

Introduction

From Tribes to Ethnic Groups

“In the hierarchical scheme a group’s acknowledged difference whereby it is contrasted with other groups becomes the very principle whereby it is integrated into society.”

Louis Dumont, Homo Hierachicus

The people who call themselves the Lese have had a turbulent history. At times they have been participants in a world rubber and ivory market, at other times they have been almost totally isolated from trade and markets. They have been integrated into nearby plantation systems, missions, and government; then again they have been completely marginalized from them. In almost every decade in the last century, the Lese have endured crises of the worst sort—forced labor and resettlement, destruction of property, beatings, imprisonment, and hunger. But within the context of flux and turmoil, there has been one striking continuity: their long-standing and complex relations with a group of people who call themselves the Efe, and who are known in Zaire by several names—Les Pygmées, Les Nains, BaMbuti, and Les Premiers Citoyens—and in much of the anthropological literature as the Pygmies.

The long-standing partnerships between Lese and Efe men and their families are for the most part hereditary: a Lese man inherits the son of his father’s Efe partner as his own partner. Nearly every Efe man has a partner, and while some Lese men do not have partners, for reasons we shall discover later, all Lese men believe that to be an adult and a “true man,” a *muto mani*, one must have an Efe partner. To the partners themselves, these relationships are primarily economic. Ask the members of either group what constitutes the partnerships and they will most likely say that the Lese farmers give cultivated foods and iron to the Efe and that the Efe give meat, honey, and other forest goods to the Lese. The division of labor between farming and foraging, along with

the transfer of goods that the Lese and the Efe believe follows from that division, is a central ethnic marker distinguishing the two groups. But the social relations that accompany the giving and receiving of these goods extend far beyond material transactions.

Lese men sometimes marry Efe women, and the children of these marriages are considered by both groups to be members of the Lese group. Efe men, however, cannot marry Lese women nor even engage in sexual intercourse with them. The Efe provide music and dancing at Lese rituals, serve as the chief mourners at Lese funerals, and protect the Lese from witchcraft. Efe children are sometimes raised in Lese villages; Efe women may serve as midwives for Lese women, breast-feed Lese babies, and obtain and administer medicines for afflicted Lese. Efe men and women carry out various household tasks in the Lese villages, such as cutting firewood, collecting water, obtaining house-building materials, and weeding the village plaza. In turn, the Lese represent the Efe in dealings with government officials and at tribunals, and they may pay fines that officials level against their Efe partners or partners' families; in addition, besides being legally responsible for the actions of their Efe partners, Lese men are expected to provide much of their partners' bridewealth payments and to aid in marriage negotiations. Efe men may place one or more of their children in the care of their Lese partner, who will feed the children, teach them Swahili and French, and, as the Efe put it, "cause the children to grow."

Many researchers have treated the Lese and Efe as distinct societies, separable and autonomous. The two groups are indeed physically different; they identify themselves by different names; they speak distinct, though mutually intelligible, languages, and employ different customs and rituals; and they maintain a strict division of labor between farming and foraging. But the intricacy of the relations between them that have developed over time has come to unite them in a system that encompasses both the local terminology and cultural differences.

In some ways, the Lese and the Efe resemble many other integrated societies of foragers and farmers in other parts of the world: the various Phillipine Negrito groups, the Mbuti Pygmies of Zaire, the San of Botswana, and the Hill Pandaram, the Nayaka, and the Paliyans of South India are among the many foraging groups that are socially integrated with their nonforaging neighbors. Few if any foraging societies, as Headland (1987) and Headland and Reid (1989) have recently shown, live independent of farmers, and their integration poses a major ethnographic problem in anthropology. The problem is also a theoretic-

cal one, however: that is, though we may now appreciate that foragers and farmers live together—which means that the model of foragers as social isolates should be abandoned—we do not necessarily know how to study their relations. How are these relations to be analyzed and represented? What theoretical and analytical concepts are available? Anthropologists who study foragers and farmers are, for the most part, specialists in forager studies, and although they have a long history of scholarship on the subject of “band level societies,” “egalitarianism,” and the relevance of foragers to the study of the prehistoric past, they have rarely specifically examined the social relations between culturally different groups, especially relations of inequality.¹ Outside of forager studies, anthropological concepts such as caste, class, and ethnicity have been elaborated for the study of intergroup relations, yet these have not been appropriated for the study of foragers and farmers. Anthropologists interested in forager-farmer relations must turn for guidance to regional specializations such as African or South Asian studies, and to social anthropology in general.

The problem of how to analyze interacting but culturally different groups, though a recent concern in forager studies, is not especially new to sociocultural anthropology. Edmund Leach (1954), Robert Redfield and Milton Singer (1954), McKim Marriot (1955), and Clifford Geertz (1960), among others, lead us to consider cultural differentiation as evidence of social integration. Leach, in his analysis of ethnic and structural relations in Burma, notes that “the mere fact that two groups of people are of different culture does not necessarily imply . . . that they belong to quite different social systems” (1954:17), and he remarks that cultural differences can be expressive of social relations (see Berreman 1975). Geertz adds that social subsystems are “incomplete social systems which are interlocked with one another and depend upon that interlocking for the maintenance of whatever distinctive pattern of organization of their own they may have” (1956:523). In other words, one group is simply not intelligible without the other. These studies, relying on contrasting terms such as *urban* and *folk*, *gentry* and *peasantry*, *great* and *little* tradition, differ sharply from the research of hunter-gatherer specialists, whose terms *farmer* and *forager* are meant to define groups according to modes of food production. Redfield and Singer, for example, focus on the interaction between cultural subsys-

1. The major exceptions include Gardner (1972), Lee and Leacock (1982), Schebesta (1936), Schrire (1984), Turnbull (1965b), and Woodburn (1988), all of whom address issues in the study of forager-farmer relations.

tems, whereas forager specialists frame intercultural interactions in terms of subsistence patterns or the exchange of material goods. The former studies emphasize the role that cultural distinctions play as markers of social relations rather than of separateness and autonomy.

This work has three central aims. The first is to show that the Lese and the Efe are more fruitfully analyzed as subgroups of a larger social collectivity (Grinker 1990). Even while the Lese and the Efe describe themselves as two distinct groups, they must be analytically treated as one ethnically differentiated group. In an analytical sense, the Lese and the Efe belong together. The second aim is to locate the social contexts in which interethnic relations are institutionalized and the sources for the symbolic representation of ethnicity. As we shall see, ethnic relations are organized at the level of the house. In addition, the Lese draw on the meanings and metaphors of the house to symbolically represent the Efe, and Lese relations with the Efe, in a variety of realms (e.g., mythology, everyday discourse, and beliefs about the supernatural) that includes their differing subsistence practices but goes far beyond them. The third aim is to explore the ethnic logic of Lese-Efe relations within the house, and the dialectical relation between the relationships the Lese have with one another and the relationships they have with the Efe. How do the values and practices of food distribution between Lese influence those between the Lese and the Efe? How do Lese beliefs about themselves influence their beliefs about the Efe? And how do relationships between Lese at the level of the clan influence Lese-Efe relationships at the level of the house?

ANALYTICAL CONCERNS: COLIN TURNBULL AND FORAGER-FARMER RELATIONS

This is not a comparative study. I do not attempt to place my analysis of the structure of Lese-Efe relations within a comprehensive discussion of the many interethnic or patron-client relations recorded by ethnographers (see Schmidt et al. 1977). While I shall make occasional comments throughout the text about the relevance of a variety of ethnographic observations to my own, such a broad and ambitious comparative project must form the subject of a future work. My immediate concern is to describe the ethnographic context within which the Lese and the Efe relate to one another, and to outline, specifically, the contribution that an ethnic perspective on Lese-Efe relations can make to the study of forager-farmer interactions, a field of research that is in

itself wide-ranging and varied. And while I shall discuss how the study of the Lese and the Efe, and their integration in the Lese house, can contribute to analyses of both the structuring of inequality in so-called “egalitarian societies” in Africa and the social organization of the many societies that have been described primarily with a lineage model, my main objective is to provide a detailed account of how ethnicity and inequality are structured in one particular ethnographic setting.

The few works that have appeared on aspects of Pygmy-farmer relations in central Africa have been, for the most part, ecological or biological studies (Hart and Hart 1984; Tanno 1976, 1981; Cavalli-Sforza 1987), brief descriptive works of hunting and farming practices and of general forest history (Schultz n.d.; Waehle 1985), or demographic accounts limited to the composition of settlements and Pygmy-farmer marriage (Ichikawa 1978, 1981; Terashima 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987). To my knowledge, since Turnbull (1965a, 1965b, 1983a), the only original ethnographic study of foragers and farmers of the central African rain forest that has concentrated on ideas, symbols, and culture is that of S. Bahuchet and H. Guillaume (1982) on Aka-Bantu relations in the northwest Congo basin, presented in a short article (1982). These authors argue that the Aka foragers have a long history of interethnic trade that involves an integration of societies going far beyond simple exchanges of material goods to the point where the two groups are integrated into a larger totality and become important components of each other’s collective identity. For the farmers the Aka, indeed, represent the “civilizing saviours” who enabled the farmers to become cultural beings (1982:194; see also Bahuchet 1992).

Despite the more recent studies, Colin Turnbull’s work on the Mbuti foragers and Bila farmers of the Ituri and Jean Peterson’s work on the Agta foragers and Puti farmers of the Phillipines still stand as the two most detailed and thorough accounts of forager-farmer relations. According to Peterson (1978a:335, 1978b:42), she and Turnbull were at that time the only anthropologists to consider these relations as a primary object of study. Turnbull’s two major publications, *The Forest People* (1961), a popular account of life with the Mbuti, and *Wayward Servants* (1965b), a more scholarly account of the relations between the Mbuti and Bila, both of which are now standard reading in anthropology classes all over the world, have been the basis of a significant number of studies on economic, political, and gender egalitarianism (Begler 1978; Godelier 1977; Meillassoux 1975; among others). These beautifully written texts continue to attract students of all disciplines to

anthropology and to stimulate interest in the lives of central African foragers. Partly because of their romantic appeal, but perhaps more correctly because of their uniqueness, the egalitarianism and social harmony outlined by Turnbull have rarely been questioned by other anthropologists (see, for example, Cashdan 1989: 44–45), and Turnbull's other characterizations of Mbuti beliefs and social organization have seldom been subject to critical examination. As I have said elsewhere in a comment on an article by Nurit Bird-David (1992), in which she applies Turnbull's arguments to a comparative analysis of forager economies, I am skeptical of this uncritical acceptance of Turnbull's writing, valuable though his work is:

I continue to be struck by the persistence with which anthropologists embrace Turnbull's romantic characterizations of the Mbuti . . . Turnbull's work presents few data to support the ways in which he represents Mbuti life and thought; there are few or no narratives, analyses of mythology, or cultural descriptions based on a knowledge of the native Mbuti language. For example, how do we know that the Mbuti feel "reverence" or "compassion" when they are slaughtering an animal? What are the Mbuti words to describe the "affection" given by the forest? How do we know that the forest is the "vital essence" of people's lives when the central word cited by Turnbull (and Bird-David) in the description of this essence is "*pepo*," a Swahili word used in northeastern Zaire to mean "wind"? To my knowledge, no subsequent fieldwork among the Mbuti or Efe, including my own, has revealed indigenous conceptions of the forest as a soul or life force. Furthermore, as in this paper, the Mbuti are frequently appropriated as immediate-returners without including in the analysis the Bila farmers with whom they live, and without a knowledge of the cultural constitution of the Mbuti and Bila economy. (Grinker 1992a:39)

Unfortunately, Turnbull provides little evidence that he learned the native Mbuti language and thus elicited the kinds of conceptions of the world that form his representations of the Mbuti and their mothering forest. Turnbull presents *The Forest People* as ethnographic realism, but it is in many ways a thinly veiled attempt to use the *idea* of the "Pygmies" as a way to make universally valid statements about human nature.² Turnbull played upon a deep-seated need throughout much of the West to invent a "primitive" and original form of human society (cf. Wilmsen 1990), and toward this goal he draws an idealized picture of the Mbuti living a romantic and harmonious life in the bountiful rain forest of the Congo. The Mbuti he describes in *The Forest People* are

2. Berger (1983:13) makes a similar point about Turnbull's *The Human Cycle* (1983b).

simple and childlike creatures, romping in the forest without the violence and inequality of the unpure West. The implied criticisms of Western civilization (in this and other publications), as compared with that of the Pygmies, are fairly obvious (Turnbull 1983a), and in a later ethnography, in which Turnbull went further to contrast his love of the Pygmies with his hatred of the Ik of Uganda, his bias was duly questioned by the international anthropological community (see, e.g., Barth 1974; McCall 1975).

Wayward Servants may be questioned for more specific reasons, namely, some inconsistencies in Turnbull's argument and generalizations unsupported by his data. Perhaps the most glaring problem, and one that relates particularly to my study of Lese-Efe relationships, is Turnbull's use of the concept of dependence. Turnbull wishes to demonstrate that the Mbuti are separate and independent of the farmers, but, at the same time, he says that the Mbuti are actually dependent upon the farmers for cultivated foods, iron, pottery, and fire, among other things (1965b:34–35). Nonetheless, Turnbull gets around these sticky facts by adopting the Mbuti classification of the world into two spheres, the village and the forest world. In the village, the Mbuti choose to be dependent upon the farmers; in the forest they are totally independent of the farmers. In either realm, they are truly autonomous. Turnbull then asks why the Mbuti choose to be dependent in the village context. There is perhaps no more important question in the study of these foragers and farmers. The answers would no doubt tell us much about the structure and motivation of the complex relations between the foragers and farmers. But he does not delve into the question deeply, for to do so would indeed mean studying their complex integration. The entire book, on the contrary, can be read as a study of their separateness. Turnbull writes:

Accepting, for the moment, that the Mbuti in their forest world are not in any position of necessary dependence upon the villagers for food or material, or technological skill, and admitting that in the village context they are dependent, the question arises as to why they choose to place themselves in that position of dependence. It is certainly not out of economic necessity. The truth of the matter is simply that the village offers, for a brief while, an agreeable change of pace, an opportunity for a relaxation that is not always possible in the forest, and, one might say, better hunting, on occasion. An Mbuti band or an Mbuti family or an Mbuti individual may descend upon a village either because of sheer whim, or because of laziness if the forest hunting gets too strenuous, or because of dissension, or indeed for almost any reason except necessity. Whatever the reason, and most commonly it at

least involves an expressed desire for relaxation, and freedom from care, the reason is on the side of the Mbuti, the choice is theirs, and the dependence that follows is as voluntary as it is temporary. (1965b:37)

In other words, the forager-farmer relationship is determined and shaped by whim, fatigue, and the desire for relaxation. Although the farmers are also “dependent” upon the Mbuti, they also engage in these relations out of choice. Turnbull concludes, “The most that one can say about the economic aspect of the relationship is that it appears to be one of mutual convenience” (p. 81). Certainly few scholars would argue with the worthy assertion that dependence is culturally constructed, but whim, fatigue, and convenience are not exactly what anthropologists have in mind when they seek to explain the enduring and well-patterned cultural makeup of a complex social situation.

Having thus established that the Mbuti’s ostensible dependence upon the farmers is essentially a kind of play performed by the Mbuti, Turnbull dwells on the theme of the forest as a bountiful, never-changing sanctuary, a place that not only provides everything the Mbuti need or desire but also is a completely good place, unlike the village, which is completely bad. There are several problems with this idealized representation, and I will note just two. First, Turnbull contends that the forest gives everything the Mbuti want or need and is a refuge from the dangers outside the forest, yet he also notes that in history the Mbuti were caught between warring “tribes” and had to attach themselves to particular farmer groups (p. 38). If the forest provides such safe asylum, why did the Mbuti need sanctuary, and why did they involve themselves with warring groups? Turnbull’s explanation is simply that the Mbuti had “developed a strong taste for plantation foods” (p. 38). Once again, the relationship is explained in terms of a taste or fancy.

Second, Turnbull’s idealized view of the Mbuti leads him to accept the Mbuti attitudes toward the village as a place of supernatural malevolence. Rather than explore the meaning or motivation of such a sharp contrast between the forest and village, Turnbull simply accepts the dichotomy at face value. Although the Mbuti have some magic, they associate witchcraft and sorcery only with the village world; hence, the village is an evil place, where even those Mbuti who do not believe in supernatural powers can be persuaded to believe in them: “When an Mbuti dies in the village there is frequently voiced suspicion that somehow the village is responsible; maybe one of the old curses is at work, perhaps a neglected *kpara* [Bila partner] is employing a sorcerer to seek revenge, or more likely, it is simply the village itself that caused the

death” (p.74). The forest, in contrast, is a world of total tranquility and peace. It is mother, father, and God. This is, in fact, the most prominent argument in all of Turnbull’s numerous books and articles—that the forest is the positive life force and essence of the Mbuti.

In sum, Turnbull enshrines the opposition between the village and the forest. I should say at the outset that I agree completely with Turnbull that this pervasive and ever-present opposition between the village and the forest is one of the most fundamental components of the culture and society of these foragers and farmers, as well as for the Lese and the Efe (see chapter 3). But there are two ways of looking at this opposition, one adopted by Turnbull, the other which I shall advocate. Turnbull embraces the view that the forest is good and the village is bad, and, taking that as the anthropological model, goes on to accept the forest and the village as totally separate and independent spheres of life about which few further questions need be asked. This acceptance allows him to interpret whatever the Mbuti tell him as simply another detail of that divided social situation. But there is another way to look at the division of the world into the forest and the village. We can see the forest-village dichotomy as an ethnic division in which the Mbuti define themselves in terms of the Bila. In this case, the local model is analyzed as a product of intergroup relations rather than group autonomy. According to the latter model, there is indeed a kind of “dependence” here, although it has little to do with food or metal. To echo Geertz’s statement quoted above, these groups depend upon one another for “whatever distinctive pattern of organization of their own they may have.” Precisely because these groups “depend” upon one another, I resist Turnbull’s reification of the village and the forest, indeed of the foragers and the farmers. The essentialist definition of these domains threatens to prohibit us from seeing them as mutually constitutive.

Peterson (1978a, 1978b) makes ethnicity the central concept in her account of the relations between the Agta foragers and the Puti farmers of the Phillipines. Much like the Mbuti and the Bila, the Agta and the Puti have different agendas. Whereas the Agta strive for an idealized economic egalitarianism among men, the Puti recognize and appreciate inequalities. And like the Mbuti and the Bila, these groups compete with each other for forest and garden resources. The similarities seem to end there, however, as Peterson contends that the Agta and the Puti forge their cultural differences out of an adaptation to the environment; ethnicity, for Peterson, is determined by ecology. But the ecological per-

spective notwithstanding, she leads us to consider the subject of ethnicity as the result of interaction between the two groups. Peterson argues that the competition between them results in a positive reinforcement of their cultural differences: “This asymmetrical competition in a sense supports positive relations between the two peoples. It helps to maintain distinctions between Agta and Puti that reinforce the potential for cooperation” (1978b:89). Peterson echoes Durkheim’s theory of organic solidarity and essentially recapitulates a well-known hypothesis that when ethnic groups compete with one another, they may do so, as M. Gluckman (1958) notes, by emphasizing the dominant cleavage between them, a process that distinguishes the groups further. Distinction is not the same as separation, for ethnic distinction is determined by the relations between these groups. Competition and cooperation, cultural distinction and social integration, work side by side toward the construction of ethnic diversity, including diversity in subsistence strategies. Whether or not we adhere to Peterson’s essentially materialist conception of ethnicity, one thing is indisputable: the foragers and farmers have to be considered together.

Peterson’s conclusions about ethnic diversity have a bearing on a question repeatedly raised in forager studies: Why have the foragers not become farmers? (e.g., Headland 1988; Schultz n.d.). An equally important question, rarely asked, is why farmers do not more frequently become foragers. Because of their mutual participation in each other’s economies, most foragers know how to farm, and most farmers know how to hunt. Why, therefore, do they not engage in these activities? Why is there so little overlap between subsistence practices? The answer seems to lie within the broader cultural context of these societies. Within the total context of the hunter-gatherer group, subsistence itself can signify a cultural identity, especially since that identity opposes others, such as farmers and herders. In other words, *the hunter-gatherer/farmer division is a symbolic representation, an ethnic identity framed in terms of the economy* (Grinker 1992b).

Turnbull introduced the subject of forager-farmer relations to an anthropological audience, and Peterson provided a way to conceive of those relations in anthropological terms. Yet both Turnbull’s and Peterson’s accounts are ahistorical. Wilmsen (1990) advances us a bit further. His comprehensive account of the San-speaking peoples of Botswana focuses on inequality and ethnicity among foragers and their neighbors in historical context. He views the various San-speaking peoples as ethnic groups whose identities and political and economic posi-

tions are the result of a long history of interaction between the San and others in the Kalahari. San ethnicity is thus determined not by their isolation but by their participation in a complex political economy. What we see today as forager groups in the Kalahari are not remnants of prehistory but rather the products of a complicated past in which these foragers were geographically and economically marginalized from the centers of power.³ Dentan (1988: 281) furthers Wilmsen's line of argument in a more comparative context by suggesting that the egalitarianism and peacefulness so often observed among foragers may actually be a creative adaptation to defeat by dominant and oppressive forces, followed by withdrawal into geographically or socially isolated areas.

I am in sympathy with both Peterson and Wilmsen in their attempt to explore the integration of foragers and their neighbors in terms of ethnicity. Peterson's book on Agta-Puti relations deserves recognition because it is one of the earlier accounts of ethnicity in a nonurban context (cf. Barth 1969), and, to my knowledge, one of the first accounts of ethnicity in a foraging society. Ethnicity has been viewed in much of the world, especially in Africa, as a correlate of urban and economic growth. Rural areas were assumed to be somehow immune from the social perils of ethnicity because they were less subject to historical change (Vail 1988). Although Peterson's work remains ahistorical, she takes pains to point out that ethnic ideologies develop in places that conventional theories would not predict. The value of Wilmsen's study is that it gives not only ethnicity but a *history* of ethnicity to a foraging group that has been treated as ahistorical and primordial.

One of the most salient benefits of an ethnic focus is that it draws our attention away from conventional and static notions of group membership, such as the tribe and corporation, and toward analyses of group identity as dynamic and as the product of intercultural relations. Studies of ethnicity thus involve, to some degree, a rejection of the conventional models of group solidarity and continuity. The most popular of these, the descent models, including the model of "tribe," have been shown time and time again to limit our range of observation and understanding (Barnes 1971), to neglect relations between people of different cultures, and to be a product of the specifically Western oppositions (such as state and stateless societies, clan system and territorial system,

3. Wilmsen's notion of history should not be accepted uncritically, however. As I have noted elsewhere (Grinker 1992a:162–163), Wilmsen tends to see most historical change as produced by exogenous forces, and thus his view threatens to rob the San of an endogenously produced history (see also Solway and Lee 1990).

matrilineage and patrilineage) to which we often hold stubbornly. Anthropologists have been particularly susceptible to the notion that descent organizes behavior—as if there might be a perfect fit between an ideology and actual group composition (S. F. Moore 1978). There is already a vast and critical literature on the theoretical and methodological problems of “tribe” and “tribalism” (see, e.g., Gulliver 1971; Helm 1968; Fried 1968; Southall 1970; Kopytoff 1987; Ekeh 1990), and the replacement of these terms with “ethnic group” and “ethnicity.”⁴ Adam Kuper points out that descent models rarely reflect folk models, the ways that people actually conceive of their own societies, and furthermore, that “there do not appear to be any societies in which vital political or economic activities are organized by a repetitive series of descent groups” (1982:92). Vansina (1980) suggests that the concept of the lineage should be dropped from the vocabulary of historians of Africa. Even Evans-Pritchard, one of the creators of the descent model, could not reconcile his own model based on the lineage and the clan with his analysis of Nuer political organization. He wrote: “What exactly is meant by lineage and clan? One thing is fairly certain, namely, that the Nuer do not think in group abstractions called clans. In fact, as far as I am aware, he has no word meaning clan and you cannot ask a man an equivalent of ‘What is your clan’ ” (1933, part 1:28). Moreover, when he did discover a word that corresponded to lineage, it was translated as *thok mac*, the hearth, or *thok dwiel*, the entrance to the hut, neither of which have to do primarily with lineages or corporate groups, both of which have to do with the house. However, I would not go so far as Vansina or Kuper in rejecting descent groups or lineages. My data show that descent is an important aspect of Lese social life, but that it is merely one part of a complex social organization constituted by many elements, one of the most important of which, I believe, is ethnicity.

A given social organization, when represented in terms of descent, might well be seen to reproduce itself within distinct and culturally homogenous “tribes,” and to be easily mapped on genealogies or kinship charts according to biological relationships. To represent the same society in ethnic terms is to see both reproduction and transformation within diverse and ever-changing social totalities. Moreover, whereas a focus on descent can potentially mask the integration of individuals and

4. For review and critical commentary on theories of ethnicity, see Cohen 1978; Thompson 1989; Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989; and Williams 1989. See also Bentley’s bibliographic guide, *Ethnicity and Nationality* (1981).

groups who do not participate together in descent groups (such as the Lese and the Efe), and who may not speak the same language, follow the same customs, or live in the same territory, a focus on ethnicity emphasizes the relationships between cultures as constituting variables in social organization. Lese descent groups (clans and lineages) are concerned with only one kind of social organization—an idealized egalitarian political organization of Lese agnates—whereas Lese houses are concerned with organizing inequality between men and women and between Lese and Efe.

TOWARD THE HOUSE

In the chapters that follow, I shall explore the ethnic processes of Lese and Efe society. By ethnic process, I mean the ways in which these groups define themselves in opposition to each other. But this study goes beyond a simple description of the cultural features that comprise ethnic stereotypes. I want to discern how and why some features are more salient than others and to analyze the relationship between ethnicity and the integration of the Lese and the Efe in both symbol and practice. I shall thus be more concerned with analyzing culture as a conceptual scheme, as culture is constituted by models and metaphors. While I do not diminish the importance of extended case analyses and event histories and descriptions, I must admit that I pay more attention to the cultural structure and logic underlying Lese-Efe ethnic relations than to analyzing those relations as they unfold in practice. I give special importance to the idioms employed by the Lese in their symbolic constructions of society, idioms expressed in myth, narrative, and everyday speech.

I view ethnicity to be a historically constituted process in which the Lese and the Efe integrate themselves into a set of relations of inequality. Though we know very little about the relations between the Lese and the Efe in the distant past, the recent history of political and economic marginalization has, in Malembi, the site of this study,⁵ contributed not only to the intimacy and the cohesion of the partnerships but also to Lese conceptions of those partnerships as isolated and primordial. As we shall see, though the Lese have been subject to successive waves of Arab, colonial, and national oppression, many Lese men and

5. "Malembi" is not an official designation of a village or group of villages. I use the name to refer to the villages in which I worked, scattered along the Malembi River.

women imagine that they have created their own isolation, and that they live in a peaceful society that is independent of outside forces and constituted entirely by Lese and Efe. As one Lese woman explained the infrequency with which the Lese interact with ethnic groups other than the Efe, "That is the way we are. We want to be alone. Every house to itself." The intimacy and nonviolence of Lese-Efe relations, based in large part upon their solidary juxtaposition to turbulent exogenous forces, stands in contrast to the many violent ethnic cleavages throughout the world, including, for example, South Africa (Vail 1988) and Sri Lanka (Kapferer 1988, Tambiah 1986). And elsewhere in Africa, C. Newbury's recent study of the Hutu and the Tutsi of Rwanda (1988), argues that historical changes in Rwandan politics over the past one hundred years have created greater ethnic solidarities and violent conflict. At the book's close, I will comment on the relative absence of violence between the Lese and the Efe.

However, my approach differs in at least one important respect from that of some anthropologists who have studied ethnicity (John L. Comaroff 1987, Vail 1988, Wilmsen 1990). Whereas many anthropologists take great pains to explore the actual historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of ethnic sentiments, I am concerned more with cultural representations than with ethnogenesis. Indeed, the bulk of this book is devoted not to a historical analysis of the genesis of ethnic identity but to a detailed ethnographic analysis of Lese-Efe social integration during the years 1985–87. The ethnography entails an analysis of how the historical circumstances of economic and political marginalization have resonated with cultural patterns of isolation—for example, the isolation of clans, houses, and gardens from one another—but I am less concerned with locating the motivations and genesis of Lese and Efe ethnic differentiation than I am with analyzing its composition and representations. These two areas of inquiry—historical genesis and cultural constitution—are, like process and structure, no doubt inextricably linked, but within the scope of this study, and within the scope of the data available to me, I place somewhat greater emphasis on my own observations, on the way the Lese group constructed and sustained cultural distinctions and social boundaries during the mid 1980s. Where and how can we locate ethnicity and the social processes that constitute it? How is identity culturally represented? And how are these representations made available to the anthropologist? Because I believe that ethnicity involves the asymmetrical incorporation of groups into a common social organization, I am especially concerned with uncovering

and analyzing Lese discourses about inequality. What are the images of domination, and the discourse about status through which relations of inequality between the Lese and the Efe are constituted? And how is the cultural discourse on inequality enacted in social practice?

In large part, the answers to my questions about the Lese-Efe relationship lie in a careful examination of the countless symbolic meanings that together constitute ethnic identity and the nature of interethnic interaction. This is a project that will, ideally, link up the historicity of ethnicity with its “primordial” constitution. Descent, I shall argue, is not of major importance to our understanding of Lese and Efe ethnicity, because Lese-Efe relations are neither conceived nor constructed at the level of the descent group, in this case, the clan. The Lese reckon descent patrilineally and organize their villages as clans. Within villages, the members believe they are genealogically related, though they cannot always discern the precise relationships and usually do not recognize a single apical ancestor. Furthermore, all clan members are ideally equal in status, with no household producing more goods than any other. The primary social function of clans is to unite and mobilize Lese men for war and marriage alliances and thus to mute inequality and social difference in the service of social solidarity. If the clan is the cultural model for equality, where, then, can we locate the model for inequality? Where can we find the images and forms of male-female and Lese-Efe relations? How are these relations culturally patterned?

These questions have been informed, to a considerable degree, by the house models Jan Vansina and Curtis Keim have proposed for the societies of the central African rain forest (Vansina 1982, 1990a, 1990b; Schildkrout and Keim 1990). Vansina’s model rejects lineage and kinship as the central or only forms of political organization and argues strongly that the southern central Sudanic and Proto-Mamvu societies of past centuries, which included the Lese, maintained house-centered political traditions. More specifically, he describes the incorporation of slaves, clients, and other kinds of house members who are not necessarily lineage members. In other words, ethnic relationships might be found in the house rather than in the lineage. The house made possible two ideologies of social organization: an egalitarian ideology that reflected the ideals of the lineage (Schildkrout and Keim 1990:89) and a hierarchical ideology that reflected the ideals of the individual. The house was thus flexible enough to simultaneously permit a “coherent internal organization” as well as hierarchical relations between its members (Vansina 1982:175). My use of the house differs from Van-

sina's in some very important ways (see chapter 4); nonetheless, his model provides a basic theoretical foundation on which I have constructed this ethnography.

I shall argue that relations between the Lese and the Efe, as well as other relations of inequality, are organized at the level of the house. For the Lese and the Efe, the Lese house is where nearly all production, consumption, and distribution of foods take place. Indeed, the house is the physical locus of economic interaction between the Lese and the Efe, and therefore also the locus of social differentiation and potential inequalities. Lese houses are not coresidential units. They ideally contain a man, his wife or wives, their children, and an Efe partner who does not live in the house. Because the partnership, and therefore house membership, is defined through individual Lese and Efe men, the children of Efe partners are not considered members of the house. Houses are therefore not defined by coresidence or lineage so much as by membership, with membership founded upon the integration of Lese men, their wives and children, and Efe partners into common participation in the production and distribution of cultivated foods. As the center of relations of inequality—between men and women, children and adults, Lese and Efe—the house is symbolically significant in the Lese construction of identity and social boundaries. The house is built upon several interlocking metaphors, the most primary of which are “the house is a body,” and “the Efe are female.” The relations between men and women are, in fact, modeled upon the actual structure of the house (in which sticks support mud as men support women), and Lese-Efe relations are, in turn, modeled upon gender relations (in which the Efe, as a group, are feminized). Thus, the symbolic material out of which the Lese construct their ethnic and economic relations with the Efe has its origin in that which is closest to every Lese individual: the home and hearth, and the primary relationships contained there.

The house, then, is not only a component of larger sets of social relations but a model that has to do with the conceptual organization of ethnic and gender relations, as well as the organization of social practices. It is a source of core symbols but also an arena for interactions structured by them. Although the core metaphors of differentiation are manifold, they all revolve around the house. The house provides for the Lese and the Efe the metaphors that inform ethnic differentiation, and that come to be experienced as primordial, everlasting, and axiomatic. This does not mean that houses and descent groups are not linked, or that one refers solely to domestic relations and the other to political