet (*Viverra civetta*), *abee*, gaint elephant shrew (*Rynchocyon cirnei*). Some others are generic, as *egbu* (genets). All are directly included in the category, which is the same for the Balese, who called it *aja-baba*.

Two terms I elicited are almost the same also in Kibira: *dere*, mongoose, and *borog-boro* (*Crossarchus obscurus*) are called in Kibira *ndele* and *kpolokpolo*. However, Harako (1976:49) identified the first animal as *Atilax palidinosus* (marsh mongoose), while the Efe told me it was *dere Bodeogale nigripes* (black-footed mongoose), and the Efe name for *Atilax palidinosus* was *fidifidi*. They added that *fidifidi* spends much time in water, so one can also call it *uura uiebolu* (in Kingwana, *lombe*).

*Odi*—Both the Efe and the Balese call all moneys and apes *odi* (however, the Balese pronounce it with aspiration, *bodi*). They say that *odi* differ greatly from other *uura* because of their general appearance, their *sura*, which is similar to that of man.

This category is subdivided into a small number of taxa. I elicited twenty terms, which for the most part label biological specific and terminal taxa. They are all unanalyzable primary lexemes. For example, the term *dato* indicates chimpanzee, and different names are attributed to the different biological species of *Colobus* present in the area.

There are two ambiguous cases that I was unable to resolve. Regarding the first, I noticed that two names in some *odi* lists were distinct, *mbela* and *muo*, in some others they were combined, *mbela muo*. I tried to discover whether or not they were different names of different species, but my efforts resulted in nothing. Somebody told me that *mbela* and *muo* were two different names for two different monkeys, and that *mbela muo* was not a correct form; somebody else said that they were three equivalent names for one and the same animals; a third informant maintained that the three terms were all correct names of three different animals. In the second case, several people gave me two different terms, *bisi* and *agbisibisi*, for two species of galagos. Afterwards, other people gave me the same terms, but reversed. When I investigated this matter further, their answers were as contradictory as in the first case.

*Uua*—All snakes fall into this category. The main characteristic is the absence of legs. *Uua* are subdivided into some terminal taxa (people agreed upon only 13 taxa), labelled by primary lexemes, including both analyzable and unanalyzable forms. Some members in this category have no names and are designated simply as *uua*. They are the smallest snakes. As a matter of fact, informants usually arranged snakes according to their size, noting if they were poisonous or not poisonous. Then, they said that other snakes were too small to have a name. It must be remembered that the Balese do not consider *uua* to be *uura*, because they do not eat them. They say that the big intestinal worms fall into this category also.

*Ufu*—The category *ufu* includes all fish, mollusks and crustaceans. However, some people told me that crabs, for example, are more akin to spiders or to turtles, because of similarities in their appearance, legs and shells. I did not go deeper into this point. I elicited the terms for 14 terminal taxa, upon which all informants agreed; they are all primary lexemes.

The Balese subdivide *ufu* into two subcategories: *ufu sei*, small fish, no longer than 30 cm, and *ufu ebi*, big fish. The Efe do not make this distinction, and call *sei* only a specific small fish, and *ebi* a specific big fish.

*Osa*—All birds and bats fall within this category, which is the widest. I have elicited lists of names which reached fifty, which is more than three times the members of other categories. These terms label taxa which are, for the most part, monolexic and terminal taxa. However, some of them designate intermediate taxa, under which some, usually two, terminal taxa are grouped. In all these cases, the term which designates the inter-

mediate taxon is polysemic with one of the terms used for the terminal taxon. For example, there are two kinds of *ebi* bird (a sort of pigeon), *ebi* and *ebi ene*. (They use the Ngwana word *jiwa* to designate both).

Besides these intermediate categories there are informal groupings of birds. Indeed, informants usually listed birds grouping them according to the kind of next, the nocturnal or diurnal habits, the diet, and kind of voice. Obviously, these groups cross and overlap. Moreover, it must be pointed out that, when I asked them if *ebi*, for example, was more akin to *ebi ene* than to other birds, they always told me that all birds were brothers, and gave me a list of other birds akin to *ebi* as for size or voice and so on.

As for bats, I pointed out to both the Efe and the Balese that bats have neither feathers nor beak and that they do not lay eggs, but give birth to their little ones. However, they all insisted on bats being *osa* because they have 'wings'.

The Balese have an identical category. The only difference consists in the name. *Osa* is translated to Kilese as *hali*.<sup>4</sup>

*Uura ueibolu*—As stated above, all aquatic animals, except those in the *ufu* category, fall into this class, which crosses and overlaps many other categories. Also considered to be *uura ueibolu*, for example, are a species of aquatic antelope, marsh mongoose, crocodile, aquatic turtles, and hippopotamus. This last animal, called *apfo* both in Efe and Kilese and *kiboko* in Kingwana, is not present in the area, but its name was given me in all lists of *uura ueibolu*. Some Pygmies had never seen it and described it as a big beast with horn and claws.

*Arigba*—The *Arigba* (in Kingwana *kora*) category includes snails. Two members, *arigba* and *magbou*, live in the forest, two others, *budubudu* and *imabududu*, live near the Balese villages. All the terms may be binomialized. So, one can say, for example, *arigba magbou* and this form is in common use. Another snail, *bicho*, which is not eaten, is considered by the Balese (but not by the Efe) to fall within this category. No Efe ever mentioned it.

*Bea*—*Bea* is the name given to the terminal taxon which includes all terrestrial turtles. It is translated in Kingwana as *kuro*. The Balese call them *afelu*. They are considered to be akin to aquatic turtles, which are called *bago* by the Efe and *begbeda* by the Balese. These last animals are considered also to be *uura ueibolu*.

*Echu*—*Echu* category encompasses all termites, which are subdivided into eight terminal taxa: *adeiraba*, *bodi*, *eabo*, *esio*, *ndufu*, *sara*, *ndoju*, *eli*. The Balese call them *ungu*, a term also used by the Efe, and they use the same names for the eight taxa. They do not consider termites to be *uura* (however, they eat them), but call them *baasi*. The Kingwana term is *ishwa*.

*Ei-ei*—All edible larvae are called *ei-ei*, both by the Balese and the Efe. However, the Balese consider them to be *baasi*. The most commonly eaten are *posi* and *mobu*, respectively, the larvae of the Coleoptera called *posi ugu* and *opu ugu*.

*Aruja*—This is the Efe and Balese name of small hairy worms, which irritate the skin, and which are eaten both by the Efe and the Balese. However, the Balese do not consider them *uura*, but *baasi*. I elicited only the terms for two terminal taxa: *aruja* and *etepebebe*. The last one can be binomialized (*aruja etepebebe*), but normally is not.

*Non-affiliated or ambiguously affiliated uura*—The categories I have dealt with so far cover a large part of the *uura* realm, but do not exhaust it. There is a small number of edible animals which, for some peculiar characteristics they present, are not affiliated in any of the mentioned categories, or are ambiguously affiliated. They are: *aropi* (flying squirrel), *ate* and *ou* (two species of pangolins), and *igbo* (aardvark). The Balese have the same names for the first three animals, but call the last one *arufey*.

The majority of people classified *aropi* (*Anomalurus*) as *osa*, because it has wings, pointing out that it was more like a bat (*derebi*). One Pygmy told me that *derebi* was a small *aropi*. However, some other people told me that it can not be considered *osa*, because it has a tail and fur, and has neither feathers nor beak; instead it was *odi*. Somebody else mentioned that it was neither *osa* nor *odi*, and that it was simply *aropi*.

*Ou* and *ate*, respectively *Manis tetradactyla* and *Manis gigantea*, are definitely not affiliated. The Efe say that they are *peke yake*, which in Kingwana means "on their own." The same is valid for *igbo* or *arufey* (*Orycteropus afer*); however, this last animal was mentioned in two lists after antelopes and wild boars. Elephant and buffalo, as stated above, can also be considered in one sense not affiliated or ambiguously affiliated in the category of *uura par excellence*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In concluding this ethnographic report, I want to draw attention to some specific points, particularly with regard to differences between Efe and Balese systems of animal classification.

In the first place, there is the primary importance of being edible or inedible, as a principle for classifying animals. Edibility is the quality which permits the distinguishing of two classes of animals, each of which is so large as to be considered similar to what we call a 'realm.' This preeminently cultural criterion operates in a coherent way in Efe classification. It is noteworthy that there are no *uura* categories which include both edible and inedible animals. On the contrary, animals of the same genus can be separated only because they are or are not eaten. All inedible animals are for the Efe a sort of residual category, which they do not name; they subdivide them into small categories, which include no other taxa or a small number of terminal taxa.

The same principle works in Balese classification, but in a less coherent way. The Balese also call *uura* all edible animals. However, they have a term, *baasi*, which they say designates all inedible beasts. So, the *baasi* category should cover the field not covered by *uura*. However, this is not the case. On the one hand, the Balese do not eat snakes (*uua*), but they do not consider them to be *baasi*. On the other hand, they eat termites, larvae and worms, but they call them *baasi*. Moreover, they tend to introduce into some *uura* categories, as the *arigba* category, species which are not eaten, thereby creating mixed categories, which sometimes they refer to as *uura*, sometimes as *baasi*.

Within the *uura* class the Efe group animals into a set of main categories, according to either purely natural or culturally relevant natural features. Three of these categories, *osa* (birds), *uua* (snakes), and *ufu* (fish), are constructed according to natural absolute characteristics (Hunn, 1982). In the same set we find another group of three categories, *aja-aa*, *odi*, and *uura par excellence*, which are discriminated on the basis of natural features which are relevant only from a cultural point of view. As hunters, the Pygmies give considerable attention to the footprints of the commonly pursued animals, and separate *aja-aa* from other terrestrial game on the basis of hooves. In this sense, *odi* constitute a sort of residual category, because of the arboreal habits of monkeys.

The Balese have exactly the same categories. However, as I have pointed out, they do not consider snakes to be *uura*, because they do not eat them, but neither are they *baasi*. So, in the Balese classification there is one class which remains out of the system. Moreover, the Balese follow the same Efe distinction, which separate *aja-aa* from other *uura*, although it is not very significant for a population which practices only a little hunting, and does not pursue animals, but catches them with traps.

These inconsistencies in the Balese system of animal classification are difficult to explain, unless we admit that the Balese absorbed the Efe system, without solving the contradictions deriving from a different cultural idea of what is edible and what is not, and, more generally, from a different economic relationship with the environment.

It is interesting to note that one of the most educated Balese people, a young man

who had gone through primary school, when faced with these contradictions, tried to elaborate for my benefit a more coherent classification. He wrote a scheme, in which he grouped all mammals under the term *uura*, and put this category on the same taxonomic level of *uua*, *ufu*, *osa*. On the same one level he put the category *baasi*. As a consequence *aja-aa*, *odi* and *uura par excellence* became second level categories. He was a little embarrassed by turtles, pangolins, aardvarks and flying squirrels. Lastly, he decided to put them into the *uura par excellence*, as a subcategory. It was exactly the system the anthropologists like. However, when I tested this scheme with other informants, they denied it firmly. Moreover, the same young man who had invented it never maintained that it was the Balese system, but only that it would have been a better one.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The research took place in the framework of the Italian Ethnological Mission and was funded by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and by the Italian Ministry for Education.

<sup>2</sup>Kingwana does not maintain the distinction that Kiswahili does between *mnyama* (pl. *wanyama*, big animals, both edible and inedible) and *nyama* (meat).

<sup>3</sup>Only one Efe informant told me that it could be used the term *ogu*, but after he denied it. *Ogu* is the term used to indicate Coleoptera.

<sup>4</sup>Vorbichler (1965) reports the term *bosa* among the Southern Balese.