

to cook the morning meal. Back in the camp they sat outside their huts, legs straight out in front of them in what seemed the most uncomfortable position possible. From there they prepared the family repast, placing green plantains in the hot ashes to roast, or concocting a stew of mushrooms and chopped leaves with whatever meat was left over from the day before, covering the pot with large leaves to trap the steam and to keep out ashes and dirt. Any little chores that had to be done were done by their daughters, who scurried around collecting dry twigs to heat the fire up more quickly, or sat over the fire with their baby brothers, carefully guarding the pot and making sure it did not upset when the burning wood subsided.

The younger women, freed in this way, relaxed and set to work making themselves beautiful. They sat in full view of the camp, unashamedly painting their bodies with black paste, calling their friends over to help with the more inaccessible regions. The buttocks in particular they found difficult to paint themselves, and rather than waste such an expansive area they would either bend over in front of a friend, or lie across her lap.

The men combined business with pleasure too, usually meeting at the kumamolimo to drink from a steaming bowl of liko. The young bachelors mostly cooked their own simple breakfast here, and together they all discussed the day ahead of them—where they should go to hunt, what they might expect to find. Cephu never came over from his little camp at such times. He merely waited until all the others set off for the hunt, then he joined them.

The men also had to prepare their nets. Helping one another, they uncoiled long lengths of knotted twine, sometimes stretching for three hundred feet, inspecting every section with care. Then, standing upright, the assistant holding the net off the ground, each man coiled his net again so that it hung from one shoulder to within a few inches of his ankle. With a loose length of twine he deftly bound the coils together, gave the net a final shake and hung it from

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## The Crime of Cephu, the Bad Hunter

EVERY NIGHT the men gathered to sing the songs of the molimo, and every morning the youths awakened the camp with their shouts and yells. This went on week after week, yet the daily life of the hunting group continued as though nothing particularly unusual was happening. The men were more sleepy in the mornings, and sometimes tempers were short, but never for long. The necessities of hunting and gathering for a living did not allow it.

As soon as the camp was light and there was no further danger of the molimo's making an appearance, the women emerged from their huts and went down to the river to bathe and to collect water

some convenient branch or tree stump. Sometimes, when hunting, nets have to be set up rapidly, and anyone whose net has become tangled through poor preparation and coiling can spoil the chances of all the others.

The women have little to do by way of preparation for the hunt, other than making sure of the strength of the bark tump line by which they carry their baskets. They put some food in these in case the day's hunt is a long one, and they wrap a glowing ember from the family fire in large, damp leaves, and sit down and wait for the men to set off.

In normal times there is often a dance before everyone departs for the hunt. Men and women circle the camp, singing a hunting song, looking from right to left, clapping their hands and leaping extravagantly in imitation of the animals they hope to catch. But this was rare during the days of the molimo as all felt the lack of rest.

Another form of hunting magic, if you can call it that, was a paste made from various parts of an antelope, particularly the heart and the eye. The charred flesh is mixed with spittle and ground to a paste, then put in an inverted antelope horn and stuck in the ground near the family fire. Just before going on the hunt, members of the family smear one another with some of the paste, using a twig to dig it out of the horn. It is difficult to say whether this form of magic is of Pygmy or Negro origin. I rather think the latter, because only a few families practiced it, and they were highly criticized by the others as being antisocial. They were trying to get success for themselves at the expense of the others. On one such occasion a family had a long run of good luck, the animals always falling into their net, while others had no luck at all. It was decided that this must have been due to *arjo*, as the medicine was called, so everyone, including the offenders, agreed that the only thing to do was to destroy the horns that held the medicine. Everyone who had such a magic horn gave it to old Moke and promised not to make any more

selfish magic. Moke threw the horns in a fire and no more was said. It so happened that the family in question continued to have good luck for some time.

Hunting, for a Pygmy group, is a co-operative affair—net-hunting particularly. The use of private magic is frowned on, though there is no law against it. The sacred hunting fire is all that they consider right and necessary, and this is found throughout the forest. It is thought to secure the blessing of the forest which provides the game, and to bring good luck to the entire group. Even those groups that hunt mainly with bow and arrow, hunt not as individuals, but for the group as a whole. For the net hunters it is impossible to hunt alone. Men, women and children all have to co-operate if the hunt is to be successful.

The "Fire of the Hunt" simply involves the lighting of a fire at the base of a tree a short distance from the camp. In other Pygmy groups I have seen a variation in which the fire is lighted within the camp, special sticks around it pointing in the direction the hunt is going to take. In this case the fire is surrounded by a long and heavy vine laid in a circle on the ground, and when the game is brought home it is placed within this circle before being divided. But this particular group, and others in the area, were less formal.

I remember one morning in particular when we went to kindle the Fire of the Hunt outside the camp, because it was the day that old Cephu committed one of the greatest sins possible in the forest.

I doubt if any of us had managed to snatch more than two hours' sleep, and we were all quiet while preparing for the hunt. In a Pygmy camp this is the surest danger signal of all, for usually everyone is talking and laughing and shouting rude remarks from one end of the camp to the other. It was not only that we were tired, but of late Cephu had refused to contribute to the molimo basket, and that morning he had been heard to call out, in his loudest voice, that he was fed up with the molimo of "that camp over there." Even though he always

made his camp a short distance off it was close enough to be thought of as the same camp, and whether or not we appreciated his presence we thought of his camp and ours as being the same. Even his unwillingness to take part in the molimo was accepted, to maintain some semblance of unity; but this sudden statement made it impossible to ignore Cephu's feeling of rivalry any longer. Rather than cause an open breach, everyone in the main camp kept his thoughts to himself and was silent.

About an hour after dawn, four or five youths with their nets and spears went off to light the hunting fire. I went with them, and only when we had crossed the Lelo and were on the other side did they speak. Then it was about trivialities, and soon they were chatting and laughing as though nothing were wrong. Shortly afterward we were joined by half a dozen of the younger married men, the most active hunters, and we lit the fire at the top of the hill. Leaves and twigs were piled around the base of a young tree, and an ember brought from the camp set them ablaze. More leaves were thrown on so that dense clouds of smoke went billowing up to the invisible sky, until finally the flames burst through with a great roar of victory. There was no great ritual or ceremonial, but somehow this act put the hunters in harmony with the forest and secured its blessing and assistance for the day's hunt. The Pygmies regard fire as the most precious gift of the forest, and by offering it back to the forest they are acknowledging their debt and their dependence.

As we sat around waiting for the others, one or two couples passed by. They were going ahead so they would have extra time for gathering mushrooms on the way. They paused to chat and then walked on, lightly, swiftly, and gaily. Before long the main body of hunters arrived and asked where Cephu was. We had not seen him. It seemed that he had left the camp shortly after us but instead of passing by the hunting fire had followed a different path. Someone suggested that he was building a fire of his own. This brought cries

of protest that not even Cephu would do such a thing. There was much shaking of heads, and when Ekianga arrived and was told what had happened he stood still for a moment, then turned around, looking in all directions to see if there was any sign of smoke from another fire. He said just one word, "Cephu," and spat on the ground.

By the time we got to the place where we were to make our first cast of the nets everyone was more silent and miserable than ever. It did not make matters any better to find Cephu there already, contentedly sitting over a fire eating roast plantains. He looked up and greeted us in a friendly way, and when asked why he had followed his own path he opened his eyes wide and softly said that he had misunderstood and taken the wrong trail. There were angry remarks, but Cephu ignored them all and went on munching at his plantain, smiling at everyone in his kind, gentle way.

Ekianga and a few others made a brief reconnaissance, and when they came back they gave instructions as to the best direction for setting up the nets. The womenfolk, who had been foraging around for mushrooms and nuts, picked up their baskets and went ahead with the small children. They trod lightly and made no noise beyond an occasional crunch of a rotten branch, buried deep beneath the carpet of leaves. We all spread out in a long semicircle, each man knowing exactly who should be to his right and who to his left. I went with Maipe, who had been sent by Njobo with his net. We soon lost sight and sound of the others, but Maipe knew just where he would be expected to set up his net, and he took a short cut. I lost all sense of direction and could not even tell on which side of us the women were waiting for the signal to beat in toward our nets. We followed a little stream and paused by an enormous outcrop of huge stone boulders, almost perfectly square in shape, some of them eight feet across each face. Maipe looked around, then sat down to wait. After a few minutes Moke's nephew appeared to our left, stringing his net out through the undergrowth as he came.

The end of the net stopped a few feet short of the boulders, and Maipe deftly joined it to his net; then, slipping each coil off his shoulder in turn, he hung his own net, fastening it to low branches and saplings. It stretched for about three hundred feet, so that one end was completely out of sight from the other. It stood about four feet high, and Maipe walked the length of it, silently adjusting it so that it touched the ground all the way along and was securely fastened above. If he found the net drooping where there was no support, he cut a sapling, stuck it in the ground and hung the net on it, bending the top sharply back, twisting it around and through the mesh so that the net could not slip. When this was done he took up his spear and casually sharpened it with a stone picked off the ground.

It was about another five minutes before he suddenly stood up and beckoned me to do the same. He stood absolutely motionless, his head slightly on one side, listening; his spear was raised just a few inches from the ground. I listened too, but could hear nothing. The forest had become silent; even the crickets had stopped their almost incessant chirping. Maipe raised his spear higher, and then at some signal that I did not even notice there was a burst of shouting, yelling, hooting and clapping, as the women and children started the beat. They must have been about half a mile away, and as they came closer the noise was deafening. We saw one antelope, a large red sondu, ears back, leaping toward the boulders as though it were heading straight for our net, but at the last moment it saw us and veered away to the left. Maipe could probably have killed it with his spear, but he said, "That is not for us. It will probably fall into Ekianga's net." Just then there was a lot of yelling from Moke's nephew. Maipe vaulted over the net and ran swiftly, leaping and bounding like the sondu to avoid obstacles. I followed as best I could, but was passed by several youngsters from farther down the line before I reached the others. The sondu had gone into Ekianga's

net, just as Maipe had said, but while all the attention was in that direction a water chevrotain, the *sindula*, had tried to fight its way through Moke's net.

The *sindula* is one of the most prized animals; it is not much larger than a small dog but is dangerous and vicious. Moke's nephew had been left all by himself to deal with it, as the others in that area were helping Ekianga with the sondu. The youngster, probably not much more than thirteen years old, had speared it with his first thrust, pinning the animal to the ground through the fleshy part of the stomach. But the animal was still very much alive, fighting for freedom. It had already bitten its way through the net, and now it was doubled up, gashing the spear shaft with its sharp teeth. Maipe put another spear into its neck, but it still writhed and fought. Not until a third spear pierced its heart did it give up the struggle.

It was at times like this that I found myself furthest removed from the Pygmies. They stood around in an excited group, pointing at the dying animal and laughing. One boy, about nine years old, threw himself on the ground and curled up in a grotesque heap and imitated the *sindula*'s last convulsions. The men pulled their spears out and joked with one another about being afraid of a little animal like that, and to emphasize his point one of them kicked the torn and bleeding body. Then Maipe's mother came and swept the blood-streaked animal up by its hind legs and threw it over her shoulder into the basket on her back.

At other times I have seen Pygmies singeing feathers off birds that were still alive, explaining that the meat is more tender if death comes slowly. And the hunting dogs, valuable as they are, get kicked around mercilessly from the day they are born to the day they die. I have never seen any attempt at the domestication of any animal or bird apart from the hunting dog. When I talked to the Pygmies about their treatment of animals, they laughed at me and said, "The forest has given us animals for food—should we refuse this gift and

starve?" I thought of turkey farms and Thanksgiving, and of the millions of animals reared by our own society with the sole intention of slaughtering them for food.

Ekianga was busy cutting up the sondu by the time I reached his net, for it was too large an animal to fit in his wife's basket. Usually game is brought back to camp before it is divided, and in some groups the dead antelope would have been sent back to camp immediately, around the neck and shoulders of one of the youngsters. But here the womenfolk crowded around as Ekianga hacked away, each claiming her share for her family. "My husband lent you his spear. . . ." "We gave your third wife some liver when she was hungry and you were away. . . ." "My father and yours always hunted side by side. . . ." These were all typical arguments, but for the most part they were not needed. Everyone knew who was entitled to a share, and by and large they stuck to the rules.

Above all the clamor, and in the process of re-coiling the nets and assembling for the next cast, a disgruntled Cephu appeared and complained that he had had no luck. He looked enviously at the sondu and the sindula, but nobody offered him a share. Maipe's mother hurriedly covered the chevrotain with leaves to avoid argument. She worked efficiently, not bothering to take the basket off but using her hands behind her back, and bouncing the basket on her buttocks until the dead animal was completely hidden by the leaves.

We went on for a mile or two and made another cast. Once more Cephu was unlucky, and this time he complained even more loudly, accusing the women of deliberately driving the animals away from his nets. They retorted that he had enough of his own womenfolk there, to which he replied rather ungallantly, "That makes no difference, they are a bunch of lazy empty-heads."

They were still arguing when they set off for the third cast. I had caught sight of old Moke and stayed behind to talk to him. He

had not left with the hunt but had gone off on his own, as he usually did, with his bow and arrows. I was surprised to see him. He said, "Don't follow them any longer; they will deafen you with their noise. Cephu will spoil the hunt completely—you'll see." He added that he had happened to be nearby, waiting for the animals either to break through the nets or to escape around the edges. He picked up a large civet cat, the skin slightly stained where it had been pierced by an arrow. "Not very good for eating," Moke commented, "but it will make a beautiful hat. Cephu won't get even that—he is too busy watching other people's nets to watch his own. His is a good net to stand behind with bow and arrow!" He chuckled to himself and swung the cat high in the air.

We ambled back slowly, Moke talking away, sometimes to himself and sometimes to me. On the way he stopped to examine some tracks that were fresh, appearing over the tracks made by the hunters earlier on. He announced that they were made by a large male leopard, and that it was probably watching us from "over there"—waving casually to our right with his bow. Then he moved on in his leisurely way, humming to himself.

Back in the camp I was surprised to find that some of the hunters were back already, including Maipe. They had taken a short cut, and traveled twice as fast as Moke and myself. Some of them said it was because rain had threatened, but others, more bluntly, said it was because they did not like the noise Cephu was making. There were a number of women in the camp, and they seemed anxious to change the subject, so Moke told them about the leopard tracks. They laughed and said what a shock the hunters might get if they came back along that trail. One of them started miming the leopard lying in wait, its eyes staring from that side to this. The others formed a line and pretended to be the hunters. Every few steps the "leopard" turned around and jumped up in the air, growling fiercely, sending its pursuers flying to the protection of the trees.

This dance was still in progress when the main body of the hunters returned. They strode into camp with glowering faces and threw their nets on the ground outside their huts. Then they sat down, with their chins in their hands, staring into space and saying nothing. The women followed, mostly with empty baskets, but they were by no means silent. They swore at each other, they swore at their husbands, and most of all they swore at Cephu. Moke looked across at me and smiled. He was skinning the civet.

I tried to find out what had happened, but nobody would say. Kenge, who had been sleeping, came out of our hut and joined the shouting. He was the only male who was not sitting down, and although he was young he had a powerful voice, and a colorful use of language. I heard him saying, "Cephu is an impotent old fool. No, he isn't, he is an impotent old animal—we have treated him like a man for long enough, now we should treat him like an animal. *Animal!*" He shouted the final epithet across at Cephu's camp, although Cephu had not yet returned.

The result of Kenge's tirade was that everyone calmed down and began criticizing Cephu a little less heatedly, but on every possible score: The way he always built his camp separately, the way he had even referred to it as a separate camp, the way he mistreated his relatives, his general deceitfulness, the dirtiness of his camp, and even his own personal habits.

The rest of the hunters came in shortly afterward, with Cephu leading. He strode across the camp and into his own little clearing without a word. Ekianga and Manyalibo, who brought up the rear, sat down at the kumamolimo and announced to the world at large that Cephu had disgraced them all and that they were going to tear down the kumamolimo and abandon the camp and end the molimo. Manyalibo shouted that he wanted everyone to come to the kumamolimo at once, even Cephu. This was a great matter and had to be settled immediately. Kenge, not slow to seize the opportunity

for reviving his earlier show of wit, relayed Manyalibo's message by standing in midcamp and shouting over in Cephu's direction, "*Nyama'e, nyama'e! Pika'i to, nyama UE!*" (Animal there! Animal there! Come at once, you, you animal!") The youngsters all laughed loudly, but the older men paid no attention. This sent Kenge into a sulk and he started calling us all animals, adding that we were a lot of savages, just like the village people. But now not even the youngsters were listening, for Cephu had appeared.

Trying not to walk too quickly, yet afraid to dawdle too deliberately, he made an awkward entrance. For as good an actor as Cephu it was surprising. By the time he got to the kumamolimo everyone was doing something to occupy himself—staring into the fire or up at the tree tops, roasting plantains, smoking, or whittling away at arrow shafts. Only Ekianga and Manyalibo looked impatient, but they said nothing. Cephu walked into the group, and still nobody spoke. He went up to where a youth was sitting in a chair. Usually he would have been offered a seat without his having to ask, and now he did not dare ask, and the youth continued to sit there in as nonchalant a manner as he could muster. Cephu went to another chair where Amabosu was sitting. He shook it violently when Amabosu ignored him, at which he was told, "Animals lie on the ground."

This was too much for Cephu, and he went into a long diatribe about how he was one of the oldest hunters in the group, and one of the best hunters, and that he thought it was very wrong for everyone to treat him like an animal. Only villagers were like animals. Masisi spoke up in his favor and ordered Amabosu to give up his chair. Amabosu did so with a gesture of contempt and moved over to the far side of the group. Moke was the only one to stay completely apart. He sat outside his hut. He had finished skinning the civet and was twisting strands of vine together to make a frame for the hat. He looked peaceful and contented.

Manyalibo stood up and began a rather pompous statement of how everyone wanted this camp to be a good camp, and how everyone wanted the molimo to be a good molimo, with lots of singing, lots of eating, and lots of smoking. But Cephu never took part in the molimo, he pointed out. And Cephu's little group never contributed to the molimo basket. Manyalibo went on, listing the various ways in which Cephu had defaulted and made the camp into a bad camp instead of a good camp, and the molimo a bad molimo. And now, he added, Cephu had made the hunt a bad hunt. He recalled how on the first day, even before the camp was built, we had been presented with an antelope by the forest, but how ever since Cephu had joined us things had gone from bad to worse.

Cephu tried to interject that the molimo was really none of his business. At this Masisi, who had befriended him over the chair incident, and who had relatives in his camp, rounded on him sharply. He reminded Cephu that he had been glad enough to accept help and food and song when his daughter had died; now that his "mother" had died, why did he reject her? Cephu replied that Balekimito was not his mother. This was what everyone was waiting for. Not only did he name the dead woman, an unheard-of offense, but he denied that she was his mother. Even though there was only the most distant relationship, and that by marriage, it was equivalent to asserting that he did not belong to the same group as Ekianga and Manyalibo and the rest.

Ekianga leaped to his feet and brandished his hairy fist across the fire. He said that he hoped Cephu would fall on his spear and kill himself like the animal he was. Who but an animal would steal meat from others? There were cries of rage from everyone, and Cephu burst into tears. Apparently, during the last cast of the nets Cephu, who had not trapped a single animal the whole day long, had slipped away from the others and set up his net in front of them. In this way

he caught the first of the animals fleeing from the beaters, but he had not been able to retreat before he was discovered.

I had never heard of this happening before, and it was obviously a serious offense. In a small and tightly knit hunting band, survival can be achieved only by the closest co-operation and by an elaborate system of reciprocal obligations which insures that everyone has some share in the day's catch. Some days one gets more than others, but nobody ever goes without. There is, as often as not, a great deal of squabbling over the division of the game, but that is expected, and nobody tries to take what is not his due.

Cephu tried very weakly to say that he had lost touch with the others and was still waiting when he heard the beating begin. It was only then that he had set up his net, where he was. Knowing that nobody believed him, he added that in any case he felt he deserved a better place in the line of nets. After all, was he not an important man, a chief, in fact, of his own band? Manyalibo tugged at Ekianga to sit down, and sitting down himself he said there was obviously no use prolonging the discussion. Cephu was a big chief, and a chief was a villager, for the BaMbuti never have chiefs. And Cephu had his own band, of which he was chief, so let him go with it and hunt elsewhere and be a chief elsewhere. Manyalibo ended a very eloquent speech with "*Pisa me taba*" ("Pass me the tobacco").

Cephu knew he was defeated and humiliated. Alone, his band of four or five families was too small to make an efficient hunting unit. He apologized profusely, reiterated that he really did not know he had set up his net in front of the others, and said that in any case he would hand over all the meat. This settled the matter, and accompanied by most of the group he returned to his little camp and brusquely ordered his wife to hand over the spoils. She had little chance to refuse, as hands were already reaching into her basket and under the leaves of the roof where she had hidden some liver in anticipation of just such a contingency. Even her cooking pot was

emptied. Then each of the other huts was searched and all the meat taken. Cephu's family protested loudly and Cephu tried hard to cry, but this time it was forced and everyone laughed at him. He clutched his stomach and said he would die; die because he was hungry and his brothers had taken away all his food; die because he was not respected.

The kurnamolimo was festive once again, and the camp seemed restored to good spirits. An hour later, when it was dark and fires were flickering outside every hut, there was a great blaze at the central hearth and the men talked about the morrow's hunt. From Cephu's camp came the sound of the old man, still trying hard to cry, moaning about his unfortunate situation, making noises that were meant to indicate hunger. From our own camp came the jeers of women, ridiculing him and imitating his moans.

When Masisi had finished his meal he took a pot full of meat with mushroom sauce, cooked by his wife, and quietly slipped away into the shadows in the direction of his unhappy kinsman. The moaning stopped, and when the evening molimo singing was at its height I saw Cephu in our midst. Like most of us he was sitting on the ground, in the manner of an animal. But he was singing, and that meant that he was just as much a BaMbuti as anyone else.

## 6 The Giver of the Law

CEPHU HAD COMMITTED what is probably one of the most heinous crimes in Pygmy eyes, and one that rarely occurs. Yet the case was settled simply and effectively, without any evident legal system being brought into force. It cannot be said that Cephu went unpunished, because for those few hours when nobody would speak to him he must have suffered the equivalent of as many days solitary confinement for anyone else. To have been refused a chair by a mere youth, not even one of the great hunters; to have been laughed at by women and children; to have been ignored by men—none of these things would be quickly forgotten. Without any formal process of