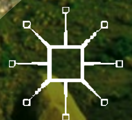
AFRICAN HISTORIES AND MODERNITIES

THE TRANSMISSION OF KAPSIKI-HIGI FOLKTALES OVER TWO GENERATIONS

Tales That Come, Tales That Go

Walter E. A. van Beek



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Walter E.A. van Beek

The Transmission of Kapsiki-Higi Folktales over Two Generations

Tales That Come, Tales That Go

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Dedicated to the memory of Timoti Teri Puwe and Tlimu Vandu Zra Tè

Timoti Teri Puwe telling the founding story of the village

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CHAPTER 1

Tales at Two Times

An Anthropologist in the Land of Folklore

In the study of folktales three characteristics strike the eye: the comparative attitude, the encyclopedic thrust in collecting and cataloguing, and a nostalgic notion of culture loss. Comparison is at the heart of folklore, that is, bridging time and space in any measure and with any means. In the study of folktales, however, comparison means something different than in my own discipline, anthropology; and as I engage in a longitudinal comparison, I sketch out the preliminaries.

Dominant in folklore, for a long time, has been the historical-geographical school, the so-called Finnish method.[1] The standard work of this approach is the encyclopedia *The Types of International Folktales*, where in principle all known tale types are registered, while for motifs the *Motif Index of Folk-literature* is the ultimate source,[2] both backed by the ongoing publication of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*[3] for the geographical source material. It is the mastery of these encyclopedias, more than anything else, which defines a folklorist in the classical sense. After all, the sheer number of different folktales in the world is staggering, or as the famous French scholar Roland Barthès put it: "Innombrables sont les récits du monde."[4]

To arrive at some order in this seemingly unbounded universe, the Finnish method based itself on the model of historical linguistics, and aimed to search for "the assumed genetic (or cognate) relationship understood between the items compared."[5] The goal was and still is a genealogy

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of tales, either on a regional basis, or—if possible—leading to a reconstruction of an ultimate '*Ur-form*.'[6] In this approach a tale type is a coherent collection of motifs that is presented as an individual entity with a number of variants, and as such stands in contrast to other tale types.[7] So comparison is between recognizable and cohesive narrative clusters. The leading idea is that these types have a long genealogical past and through their variants can be retraced to one common origin in one particular location. The discussion between polygenesis (tales reinvented in different times and areas) and monogenesis (tales invented only once) has been won by monogenesis; this implies that each individual tale has its proper history, which can be reconstructed, in effect a diffusionist paradigm.

This is quite different from 'the comparative method' in anthropology. Early evolutionary anthropology also compared cultural items all over the world, such as types of descent and types of kinship terms, in order to arrive at general conclusions of broad cultural evolution; but here the items were considered to be invented and reinvented over and over again, a polygenetic evolution where different, unrelated societies going through the same developmental phase would produce similar cultural solutions. Monogenesis, on the other hand, was important in the various diffusionist schools, especially in the German historical one, which presumed that cultural inventions were very rare and that a reconstruction of the deep history of mankind was possible through the geography of customs.[8] The problem is that both paradigms have been thoroughly discredited in anthropology, so for an anthropologist the 'Finnish method' seems like a walk down memory lane. One buzzword in present-day anthropology is the 'reinvention of tradition,' which does not augur well for historical reconstruction of cultural items.

However, comparison has remained crucial in anthropology, despite the postmodern phase it went through,[9] and it takes specific forms. One is the type of comparison in this study, within one culture and over a restricted passage of time, a form of what in anthropology is called 'controlled comparison,'[10] trying to gauge the dynamics of change while controlling for as many variables as possible. The aim of the present study is to view the temporal dynamics within the folktales in one society. But even this focused goal calls up a series of other comparative issues: the notion of folktale itself, of types and their similarities, of African versus Eurasian tales. The question of cultural boundaries and regional variation also arises, when changes in folktales are related with the distribution of tales in West Africa and with focused comparison of specific African tale types. As 'the past is a foreign country,' my comparison over time has to

be set within a comparison with tale complexes in neighboring cultural groups, close as well as more distant.

Comparison has to be led by a goal, an 'in order to,' in this case implying a leading notion to direct the eye. Two theoretical notions will be used as our cognitive lens. The first is the debate on devolution, culture loss, a persistent notion in the study of folktales. As Dundes noted in 1969 about folklore studies: "The tales speak to us from the past and will be eventually lost in the mist of change. The question is thus not whether there is a devolutionary bias or premise in folklore and method. There can be no doubt that there is; the question is merely what devolutionary scheme is in vogue at any given point in time."[11] Folk culture was seen as doomed by modernity; the era of myth-making was in our past; we were inexorably set on a path toward a global present devoid of fantasies, of epic tales, and of the wonderful variety of folkways. Also many anthropologists who have collected folktales, harbored—and still harbor—the notion that they were after disappearing cultural wealth.[12]

This reflects the solid root folklore has in Romanticism, and it still is dominant in popular thinking. Academic folklore studies, however, have made a shift in the last decades, viewing folktales as cultural productions in any era. In fact, research found new forms of folklore emerging, both as tales and in other forms,[13] with the twentieth century showing more folk narratives than before. Crucial here is that the strict separation between the oral tradition and the written form, in which the oral form was 'authentic' and the written form an artificial construct, has become outdated, as the interaction between literacy and orality has shown itself to be both inevitable and productive: "As we now know, many so-called oral narratives have a rich literary history."[14] Most of the European fairy tales seem to have been read before they were told, not the other way around: "What is told in the 20th century, has been read in the 19th."[15] Folktales even seem to have their own life cycle, emerging first in a literary form, then taking hold of the grass roots narrative culture, and eventually reemerging in literary productions.[16]

This trend against devolution is what the present study wishes to feed into.[17] The interaction between written forms and orality is just starting in Africa; my two samples stem from an oral culture, so the question here is whether the narrative culture in a predominantly oral society shows similar dynamics as well.[18] The new folklore paradigm feeds into similar trends in anthropology, such as the heightened sensitivity to the dynamics of oral tradition[19] and to the discursive character of cultures: tradition is constantly 'reinvented,' and culture is an emergent discursive event.

The second theoretical debate is the way folktales relate to social reality. Folklorists occasionally use folklore as a window into another culture or the past[20] but when doing so recognize the complexities of this relationship. Among anthropologists the use of tales as 'informants' seems more common, especially in Africa.[21] After all, they know already about that culture and see the tales reflecting what they know. The overall question is how these tales 'dwell' inside local culture, how we may gauge cultural information from tales, and, consequently, how we may read sociocultural changes from the tales. If we can engage in such a reading, what aspects of culture show in tales and what elements are never mentioned? In short, how reliable are these tales as 'informants'? I call this the 'ecological' approach, trying to establish the complex interactions between tales and society and construct my argument as a partial refutation of the tales' 'use-as-an-informant.' I will argue that it is more the other way around: one has to understand the culture in order to gauge the meaning of the tales. In any case, this discussion projects us into the complex relationship between folktale and culture and into the problematic of ethnic specificity and regional boundaries.[22]

Thus, my premise here is that local cultures continuously reinvent themselves, that the notion of tradition is a modern invention, that traditions in whatever definition have never been static, and that culture is constituted in discourse. Tale production is an ongoing process,[23] and the study of folktales is much more than the inventory of a dusty museum shelf;[24] it is, rather, a glimpse into a discursive repertoire used by people to make sense out of their lives. Telling tales is part of our basic humanity; and though the tales may change and hail from ever larger distances and more diverse cultures, the telling of tales will be with us at all times. At least, that is the course I embark upon. To prove such a view, in fact, is a lot to ask from an empirical study of two corpora of folktales from one restricted field; but this premise is at the heart of my approach.

Kapsiki Folktales over Two Generations

This study focuses on the transmission of folktales over a considerable period, looking for the modalities of change in two sets of folktales collected from the same community, with a time lapse of two generations. Thus, I present folktales from one particular culture, the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria, a group straddling the international border through the Mandara Mountains, with one corpus collected in 1972 and the other in 2008.

For my PhD in anthropology I opted for an African culture which not only still had its own functioning indigenous religion—my primary focus—but also its own language, and after a reconnaissance trip in 1971 I chose the Kapsiki. My first field stay was from March 1972 through August 1973. Collecting folktales was not planned in the original research design, but it came in handy. First, I needed text material to study the local language, *Psikye*. I had found a language teacher in Jean Zra Fama, a Kapsiki youngster who would soon leave for the nearby town of Mokolo in order to finish his secondary education. In the meantime, Luc Sunu came around, the assistant of an earlier linguist researcher, and viewing his credentials I wanted to employ him as well. So I gave Luc Sunu my tape recorder and sent him out to collect folktales. In this way I collected valuable material, but also—my primary rationale—I obtained Kapsiki texts to practice my language skills on, as very little printed material was available at the time for this particular Biu-Mandara language, *Psikye*. When Jean Zra had to leave, I employed Luc Sunu as my regular assistant, and Jean Zra Fama set out to make the first translations of the texts, a task that took him well through his next year at school.

In late 2007 Jean Zra Fama retired from his posting as an agricultural extension officer and we started working together again (Fig. 1.1). I gave him a computer and he typed in all the texts of the tales collected in 1972, both the vernacular and the French translations. As Luc Sunu was still going strong, I had the original team back and decided that a second bout of tale collection would be a good idea. In the meantime, during the 36 years in between, I had, among many other things, collected folktales among the Dogon of Mali as part of my general ethnographic work. The technology had changed: the heavy-but-oh-so-reliable Uher tape recorder had given way to the minute voice recorder of today, but Luc was as handy with the small instrument as with the bulky Uher, while Jean Zra was growing in his computer skills. At the end of 2008 my wife and I went to Cameroon, worked through all the tales, and came home with another 85 tales, to supplement and contrast the 107 tales recorded in 1972.

The tales were collected, both in 1972 and 2008, as an eliciting project, not unusual in folklore. Luc set out to find people who knew *rhena heca* (the Kapsiki term for folk tale, lit. 'old words') and, usually during the evening, had them tell the story into the microphone, in his presence. Sometimes the setting was more natural, as when the stories were told in a family compound, with children listening, but usually the session was one-on-one. For each tale the teller was rewarded with a small gift—one reason

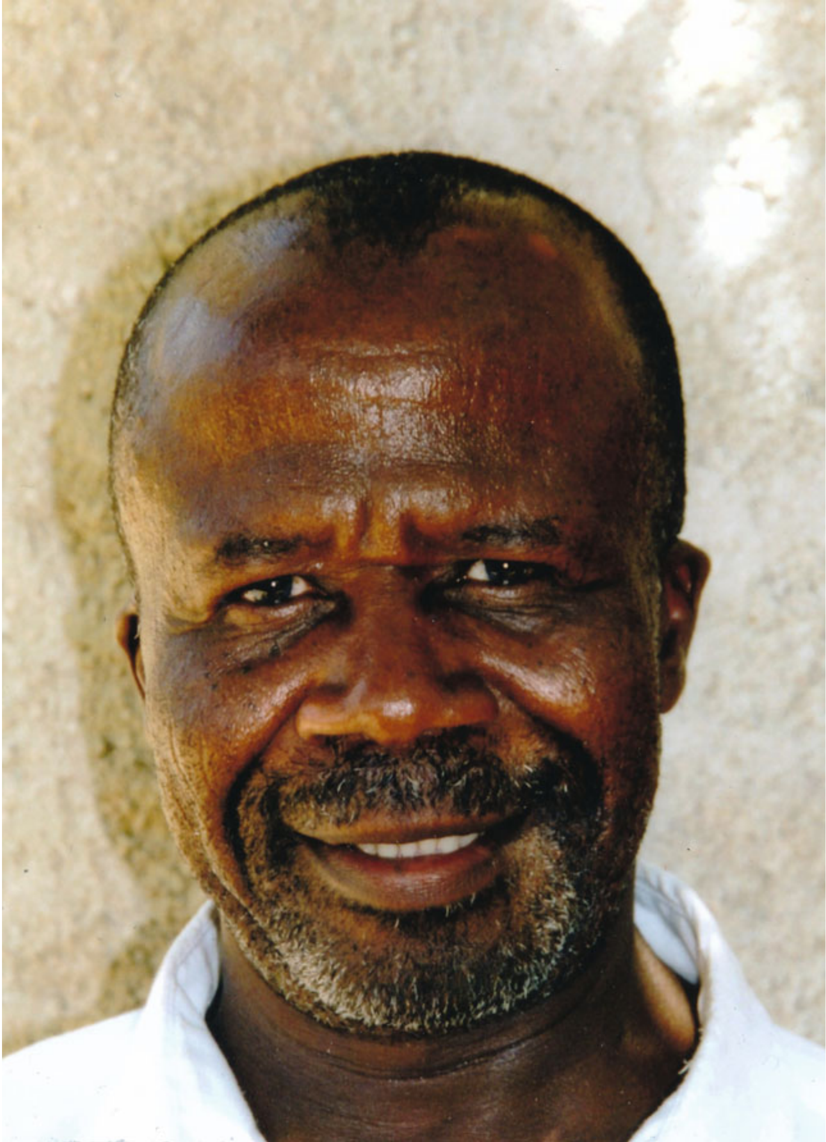

Fig. 1.1 Jean Zra Fama, retired

we did not aim at multiple versions—usually sweets (the famous 'bonbon axe' of West Africa) or a cola nut in the case of older raconteurs. When the story was told during a market, a calabash of beer was just as appreciated, with an eager audience wanting to join in as well. We consistently avoided anything resembling real payment, but there never was a reason for serious remuneration, as stories are fun and telling stories adds to social status. As the collection was text-oriented, I did not focus on the performance element, though that did creep in. The picture on the dedication page shows how my father-by-adoption, Timoti Teri Puwe, really gets into the heat of the story he is telling, right at my working desk.

Luc was schooled in the Kapsiki orthography developed by the Lutheran Brethren Mission at Mogode and wrote out the tales verbatim from the recorder. With the first half of the tales, Jean Zra made an interlinear translation of the text inside the same cahier, followed by a flowing French rendition of the text, highlighting the specific translation hitches; these turned out to be mostly ideophones. The same holds for the 2008 batch, where I have a *Psikye* text with a running French translation—with the ideophones highlighted, as I had become quite smitten with them. Starting from about halfway through my first fieldwork, my own proficiency in *Psikye* was sufficient to check the translations and to discuss the choices made with the translator himself, Jean Zra. The translation from French into English—and some into Dutch—is my own work, but these languages are culturally close. I read some of the French texts back to my informants, mainly Luc and Jean themselves and occasionally supplemented by Timoti, François (Luc's son), and Marie Kwafashè (Luc's wife); the latter three are good storytellers in their own right. During the reading, they rarely commented on the text itself but were often triggered into telling a variant of the tale.

Kapsiki culture knows no professional storytellers.[25] Public performances of songs and music are smith business, both in terms of praise songs and accompaniment of rituals, as the endogamous group of the *rerhè* ('smith') dominates all specializations and most performances.[26] Tale telling is for everyone, smith and non-smith, and both groups feature proportionally in my list of raconteurs, so there is here what Abrahams calls a 'community of performance.'[27] The 'old stories' are told for an audience, usually a small one in an intimate setting. The classic stage setting is the family, in the early nighttime, when everyone is waiting around the hearth for the cooking to finish.[28] A grandmother or grandfather is often the raconteur.[29] Or girls and boys, sometimes quite young, recount tales to each other sitting around a

small fire in the evening. Both men and women tell stories, but inside the family the grandmothers dominate, regaling their grandchildren with the enchanting stories of *meke*, the ground squirrel, the trickster-hero we will encounter throughout this book. Though women dominate this field, men are also involved, both young and old, especially the grandfathers. The two men to whom this book is dedicated were both grandfathers with a host of grandchildren, and in this phase of my life I can well relate to them.

Fascinated as I had become with the *rhena heca*, I probed for other oral genres as well, especially on my many return visits: riddles, parables, dilemma tales, and proverbs. Historical tales were there, as were the complex of tales about the village founder. The Kapsiki culture has a very specific set of myths about a typical culture hero, Hwempetla or Nayekwakedè, a set of stories reflected in their initiation and burial rites.[30] But these are never called *rhena heca*. I found many rhetorical figures in Kapsiki speech but very few of the other genres mentioned, such as dilemmas, proverbs, praise texts or dilemma tales.[31] In fact, it is only in the later corpus that some of these have appeared in the tales, mainly the riddles. They typically relate about three stupid brothers doing crazy things: who is the real dummy among them? I consider them, as I shall argue, a new narrative development brought along by increasing outside contact, mainly through schools.[32] In these mountain villages, which have for so long forcefully resisted Fulbe domination, Qur'anic schooling—the other major influence in the larger region—is not yet a factor.[33] In Kapsiki oral culture the classic folktales still dominate, and we shall see how these cluster around a well-established core of trickster tales.

As inter-generational comparison was the aim, Luc was instructed to use informants from the same area, with about the same gender composition and general background; in addition, I told him to focus primarily on the younger generation in order to maximize the generational difference. He started out with the children of the secondary school in Mogode and then branched out, involving also older narrators. With the mean age in 1972 being about 40 years[34] and that in 2008 being 28 years, the recording interval of 36 years amounts to a time separation in Kapsiki storytellers of a full two generations. What follows, therefore, is the comparison of two sets of folktales from the same culture, collected in the same village by the same researchers (though a wee bit older …) in the same way, a controlled comparison over a significant time span that is rare in folklore studies—and in anthropology, for that matter—all in order to assess the dynamics of change and continuity in folktales.

Performance

From the start in 1972 I was struck by one feature of African tale telling that many have already commented upon: the wealth of ideophones.[35] Telling a tale is not just producing a text; it is a performance, 'poetry in ordinary language' in Evans-Pritchard's appreciative terms.[36] And if one linguistic feature is directly related to performance it is the ideophone. As most African languages, *Psikye* is rich in these evocative sounds, which usually accompany and depict an action, sound or inner state.[37] Leaving the house is a particular sound, as are footsteps on a long road, or the arrival at a house. The actions of teetering, hesitating, running water, speaking through the nose, and even walking while being angry—all have their proper ideophone; and thus the tale becomes an event, telling the story becomes a performance, and listening implies participation. Tales about history also feature ideophones, and my first encounter with this phenomenon was during a tale about the last 'war,' the skirmish between Mogode and the neighboring village of Sirakouti. The raconteur, my late social father Timoti Teri Puwe, was a master of this verbal art; and during his performance I could hear the arrows fly—*fwfwfwe*—the sound of the bowstrings—*ptash*—and of course the screeching of the victims. One of the latter, present in the audience, who survived a hit, even showed off his scars—the dedication photo is a small testimony to Kapsiki culture memory and Timoti's telling prowess.[38]

But the field where ideophones really flourish is in the folktales, where any action of the hero, be it the clever trickster Squirrel or the dumb Leopard, is highlighted with an appropriate ideophone. Of course, the better performers use all these words, but less experienced ones also quickly rely on these descriptive sounds to enliven their tales. I did not make a systemic comparison between the use of ideophones before a live audience and in the setting with just Luc-cum-Uher, but my impression is that it makes little difference. Luc and Jean both explained to me that ideophones are simply part of the telling of the tale. The setting seems to have little influence on the linguistic acumen of the tellers; they clearly associate telling a tale with the use of ideophones, whether the audience is a group of people or one person with a recorder. A tale without ideophones is not a proper *rhena heca*, and as we shall see they also function in retention of the tale. When I went for the second round of tale collecting, I expected this wealth to have diminished; but that proved not to be the case: the ideophones have remained, if anything even more pronounced than in the past. As I aimed at younger narrators, I recorded quite a few children telling tales to other children, and many of these young tellers of tales used

ideophones quite expertly and to full dramatic effect. For youngsters the private recording seemed a ready setting to hone their narrating skills by inserting ideophones wherever they could. From their school they know quite a few tales that found their way into school primers,[39] tales that do mention some ideophones, though not as extensively. So for them, the use of ideophones has become indexical for the folk tale as a genre, a marker of authenticity that also should be captured both on tape and in actual text.

Thus, this observation on ideophones has a wider bearing than just a form of delightful linguistic creativity in African languages,[40] as it also points to a fundamental issue: the rendering in text of an oral performance. Much more is at stake in the seemingly simple task of 'writing down' stories, as Ruth Finnegan points out: "Writing is actually a somewhat awkward medium for representing multimodal performance, and series of steps are needed for spoken performance to become trans-formed into written display."[41] The capturing of oral performances in a recorder, writing in the vernacular, and then translating involve a threefold filter for the performance to become text, each filter usually applied by different persons: the narrator, the recorder, the one who knows how to write the vernacular—pretty scarce in Kapsiki—and then translators from *Psikye* to French and from French to Dutch or English. Recent performance studies have pointed out that our preconceptions as researchers of what constitutes orality and text do influence our role as co-producers of text-from-orality.[42] This point was brought home to me by these very ideophones: first, they can never have the same self-evidence and colorful descriptive power in text as they have in performance; and second, the audience itself is omitted. Audiences react to a tale during a performance, especially to well-performed ideophones, with grunts, exclamations, or just nodding.[43] But for the comparison undertaken here—the comparison over time of the texts—this gentle disregard of the performance element is the same in both sets of folktales, so it does not affect the comparison. Crucial here is the fact that the team has remained the same, so the filtering by the various stages is more or less stable.

Remains the issue how to render ideophones in text, a problem in two layers. The first question is what exactly they mean, a thorny question as they highly depend on context, and their denotation has fuzzy boundaries. Some scholars consider them practically untranslatable, even treating them as 'paralinguistic' features.[44] For most linguists, however, that seems overly exotic, as after all ideophones are words and do follow the phonological and to some extent also the syntactical rules of the host language.[45]

A one-on-one translation is indeed impossible—but that holds for many other lexemes as well—and deciphering their meaning may be hard, yet finding out their range of meaning is well possible with standard linguistic techniques.[46] Now, how do I render them in this text? In our written account I have chosen to insert a selection of ideophones in their *Psikye* form with a short explanation of what they mean in this context, in fact the meaning given by my assistants, the 'folk definition.' This practice has a slight adverse effect, as it may render the text less flowing, halting to highlight a strange word, whereas for a native listener the ideophone is an integral part of the spoken word, not a stop-and-go. We have to live with this difference, as leaving them out would be worse, and our aim is to evoke a tale, not to elaborate on all shades of meaning.

Another problem I encountered in the tales is the Kapsiki proclivity for indirect storytelling: a story is told mainly through quick dialogue between the actors. In the performance, the better raconteurs changed voices just a little and, in any case, never stipulated who was talking, Squirrel or Leopard, Death or his wife. In the written form the tone of the voice is muted, of course, but to some extent this type of information reappears in another layer of a written text: punctuation. When going through the translations I often had to consult with Jean Zra about who was speaking at a particular instant, simply to get the punctuation right, because that is what separates speakers in text. When editing a plain text to one with punctuation, one realizes how much information this simple convention carries.

In addition, the stories were my first introduction to what the people from Mogode proudly call *rhenaNgwedu*, 'Mogode talk,' a speech style full of hyperboles, allusions, wordplays, and 'double entendre.' Political meetings are full of these style figures. The first texts from a public gathering that I collected were a great challenge: after translation I could follow what was said, but had absolutely no idea what they were talking about. Little did I know that when the chief of Mogode was referring to 'the war,' he was not alluding to the Fulbe war in the past, nor to recent skirmishes with neighboring Sirakouti, but to the more mundane fact that the poll tax would be collected next month. When speaking in public, one should be understood only by those 'in the know.' These public speaking codes are different, though, from the verbal frolics of the *rhena heca*, where the meaning of the words is more straightforward. Some *rhenaNgwedu* did surface in the dialogues of the proponents of the folktales, but then mainly when the old men told the tales. Thus, they seemed not only to add to

their own prestige as narrators, but defined themselves as *za*, a real adult man. But for the rest in the *rhena heca*, the clarity of the story should not be diminished by linguistic prowess but enhanced by it, by imitating the sounds of the action. Indeed, my assistants continually referred to 'ideophones' as 'action sounds,' even if their range is in fact much wider than that. Essentially, a folktale in Kapsiki is subtitled in ideophones.

All in all, the close friendship with my assistants has been crucial in the collection of both the 1972 and 2008 samples, and thus the French collection of tales[47] is dedicated to Jean Zra Fama, without whom I could never have grasped something of the narrative dynamics of the *rhena heca*. Luc did already receive 'his own book.'[48] This present volume is dedicated to the two great narrators, my social father Timoti Teri Puwe and Tlimu Vandu Zraté, friend and son of a friend, a male nurse at the dispensary. The picture in the dedication page features Timoti telling the story of Hwempetla; the picture below shows Tlimu distributing the food of a family sacrifice among some of his numerous children.[49] Even in an activity dominated by very able women storytellers, these two stood out as exceptional performers (Fig. 1.2).

Fig. 1.2 Tlimu during a home sacrifice, with a small part of his family

Modalities of Comparison

So my first collection of texts came about as a contingency of my research history. I used the texts as most anthropologists do, mainly as an illustration of my ethnographic material; especially in the complex field of marriage relations, these tales highlight male–female relationships, some of them veritable gems of the inter-gender battlefield. This is well known in many cultures,[50] but I found a lot more in the texts. In the folktales, I encountered several of the themes crucial in the Hwempetla tales, mentioned above. Examples are a wager with Death, a hot pursuit by Death, and the encounters and arrangements with Rain—all relevant to the cyclic rites in the Kapsiki ritual calendar. Still, as noted, the Kapsiki make a clear distinction between folktales and what they consider history: the first are called *rhena heca*, tales of old; the second, historical stories, are indicated as the story of so-and-so, and thus the founding myth of Mogode is simply called *rhena ta Hwempetla*, the story of Hwempetla, the culture hero of the village. I consider this story a myth, and the relation between the two, myth and folktale, is intricate. Despite the emic differentiation, we will encounter many joint motifs and 'fabula' between Hwempetla stories and several of the trickster stories.[51]

In both instances, it was not my aim to record as many versions as possible, as is usually done in folklore studies.[52] My aim was to have at least one version of each type of folktale, each 'fabula'; and if another one was recorded, that was welcome but not what I aimed for, either in 1972 or in 2008. The latter set, in particular, was collected with the focus on retention of tale types as such, so Luc tried to avoid repetition and variety in versions, aiming at one full version per tale type. Nevertheless, for some tales he did collect several versions, as he was not always sure whether he had a version already; and he also wanted to supplement incomplete stories or to unravel stories that mixed the storylines of different tales, as occasionally happened. These doubles also gave me some insight into the present popularity of a tale. Viewing the aim of the second collection, the focus is not on the gifted and experienced raconteurs but on average storytellers, and evidently some were better at it than others. This is a study in retention and in cultural continuity, not in oral 'literature'—a difficult concept anyway.[53]

A thorny but absolutely crucial issue is what constitutes one 'tale' or one 'type.' The encyclopedic thrust of folklore hinges on the ability to separate tales that are 'the same type' from those belonging to different

'types,' and the same holds for motifs. And while the difference between 'type' and 'motif' is usually construed as 'whole story' versus 'narrative details,' the line is blurred: "A clear distinction between motif and type is not possible because the boundaries are not distinct";[54] for Uther, this intellectual construct is simply a pragmatic tool. Some motifs, as we shall see, appear in different stories, just as similar tales can host different motifs. But the major question for my project is when we should count tales as similar and when as different, because this was what we set out to do in collecting our stories, aiming at 'different stories.' The encyclopedia meets this challenge in a pragmatic way by looking at the stories and seeing how they arrange themselves, forming patterns with variations.[55] And to a considerable extent that inductive strategy works, albeit with ramifications per type; it seems that the narrative logic, the 'fabula' as narratology calls it,[56] has both a creative and a restrictive dynamic. I solved the question in an emic way: for the collection of Kapsiki tales it was Luc who made this selection, as he decided what was a new story and which one he 'had' already. This is not a very systematic choice but a fully 'emic' one, based upon Kapsiki notions of what constitutes a folktale type—in Kapsiki. In 2008 we went through all the tales together, and he indicated what 2008 tales were represented in the 1972 batch, an exercise that taught me how he looked at it. In the process of writing, I had to do this exercise again, to check and supplement, but I found few instances where his judgment differed from mine. This inductive way of delineating one's subject matter appears to work against all epistemological odds.

The two sets of tales each represent a sample of the tales that circulated in the area at that particular time, and in both cases there is no certain way to establish how saturated these samples are. In both cases we have sampled as many tales as Luc could find. Considering the dense network of connections in this society, the deep involvement of my two assistants in their home community of Mogode, and the length of the search for new tales, there is every reason to suppose that both samples represent a valid and reliable mirror of the corpus of tales circulating in the area at those times.

Analysis of the two sets of tales is conducted at several levels. First, the tales are grouped into four genres, following the indications of my two assistants, who at the end of the two collection periods considered themselves local experts on the *rhena heca*, and with good reason. Luc and Jean quickly agreed to this division, and I think the subsequent analysis does bear them out. Then, zooming in on each of these genres, I analyzed the

content and narratological structure of these tales, to view the dominant types and to see whether the transmission of tales affects their deep structure. As the fabula varies with the type of tale, a shift in type could also mean a shift in narratological structure.

Then my second theoretical notion is addressed: the complex relationship between the tales and social reality.[57] In what measure are the stories informed by endemic tensions and contradictions and by the historical pathways of change in this culture? Do we find echoes in the tales of old events; do the ripples of a changing society wash ashore in tales? For instance, one crucial change in Kapsiki society is the decreasing infant mortality and the increase in the stability of marital unions.[58] Another dynamic is the special position of the blacksmith, which occasionally finds expression in the tales, often as a mechanism for deception or in uncovering a ruse, and which has undergone considerable change.[59] How do the tales relate to such social dynamics within Kapsiki society?

Third, the symbolic order in the tales is part of the Kapsiki cultural grid.[60] Crucial are the symbols of evil, for if tales set the scene for anything in particular, it is the perennial struggle between good and evil, in its many forms and incarnations.[61] Death—a deity in Kapsiki religion—harmful spirits, and the many faceless and formless monsters that populate the stories, with all their transformations into human forms, offer a window on this enduring fascination of folktales.[62] What is interesting is whether witchcraft, which was never a major focus of Kapsiki cosmology, has gained in importance during the last two generations. Other symbols may also shift. As Mary Douglas has shown,[63] the body serves as the first repository of symbolism, and—though not at all to be interpreted in a Freudian fashion—sexual as well as anal symbols are ubiquitous; and changes in that symbolic focus are to be expected, independent of structural changes.[64] Quite African, I think, are the sweet symbols in Africa, the honey, of course, but also the sugared finger.[65]

Fourth, the major actors of the tales are animals, both in the 1972 and 2008 tales, the principal ones being Squirrel and Leopard as the protagonists in the eternal battle between the clever weak one and the dumb brute, with Tortoise and Hyena serving as 'understudies' for either role. How did these characters fare in the last four decades? Are there shifts in their characters, and are new understudies coming in? What happens if old Squirrel meets new Pigeon in tales? Is there an ecological reason for a change in the animal population of the tales?

As noted, tales are not ethnic-specific, so they have to be related to the diffusion of tales throughout the wider area. The 1972 and 2008 configurations of Kapsiki tales will thus be examined against the background of tales known in the Mandara Mountains, the wider Mega-Chad area and to some extent the larger West African region, in order to glean where the new tales came in from and what the dynamics of specificity are of the Kapsiki corpus, if any ethnic specificity is to be found at all. The core area of this comparison, the Mandara Mountains, forms a veritable hothouse of linguistic variation. Straddling the border between Nigeria and Cameroon some 250 km south of the border of Lake Chad, the Mountains house a host of languages, 65 in total, of which 22 are in Nigeria and 43 in Cameroon. For such a relatively small area, some 200 km×100 km, this correlates with a tremendous cultural diversity as well, and thus the Mountains offer a choice testing ground for this kind of intercultural comparison. The map below gives the location of the Kapsiki/Higi habitat, who form one of the larger groups in the Mountains, with their immediate neighbors (Fig. 1.3). So I will supplement an intensive comparison over time with a limited comparison in space, as an exercise in internal 'globalization' of oral culture in Africa.

My analysis of change versus stability in the two sets of tales, then leads to an attempt toward explanation. What factors may enhance or prohibit the transmission of the tales; and what processes may render the tales either fleeting or enduring? These factors reside in both the ecological fit of the tales—the way they are embedded in local culture—but also, for a major part, in some specific characteristics of the tales themselves. What makes for a tale-to-remember? Here we look at the internal narratological structures of the tales, using a new approach from cognitive studies that zooms in on the specific characteristics of both the principal players in the role and the specific twists in the plot. Research on so-called minimally counterintuitive concepts has been growing fast in the last decade,[66] and I aim to show that these studies offer an important key to help us understand why some tales are so robust, and why others may fade away.

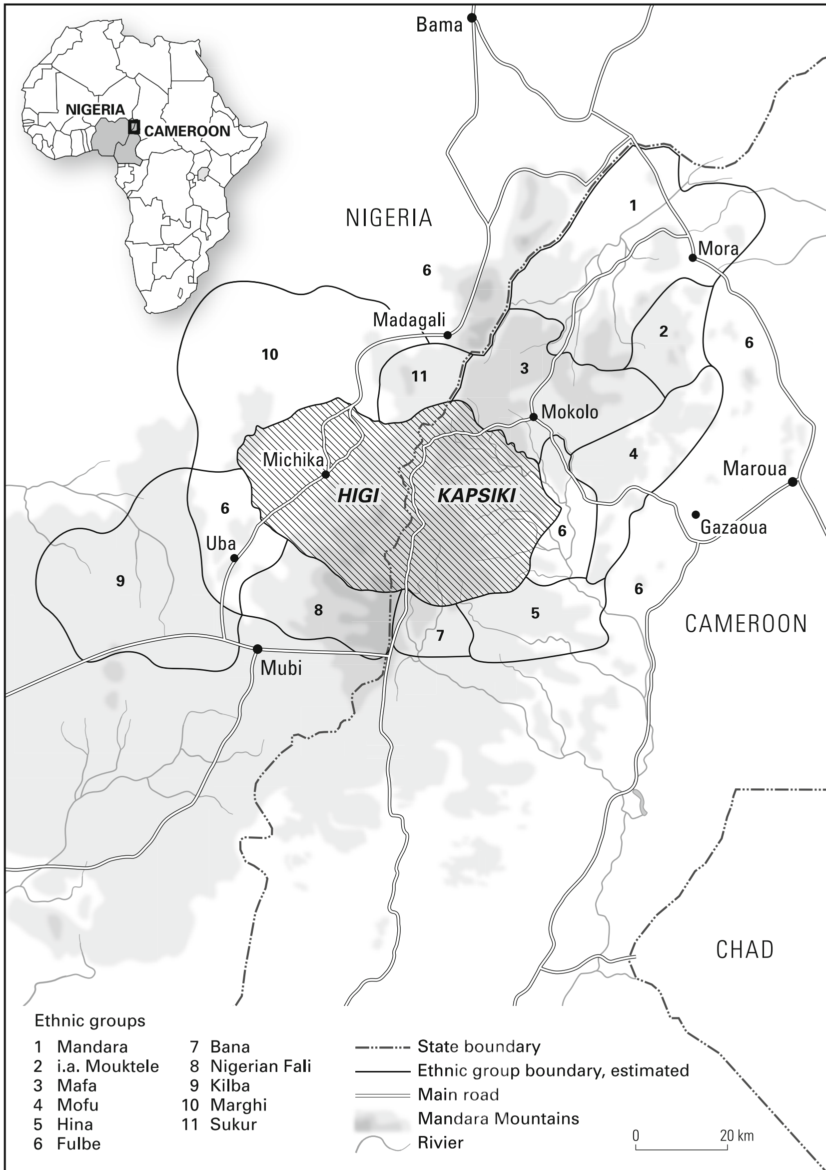

Fig. 1.3 Map of the Kapsiki area (The map was made by Nel de Vink)

Notes

1. Dundes (1989: 64). The author thanks Jurjen van der Kooi, Daniella Merolla and the peer reviewer for their valuable insights and commentaries on the text. Christian Seignobos had the good grace to contribute a drawing to the book; Carel van Wijk helped with the statistics; and Nel de Vink made the map of the Kapsiki area.
2. Uther (2004), the source of the ATU classification of types, and Stith Thompson (1955–58), the encyclopedia of motifs. For Africa, Clipple (1932), Clarke (1958), Lambrecht (1967), Arewa (1980), Lee (1982) and Haring (1982) have neither claimed nor attained similar prominence; but the ATU and Thompson intend to have a global reach in any case, even if Eurasian tales are still dominant.
3. Ranke and Baumann (1977 …) Important in this respect is the series *Die Märchen der Weltliteratur*, for West Africa especially Schild (1977) and Jungraithmayr (1980).
4. Cited in Fludernik (1996: 31).
5. Dundes (1992: viii).
6. At least in the historical–geographical school, Dundes (1989: 64).
7. Dundes (1989: 70).
8. Van Baal and Van Beek (1985: 58–63, 95–101).
9. See Holy (1987, 6, 7) and Parkin 1987. Comparison for functional equivalents did remain on the agenda, however, but without historical implications; ibid. 9, 15, see Fox and Gingrich (2002).
10. The more realistic American culture area school did the same at a regional level, Fox (2002: 170).
11. Dundes (1969: 403).
12. Sometimes they do disappear of course, as in the case of the Bleek/Lloyd collection (Schmidt 1996).
13. Like 'photocopier folklore' (Dundes and Pagter 2000) or new narrative tales (Kelly-Romano 2006). But also in the realm of the more traditional 'fairy tales' our present age seems richer than the past, not poorer.
14. Uther (2004: 9) and Van der Kooi (1986); see for a case study on one canonical fairy tale (Zipes 1983a).
15. Van der Kooi, personal communication.
16. Van der Kooi (1986); they reappear especially when they become canonical in our media age, Dundes (2006). However, that cannot mean that all fairy tales, even when one restricts oneself to the European legacy, are only of literate origin, as Bottigheimer (2009) would have. For African folktales this would not hold at all, as the first interactions of oral transmission with written sources are just starting.

17. The field of ethnobotany harbors a similar discussion: is the folk knowledge of the plant environment dwindling? Some major studies report the body of knowledge as fairly robust, while others look for its vulnerability; see Shenton et al. (2011).
18. A major trend in the study of African folklore is the link from orality toward literature, not the other way round (Baumgardt 2000, 2005, 2008; Finnegan 2003, 1970, Barber 2007).
19. The many studies on oral tradition in Africa have been crucial, especially the considerable attention given to the Sunjata epic (Jansen 2000) as well as to tradition as an epistemic notion (Boyer 1990).
20. A fascinating example is Dundes' study on German national character (Dundes 1984); it is quite hotly debated for the conclusions he arrives at, for his Freudian slant, and for the very notion of national character.
21. See, for a discussion, Möhlig et al. (1988) and Schott (1988); for an elaborate example, Kosack (2001); and for South Africa, Canonici (1989). Even jurists are involved here, Shylov (2008).
22. For a critique on ethnic specificity in folktales, see Fardon (1987).
23. This is a running debate in the studies of myth; for splendid examples of modern myth-making, see Kelly-Romano (2006) and Roberts (1999).
24. See Dundes (1989).
25. Thus an ordering by a storyteller would have little relevance, cf. Calame-Griaule (2002).
26. Van Beek (2012).
27. Abrahams (1983: 6).
28. The Kapsiki do not have a type of tales just for restricted audiences, as the Tjokossi have (Calame-Griaule et al. 1984: 209).
29. Godula Kosack considers storytelling an almost exclusively female domain, and in her research consulted hardly any male storytellers, one reason why she could write the volume for her Habilitation (full professorship) (Kosack 2001) on the definition of femininity in Mafa, using folktales as the main source. I found many male raconteurs, the best of whom are mentioned at the beginning of this book. This difference might well have more to do with the gender of the researcher-cum-assistant—both female in Kosack's case, both male in mine—than with any significant difference between Mafa and Kapsiki cultures. Sorin-Barreteau also found both genders as informants (2001), as did Eguchi (1978–84), Noye (1999), and Zwaal (2003), all working in the same region. See also Mugambi and Allan (2010).
30. See Van Beek (2012). The dedication picture shows Timoti telling this foundation myth of the village of Mogode. The presence of my recorder in no way detracts from his performance.

31. Cf. Abrahams (1983).
32. See Moore (2000).
33. Moore (2012, 2013).
34. These are of course estimates, as anyone with knowledge of Africa realizes: ages are always approximate in Africa, or, as Luc and Jean put it when speaking about age: "*Seulement les blancs comptent tout.*"
35. See Blench (2010), Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz (2001) and Dingemanse (2011a, 2012) for a global overview of this fascinating phenomenon, which is much more ubiquitous than its relative marginalization in linguistic handbooks would suggest, Tedlock (2000:118).
36. Evans-Pritchard (1962: 145). This fascination with aesthetics has remained, see Dingemanse (2011b).
37. Or for that matter for Kapsiki terms for smell, Van Beek (1992, 2010).
38. The picture also conveys the nonlinguistic side of telling tales—gestures—see Dingemanse (2013), an issue I will take up in the last chapter.
39. These tales were well known by my assistants, and were not included in both samples of 1972 and 2008.
40. Not only African, but the phenomenon has been 'discovered' more or less in African languages, and then recognized in other language families, Dingemanse (2012: 666).
41. Finnegan (2007: 159). In Africanist studies a shift has been observed from text to performance, focusing on storytelling, which Dundes finds laudable as long as the text itself is not neglected (Dundes 1992: xv).
42. Bauman (2004).
43. Yeboa-Dankwa (1992).
44. As "they cannot be translated into ordinary lexical items in non-African languages" Teilanyo (2001: 227). The same problem holds, by the way, for translation into other African languages.
45. Newman (2001) and Dingemanse (2011a). For instance, they habitually show up after a verb or at the end of a sentence. See also Amha (2010) for a treatment of ideophones as complex predicates.
46. Samarin (1967, 1970), Newman (2001) and Dingemanse (2012, 2011a).
47. Van Beek and Tourneux (2014).
48. Van Beek (2012) is dedicated to him.
49. By the time of his death in 2009, Tlimu had sired 44 children, 13 of whom had died.
50. See Görög (1981, 1997), Steinbrich (1988) and Kosack (2001).
51. This puts the famous debate between Propp and Lévi-Strauss into perspective. Propp considered folktales as watered-down myths after Christianization (an old idea from Max Müller), while Lévi-Strauss dismissed the historical argument, as both coexist within the same society (Dundes 1997;

Merolla 2006: 125). The latter does hold for the Kapsiki, but here myth and folktale can be considered a part of a continuum, not a dichotomy. See also Hammond-Tooke (1988) for a similar situation.

52. See, for Africa, the work of Eguchi (1978–84) and Addi (2000).
53. Dundes calls it an oxymoron, as literature implies writing or at least reading (Dundes 1992: xv). Yet, the continuity of oral storytelling and literature in the modern sense is clear, with a mutually constructive interaction; see Petersen and Rutherford (1981), but especially the work of Ursula Baumgardt (2000, 2005, 2008).
54. Uther (2004: 10); earlier voiced by Foley (1986).
55. Of course there is a gentle debate on this issue between folklorists, that is, between those that are 'precise' and those that are 'liberal' in this respect; Jurjen van der Kooi, pers. com.
56. Bal (1997).
57. See for this issue Abrahams (1986).
58. Van Beek (1987, 2014).
59. For an in-depth analysis, see Van Beek (2015).
60. For an early inventory of symbols in African tales, see Kriel (1971).
61. See Van Beek and Olson (2015).
62. These monsters are also nameless, but proper names are scarce in Kapsiki tales, which do not play with names as, for instance, the Xhosa do (Mkonto 2009).
63. Douglas (1982).
64. For a comparison: see Schott (2006).
65. Calame-Griaule (1985).
66. See, for instance, Russell and Gobet (2013).

CHAPTER 2

Grouping the Tales

First we tell tales to children.
And surely they are as a whole, false,
though there are true things in them.
Plato, *The Republic*[1]

Dividing the tales into genre groups is a common practice in folklore studies,[2] mainly in order to make a huge mass of tales accessible. Though this holds good for the Kapsiki corpus as well, grouping the tales is more than an expedient of presentation and will prove to be crucial for analytical purposes. The division into genres allows us to see how some types of tales shift more than others, and thus the genre offers a window on the dynamics of storytelling. Most collections of folktales (e.g., those stemming from groups in the immediate vicinity of the Kapsiki) roughly divide their stories into animal tales and human-oriented ones, sometimes distinguishing between man-cum-animal and man-cum-supernatural beings.[3] Zwaal, also for the purpose of comparison, distinguishes between human stories, human/animal stories, and animal fables, which comes close to our fourfold division.[4]

As the genres play a major role in this comparison, the challenge is to ensure that the criteria for grouping are culturally relevant. As stated above, my two assistants were instrumental in dividing the corpus into what they thought were relevant and viable divisions. For them, the protagonists of the tales offered the major handle on how to subdivide the tales, both for

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the old and the new set. Looking at the tales' heroes, they distinguished four types. Animal tales are either (1) Squirrel tales or (2) tales without Squirrel featuring other animals. Tales about humans are either (3) those of humans-plus—that is, humans interacting with non-humans—or (4) those featuring just humans. This last genre also includes tales on one specific 'miracle individual', a subgenre my assistants recognized and one that merits some specific attention.[5] These groups appear to co-vary with major themes, such as (1) trickery and cunning, (2) the properties of the animal world, (3) the uncanny 'other world', and (4) the intricacies of human relations, so they do offer an emic classification of the tales. These themes in concert then provide a picture of the African character of these tales, a topic that will engage us at the end of this chapter. After all, much more theorizing has been done on Eurasian than on African tales, and some systematic contrast between these major continental traditions is illustrative.

Finally, narrative structures appear to co-vary to a significant degree with this fourfold division, an observation that suggests some of the factors informing differential retention and the loss and emergence of this type of cultural heritage, the main topic of the last chapters. Now, let us take a closer look at the four tale groups.

Squirrel Tales

The first genre is very easy to identify, in both sets. The core hero of these tales is the ground squirrel, *meke* in Kapsiki, *Xerus erythropus*, henceforth called Squirrel. This furry little animal is everywhere in the bush, scuttling around, always disappearing rapidly out of sight (Fig. 2.1).

Though it looks cuddly, this footlong scavenger is reputed to have a fierce and dangerous bite, with a high chance of infection.[6] This contrast with his innocent looks may well have earned him his place among the tricksters of Africa, where he plies his trade along with the hare and the spider. In the Mandara Mountains, where peanuts are cultivated as cash crops, squirrels wreak havoc with the harvest. Trickster heroes are, in the words Lévi-Strauss uses for symbols, 'good to think,'[7] meaning they are easy to conceive and embody contrasting messages.

His opponent is Leopard or Panther, the prime predator of the region, formerly much more common than today.[8] In precolonial times slave ransoms were paid in leopard skins, and the early colonizers were called upon with their breach-loading rifles to curb the danger of leopards. Enthusiastic hunting and the increasing human population have reduced the leopard's

Fig. 2.1 The trickster, the ground squirrel (Christian Seignobos was so kind to make this drawing specifically for this book)

numbers, and the predator is now an endangered species. In the religions of the area the leopard is still very much present as a symbol. The chief of Gudur, the prime traditional religious authority of the mountains, is said to send leopards to make sure his authority is heeded, and similar tales abound in other ritually charged villages. Tlukwu, the village to which the epidemics are ritually chased each year,[9] is reputedly full of leopards. The strongest magic is done with the most elusive of his parts, the whiskers. Chopped leopard whiskers are the major magical threat: whoever consumes some of them, as, for example, in a foreign-made beer, will be filled with these whiskers growing inside him, finally exploding as a hairy ball.[10]

In the tales, Leopard is often replaced by Hyena, another favorite in the African big-and-dumb category. In Kapsiki their names are almost the same: the leopard is *derhwava*, while the hyena is *derhwavangwe*, and many a raconteur starts out with Leopard and ends the same tale with Hyena, or vice versa. In the local folklore Hyena carries his own peculiarities. One is that hyenas never die a natural death: they just go on living until they swallow some of their own whiskers—those hairs again.

Other understudies for Leopard are the elephant and the buffalo, but rarely so. Different tricksters are also available, and their relationship with Squirrel is often complicated. An important character is Tortoise—*Geochelone sulcata*, probably the spurred tortoise—who often operates together with Squirrel. Being both aquatic and terrestrial, with its characteristic carapace, it is an easy animal to think with, and in the tales is often even smarter than Squirrel. The third smart one is Pigeon, who is also known to outwit Squirrel if pitted against him, since he is at ease in third dimension as well, air. The burrowing capacities of Squirrel do not fully compensate for this, it seems.

Other animals enter into the tales as well, but in minor roles. The hamerkop called *dambatsaraka* in Kapsiki—*Scopus umbretta*, a bird with its own symbolic power as an inveterate nest builder—features with the monkey, goat, donkey, buzzard, boa, camel, and the ever-present scorpion, the epitome of inflicted pain. The small ones are the smart guys, like mouse, lizard, frog, and also the family of dogs; the large ones are dumb, such as the very occasional lion or warthog; the guinea fowl is the icon of beauty in the tales, admired by all and exploited by Squirrel.[11]

The animal tales, thus, fall into two genres, those with and those without Squirrel, each genre comprising about half of the animal fables. One major difference is that Squirrel tales do not feature humans, while in tales with the other beasts, humans regularly make an appearance. In particular, Leopard sees human actors pass through his doors, such as spouses, in-laws, or treasure hunters, and so does Leopard's double, Hyena. Squirrel tales have an exclusive animal cast and also have a well-developed iconography. For instance, if Squirrel has to find a mount, often in order to disguise himself as a powerful cavalier—meaning a mounted Fulbe warrior in this region—he has his own proper 'horse,' a duiker antelope.[12] And he easily morphs himself into a blacksmith—the trickster among men in Kapsiki—being very much at home in the smithy; interestingly, one of the prime instruments of the smithy, the tongs, are also called *meke*. Just like a human being, Squirrel may consult a diviner, and then he always uses the red ants or ant-lion as divining animals. Whereas the crab is the animal of choice in actual divination in the Mandara Mountains, the stories are full of ants who foretell the future.[13]

This standardized Squirrel outfit provides a clue to why no humans feature in the tales of *meke*: of all animals he himself is the most human. He is so human that when in some tales his own family is mentioned, they seem to be non-squirrel and human, even if humans are never mentioned

as such in Squirrel tales. Squirrel is quintessentially human, and so is his family; not only is he the most tricky and clever, he is also the most deceitful, and often cruel. *Meke* embodies the human condition in Kapsiki, with at its core the constant struggle against a stronger opponent. In order to survive one always has to rely on cleverness—*ntsehwele* in Kapsiki—a crucial notion that embodies the minority position of the Kapsiki against their dominant Fulbe enemies of old. This wiliness is also characteristic of the smiths, the very embodiment of *ntsehwele*.[14] On the other hand, when he is winning, Squirrel is ruthless and cruel. Yet, even his wit has its bounds; when confronted with Pigeon or Tortoise, these others may carry the day. Squirrel has a standard household, with two wives who carry no names. As such, they are pitted against the household of Leopard/Hyena, with just one wife, who does have a proper name: Kwerukweru, a short reduplication of the name of Kwarumba, third daughter. She is as dumb as her husband, despite her name—the third child is considered to be usually clever in Kapsiki.

For Squirrel all other animals are family, under the very generous rubric of *kwesegwe*, which means cross-cousin as well as uncle and nephew (mother's brother and sister's son respectively). In the tales, I have translated it as 'cousin' (though in other publications the French term *oncle* is used), but the term indicates any relationship based on a brother–sister bond somewhere in the chain. The opposite terms are 'brother,' meaning lineage member, and *mekwe*, in-law. These terms, also classificatory, indicate a link between clan-brothers and one between husband and spouse respectively, rounding off the three major bonds in the Kapsiki kinship system. In other animal tales, these kinship terms are far less used, underscoring the very human nature of Squirrel and his exploits.

Elephants form the revered bride wealth for Squirrel's bride, and his in-laws are highly significant others, such as Rain and Death, both near-deities in the Kapsiki pantheon.[15] This is the final element that sets off *meke* tales from all other stories, as several dominant motifs in *meke* tales echo the exploits of the culture hero Hwempetla: wagers with Death or Rain that he could hide or flee from these formidable opponents;[16] stealing cattle and leaving horns and head above the ground; flying through the air to escape from Death—all motifs essential in the main mythic charter of the village. So Squirrel tales are very close to the main mythical corpus of the Kapsiki.[17] For that matter, the reverse also holds: the culture hero features as a trickster in the mythical history of the village, which gives the tales also a historical and political referent.[18]

Tales of Other Animals

The non-Squirrel animal tales, the second genre, are about as numerous as the Squirrel tales but more polymorphous. They usually conform to the clever–dumb interaction but without the elaborate set-up Squirrel uses to trick his opponents. The weak ones use inherent and very visible bodily characteristics, such as the large testes and the horns of the billy goat, the scorpion's sting, and the loud voice of the donkey. Tortoise is the cleverest and uses his aquatic skills for survival against his powerful adversaries.

These other animals interact with humans, or rather humans with them, and most often the humans by their own stupidity or greed get themselves into trouble. Frequently, the humans are saved by other animals, often by small ones, or by a blacksmith. Redeeming animals are of several kinds, but the humble servants such as the donkey, the goat, and the dog are the most important. In all non-Squirrel tales the animals exhibit some of their actual qualities, playing a role for which they are well cast, easily understood by the audience and as close to real life as the story allows. Of course, the animals are mainly human-like actors that are very understandable and endearingly recognizable. The dumb brute Leopard, strong but gullible and dangerous but deflectable, would be rather one-dimensional were it not for the fact that he is after all still somewhat 'leopardesque': he craves meat; he has a wife who is smarter and more practical than he is—seldom children though—and he hunts. And if the mother of Leopard dies, her fur makes a splendid baby sling! It is this combination of one-dimensional humanness with well-known animal characteristics that gives the animal characters their proper dynamics.

What goes for Leopard also holds for the other animals. Hyena is another stereotypical, stupid bully; but, true to actuality, he lacks the outward splendor of Leopard. No sling is made out of his hide and he never features as a splendid husband for a proud bride. Tortoise is an animal whose box-like looks can be used either as a drummer—they are their own drums, one could say—or as a money box. But before anything else he exhibits a clever defense against his vulnerability, and thus exhibits cleverness—*ntsehwele*, the central Kapsiki value—in his encounters with external powers.[19] His shape hides well his ability to swim, so in many tales he escapes from Hyena/Leopard by insisting that he be drowned in a large body of water. And when Elephant dries the pond, Tortoise easily enters inside the huge beast, making Elephant's life miserable.

The figure of Elephant is large, bulky, not overly smart, but not dangerous either—the Big Friendly Giant, one could say. His exploits to help Hyena/Leopard catch Tortoise invariably fail—he is too ticklish in his stomach—and for the rest of the time he is just large, a great weight on a rock, and the ultimate bride wealth for a supernatural father-in-law, a sort of super-cow. The other animals share this aspect of very human actors with selected animal characteristics. Porcupine can shoot his quills as arrows; monkeys live in groups and are clever; the billy goat has indeed huge testicles; and anyone who has really heard a donkey will never forget it.

Birds may consider themselves of another category in a tale, being people of 'heaven,' but then they are chastised and brought down. They are portrayed as inveterate frog-eaters, such as Hamerkop and Toucan, who go through great suffering to get their meal—but that is not unusual. What is special is their association with magic: Toucan is the great sorcerer, a quality matched by Termite, who provides a new penis for those in need of one (Termite, however, features only in the 1972 set of tales).[20] Sometimes a bird is unnamed, and that is where the most powerful magic resides: quite a few tales speak about a bird who knows secrets, who produces miracle objects—like the miraculous horn that features in a key story—and who, by having himself be eaten, helps out a woman. Birds feature in genre 4, meaning they interact more frequently with humans than other animals, a situation reflective of actual life.

So birds fly and have sharp eyes, viewing the whole world from above; Vulture loves carrion; Frog croaks in the tales; Swine uproots the soil; Scorpion stings; Snake bites; and Owl utters incomprehensible profundities. As a counterpoint, however, some animals act completely out of character: a wrestling Termite is a definite surprise, as is the wrestling prowess of Lizard, though in the latter case the tail seems to explain his proficiency in flooring opponents.

Humans-Plus

The third genre of tales comprises those about humans interacting with supernatural elements. Often this presence of the 'other world' is more hinted at than described, a 'Something,' a 'Thing,' or an undefined monster, all of them residing in or originating from the bush. These weird presences may be close to animals, such as a bird that does miracles, but are then reduced to an object—a horn, a beak, a walking stick—all endowed with the magical properties of their former owner. The lack of form of these 'things'

proves to be an asset in the tales, as they can transform into whatever they need to be in order to catch their human victims: into a tree, a river, a rock. Their very lack of form serves as the main symbol for nonhuman characteristics: they are nothing in particular, without form or relationship, the ultimate contrast with the bounded existence of human beings. Death plays its part as well in these tales, often disguised as 'something entering the village.' The large dangerous animals, like Leopard and Hyena, may take their part in the story and form traps which humans gullibly fall into. A considerable number of tales relate stories of girls marrying Leopard-husbands, who wooed in disguise and now abuse their human wives.

One dominant theme is eating: the strange thing eats everything, and famine reigns among men.[21] Crucial is the notion of strange women entering the village, enticing youngsters into marriage who then discover they have married the wife of Death and will be eaten. The Kapsiki marriage system is replete with incoming women, aspiring to find a husband in 'secondary marriages,'[22] so women who are relatively unknown enter the village as a common feature of everyday life. Who are these women? In many other African cultures, these women turn out to be witches, but Kapsiki society is not witch-ridden, and here the tales portray the women as part of Death, even more direct as a threat and at least as cannibalistic.

The dominant emotion in these tales is fear, the deep and abiding horror recoiling from an encounter with the ultimate nonhuman presence. Fear in Kapsiki tales is expressed by excrement, by defecation running wild, and then by running away from the results. Feces form an important symbol of norm transgression, such as when a mother-in-law fills her son-in-law's house with her excrement; and in the tales excrement never loses its connection with its original owner: the defecated mess often sings her songs and thus saves her, or smells great and distracts the evil pursuers who simply must stop and taste it. Kapsiki raconteurs, especially the younger ones among them (well represented in the second set of tales), love to dwell upon the songs sung by the trembling feces of fleeing women.

Trees play an important role in these tales, as symbols of the bush and, as such, of force and wisdom, but also of danger.[23] Abducted children live in trees; people hide from animals in trees; and feces in trees sings even better than on the ground. The baobab offers the favorite branches for rescue, a tree that is well suited for special symbolism. After all, *Adansonia digitata* is different from all other trees because of its specific shape—its branches reach out in all directions—but mainly because of its lack of wood. Baobab stems consist only of bark, without any hardwood, like a

human without a spine, and they can also morph into other items. In the vicinity of houses, fruit trees are important, as givers of plenty and so as repositories of wealth; and though baobab fruits are eaten and appreciated, they are never counted among such fruit trees.

Just Humans

The last genre, tales about humans only, is the largest. Here the characters follow the usual patterns in society. One persistent motif is that of the three brothers going on a quest in a strange country—which in Kapsiki means another village, their geographical range being limited, at least in tales. The oldest two are the dumb ones, falling into every conceivable trap; while the youngest warns them in advance, is never listened to, and then has to save them with a major effort. Girls in these tales are not very clever either, marrying the wrong type of guy—like Death or Leopard in the preceding genre—or engaging in commerce on the road in such a way that they end up empty-handed.

Marital relations abound in these stories. A dominant theme is the common one in polygynous societies: the difference between the *kwajuni* (the loved wife) and the *kwazerema* (the unloved wife). As narrative logic would have it, the pampered, loved wife does not have the well-being of her husband at heart, while the self-sacrificing *kwazerema* in the end redeems her husband, is taken into his loving embrace, and gets full access to his filled meat bowl (Fig. 2.2). Different sons of the same father are rivals, and the sons of unloved wives occupy the position of the third son, the clever one. This theme is reflected in the story of the culture hero Hwempetla, who is also the first son of a *kwazerema*. Some heroes in the fourth genre are named and routinely originate from unloved mothers, fully redeeming their mothers through their exploits. The theme can also be collective, such as when a group of older wives acts against a newly-wed young and beautiful one, who then in the nick of time is saved by the husband. A remarkable theme in marital relations is that of distrust between husband and wife, a theme that reverberates through the actual marital histories of both men and women. It shows up in the tales in various ways. Distrust because of adultery is one way; distrust because of competition between partners another. But even without these norm transgressions, husband and wife may enter a fierce wager, without any evident reason.

The theme of infertility also pervades many of the tales, just as it turns up in divination séances throughout the region.[24] Infertility in Kapsiki society

Fig. 2.2 Joseph Zra Mpa with his three wives, cultivating in front of their home

is considered an illness that can have many forms and sources: infractions of taboo, wrongly conducted burials, ruptured relations, the whims of the supernatural world. The latter reason is dominant in the tales, as the actors in them have a limited agency; in these tales, people are fully dependent on external causes, often directly related to 'god.' The notion of god is complicated in Kapsiki religion[25] and should not be equated too easily with the Christian or Muslim deity, as it has a much more personal ring to it: one's god is a very intimate, personal relationship with the 'other world', in some ways reminiscent of the notion of destiny that reigns in other West African religions. Still, the main message is one of piety and dependency, which is fully consonant with the dominant external religions. In many ways, these tales are a reflection of Christian and Muslim influence in their strict dependency on the supernatural world, even if the rest of the story unfolds according to more traditional schemata.

A final societal tension sounding through the tales is the competition between father and son. This kind of competition in the stories is limited to chiefdoms, the older chief not wanting to cede to his son's claims, and

in the tales appears as a competition over women. Especially supernaturally acquired brides—often the direct gift of god in a sterility case—kindle the jealousy of the older man against his princely son, and then the tale tells about the way the scales are redressed toward normality, with the son succeeding his own father, often after killing him. The Mandara Mountains are not a classic region of regicide,[26] and the Kapsiki are too much of an acephalous society to delve into these kinds of succession struggles; so they content themselves with tales of that most precious of all commodities: young, beautiful, and therefore presumably fertile wives.

Nevertheless, despite the pervading notion of male equality, the concept of chieftainship is no stranger to this society. For the Kapsiki, however, the important chiefs are elsewhere, outside their area; so whenever an important chief is mentioned, he is often a chief of one of the mythic and ritually important places—either Gudur or Sukur. Gudur is the central place of origin for most of the groups that populate these mountains, as more than half of the groups in their tales of origin trace their provenance from this chiefdom. This is the chief, already mentioned above, that commands the leopards.

Sukur has a very different status, as the main center for iron production in precolonial times, a crucial economic advantage that made Sukur, a large independent village, into a nexus of ritual relations. Most of the blacksmith families in the Kapsiki/Higi area trace their provenance from Sukur. So, whenever an important chief is mentioned, it is one of these two, without making a distinction between their sources of power.

This fourth genre, humans interacting among themselves, also features tales of a specific hero. A small set of tales has a named hero as its main actor, Ngemburu or Njamburu in Kapsiki, or Yamere in the Higi part of the group. The Fulbe of the area call him Haman Dèftèrè.[27] These tales are more numerous in the 2008 set than in the 1972 one and follow the narrative patterns of the other tales, but here the main actors are endowed with more agency, more mystical power. Without resorting to tricks and less dependent on supernatural aides, these heroes rule in their own realm, bending the power structures to their incidental aims. Even more so than the majority of this fourth group of tales, these stories are highly moral, with the named heroes in the role of judge, jury and hangman, punishing severely the culprit power figures who try to do them harm. Named heroes are on the side of angels and are thus farthest removed from our first and foremost protagonist of the Kapsiki tales, Squirrel. With these heroes the ambivalence that *meke* embodies is fully resolved into a clear opposition of good and evil, a dynamic that will occupy us later.

African Tales

What is African about these tales and what is specifically Kapsiki? The group I call Kapsiki in this book lives on both sides of the border between Cameroon and Nigeria, some 300 km south of Lake Chad. In Nigeria they are called Higi, in Cameroon Kapsiki, and I use only the latter name to avoid repeating 'Kapsiki/Higi', which would be technically correct. Numbering close to 150,000 people, the majority in Nigeria, they live in the rugged volcanic range of the Mandara Mountains as one of many similar groups. These mountains are home to no less than 65 languages—22 in Nigeria, 43 in Cameroon—a veritable hothouse of linguistic diversity, the majority classified as Chadic languages, part of the Afro-Asiatic family. The Kapsiki/Higi language, also Chadic, is called *Psikye/Kamwe* and counts no less than 11 dialects, four of them in Cameroon. The tales are told in *Psikye*, one of the Cameroonian dialects. As the mountains house a patchwork of related montagnard cultures, I will compare the Kapsiki tales specifically with those of two neighboring groups, the Mafa and the Mofu-Gudur.

In between the Kapsiki villages, the Fulbe pastoralists tend their cattle. They have a completely different language and culture—and different folktales—and form a small portion of a huge Fulbe presence all through West Africa. The Fulbe dominated the last large political empire of the African savannah, the Caliphate of Sokoto (in present-day Nigeria), up until colonization at the end of the nineteenth century; for the Kapsiki, they were the feared slave raiders.

Like the other montagnard cultures, the Kapsiki cultivate sorghum, millet, and maize, using mainly hoes as the soil is not suited for plows. This horticulture is supplemented by animal husbandry, primarily goats, sheep, and cattle. The Kapsiki occupy the small plateau at the center of the Mandara Mountains, a fertile area because of its volcanic origin and well known in tourist circles because of the huge, spectacular rocky pillars that dot the undulating plateau, cores of old volcanoes whose rocky mantles have eroded away.

This is a village society, almost a prototype of African village life. Each village has its own territory and houses a series of patrilineal clans, one of which furnishes the headman. In olden times these villages were at war with each other, just as they suffered from slave raids by the Fulbe raiders; but these days lie behind them now. Still, there is little that links the autonomous villages, no traditional authority, just women moving between the various settlements in marriage. Today the Kapsiki and Higi are gov-

erned by the local and regional authorities in both countries, but throughout this is an autarchic society, each household minding its own business. Kapsiki village chiefs have mainly a ritual function; and as the tales testify, any foreign power is distrusted. As we shall see, many themes of the tales revolve around the individual compound, inhabited by a polygynous family with its internal tensions (between co-wives, between brothers). Kapsiki marriage is brittle, with a high divorce ratio; since the women take the initiative to scout for a new spouse in a foreign village, many a tale focuses on the theme of a foreign woman coming into the village to look for a husband, a seductive threat. Despite the rootedness of the Kapsiki villages, in-marrying women make for an intense inter-village contact as well as for a considerable contact over ethnic lines, important for the exchange of tales.

Like all groups in the mountains, the Kapsiki have their own indigenous religion[28] with a complicated supernatural world and an elaborate system of rituals. One specific feature for this area is the importance of blacksmiths. We will meet them in some of the tales: they are not just the tool makers and brass casters, but also undertakers, musicians, diviners, bards, and healers. In the recent past the Kapsiki have gradually switched to Islam and Christianity, and this also reflects in the tales.

Now let us have a look at the presumed 'Africanness' of the tales. Some of the social themes have been identified above; but in order to gauge the specificity of these tales, a comparison with the main body of international tales is apt. It is difficult to fit the African tales, many of which have become available in the past decades, into the Eurasian-dominated catalogues, so I am here focusing on differences.[29] Comparison of our body of Kapsiki tales with the compendium of Uther (2004) places our two sets in relief. Our animal heroes do not differ much from the international ones: the fox, hare, jackal, coyote, wolf, rat, and cat. Animal stories throughout the world resemble each other more than stories about humans.

There is, however, as far as my impression goes, a larger and more consistent focus on the trickster element in African tales,[30] a delight in the clever antics and disguises shining through in most tales, while the 'stupidness' of stupidity is reveled in all the time. Not etiological messages, but the enjoyment of *ntsehwele* forms the core of these tales. In addition, the role of other animals seems more geared to their physical characteristics than in Euro-Indian tales, like Tortoise with its box-like body, swimming, entering, and escaping. A clear example is the role of Scorpion, the ultimate instrument of pain, ever unsuspected by the dumb brutes and extremely convincing in its implementation; more than any other animal

it symbolizes Africa. The snake is ever-present in real Africa; and while it forms a symbolic item in Indo-European tales, it does not figure in our stories, nor does it serve as a symbol for evil or eternity. An African snake is a snake and not a frequent actor in tales; if it appears, it is often used for decoration! Animals remain animals here, not changing into humans, like princes—nor vice versa, humans changing into frogs, pigs, or whatever.

Shape changing is an aspect of evil in this part of Africa, with the 'Something' from the bush transforming into women, but also into a water pond, a rock, a bush, a needle.[31] Once the threshold of shape is breached, there is no limitation and there are no privileged change-pairs to be found, such as the prince–frog. People are people, animals are animals, and animals may speak when interacting with people; but hardly any misunderstandings result, and the notion of a separate animal language is completely absent. There is no Dr. Doolittle in Africa. The one frontier the animals breach, however, is physical: animals continually burrow into each other's bodies, sometimes through the mouth—being drunk along with beer—but usually through the anus, which is also the preferred exit route.[32] Identity and physical form belong together, so the maximum harm the small one can inflict on the big one, apart from trickery, is from the inside, and getting inside the opponent is often part of the trick.

When heroes or heroines are helped in the tales, it is usually by animals, the small ones, such as ants and birds; that in itself is not too dissimilar from the North, but where in European tales helpers might also be supernatural,[33] in African tales that is very seldom the case. The moral of these tales in which the weak animals help the polite humans is very similar to the European ones: the polite hero or heroine is intelligently assisted by those modest animals that are spurned by their haughty sisters, brothers or co-wives. It pays to be polite, both in Europe and in Africa.

But in Africa humans are mostly just that, human. Dwarves, elves and giants may populate European tales; African humans are all the same size sharing similar properties; the everyday range of human variation somehow seems to suffice for the African story plot. Thus, fairy godmothers are absent, as are helpful magicians with power objects. But a crucial distinction is in those who epitomize evil. In Europe this is the devil, in demonic or human form, who often is also a cannibal; our Kapsiki tales hardly mention cannibalism at all, the one exception being a cannibal who eats himself—and good riddance! The same holds—surprisingly—for the figure of the sorcerer. This emblem of power is hard to find in African tales, although clearly present in the North, so there is no sorcerer's

apprentice either. Also the witch, although not absent, is a rare occurrence in the tales—a surprise when one considers the importance of the witchcraft discourse in Africa.[34] In Kapsiki tales her place is taken by the wife of Death, or the 'It' from the bush; in tales from other groups in the Mandara Mountains, however, witches do appear, and these are predominantly female.[35] Demons are also rare, as is the Devil himself, since they do not fit into the cosmology; but the absence of ghosts is striking, as is the case with the ogre, the stupid and shortsighted supernatural being that is easily misled in European tales. In Africa, things from the bush are powerful and shapeless, and all the more fearful because they are undefined. Nor do the tales contain the benevolent 'djinns-in-the-bottle,' who grant three wishes; consequently, the three wishes motif is also absent.

In the fully human realm, the figure of the stepmother is completely absent, easily replaced by that of the co-mother, the 'sister-wife' of one's mother, given that the African tales are completely polygynous. But the co-mother is not the epitome of evil neglect the stepmother routinely represents;[36] sometimes she is more intelligent than the actual mother. The competition for attention is between the co-wives, not between the husband's children by the various wives. In any case, the motif of the stupid wife seems to be rare in Africa; stupidity is mainly an issue between brothers. Furthermore, adultery by the man is not a theme at all, while female adultery is nowhere near as large an issue as in the North; and if it is an issue, the focus is on the relationship of her lover to her husband. Adultery is considered a relational affront between men, more than one between husband and wife, and the motif of the wife engaging in adultery with a visiting stranger is absent. All those frivolous tales of hiding lovers in a cupboard do not resonate in the South. African tales actually have few women as main actresses—fewer than in the North, it seems. Perhaps one reason is the absence of large hereditary class differences: there are no kings, so no princesses; and no castles means no locked-up maidens.

Few girls in Africa outwit their father to get their lover, and rarely do they go on an active search for a husband; those who do are not to be trusted, coming as 'It' from the outside, with—admittedly—some witch characteristics.[37] But these are women, not girls, a crucial distinction in Kapsiki; the difference is not one of virginity—which is of limited interest anyway—but of experience, and especially of rights to the woman, male rights of her father and possibly her ex-husband. Girls in Africa lack the urge to get a husband 'before it is too late,' as the polygyny of the continent guarantees them a husband anyway. Murders of husbands and lovers

are also in principle absent. Few stories deal with lovers denied to girls, nor do we encounter old maids or desperate wannabe-brides. But in a polygynous society those are not to be expected, as all women marry.

Probably the most characteristic African tale featuring a girl revolves around her impossible wishes for a perfect husband and she gets her comeuppance. And while three brothers are a common item both in Africa and Europe, three sisters are much less usual in Africa. If they appear on the scene, as in the Wife of Death stories, they are featureless, and all react in the same way. The three brothers in African tales, on the other hand, always distinguish themselves, just as in Europe. In Africa the youngest usually is the smart one, while in Eurasia he seems to be rather dumb. For our corpus the distinction in age is easily made, as Kapsiki have birth order names, each child bearing a name indicating his place among the children of its mother. So in Kapsiki the first two sons have their proper name (Tizhè and Zra respectively), and so has number three, Deli, a name that is associated with wit and intelligence anyway in this culture.

Master–servant tales, so common in Europe, have few parallels in Africa and certainly not in Kapsiki with its egalitarian small-scale society. Chiefs are mentioned, but they are either Fulbe chiefs or the Sukur and Gudur leaders, and in such cases they form the background of the story, never the main characters. Even the blacksmiths, who are the structural 'Other' in this society,[38] are portrayed not as lower and dependent, but as smart, witty, and all-seeing, the human equivalent of Squirrel, occupying the place of the seer or old woman in other African corpora. In Europe this slot in the story is often taken by the student; but the blacksmith is never the hero in the Kapsiki story,[39] he just plays a side role in the tales, important but marginal. Strangers are also absent, as are soldiers, but for the 'Things from the bush.' This is a society where the relevant Other is known and is a kinsman, just as it is a society where relationships between people are clear and unambiguous. No blind or deaf men populate the stories, nor is drunkenness a topic. Robbers are never glorified; in fact, apart from the occasional thief who ends up badly, robbers and their bands are absent. Society is still clear; the village is well circumscribed. Though the dumb brutes among the animals may be mainly stupid, the human fools from Eurasian tales have no equivalent in the region. Here the structure of society has not—so far—generated an anti-structure in the tales. The relations depicted belong fully to the social structures that reign supreme; there is no Turnerian communitas. The virtual reality of the stories runs parallel to lived experience, sometimes with clear morals but without radical

inversions of society. And when brothers vie among themselves for a girl and have to be rescued by the youngest, or when the *kwajuni* misbehaves and the *kwazerema* shows her true fealty to their joint husband, this is not an inverted society, but just an unexpected—and quite moralistic—message within the existing social structure. Wagers are often just as realistic: the best dancer wins the girl, a motif seldom encountered outside Africa.

Wealth is important in any society, and in this part of Africa it means cattle—and just cattle; so there is no cache of gold. Very few miracle objects or other sorcerers' delights help out the heroes or heroines; they have to rely on their own abilities. Of course, with the material culture of the African village being what it is, there are no magic mirrors; but there are no stories about reflections in a pool either: no Narcissus, no scrying through a water-mirror. For anyone who knows the pools and rivers in this dry part of the continent, this does not come as a surprise, as the muddy waters here hardly reflect at all. The role of water here is different anyway: it is a separation between territories, a large body of water serving as the sign of being elsewhere. Water is also for fishing, but just at the waterside, and for drowning—or escaping if one is Tortoise. Wealth is in status, which routinely means being a chief, and such a status is sufficient reward in itself. This, of course, is not too different from the (half-a-)kingdom rewards in Euro-Indian tales. The rewards of the afterlife, so bountiful in Christian tales, are completely absent here. The best reward one can get is to have a full and fertile life, ending in a good death, bemoaned and danced to by all one's kith and kin, with hosts of descendants, honored as a good person who had a significant life. An afterlife holds no interest.

Notes

1. Cited in Zipes (1999: 37); see *The Republic of Plato in ten books*, transl. from the Greek by H. Spens London: Dent, 1908.
2. See the format of Uther (2004) and Ranke and Baumann (1997).
3. See for the first Kosack (1997a, b) and for the second Sorin-Barreteau (2001).
4. Zwaal (2003:100 ff.). She also distinguishes 'other animal stories', but this last genre is of an etiological nature and rather problematic: containing explanations of why things are as they are, they are few and far between and often fall within the realm of myth. In Kapsiki stories, myth and folktale are clearly distinguished—even if they do overlap to a degree—and the myths have their own proper dynamic. For Kapsiki myths, see Van Beek (2012, 2015, 2010b). Smaller collections do not engage in genre definition

(Noye 1999; Palaï 2007; Kosack 1997a, b), though Sorin-Barreteau implicitly gives the same threefold division as Zwaal (Sorin-Barreteau 2001: 19).

5. In this respect an interesting definition of genres is found among the Borana of African's Horn: narratives for children (trickster tales + 'hobglobin' tales, our genres 1 and 3) and rescue tales (our genre 2). Adult tales, in the sense of being unsuitable for children's ears, would be in our group 4 (see also Kidane 2002), but I have not found this distinction in Kapsiki, where everything seems to be suitable for young ears.
6. For a thorough species description, see Robel (1976). He points at the etiological reasons why Erythropus has entered 'die Fabelwelt' of many African groups, where they often are joined by poisonous snakes (ibid. 18, 19). The latter is not the case with the Kapsiki. I thank my colleague Jan de Wolf for this reference.
7. Lévi-Strauss (1964: 37).
8. I will use 'Leopard,' as 'Panther' in English is ambivalent since it can also indicate the black specimens of other species, such as the cougar.
9. See Van Beek (2012: 128 ff.).
10. This notion is widespread in the region; see Andersen (1999).
11. Like ATU 66B.
12. The common duiker, *Sylvica pragrimmia*.
13. The same holds for the Mafa and Mofu-Gudur, but pebble divination is more prominent among these groups than among the Kapsiki. In Mofu-Gudur tales, divination is usually wrong the first time and only gets the answer right in a second session (see Sorin-Barreteau 2001), a feature absent in Kapsiki and Mafa tales.
14. Van Beek (2015). Thus, the trickster figure could be read as a satire on subordination and incitement to resistance against a more powerful political enemy; the famous Bleek/Lloyd collection of Khoi tales could be read this way, according to Wittenberg (2014) and Jenkins (2010). For the Kapsiki this reading is less evident, as their treatment of Fulbe in the tales is remarkably neutral.
15. For an extensive treatment, see Van Beek (2012).
16. Like ATU 332C*.
17. Where African pantheons do feature a trickster-deity, as among the Yoruba, the distinction between a hero-of-tales and a deity disappears completely; see Adélékè (2005) for the famous example of Esu. But the Kapsiki pantheon is different, van Beek (2012).
18. A parallel would be the notion of satire and resistance in Khoi tales, Wittenberg (2014).
19. Van Beek (1992, 2015).
20. An interesting parallel is ATU 318.

21. Geneviève Calame-Griaule takes this as her starting point in her study entitled *La dévoration fantasmatique*, Calame-Griaule (1987).
22. Van Beek (1987).
23. See Walker (1990) and Abrahams (1983: 6).
24. Van Beek (2013a).
25. Van Beek (2012).
26. Dumas-Champion (1995) attempts to make it into a case of regicide, and some reports have even been given in the case of the Marghi, the western neighbors of the Kapsiki in Nigeria. On later inspection, the latter case lacks sufficient grounding, the first is based on a rather speculative reasoning, and both miss cultural fit.
27. This miracle child is also called Dumo Hecco and, more than among the Kapsiki, acts as an enfant terrible, anti-hero, and thief (Eguchi 1978–84).
28. Van Beek (2012, 2015).
29. See Dundes (1992: ix).
30. Pelton (1980) and Chevrier (1986).
31. If shape changing is a human quality in African tales, it is linked with power and magic, not with an anonymous threat. See Jackson (2002).
32. See for an extended treatment of this motif in both African and New World tales Bascom (1992: 182 ff.).
33. See Davidson (2003) for a reasoned overview of these actors.
34. Geschiere (2013) and Van Beek (2007).
35. Kosack (1999) and Sorin-Barreteau (2001).
36. Even if she is not as dominant a motif in European tales as her prominence in the most well-known tales, Snow White and Cinderella, would lead one to believe. I thank Jurjen van der Kooi for this information, as well as for his general constructive criticism of my text.
37. These are stronger in Mafa tales, Kosack (1997b), as well as in Moose tales, Sissao (2010).
38. The main theme of Van Beek (2015).
39. Like he is in ATU 330, for instance, where he is also very clever.

CHAPTER 3

The Tales, Old and New

Without speech we should scarcely have been rational beings.
Thomas Astle (1784).

It is time now to take a look at the tales themselves. Given our fourfold division into genres, a selection of tales will pass muster in order to highlight the core of each genre with its characteristic actors, story lines, plots, and outcomes, be they etiological, moral or otherwise. In order to know about Kapsiki tales, we must get acquainted not only with the tricks of Squirrel, the dumb strength of Leopard, and the intrinsic beauty of Guinea Fowl, but also with the suspense generated by a strange woman coming into the village, with the deep virtue of the non-loved wife, and with the intrinsic wisdom of the third brother. Any story we tell is ultimately about ourselves, and the Kapsiki also tell stories about their own life, to themselves and here to us. So now we listen.

Folktales not only are part of the oral wealth of a culture but as they are told for an audience, they have their own internal logic, and a crucial focus of this chapter is formed by the narratological structures of the tales, the fabula.[1] Such formalized story plots will be shown to vary in accordance with the four groupings, so our genres will inform the analytical framework of this chapter. Since tales have their own logic, and raconteurs follow a tale as much as they produce it, the fabula is essential. After all, the logic of the folktale, compelling as it is, forms a major factor in the simple

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fun of telling and thus of retention. The selection in this chapter contains tales from both the 1972 and the 2008 samples, as the aim here is to get an organized impression of the total corpus of Kapsiki folktales. Questions of change will occupy us later. The indented texts are translations of the original Kapsiki (*Psikye*) texts; the italicized titles are mine.

Trickster Tales: Squirrel as a Hero

Squirrel tales fall into the general type of trickster stories; and as trickster tales go, they have a quite complex narrative structure. So here follows a selection of Squirrel tales, the first a classic one that every Kapsiki knows now and knew in 1972, one of the tales that abide.[2] Like all *rhena heca*, stories of old, in Kapsiki there is a formal opening—*Pekwuke* (lit. 'it came about')—and a formal ending—*VVung*—the latter instantly recognizable as it is the only sound in Kapsiki where one has to use one's fingers: the lips are closed by thumb and index finger and then loosened in a prolonged 'V.' This version is from Luc Sunu:

> *Squirrel and the peanuts*
> It came about…
> Squirrel's co-mother cultivated peanuts in a wet part of the bush and asked Squirrel to keep a watchful eye on the crop. His father asked him to signal when the plants would almost be ripe for harvest in order to organize a harvest party. Squirrel remained in the field, and when he came back to the village the people asked how the crop was doing. "The peanuts are just sprouting," he answered, though the plants had in fact already flowered. A few days later, people asked again, and he answered that the sprouts were growing well, while the stalks were actually already re-entering the soil.[3] A few weeks later people asked about the field, and he answered that the flowers were starting to bloom, while actually the fruits were forming. A week later he reported that the flowers were settling down, while the peanuts were almost ready for harvest.
> "What about our peanuts now," his co-mother asked. "The stalks are entering the soil," Squirrel answered, but he was already busy with the harvest, putting the peanuts in a huge termite mound. A week later: "How are my peanuts?" "Harvest in three weeks," Squirrel answered, while in the field he put pebbles in the ground around the plant stems. When the indicated harvest time arrived, the woman set out for the field but found only pebbles in the ground.
> She sat down and cried: "What is happening to me?", but people tried to calm her: "One does not cry at a place of god."[4] She wanted to relieve herself, so she set out into the bush, and Squirrel saw that she headed in

the direction of the termite mound where he had stored the peanuts: "Do not go there, I saw a huge serpent over there; I cannot have the wife of my father being bitten by a serpent." The wife answered: "What is the problem? I am not worth anything anyway, as I have nothing to eat this year." Walking on, she found the termite mound with all the peanuts stacked into it: "What is this, Squirrel? Did you harvest my peanuts and put them in here?" The woman called upon her co-workers to catch Squirrel, but he fled. Back home she told his father: "Your son has harvested my peanuts and put all of them in a termite mound; now the others say that my field did not produce anything."

"Where is Squirrel now?"

"He ran into the bush."

"I will send for him," her husband said, and sent his neighbors to catch him, but in vain, because Squirrel refused to come home.

"What now? How do we get Squirrel home?" his father asked, and on their advice he pretended to be dead. The people decorated him lavishly[5] and seated him on a chair in the forecourt. Then they set out for the bush and told Squirrel that his father had died. "It is not I who is the oldest son." Squirrel responded. "Call upon my brothers." His brothers were called and came; only Squirrel was missing. "Come and mourn your father." During the obsequies they put sesame before the 'corpse' for eating, and Squirrel came and started to wail: "My father, who gave me such large pots of meat," and he took the sesame and ate. When he took the sesame for the third time, his father caught him. "Please unwrap me, folks;[6] we are going to punish Squirrel." The people disrobed his father and bound Squirrel with strong ropes, suspending him in the nook of the *dabala*.[7] Beneath him they put a large fire, burning peppers, tobacco, and euphorbia, so a large cloud of burning smoke stung his eyes and Squirrel suffered, eyes and nose running.

Leopard entered the *dabala* and saw Squirrel hanging on high. "What are you doing there, cousin," he asked Squirrel. "They have put me here to give salt to whomever wants it," Squirrel answered.

"Give me some salt, please, cousin." Squirrel dropped a large lump of snot onto Leopard.

"Hmm. Nice, salty. Get me some more, cousin."

"Get me down, so I can relieve myself, and I will come back and give you more," Squirrel said. Leopard climbed up and untied Squirrel, and Squirrel seized him and bound him at the spot.

When the father of Squirrel came back from the bush, he found Leopard hanging from the roof. "Who has put you there?" he asked Leopard.

"Squirrel put me here when he went to relieve himself. But he will come back," Leopard assured him. The people took Leopard down and started to beat him with sticks, *pam pam* [ideophone for beating with a stick], and Leopard fled at full speed.

In the bush Leopard found Squirrel, who was playing his guitar under a tamarind tree, singing: “I have tricked the husband of Kwerukweru,” *keldig keldig* [ideophone for a guitar playing]. Leopard crept up to him and grabbed his tail: “You are mine now!”

“That is not my tail you are holding, it is a tamarind root.” So Leopard let go of the tail and instead took hold of a root and started to pull with all his force. The root broke and Leopard fell on the ground. Squirrel used this opportunity to flee and hide under a rock. Leopard came and found Squirrel under the rock: “Now, can you tell me now that you are not mine?”

“This rock is going to fall; it is falling down, you see? Stand here and hold the rock up,” urged Squirrel. “I will go and look for a pole to hold it up.” Leopard took up his place to support the rock, and Squirrel went back to the termite mound to play his guitar and sing.

Meanwhile Duiker came along: “What are you doing under that rock?”

“This rock wants to fall down; that is why I am holding it while Squirrel is out to cut a supporting pole,” Leopard explained to Duiker.

“Squirrel has tricked you, that rock will not fall at all, and anyway you do not have the power to hold it up,” Duiker said and left. All the animals passed by, and eventually Elephant came ambling along: “What are you doing under that rock, cousin?”

“This rock wants to fall down; that is why I am holding it while Squirrel is out to cut a supporting pole,” Leopard explained to Elephant.

“Wait, I will see whether that rock will fall,” Elephant said, and he climbed onto the rock and danced on it. The rock stood steadfast. “Squirrel has tricked you,” Elephant explained, and Leopard went to find Squirrel again, who sat playing his guitar on the termite mound. Leopard pushed him into the hole. “Now you cannot escape from that spot. You have tricked me all day; and were it not for cousin Elephant, I would still be under the rock,” Leopard exclaimed. And when he saw Kalao nearby, he called him: “Come over and keep a watch over Squirrel, while I get my digging iron to dig him out. And meanwhile blow into the hole.” Kalao complied and sat down when Leopard went away. Down in the hole he saw Squirrel chewing on something: “What are you eating there, cousin?” Squirrel took a handful of termites and threw them into the eyes of Kalao, and the termites bit the bird in the eye. Kalao rubbed his eyes and Squirrel escaped from the hole and fled.

When Leopard came back with his digging iron, his stick, and his mush, all ready for a good meal, he found nothing. “What have you done, Kalao?”

“I have been here; I ate nothing, but he threw termites in my eyes,” Kalao said.

“No, you have let Squirrel escape,” retorted Leopard, and he killed Kalao and ate him.

VVung[8] (Fig. 3.1)

Fig. 3.1 Shelling peanuts

The version recorded here is the one my assistant knew himself, but he collected also an earlier version told by Masi Meha in the same month. The 2008 corpus gives a shorter, possibly lacunar, version where a girl takes the place of Squirrel, later to be replaced by Leopard. Other versions lack the trick of the father pretending to be dead in order to trap his son. That latter motif is common and can also be found in other tales; in fact, it is more important than just a tale, as a similar story is told about the divinatory animal, the crab. He was given the wisdom of the future after a similar incident: god played dead in order to gauge the intelligence (*ntse-hwele*) of his creatures; and the crab did not respond to the call to mourn and stayed away, doubting whether god was really dead. The storyline[9] is widely spread in West Africa. For instance, among the Dogon of Mali almost exactly the same story is told about the pale fox, their divinatory animal; he, too, refused to heed the mourning call and was allotted divinatory wisdom as a result.

Other motifs are always in the tale: giving wrong information about the peanuts, hiding them in the termite mound, being punished over a smoky fire, exchanging places with Leopard, exulting in his trickery, and finally escaping the wrath of Leopard by a new, smaller trick. The exchange of Squirrel's tail for the tamarind roots also occurs in other tales, as does the trick of holding up the rock.

Trickster tales have their characteristic narrative structure, a complicated one in two variants. The peanut story gives us the first, the variant with, in principle, two combatants: a weak and a strong one—plus an audience.

> Value from the bush ➔ Actor 1 transgresses norm ➔ Punishment ➔Setting the stage ➔ Trick ➔ Disaster actor 2 ➔ Revelation of trick ➔ Revenge ➔ Deflection by final trick

The first sequence starts with an 'enjoyable good,' the value that is at stake in the tale. Usually in these tales it originates from the bush, as anything of value ultimately stems from the surrounding wilderness, not the village itself. Here it is a harvest of peanuts; in other Squirrel tales it is a bull, a buffalo, fishes, fruits, game—always from the giver of plenty, the *gamba* (Kapsiki for 'bush'), though the same bush can also harbor dark and dangerous secrets. Water is an important symbol adding to that plenty, in this case a watery spot in the bush, which in Kapsiki thought is routinely associated with a god belonging to that particular spot.

The norm transgression is motivated mainly by greed, the trickster trying to get something for free, or to get for free what his opponent has won—in the latter case usually a girl from another village or the daughter of Rain. Sometimes the issue is simply that the stronger one takes something by force from the weaker opponent. This, in Kapsiki life, is not the same as stealing. Stealing is done in stealth, under the cover of darkness, and by going into a place one is not supposed to enter at all, by breaking in or at least entering. The privacy orientation of Kapsiki culture renders theft into a great sin, an affront to one's personality as well as a terrible reflection on the thief. The Kapsiki word for theft clearly reflects this: *rhere*, a guttural grunt without any clear vocal, and more an invective than a lexeme. On the other hand, taking by force is done in broad daylight, the stronger taking advantage of his superior strength or power, which is simply to be expected rather than to be condemned. This means that the weaker individual has to resort to trickery, cleverness, so *ntsehwele* is very much the resort of the weaker one, not as a subterfuge but as an acknowledged weapon of the weak in a continuous battlefield.

Punishment is meted out if the two, Squirrel and Leopard, perform for an audience; and if so, the elaborate punishment sets the stage for the main trick. If not, then Squirrel has to set the record straight against the stronger one and has to set the stage for the trickery himself. We will see examples of this process later.

The trick itself forms the highpoint of the tale, both the large one in the middle and the small one at the end. Three elements are crucial in the structure of the trick: liminality, identity change, and disinformation-cum-trust. Most tricks are situated in a liminal situation such as a feast, a work party, a market in another village, or a journey into the wild. Being strung up at the ceiling of a *dabala* is typical, as Squirrel is in the hut that is itself between the outdoors and the indoors, between in-group and out-group, with his body between ground and sky. Even more importantly, the *dabala* contains shelves inside its thatch roof, where the women keep their cooking utensils, so Squirrel is caught between cooking and the smoke of the aggressive bush—between culture and nature, in the terms of Lévi-Strauss. When Squirrel sets his own stage, the liminality is structural. In one tale he has Elephant lifted up between earth and heaven and has Leopard enter into the huge body, where Squirrel has his opponent destroyed. Or, in several tales, Squirrel disguises himself as a blacksmith and performs his trick as the ultimate liminal person in Kapsiki society, the smith.[10]

Identity change or disguise is very common in the tricks, with the hero disguising himself as a Fulbe 'cavalier' or a blacksmith or hiding in a bushel of straw. Here the iconography of Squirrel comes in, as a mounted warrior riding a duiker, or adorned with the ultimate ornaments in Kapsiki, the feathers of Guinea Fowl. Even when his tail is taken for a tamarind root or when he serves as an undertaker for little dead monkeys, the small hero shows himself as much more than he really is, and his opponent falls for it. The funny part, for the audience, is not just the setting of the trick, but particularly the disinformation from his side, and the blind trust of Leopard or Hyena in this information. The joke is in the blatant nonsense Squirrel manages to get his opponent to believe in and the deep abiding trust the dumb ugly brute (hereafter DUB) puts into everything the wily one tells him.

A third party comes in to reveal the trick: another animal, a blacksmith, an old woman, a leper, the marginal ones in society. The wives of the protagonists function as revealers also, conforming to the Kapsiki male stereotype that women cannot keep secrets. The reaction of the duped one is anger first and revenge second. In any revenge, the tricked one has an extremely strong vantage point, at least in Kapsiki culture. For instance, someone who avenges for a death by black magic has the power to wipe out a whole family, in fact transforming himself into an epidemic focused on the whole family of the culprit.[11] Thus, as the avenger in the tale is both the larger one and the wronged one, he has an unassailable position. So a second trick is needed, by which the trickster deflects this revenge, a minor one as no further harm should be inflicted, just getting out of the angry DUB's way. In some tales a flight is called for, or there is even a beer party to placate the feelings.

This narrative logic indicates one evident conundrum of trickster tales: they have no logical ending. In the well-told tales, the deflection of the revenge suffices for an end, but in principle this cycle of tricks–revelation–revenge can go on forever. In other types of tales, especially the ones featuring human actors, endings are much more natural, because they lead up to a conclusion that might be based on outright morals. So the deeper reason why trickster tales have no obvious ending is that they are deeply non-moral: the motor of the tale is a transgression of norms; a deception forms the turning point, and the end is full of violence. In order to show the inherent quandaries of a trickster tale, we will follow another exploit of Squirrel, one which is a favorite among the 2008 'raconteurs.' Here is 13-year-old Tizhè Fashè telling the story:[12]

Squirrel and the bull in the bush

It came about…

Squirrel, Tortoise and Hyena went on a trip to woo a girl. *Ntung* [ideophone for leaving home] they went, walked through endless bush, and arrived at nightfall in a village housing a widow with three nubile daughters. The old lady asked where the guests wanted to sleep. Squirrel wanted to sleep with the girls. "Hyena, where do you want to sleep?" "Among the melons." Tortoise said he wanted to sleep among the chickens, and so it happened.

"*Kweya*, *kweya*, *kweya* [ideophone for chicken cackling]," the chickens cried out. From her hut the widow asked: "What's happening over there?"

"The one with the shell is gathering all of us under his carapace," cried the chickens. Tortoise said: "Nothing much is happening; they're just having fun over my shell," while at the same time killing all the chickens and putting them in his shell.

A persistent giggle arose from the hut of the girls. "What is happening with my girls," the old widow wanted to know. "We tell him to fuck our mother, but he keeps touching our vulvas," the girls giggled, but Squirrel called out; "They just make fun of my tail, and start laughing when I use it."

A different strange noise came from the back of the compound: "What is happening over there, Hyena?"

"The melon called me 'Taily One' and I called him 'Fat Belly.' He got mad and splashed down," Hyena answered.

In the early morning, the guests wanted to leave and the widow gave them some gifts. Hyena wanted a basket full of vegetables to go with the melons. The widow gave him a lot, inside a *rhucè* [the plaited cover of a granary].

"Tortoise, what do you want for a gift?"

"Just give me chickens," asked Tortoise, and the widow gave him the chickens that were left.[13]

"What for you, Squirrel?"

"I would like a bull," Squirrel said, and a bull he got.

The three left and came to a river, where Tortoise disappeared with all his chickens. Hyena wanted to cross but could not with his huge *rhucè*, so he called out to Squirrel: "Cousin, give me your bull; then he can carry me across the river. At the other side I will give it back to you."

"I will not give you my bull," Squirrel said, "because I know you, and you will not give it back."

"No, I will certainly give it back," Hyena protested, so Squirrel gave him the bull. Hyena got safe and sound to the other side and then refused to hand the animal back to Squirrel. "Why do you not return my bull?" Squirrel asked.

"Just because I do not want to."

As Hyena was much stronger than Squirrel, the latter said: "Let us tie the animal to this tree here. We'll go home and tomorrow first thing in the morning we'll come back and slaughter it." They tied the bull to the tree and went home.

In the middle of the night, Hyena came to Squirrel's house and said: "Cousin, let us slaughter our bull."

"It is not yet time; it is completely dark, and the rooster has not crowed yet. Go and lie down."[14]

Hyena went home and Squirrel woke up his wives and set out for the bull in the bush. They killed the animal, skinned it, and half-buried its horns, tail, and head in the earth, with just a little sticking out. The meat they took home in long bands to dry, *tsewele tsewele* [ideophone for cutting long strips of meat].

The rooster crowed at daybreak, Hyena woke up Squirrel, and both headed for the bush. There they found only horns, a head, and a tail. Hyena asked: "Who has buried our bull, cousin?"

"I do not know, but don't pull at the tail, cousin." Immediately Hyena pulled at the tail with all his strength, and *rhiya iyaglag* [ideophone for falling on one's back], he fell on his back.[15]

Back home, after some days, the wives of Squirrel and Kwerukweru, the wife of Hyena,[16] started talking at the waterside. Squirrel's wives started to make fun of Kwerukweru: "Do you not know what our husband has done to yours? Together with our husband we have slaughtered the bull, and your husband knew nothing."

Kwerukweru ran to her husband to report what the other wives had told her. Hyena took his lance, his bow and arrow, and his big knife and went for Squirrel in order to kill him. Squirrel saw him coming and put some eggs in his mouth.

"What is the matter with you, cousin?" Hyena asked.

"I am very ill, an illness that came from above. Do not look up, for then you will fall ill as well," Squirrel mumbled, because the bands of meat were strung between the rooftops of his house just above his head. "Look, how I vomit," and he broke the eggs.

"Patience, cousin. The people told me that you had slaughtered the bull."

"Just women's talk, cousin; the people just want to set us up against one another. We really have to beat our wives to get them to behave properly," Squirrel explained.

Both went to their spouses. Hyena took a twig and beat, *puw puw puw* [ideophone for beating with a rod] his wife who cried out, but Squirrel beat the granary. Hyena took a club and beat Kwerukweru for real, *wyaw wyaw wyaw* [ideophone for beating with a club], and she cried out.

> But Squirrel knew he had to come up with an answer now, and went into the bush to collect beeswax. He collected a lot, mixed it with sharp stones, made a figure out of it, and put this figure in his *pulu*, the seat of honor in the forecourt of his compound. He then called Hyena: "Look, cousin; that is the one who slaughtered our bull." "Did he?" "Yes." Hyena took a swing at the figure and his right hand stuck in it; a left swing, and his left hand also stuck. "You have to wrestle him to the floor," Squirrel said, and Hyena really went for it, until he was completely covered with wax and torn by the stones.
>
> *VVung*

In this tale the structure of the first tale holds well, with the main difference that the norm transgression has little to do with the rest of the tale. The distinctive values stem from overdefinition of hospitality, but then a hospitality associated with the bush. The narrative with the widow seems relatively unrelated to the rest of the tale and follows its own logic. The three sleeping preferences are triggered by norm infractions—greed, sexuality, and plain nonsense—and the gifts have very little bearing on them, but for the second part of the tale they serve as the rationale for Squirrel suddenly having a large bull at his disposal. This kind of weak logical link inside a tale is common in this genre. Somehow, the very nature of tricks, the centrality of the trickery, and the impossibility of a clear moral ending or ethical lesson in the face of a devious and cunning hero—all these deflect from the logic of the narrative itself. The ending with the wax figure occurs in quite a few tales, not just trickster ones, and is a characteristic African motif.[17] So this narrative structure, the second one, involves indirect competition between the trickster and the DUB. The competition is indirect, as both protagonists run through the series of tests or tricks independently and in very different ways. So this runs:

> Conform social norm ➔ Staging the test ➔ Test actor 1 ➔ Passing the test ➔ Reward actor 1 ➔ Transgression of norm ➔ Actor 1 tricks actor 2 ➔ Falling for the trick ➔ Punishment actor 2

In principle the trickster gets what he wants by legitimate but very clever means, and he then tricks the dumb one into wanting the same, but in the wrong fashion. The result is that actor 2 gets punished, while actor 1 has his cake and eats it. Usually there is no revenge cycle here, as the punishment is meted out by a third party, superior to both, against whom little recourse is possible. The transgression of the norm by the trickster serves two purposes in the tale structure: to have actor 2 enter the test in the wrong way and to have the trickster benefit himself from the price he paid

Fig. 3.2 Cattle on the Kapsiki plateau, the usual bride wealth

to obtain his value. The norm rupture is used to escape from the exigencies of reciprocity in which actor 1 is engaged with a superior party.

Let us look at one important and central tale which can be considered one of the core *rhena heca* in this part of the Squirrel genre. This classic story involves Rain, a deity in the Kapsiki cosmology, and his—undoubtedly very desirable—daughter, to be won by paying bride wealth (Fig. 3.2).[18] Such a wonderful prize can only be obtained by legitimate means, though here too the value is out in the bush and not in the village. In the case of Rain, the out-there is the ultimate 'other country' (i.e., heaven). The old Vandu Kwadeva was keen to give this story:

Squirrel and the daughter of Rain

It came about…

Squirrel wooed the daughter of Rain. When he entered the house, he spoke nicely with the daughter, who told him to contact her father. So he did. "What are you looking for?" her father asked Squirrel.

"I want your daughter."

"Ask my daughter whether she wants you, and see what she will say."

"Your daughter and I have already agreed."

Rain told Squirrel: "Whoever is going to marry my daughter has to bring me as bride wealth an elephant."

"All right, father-in-law, I will bring you an elephant," Squirrel answered.

Back home Squirrel started to plait a rope, and while he was doing this, Hyena came along. "What are you using such a long rope for, cousin?"

Squirrel answered: "Will you reveal my secret?"

"No, I will not!"

"I will bind Elephant with this rope to hand him over to my father-in-law, Rain."

While Squirrel kept on plaiting, Hyena went to the waterhole, where all the animals drank water. There he found Elephant and told him: "Squirrel is busy making a long rope to bind you with." On the next morning Squirrel came to the waterhole to drink, and Elephant asked him: "Cousin, are you truly plaiting a rope to bind me with?"

"No, cousin. Hyena wants to sow disagreement between us. I'm making that rope for my roof. Wait, tomorrow I will bring my rope along to show you."

The next morning Squirrel came with the rope, and Elephant arrived as well. Squirrel said: "This is the rope I have plaited. Do you really think I could bind you with it?" He put the rope around Elephant's foot. "You don't think I could bind you, do you?", and *tsa'a tsa'a* [ideophone for 'like that'], bound his other foot: "Like that? Or like this?", and he bound his foreleg, binding it very well. Elephant said: "That hurts; release me." "OK, I will loosen the ropes," said Squirrel and instead pulled them quite tight. When Squirrel had finished tying up Elephant, he called upwards, saying: "Father-in-law, take your due." Rain pulled at the rope and Elephant moved up to the house of Rain. Two days later Squirrel took the daughter of Rain for a wife.

A few weeks after the girl had moved in with him, Squirrel told Hyena that he had seen a huge bull in someone's house: "Let us steal some meat." So there they went, Squirrel with a small sack, Hyena with his large one. Taking a hidden route, Squirrel led his mate to the house of Rain, where they found Elephant, still completely bound. Both crept into Elephant through his anus and started cutting the meat from the inside. Squirrel cut small morsels only, but Hyena cut out huge chunks of meat, and then he cut out the heart of Elephant. Elephant fell down, and the people came and saw that Elephant was dead. The two friends could not get out any more, so what now? Squirrel entered the gall bladder, while Hyena sought refuge in the stomach. The people started to cut up the meat and they cut out the gall bladder and threw the ugly smelling thing on the garbage

heap. Immediately, Squirrel crept out and started complaining: "Why did you throw that bladder on me? I heard that the bull of my father-in-law was dead, and therefore I came, and then you throw the bladder on me?" The people said: "Give our son-in-law some water to wash himself." When they kept cutting, they saw something move inside the stomach. "Ah, there is the illness that has killed our elephant." They took a *jikwu* [a flail for threshing sorghum] and beat up Hyena inside the stomach, then cut up the stomach and found Hyena, with his sack full of elephant meat. They killed him and roasted him. Thus, Squirrel got the daughter of Rain, plus the meat.

VVung

This second trickster fabula runs parallel to the last one:

Conform social norm ➔ Staging the test ➔ Test actor 1 ➔ Passing the test➔ Reward actor 1 ➔ Transgression of norm ➔ Actor 1 tricks actor 2 ➔ Falling for the trick ➔ Punishment actor 2 and double reward actor 2

Many of the trick settings, the stages, so to speak, on which the trickster performs, are about entering another body, where a smaller animal has the advantage. Here it is the elephant; in other stories it is inside the bull; and in some tales the prize is put in the *tame*, the plaited granary that is central in Kapsiki ritual, where Squirrel can enter sideways through the straw maze.

This theme of entering another body can also be a direct contest, especially between the two clever guys, Squirrel and Tortoise. In another favorite story, the two have a quarrel, as Squirrel refuses to hand over the mat he has borrowed from Tortoise, using his force and not his *ntsehwele* to exact it from him. Tortoise takes revenge by inviting Squirrel to his house for a feast and then hiding in the sauce. When Squirrel eats the sauce, Tortoise enters his stomach and inflicts a lot of pain. Speaking from Squirrel's anus, he makes Squirrel return his mat and defecate him into the river. Squirrel later tries the same trick, but Tortoise does not fall for it.

In this particular tale Squirrel is the physically stronger one, who is tricked by Tortoise, with one persistent theme in all tales involving Tortoise: Tortoise always convinces the big Other to drown him in the river. When Squirrel is confronted with the other clever one, Pigeon, the bird usually wins by a combination of cleverness and being able to fly, and thus trumps Squirrel. In one tale mentioned below, it is the young Frog who wins out against Squirrel. So, in the contest between the tricksters, the ones who can move both on land and in another medium seem to win out.

The same motif appears in our last Squirrel example, an old story in which he is ultimately outwitted.[19] Vandu Kwadeva gives his version:

Squirrel and Pigeon in Bornu

"This year, cousin, we are going to cultivate beans as soon as the rains start," Squirrel told Pigeon, "but let us be smart and save time. Let us roast the beans first before sowing them; they will grow quicker, and it saves time roasting them later."

"OK," said Pigeon. When the rains fell, they set out to roast their sowing beans. Pigeon roasted his batch, but Squirrel just sowed the regular ones. After the rains, Squirrel's beans came up quickly, but not those of Pigeon. When they visited the field, Pigeon asked: "Cousin, when are mine going to grow?"

"As soon as your beans grow, they will immediately show flowers," Squirrel assured him. "Oh, good."

On their next visit, the beans of Squirrel already had flowers: "When are mine going to grow?" Pigeon asked.

"As soon as yours grow, there will be seeds immediately," Squirrel said.

"OK, good."

On their next visit, Squirrel's beans were ripe, and nothing showed for Pigeon. But, as Squirrel assured him, he would surely harvest in one go. When Pigeon came again, Squirrel had already harvested, and Pigeon found nothing. He started to think: "What can I do with this guy?" He took some money, went traveling, and bought a large gown, a long turban, shoes, and a pair of trousers. Back home, he dressed himself and went to Squirrel.

"Good afternoon," said Squirrel. "A stranger has come; give him a mat." They brought him a mat, and Pigeon sat down in full splendor. "Do you recognize me now, cousin?"

"What is your name?"

"I am Pigeon."

"You seem different; where do you come from?"

"Last year I gathered the stubble from your field, and from the ashes I made salt, went to Bornu in Nigeria, and sold salt and ashes at the market. That is how I grew rich."

Squirrel set fire to his harvest, burned the whole granary down, gathered in the ashes, and made salt. He went to Bornu to sell it. "Salt and ashes, salt and ashes," he called out in the city.

But the people said: "What idiocy is this? We have plenty of salt here, and you come into town with more salt?" They brought him to the chief, who told him: "Are you crazy, my son, you see salt everywhere and you bring some more. Who is going to use it?"

Squirrel looked and said to the chief: "I do have something for you, chief."

"What thing?"

"That stone you are sitting on—a snake might bite you as it is split. But I know someone who can sow it for you."

"Who can sow my stone?"

"Pigeon can sow your stone, chief."

The chief sent his notables with two horses to look for Pigeon, and they brought him to the chief.

"Good morning, chief."

"Good morning, son. I have sent for you because I have a little job for you, as I heard that you could do it."

"With pleasure. But what can I do for you, my chief?"

"This large stone is split, and I have nothing to sow it with; and people told me that you were able to repair this seat."

Pigeon said: "OK. But I can sow it only with the skin of Squirrel." So the notables took their horses and hunted down Squirrel and threw him at the feet of Pigeon. Immediately, Pigeon took to his wings and fled, and in the fracas Squirrel just managed to escape.

VVung

Here, in principle the two protagonists are equal, both alternatively clever and stupid, outwitting the other in strict reciprocity. The structure is the following:

Enjoyable good ➔ Trick ➔ Loss ➔ Revenge
Virtual enjoyable good ➔ Loss ➔ Trap for actor 1 ➔ Trap for actor 2 ➔ Double escape

We have seen now a series of narrative structures, of various fabulas. Is there an overarching fabula structure of the Squirrel tales discernible?[20] The Squirrel tales all begin with a surplus value that originates from the outside—peanuts, the daughter of Rain, a huge bull. None of these enjoyable goods are within normal reach, originating from beyond his control or realm. Then something goes wrong, and there the variation resides: denial of duty, loss against a stronger opponent, denial of a legitimate debt. These can be subsumed under 'denial of relationship,' and the story moves into the realms of the marginal, the bush, *dabala*, or inside Elephant, setting the stage for the trick: the liminal action of the trick is performed in the liminal realm. Stage four is the revelation of the trick, leading to the deflection of justice (including revenge), which ends the story. So the basic structure is the following:

Enjoyable good ➔ Loss ➔ Trick ➔ Revelation ➔ Trick 2 ➔ Deflection

The fabula structure reflects the fundamental minority position of Squirrel, who needs all his *ntsehwele* to stay afloat amidst the rubble of life—although often a rubble he himself helps to create. He is the randomizer of happenings, the denier of debts, the agent battling the results of his own acts. In this way, a trickster is the Kapsiki expression of the 'condition humaine', the lone individual battling on two fronts at the same time. On the one hand, his—as the wonderful German word calls it—'Schicksalsgeworfenheit' (lit. 'thrown together by fate') highlights his dependency on the stronger others; on the other hand, he always upsets the normal order of things himself and then has to use all his wiles to escape justice. In some ways, he is always struggling against himself, against his own character, which sets him up against the very world he is dependent upon.

Miscellaneous Animals

The narrative structures of the other three genres are relatively straightforward compared with the Squirrel/trickster tales. First there is the genre of 'other animals.' In many of these, tricks are being played, but here the tricks are inherent in the specific capabilities of the animals themselves: the weak trump the strong by virtue of their appearance, voice, or venom. Thus, Tortoise can disguise himself as a box; Donkey, with his braying, chases dangerous predators or causes a rumpus in a herd—thus proving himself an able hunter; and Frog tricks Buffalo, another tale harvested more than once, and which also serves as a connection to the former genre.[21] The story is told by Kwada Dzeme:

The race between Frog and Buffalo

It came about…

One day Frog told Buffalo that he could outrun him. Buffalo almost died from laughter and said: "If you, Frog, can outrun me, I will kill myself, really." Frog accepted the wager and they set a day and a place for the contest. Buffalo could indicate the day; Frog could just fix the spot, and he chose the riverside. The evening beforehand, Frog visited his brothers at the riverside and told them: "Brothers, we are going to have a speed contest with Buffalo, but on that day none of us will move at all. When Buffalo calls out for where I am, the one in front of him will answer: 'Owua.' If he calls again, the next one will answer." All agreed, and Frog went for a quiet night's rest.

The next morning, Buffalo came to awaken Frog, and both went to the riverside. Someone cried: "At your places; get set; go!" and off went Buffalo

along the river at full speed. After running some distance, he called out: "Frog?" And the next Frog in front of him answered: "Owua." Buffalo ran and ran and called again: "Frog, where are you?" Another brother, ahead of him, answered that he was there. Buffalo kept running at full speed, exhausted, and always Frog was ahead of him. Buffalo fell down, exhausted to his bones, and died. The Frogs feasted, and called their friends the Flies to feast upon the cadaver. When these were at it, Vulture came along, chased the family of Flies away, and he was the one that finished Buffalo.

VVung

The fabula is quite simple:

Value ➔ Competition ➔ Disinformation ➔ Counterintuitive outcome ➔ Deflection, end of DUB

In another version, also from 2008, Squirrel makes an exceptional appearance and robs Frog of the meat by making him believe that most of the meat was 'not good,' so Frog's family ended up with the skin and the bones. However, they got their revenge on Squirrel in a trick devised by the youngest of the Frogs. The latter told his family members to lie down in pairs, as if dead, then called in Squirrel and told him that magic had rendered the meat poisonous: anyone eating it would die in pairs, so young Frog had called Squirrel to die together. Squirrel quickly handed the meat back. So this is a tale that straddles two genres; but considering the out-of-character role of Squirrel, I have chosen to place it in genre 2.

In many stories, disinformation is crucial as the mechanism by which the tale spins from start to finish. Often the actors themselves are directly at stake, so survival is the issue. Here is an example, a favorite tale especially among the young raconteurs, in this case Kwayengu Kwava and Tizhè Teri:[22]

Cat, Tortoise and Pigeon's nest

It came about…

Pigeon was building his nest up in a tree when Cat came along and said to him: "Why do you make your nest up high, my friend, which is for little children to do? Come down and make your nest on the ground, as a grown-up." Pigeon was busy moving down when Tortoise ambled along and told him that Cat was deceiving him: "What you have to do is to build on high, like you did, but down at the foot of the tree you put some stones with your feathers in between. You will see what Cat had in mind." Pigeon followed

the advice of Tortoise. Cat went home, prepared some mush for dinner to go with the Pigeon sauce, and came back to Pigeon. At the foot of the tree he thought he saw Pigeon in his nest, and he struck out, took the feathers, and stuck them in his mouth. On high, Pigeon started to laugh: "That is how you wanted to deceive me."

Cat asked: "Who told you what I had in mind?"

"Tortoise told me."

Cat went for Tortoise: "Why did you inform Pigeon? Now I will slaughter you, with Pigeon." "All right," Tortoise answered. Cat took him, put him in the fireplace, and set the fire alight. "Wait," Tortoise said, "this is just a grass fire. This is nothing; this will never be able to burn my shell. Let us go and cut some real wood; then you can burn me properly." So the two took their axes and went into the forest. Cat ordered Tortoise to climb a tree and cut some branches. Tortoise climbed and cut some branches, *ndeng ndeng* [ideophone for cutting with an axe], and then shouted out: "Yes? Yes?" Again he shouted: "Yes, yes," and Cat asked who was calling him. Tortoise said: "People over there. They say they need the skin of a cat to make the drum of the chief." Cat said: "Give me the axe," and Tortoise threw down the axe and split the foot of Cat. Tortoise came down, Cat fled and ran and ran, until he died of fatigue. Tortoise ate Cat with the mush that the latter had prepared to eat Pigeon. And Tortoise started to chant: "*Mpelèa* [ideophone for using an axe]. Tortoise killed Cat. Now Cat has died. *Depweng* [ideophone for taking mush with meat]."

VVung

Here the sequence of disinformation, information from a third party, and violent outcome is evident.

Value ➔ Trick/disinformation ➔ Revelation ➔ Revenge ➔ Deflection/disinformation ➔ End of DUB

Characteristic is the eating part, as in these tales all animals eat all animals; and just as in the Squirrel trickster tales, the bad guy is eaten. The outcome can be moral as in the above, but this is not always the case. As an example, here is a story told by Tizhè Vakwete where for the Kapsiki the fun is in the repetition of the deception:

Hyena and the Dogs

It came about…

Hyena and Dog agreed to work together as friends, but Hyena wanted in fact to eat Dog. They discussed what they would do the next day. Dog said

he would cut sorghum stalks for his hut. "Let us go together," said Hyena, who wanted to eat Dog in the bush.

Very early in the morning, Dog woke up his children and went into the bush before Hyena woke up. In the bush, Dog cut the stalks with his children. Hyena woke up and waited on the road for Dog. Dog's family wrapped themselves in reeds and walked home. Hyena said: "Good morning, sorghum stalks," and the Dogs answered: "Good morning to you." Hyena kept waiting but did not see Dog, so he went to their house where he found them. "Dear cousin, why did you deceive me, for you did not go to the bush?" Dog told him: "But you greeted me 'good morning,' and I answered you with the stalks on my head." Hyena answered: "If I had known, I would have searched the stalks" (Fig. 3.3).

He asked for another appointment with Dog: "What are you doing tomorrow?" "I am going to cut grass." At midnight, Dog woke up his children and went out. That morning, again, Hyena waited for them on the road. The Dogs covered themselves with grass and came by Hyena. He said: "Good morning, grass," and the Dogs answered: "Thank you. Good morning to you." After waiting much longer, Hyena went to the Dogs' compound, where he found them with the grass. "How did you do that?" Dog answered: "Cousin, what is the problem? You said 'Good morning, grass,' and we answered." Hyena said: "If only I had known."

Another appointment, and Dog said that they were going to pick fruits. Again the Dogs left at midnight, but this time Hyena came right after them and found them up in the trees. He said: "Today I am going to eat you."

"Maybe if god wants it; maybe not." First Hyena asked for some of the fruits, and the Dogs gave them but they were not ripe. When Hyena tried to eat it, Dog threw one of his children through the air, far away. Then another one.

Hyena said: "This is not good fruit, and the air transports the little Dogs." Dog gave him another, large fruit, and while Hyena was eating he came down at the other side of the tree, without the Hyena seeing him. Hyena looked up from his fruit and saw no Dogs around. He called Dog but there was no answer, so he went home and found Dog and his family at their compound. "How did you get down the tree?"

"I threw you the unripe fruits, and when you were busy with them we went home."

"What shall we do tomorrow?"

"We are going fishing," Dog proposed.

Again the Dogs came early, but then the youngest Dog said that he saw Hyena coming. "Stick your head in the mud and open your anus." Hyena came and saw nobody, just small holes in the mud. He blew over them as a whistle, saying that they were his flutes,[23] not recognizing the anuses. He went home and the Dogs after him. Hyena asked Dog: "Where were you today?"

Dog answered: "You used our anuses as flutes when we were fishing."

Fig. 3.3 Sorghum harvest

"If only I had known. But where will you be tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow I will dance because my father-in-law has died."

"We will go together."

The next morning the Dogs made themselves ready for the dance, well decorated and with full gowns. They went to Hyena and sang: "*Hwe iya hwe iya renyè kadlengu*" (lit. 'we are not Dogs; we are the people from Wula'). Hyena said: "*Jiga ngjingtara kelè*" (lit. 'when you return, salute my friend Dog'), and he danced with the Dogs—he jumped, he twirled. His wife said: "Those are the Dogs." "No," said Hyena, "they are my stranger friends." When he jumped, he trampled on a small Dog, and the small Dog cried out. Kwerukweru called her husband, who was dancing far away, and the Dogs ran home. Hyena came home, took the little Dog, and ate it in the company of his wife and child.

VVung

The narrative structure entails the repetition of the same trick in different forms, adding of course to the listeners' amusement about the stupidity of the DUB. The trick is in the disguise, and its consecutive revelation. Structurally significant is the setting of the disguise: the first series takes place in a liminal space, in the bush, on the road, and at the waterside; the last one occurs during a festival inside the village. The liminal spaces remain sovereign—here the weak ones are safe from the DUB—but in the village setting the disguise is not sufficient. The tale, like all those based upon tricks, lacks a logical closure and the variants have different endings; I choose this one as it illustrates this narrative quandary by its rather dismal finish. The fabula runs:

Denial of relation ➔ Trick (disguise) ➔ Revelation ➔ [Repetitions] ➔ Partial revenge

In this genre, as well as in the next, we find tales with explicit or implicit tests, and the narrative structure is quite straightforward. The following is an example of such a story, told by Kwada Dzeme, that has withstood the onslaught of time and is very popular among the younger storytellers:[24]

Hamerkop, Marabout and the Frogs

It came about…

Hamerkop and Marabout always fed on Frogs. One day the Frogs had a meeting and decided they would stay indoors, as Hamerkop otherwise would finish them off. That morning Hamerkop came and stayed by the

waterside the whole day, but no Frog showed up. For a whole week he came and waited, but he found nothing to eat. He waited and thought, threatened by famine: "I have to see my old friend Red Ant," and he went for crab divination with Red Ant.[25] He told Ant: "I really suffer from famine; I can't find anything to eat any longer. The Frogs do not come out any more, so I came to consult the crab." Red Ant consulted the crab, who told him: "You have to grind peanuts and smear the paste around your beak; then you lie down at the refuse heap of the Frogs and pretend to be dead. You let the ants come and walk on your beak, and all will think you are dead. Then they will come out, and you choose the big, fat ones and you will have food for two weeks."

Hamerkop went home, took peanuts, ground them, and smeared his beak. That morning he went to the refuse heap and lay down. Kwayèngu, the youngest Frog, came out to throw out the garbage and saw Hamerkop lying there. She ran inside to call her father. The father came, looked from a distance, and saw ants around the beak. Cautiously, he touched Hamerkop, but Hamerkop kept himself stiff as a corpse. The father went inside and called: "Hamerkop is dead. Come and see; come with the drum and the flutes; come quickly." Some Frogs said: "No, he is not dead, he is tricking us in order to eat us." "Let us send for the large ants," the father said. They let the large ants bite Hamerkop, but he did not budge, *biui biui* [ideophone for not moving]. Then they called Scorpion, who stung Hamerkop hard, but still he did not move. Now all the Frogs rejoiced: "He is dead!" They touched him all over.

They called their smith to adorn the corpse, just leaving the eyes and the beak uncovered. The Frogs gathered with their dancing gear and started to dance, the smith with Hamerkop on his shoulders. They sang: "*Shèwu damba ingwèru ingwèru shèwu damba ingwèru ingwèru*" [lit. 'Hamerkop is dead,' plus ideophones for croaking frogs]. They beat their drums. Kwayèngu, the youngest Frog, saw that Hamerkop opened his eyes just a bit and warned her father. Her father looked, touched Hamerkop: "Do you not see that he is dead? You cannot hide the death of a chief." "He is not dead; he's looking at us," Kwayèngu insisted. They kept on dancing. Hamerkop looked at the fattest Frogs, flew from the smith's shoulders, and caught them, *y y y y y* [ideophone of picking out].

Hamerkop ate well, and with a full stomach went home with some more Frogs for Marabout. "Friend, where have you eaten? That is good meat, where does it come from? Maybe we can go there together, for I am still hungry." Hamerkop told him: "There is a worse suffering than hunger," and he explained to Marabout how to go about it: "You go to Frog house, lie down on the garbage—like a corpse—you say nothing and do not move.

Whatever they do to you, you keep still. Then they will come out and start to do the funeral dances with you. And then you catch them."

Marabout went to Frog house, saw the garbage heap, and lay down. One Frog came to throw away garbage and threw it over Marabout. He told the others: "Marabout is dead outside!" "Marabout?" "Yes." "You lie!" "No, it is true."

They looked: "Yes, it is true, Marabout lies dead there."

"Is he not tricking us to eat us?"

"No, I threw the garbage over him and he did not move."

They called for the large ants, and when these bit him, there was a twitch in the buttocks of Marabout. "What now? Let us send for Scorpion." Scorpion came, *tash* [ideophone of stinging scorpion]. Marabout started to cry, *rha rha rha* [ideophone of marabout cry]. He flew up in the air, *few few few* [ideophone for flapping of large wings].

VVung

The structure is not complicated, as the trick either succeeds or does not, with an outcome commensurate to the working of the trick.

Value ➔ Disinformation/trick ➔ Test ➔ Success / lack of success ➔ Reward

The fun of the tales resides in the testing of the trick, the terrible pain inflicted on the disguised birds, with Scorpion in his favorite role, that of torturer. Each listener has had some experience, directly or other, of the pain of a scorpion sting and can thus relate easily to this tale.

The composite fabula structure of the genre 2 tales is almost as straightforward as the last one:

Denial of relation ➔ Disinformation/Disguise ➔ Revelation ➔ Revenge/Test ➔ Reward/punishment

Death, Monsters and 'Things'

The third genre, tales about humans plus supernatural or special beings, contains a considerable number of tales with a similar narrative structure, especially in one favorite tale type, that of the choosy girl. As elsewhere in Africa, the girls who set their sights for their husbands too high on the social ladder reputedly end up badly.[26] Often they are wooed by irresistible strangers, who in Kapsiki tales are either predators—usually Leopard—or

a demon, or even Death, all of whom either mistreat or threaten to eat the girl. Let us look at an iconic tale, here with Leopard in the role of the groom, and a named heroine, one of the few, told by Masi Kwada:[27]

Gwemba and her Leopard husband

It came about…

A very beautiful girl with the name of Gwemba lived with her father, and all men came to woo her, but she found no one to her liking. Even the chief, who came with his son, was refused. When Leopard heard this, he went into the bush, gathered serpents, and adorned himself with serpents. He came to Gwemba's father, stayed outside, and greeted the father. Gwemba came out and saw a gorgeously adorned person sitting in the forecourt. She went back in and said to her mother: "If the man sitting outside has come to woo me, I will leave with him right away." Her mother went out and saw the well-dressed man. She asked him: "From where did you come, handsome man?" Leopard said: "I came because people told me there was a girl here, so I came to try to speak with her. I know well that she might not speak with me, because men are nullities for women anyway." The mother of Gwemba said: "Please go inside the house, for she will not converse outside."

Leopard entered, and as soon as Gwemba saw him, she asked: "Did you come here to love me?" "Yes," Leopard answered, "I came to love you." Gwemba said: "I have nothing to tell you, other than we have to leave together, because I have been waiting for you all the time." She told her mother: "Here is the one I love. Give me my things; I am leaving with my husband." Her mother was content, handed Gwemba her *rhuli* [pubic cover], and said: "Thank god, my daughter has a man. May god keep you in peace." Gwemba left with her husband, even without waiting for the food.[28]

They left the village, and a bit farther along the road Leopard dropped a serpent. The girl said: "Your thing has fallen down." Leopard answered: "That is where I took it from." A few kilometers more down the road he dropped another serpent, and the girl said: "There goes another one." Leopard raised his voice somewhat: "I took it from here." A third time he dropped a serpent, and the girl said the same thing. Leopard said to her: "You want to control me?" The girl saw that things were heating up.

They arrived in the cavern where Leopard lived: "This is my house." Gwemba said: "OK, that is fine," went into the cavern, and saw the feet and heads of a lot of people. She was afraid of being eaten as well and sat down. "You are not going to cook?" asked Leopard, "what else have you come for? You thought yourself too good for all the men who came over for you, and now you have married the most handsome one."

"Allright," the girl said, took a human leg, and started to cook.

"If you are going to boast as you did with your father, you will be the soup," said the Leopard. "You see here the heads of the other people, and you are not more than they were. But before you cook, we have to have sex. Give me your sex."

"Take it," the girl said.

Leopard answered: "I take it? How do I take it, on my head? Lie down."

She lay down and Leopard took her, tearing up her vulva.

That morning Leopard went into the bush. A smith lived near the cavern, and he said to Gwemba: "Put some cailcedrat[29] oil with red earth on your vulva. Maybe he will take some pity on you." Leopard came back, saw the red vulva, and immediately threw himself at the girl, with no pity at all.

A few months later, one other wife of the house of Gwemba said to her father that the mother of the bride had to visit her daughter and son-in-law. But the latter said she could not go before there was a child, so her co-wife went instead. She asked for the house, and people pointed out the cavern for her, where she found Gwemba and Leopard naked. She greeted Gwemba and asked for her husband. Gwemba introduced Leopard, and as the co-wife was smart, she said: "It is well. May god keep you well and give children. I will leave you; I will go home." Leopard asked her by what route she was returning, and she told him. Leopard left before she did, killed two animals, skinned them, and cut up the meat. As soon as the woman came to the spot, Leopard gave her the meat and she went home. There she presented what she had received. Gwemba's mother said: "Truly, my daughter married the right kind of guy." She kept the meat and ate it each day. When it was finished, the mother of Gwemba said: "It is now my turn to see what Gwemba has put in the world." *Satatata hwèa* [ideophone for leaving and arriving]. She asked a boy where Gwemba's house was. He pointed out the cavern.

"Where is the house?!"

"Go in there; people will respond to you when you speak."

"I see no house; I see only a cavern."

Her daughter heard her talking and answered from the cavern: "Yes, mother, I am here in the cave."

"You sleep in the cavern?"

"This is our house."

"Your house, in the cavern?"

The girl said: "Mother, do not speak like that; just enter the cave."

She went into the cave: "My daughter Gwemba, where is your husband?"

But Leopard sat there on the rocks.

"There he is, my husband."

"Where is your husband? I see only a dog with his tail. I do not see a person, just the dog."

"Don't talk like that, mother."

"That is what was in store for you, daughter. Real people came to court you, and you refused even the chief and the prince. This is the result. You married a dog," and she turned away, angry.

Leopard asked her: "You are going back by what way?" The mother said: "Why do you ask that? I walk alongside the river. What about it?" She left and found Leopard on the road. Leopard broke her neck and ate her, except for a leg that he took home and gave to Gwemba: "Cook this meat for me." Gwemba saw it was her mother's leg. She wanted to cry but was scared of Leopard, who asked her: "Why do you seem to cry?" "My calabash is broken." "No problem; I will buy you a new calabash."

That morning he said to Gwemba that he would go into the bush. A neighboring smith then said to Gwemba: "You will die if you remain with your husband. Give your horse millet and water. After eating, you take your luggage and you mount."

Gwemba did as the smith had told her. She took the millet and water, gathered her stuff, and mounted the horse, *paraw paraw paraw* [ideophone for a horse galloping]. She ran and ran. Leopard returned from the bush and found Gwemba gone. He followed the tracks of the horse and almost overtook them just before the river that separates the ward of Leopard from that of Gwemba's father. Gwemba jumped with the horse, but Leopard could not jump that far. Gwemba cried out, the people of the ward came and took her in, and she was saved.

VVung

For the narrative structure in this genre we can use the oppositions and mediations of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, namely, the opposition between descent and alliance, the perennial tension around a marriageable girl, reflecting the general tension between 'brothers' and 'in-laws.' Normally these tensions are mediated by the third kin type, the cross-cousin, who shares both features, descended from an alliance.

Over-valuation of self ➔ Over-valuation of alliance ➔ Disguise of candidate ➔ Wrong appraisal of partner ➔ Lower status ➔Serious transgression of norms ➔ Devaluation of alliance ➔ Devaluation of descent ➔ Return to normalcy

There are more versions of this tale in both my samples. It is one of the most popular stories, both with male and female raconteurs. The one given here is from 1972. Similar tales focus on the horse, which saves Gwemba without assistance from a smith. In other versions Gwemba is warned not to eat from her mother's leg, or there are more details given about the—

very problematic because of apparent menses—sexual intercourse between Gwemba and Leopard. For the remainder, the tale is remarkably stable. A 2008 version of this tale features not Leopard but a 'fool' from the bush, who is elaborately groomed, clothed, and adorned by bush friends, and then wins the girl who has set her heart on any groom without *gurehi* (scars). The result is the same: at each stage of the journey back, he returns the gifts, and then shows himself to be a *gutuli*. This latter concept is a difficult one in Kapsiki/Higi thought. In Bible translations it is used for demons or evil or possessing spirits; and in traditional religion, *gutuli* are often depicted as small, dark men of the bush who are dangerous and mean. However, the relation of *gutuli* to the personal god of Kapsiki, *shala*, is ambiguous, to say the least, as the *shala* of a particular place may also be called a *gutuli*, and also the personal god may be called *gutuli*.

One version provides an interesting slant to this tale: a blind girl marries a god in heaven. Her mother comes to visit her, eats too much, and defecates over the whole compound. In the end, Leopard comes in and destroys her. This could be a mix-up, but I think we have to treat the mixture of god–Leopard as genuine, both expressing wealth and power on the one hand, and threat and punishment for norm transgression on the other.

But here we gradually move into a related tale, which concentrates not so much on the girl but more on the mother, with the central motif of defecating throughout compound; and it is usually not god, but Death—or Leopard—who ends up with a smelly compound.[30] Kweji Deli told and sung the story with visible delight:

Death, the co-wives, and the singing excrement

It came about…

Separately, an unloved wife and a favorite wife went into the bush, because the locusts ate the harvest as well as all the fruits from the *lerhwa* [a fruit tree[31]]. The favorite went into the bush with the husband, and when Kwazerema [the unloved wife] was leaving, the house was empty. "I find no one here," she said, took her basket, and left for the bush. She saw some ripe *lerhwa* growing close to the house of Death. When she climbed into the *lerhwa*, she saw Death also picking his part.

"What are you doing there?" Death asked her.

"I'm plucking *lerhwa*. Everyone has left and there is no sorghum left in the house," Kwazerema answered.

Death said to his compound: "*Lalila*," and the door opened. They went in. Death said: "*Haw nde haw*" to the sorghum and the sorghum came from the granary and was ground. He said: "*Ga'a*"[32] and the mush was ready.

Death said "Cut your throat" to the goat and the goat was slaughtered. He said: "Cook yourself," and the goat was well cooked. Together they ate their fill. Then Death said to the basket full of sorghum: "Put yourself on her head," and it happened. "Go," he said, and both had gone from the house. "*Brejigula*," and the doors of the house were closed. He told the wife: "When your food is finished, you come back to do the same things, and you will have food again."

The husband and the favorite came home with some *lerhwa*.

"Where did you come from?" the favorite asked when she saw Kwazerema with all the food.

"From the same bush you came from."

"Can you show us the spot?"

"You could not get there."

"You will show me. If you, the weak one, can go there, I can easily," her co-wife answered.

Very early next morning she came to the hut of Kwazerema: "Let us go." Kwazerema refused, but their husband forced her to comply; if not, he would take away her sorghum. The two went to the house of Death, who was out in the bush with his people. Kwazerema said: "*Lalila*," and the door opened and they went in. She said "*Haw nde haw*," and the sorghum came from the granary and was ground, both for her and her co-wife. "Let us go," she said to the favorite, but she answered that they had not yet cooked and eaten their fill. "OK, you have to do as we did at the start: you say '*lalila*' and '*brejigula*' to the house and the doors will open and close," her co-wife answered. Kwajuni started to grind—*haw nde haw*—and put the jar on the fire. She then went into the stable and slaughtered the goat, and all was cooked. While she was eating, Death came in, singing: "*Odjak djakii, djich odjak adja*" (lit. 'What is that thing of my mother?'). Kwajuni was scared: "How will I now handle that basket full of sorghum flour?" In order to escape from Death, she went into the stable between the goats and shat from fear, but she had forgotten how to close the stable, so Death became aware that something was the matter. "What does the billy goat smell? Who has done that?" Death asked his wife. "Who knows?" his wife said, who wanted to have nothing to do with it. But the children cried out: "She is inside, she is inside!" and they went and found her, cornered against the wall by the goats. They took her out. Death saw her and said to his wife: "But that is not the one to whom I gave the sorghum." He beat her with a rope, filled a large jar with water, and started to boil it to cook her. The water went *bedget bedget* [ideophone for boiling water].

Back home, Kwazerema waited for her co-wife till dawn and then decided to look for her. She started to sing: "*Lilila*, *brejugula*, *merjigula*, *sergula*.[33] Could you not say '*brejigula*,' or could you not say '*lalila*'?"

At the sound of her singing, the women and girls of the ward took their *livu*[34] and joined in with her. Kwazerema continued to sing: "*Lilila*, *brejugula*, *merjigula*, *sergula*. Could you not say '*brejigula*,' or could you not say '*lalila*'?"

The dance grew animated, with the calabashes making their *haw haw haw* sound on the *livu*, until they arrived at the house of Death. While all were dancing, Kwazerema untied her co-wife and shat on a tree, and the shit kept singing: "*Lilila*, *brejigula*, *merjigula*, *sergula*. Could you not say '*brejugula*,' or could you not say '*lalila*'?" When they were already far away, the excrement grew cold and its song faded away. The Death family saw that the meat they wanted to put in the boiling water had left, and they threw the water away.

VVung

Here we have the singing excrement, a favorite feature in Kapsiki stories. Why is this so important? The singing serves to enable escape from the pursuers—when there is music one simply has to dance, as is also the case among the neighboring Mafa[35]—and the singing turds give the women time to escape. This occurrence always concerns women. I have not been able to find tales of men defecating, or of men singing, let alone singing male excrement. The tales reinforce male stereotypes of women being afraid—as well as gluttons; but on the other hand, they are the ones that escape, more often than the men; singing excrement symbolizes the power of the liminal, and for the women it is the weapon of the weak—the very weak, that is.[36]

The fabula structure here is still that of genre 3, although not based upon alliance but on reciprocity of other gifts (food) and with a certain slant. The Kwajuni co-wife ignores the normal rules of reciprocity, wanting too much for nothing, and then stumbles with the exit code, the breaking of social codes punished through the forfeit of the linguistic ones. Kwajuni is saved by the power of words, in fact the power of super-speech, singing, and of course by the shit. When the favorite defecated, she was found out by the smell, but when the heroine, Kwazerema, shat she did so on purpose and her poop kept singing and saved them; the power of super-speech was transferred into the heroine's lowest body parts, excrement.

Valuation of reciprocity ➔ Positive change in dangerous partner ➔ High status for human ➔ Undervaluation of reciprocity ➔ Loss of speech codes ➔ Help of marginal body part ➔ Power of super-speech

Another tension in the family, the one between siblings, gives rise to a whole series of stories that feature brothers on a joint quest. Usually, *rhena heca* have no named actors, but in the 2008 set several of the tales about brothers feature a named hero—a youngest brother with a clear identity, a miracle kid. In the 1972 set of tales this trend was hardly discernible; the new tales show it more clearly. The classic name of the miracle kid in Kapsiki is Ngemburu or, in southern villages, Yamere. In the Fulbe variant he is called Haman Dèftèrè or Dèkèrè. I give a modern version of this quite popular and often-told story.[37] In a way, it bridges this section with the next one, as similar tales exist where the dangerous wife is human, albeit a witch. The main motif is the rivalry between brothers, the older two being dumb and easy prey for evil women, the youngest serving just like Squirrel in the genre 1 tales, the know-all and can-do-all. This version is told by Timoti Teri Puwe:

Ngemburu and the wife of Death[38]

It came about…

There were three sons with one mother—Tizhè, Zra and Deli—the latter still in the mother's womb. While still in the womb, Deli said to his mother: "When my brothers go on a journey, you have to deliver me. I will travel the very day that I come out." His mother asked him: "Where will you come out?" He answered: "Through the anus."

When his brothers told their mother that they would go on a journey to find a wife, Ngemburu[39] came out of his mother's belly and asked for his walking stick. He told his brothers: "Let us go together." "You are not going to follow us," they said to Ngemburu. When they left, Ngemburu followed them at some distance, as far as the house of the wife of Death. Ngemburu told them not to drink the water.

"When a girl gives us water, shall we not drink? Come on."

"Drink if you want." When they drank, the calabash stuck to their necks.

"You see, I told you not to drink, and you did not want to believe me; you see what happens."

"Get lost, we are looking for a girl. Why do you speak like that always?" And they scolded Ngemburu.

Night came and they were in the house with the daughters of Death. Ngemburu told them not to sleep with the girls, but they said they would anyway. And they did. When all were asleep, the wife of Death attached the iron chains—*livu*—around their daughters' necks and the loinskins around the boys' loins, as a sign. But Ngemburu was present and saw that she wanted to kill his brothers. She then went to Ngemburu, who said "*u u u*" [ideophone for not sleeping]. She went to her husband's room and came

back later. Ngemburu said the same again and she asked: "Are you not sleeping? You don't know that your brothers are asleep?" "I will go to sleep."

When she went again to her husband's room, Ngemburu took the chains and tied these around his brothers' necks and the skins on the loins of the girls. When the woman came, he pretended to sleep in the pitch-dark hut. The wife of Death felt around and cut the throats of her daughters, believing them to be Tizhè and Zra. Ngemburu made a hole in the wall, leading to their mother's hut, and told his brothers to leave.

The next morning the wife of Death came to the hut and saw the blood of her own daughters. "Did I kill my own daughters, Ngemburu?"

"Yes." She really had, and she asked: "Where are you, Ngemburu?"

"I am under the lean-to of your husband." She broke the lean-to.

"Where are you?"

"I am under your husband's straw roof." She burned the roof.

"Where are you?"

"I am here with my brothers now."

The wife of Death changed herself into an ox and went to their home. Ngemburu warned his brothers not to catch that ox, but they did anyway and Tizhè sat on the ox. The ox gobbled him up, but Ngemburu struck the ox hard and Tizhè came out.

The wife of Death changed into a beautiful girl. Ngemburu warned Tizhè not to make love to that girl, but he said he would do that anyway because she was very beautiful. "How can I not make love to her? Get lost." And he married her. When they were inside the room, the wife wanted to take out the eyes of Tizhè. Ngemburu changed into a dog, *we we we* [ideophone for barking of a small dog]. The wife said to Tizhè: "I cannot sleep for that dog," and Tizhè took the dog and threw it out. Ngemburu changed back and slept at his mother's room. The wife of Death then took out Tizhè's eyes.

That morning, Tizhè came to Ngemburu complaining that his eyes had been taken out. Ngemburu said: "I told you so! But I will try to get them back for you."

Ngemburu swallowed up one of his own legs, just as Death has done,[40] and went to the wife of Death, while singing: "Ngemburu has finished my whole family. Oh, my sister. Ngemburu has finished all my family." The wife of Death thought it was her sister singing her condolences for the loss of the daughters and danced with her, but with one foot Ngemburu tired quickly.

"My sister, I am going back. I have some children who do not have eyes; I have to see to them." Death's wife said her: "Ah, I have the eyes of Ngemburu's brothers here."

"Please give them to me."

"To put them in, you have to mix a sticky leaf with some ashes; then you put that mixture in the holes, and the eyes will slide in." She also gave Ngemburu, disguised as her sister, a leg of meat. When Ngemburu was far

away, he made the leg come down and shouted: "I am not Death like you. Take your meat." Death's wife cried out: "You have to mix with peppers and euphorbia!"[41] Ngemburu said: "I will follow your first words." He put the eyes back into his brothers and they were healed.

VVung

Heroes of folktales are not famous for their pleasant characters—the same holds for Squirrel—and such a know-it-all is easily hated by everyone, since 'I told you so' lies on the tip of his tongue. Old themes abound in these tales: one-legged Death with his wife and children. The chains mentioned in the tale are the *livu*, the chain skirt that forms the central outfit of the Kapsiki brides (Fig. 3.4); the skin is the goat skin, the classic men's wear in the mountains.

Morals do not mix well with complex narrative structures: this is a long but slightly repetitive chain of events:

Denial of siblinghood ➔ Problem ➔ 1st exchange trick ➔ Destruction of threat ➔ Deflection ➔ New threat by shape change ➔ Decrease of humanity ➔ 2nd exchange trick ➔ Redress of normality

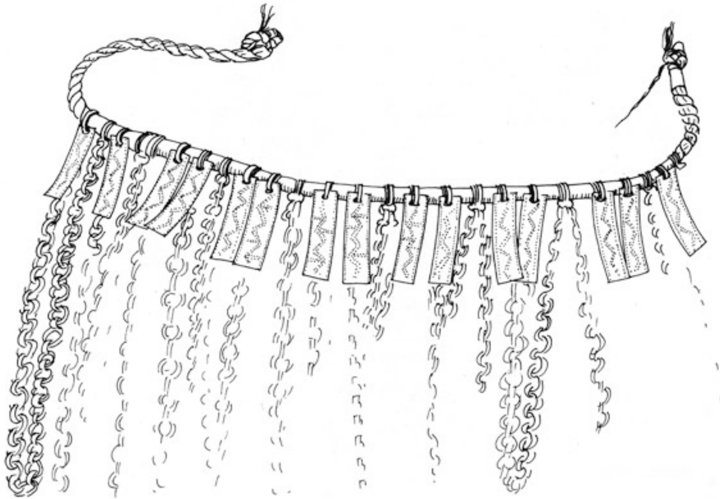

Fig. 3.4 A *livu*, girl's wedding skirt (For the drawing I thank Paul Wartena)

In genre 2, humans come occasionally into an animal world, but in this third genre it is the reverse: something from the bush comes into the human world, something which is definitely non-human—and the non-human entity is 'a Thing,' or 'SomeThing.' The very lack of definition is what makes it fully non-human, a vagueness that also implies shape shifting, for 'SomeThing' in stories can become 'AnyThing.' And that 'Thing' starts out as a non-human curiosity and then morphs into a human shape, which involves at the same time an attraction—a beautiful woman or a wondrous object—and an enormous threat, as 'It' is ultimately Death or another destructor of humanity. In many ways, the 'Thing' is the antithesis of Squirrel, an anti-trickster. The trickster is, as we have seen, ambivalence incorporated, not so much a mixture of good and evil but a definite character in which the distinction is not, or not yet, feasible. As I shall argue later, in comparing the two corpora, a polarization of the notions of good and evil is to be expected, if only from the vantage point of the world religions. In the trickster, the distinction seems to be in the future, yet-to-be-made. The monster or 'Thing,' on the other hand, exhibits no ambivalence; it is pure evil, a perennial threat to human life. It is, luckily, neither omnipresent nor omnipotent; it has its limitations vis-à-vis humans. First, it is from the bush, the topical opposite to the village that is relevant in most tales, either as a giver of plenty or as a threat. The 'SomeThing' that comes from the bush is evil, sometimes on its own but usually through a human link, and then it wreaks havoc on the village. It can be countered only with great effort and only by marginal people—by a widow that remained with her surviving children, which she reared inside a baobab, by a blacksmith, or by a 'fool.'[42] Human frailty opens the door; human weakness may defeat it.

In contrast, the trickster is fully human, ambivalent, and wily, but always part of human society. His tricks are performed in the marginal space, be it the bush, the water, or the roof of the *dabala*, and the effects of his tricks are always temporary, never resulting in a lasting change. Against a revengeful DUB he has no recourse other than deflection of its rightful anger. Furthermore, the trickster has a very definitive form: he may disguise himself but never changes shape; he is always just himself, never fully good, never fully evil—the epitome of humanity. So the Monster, the 'SomeThing,' in the tales is the countervailing power of the tales: unpredictable, indefinable, non-ambivalent, un-human, quite stupid, and only vulnerable to marginals. In her analysis of Mafa tales, Godula Kosack characterizes this figure as a witch, and one can see the rationale,

as 'It' is the epitome of evil, as are witches. However, the crucial feature of the witch in Africa is that the threat stems from the inside, from kinsmen, forming a betrayal of the trust that should reign inside a family.[43] Witchcraft is intimacy and trust gone wrong. Here in the Kapsiki tales—as in the Mafa tales—the threat definitely comes from the outside and is then trusted against all odds and taken into an intimate relation. Witches are less human than they seem; 'It' seems more human than it is.

Sorcery is something else. In the animal tales, Toucan is the great sorcerer, using his eyes and beak to conjure up things, a quality Squirrel tries to match in vain.[44] In human tales, the blacksmith occasionally furnishes magic aid, but he is usually a seer more than one a performer of magic. The major magic resides in restoring beings back to life and uses as its central symbol the *dlèmpedli*, the indigenous vinegar made from the ashes of certain herbs and plants. Vinegar is the basic ingredient of Kapsiki sauces, aimed at revitalizing the eater by lifting his spirits. That is exactly what its function in the tales is: through a judicious application of *dlèmpedli* the privileged dead come back to life to take their rightful place in the story ending. Death can perform any magic, as can his wife and things from the bush. The main element of the ultimate strangeness-as-evil is indeed shape shifting, the monster becoming a rock, a pool, a hedge, a tree, a needle and—the ultimate transformation—a beautiful girl.

So two separate sets of supernaturals or 'non-naturals' feature in these tales, especially in this genre. The first are the clear supernaturals such as Death, god/*gutuli*, and Rain. They are clearly recognizable: all have households and families, which makes them quite human, while they all command huge bounty, which makes them superhuman. In the tale just related, it is Death who is a giver of plenty to ones in need. This is not a usual aspect of *Mte* (Death), but then he is after all a god in Kapsiki thought. For both Death and the other deity, Rain, the main symbol of power is wealth, immense and immediate riches to hand out. This is the main contrast with the second genre, the undefined 'SomeThing' from the bush. Here we see a denial of humanity, as the 'Thing' is formless, unshaped, and frightening; the main scare is the very lack of shape and the absence of definition, which in the end may amount to cannibalism, a pandemic, or to forms of suicide by people. The 'Thing' is undefined, and becomes powerful when defined by humans, while the supernaturals are the ones who define humans. The deities may give as well as take, but in fair measure and with a definite moral attached, whereas the 'Things' have no morals and do not reward or punish, just follow common human

frailty. The 'Things' can be beaten only by not-quite-humans, like people raised inside a tree, or by very simple practical means, often by women. The supernaturals, on the other hand, are never beaten, not even challenged, because there is nothing to beat here, representing as they do wealth-cum-justice. They are the norm; the 'Things' are the anti-norm. In astronomical terms, the undefined is a black hole; the deities form a supernova. An example of a 'Thing' story follows here, as told by Keka Yang, one of the favorite stories focusing on human doubt:[45]

The miraculous horn

It came about…

A very good cultivator succeeded in filling four granaries every year. One day something came from the bush, which heaved up everything that was lying down. "Stand up, stand up," it said to the grasses, and they stood up. The man said: "I did not clear this field well." He labored and labored, but the thing came again: "*Kewusu*, *kewusu dangelange* (lit. 'Grass, grass upright'), stand up." And the grasses stood again.

The man went to see the diviner with the crab, the ant-lion.[46] "I have come to ask the crab at your place. I cultivate my field, but something comes and says: '*Kewusu*, *kewusu dangelange*, stand up,' and all the grasses stand up again. That is why I came to see you."

The ant-lion told him: "Go to that mountain over there, and you will find an ant with a tuft of hair on its head. You have to consult him." The man went to the mountain and found the ant with a tuft of hair on its head.

"Where do you come from?"

"When I cultivate my field, which can fill four granaries, something comes from the bush and says: '*Kewusu*, *kewusu dangelange*, stand up,' and all the grasses stand up again. That is why I came to see you."

"OK, when it says '*Kewusu*, *kewusu dangelange*, stand up,' you stand up and throw your stick at it and take its horn."

So he went into the bush to cultivate. Again the thing came and said to the grasses: "*Kewusu*, *kewusu dangelange*, stand up." The man threw his stick at it, the horn fell from its head, but the thing fled.

"What kind of horn are you?" the man asked.[47]

"I am the horn that gives you milk."

"You can give me milk this evening?"

"Yes, I can."

The man went home and took the horn into his room. When his wife had cooked the mush, he poured it out behind his hut and the horn gave him milk.

He called his wife: "I will leave for a journey, and you may enter my room to light the fire."

He left, and his wife went into his room, lay down, saw the horn, and asked:

"Who has put this horn here? Oh, it is the horn of my husband."

"I am the horn who gives milk."

"If you can, give me now," and the horn gave her milk. "Ah, that is what my husband has had all this time," the wife said. "This is a horn that deranges our house." And she set out to hand the horn over to someone else. She explained what the horn did, and the other woman asked the horn what it did: "Can you carry me?" "Yes, I can carry you." She ran to the riverside, to give the horn to the people on the other side.

"Throw us the horn," the people said on the other side. She threw it, but the horn fell into the water. The people took water from the water pool and went into the water to look for the horn. The woman herself was also well into the mud. They found the horn.

"What kind of horn are you?"

"I am the horn that puts the woman well into the mud."

"Can you put all of us into the mud?"

"I can put you all into the mud," and the horn put all the women into the mud and transported itself to the hut of the man where it had been staying.

People had told the man already: "That thing in your hut is no longer there. Your wife spoiled it. When you see the women coming back from the pool, they will all be completely white."

"OK," the man said, and went back. His wife made mush, and the man asked: "Horn, are you still there?"

"I am the horn that rolls a woman into the fire, when she has lit the fire."

"Can you throw me into it now?"

"I can throw you in." The man was thrown into the fire and was covered with ash, a white thing in his room.

He left the hut and said to his wife: "Light the fire in my room. Ask the horn what type of horn it is; then I will not cut off your head."

The wife entered the room and asked the horn: "What kind of horn are you?"

"I am the horn that throws the woman into the fire when she has lit it for her husband."

"Are you able to throw me in now?" The horn threw her into the fire.

The man took the horn to throw it away on the road, but the horn followed him home. So the man went to the blacksmith: "There is a horn in my house, people."

"What kind of horn is it?"

"It is a horn that kills people. It says so itself and truly it kills people."

"You lie, and you are not even a blacksmith, for they are the ones that lie. How can a horn kill somebody? Go, fetch it and bring it here."

The blacksmith said in his forge, "I want to have it here before I light my fire."

The man brought the horn. "What kind of horn are you?" the blacksmith asked.

"If someone has lit the fire in the forge, I will throw him in."

"Are you able to throw me in now?" The smith was still talking when the horn took him and threw him into the fire. The blacksmith was completely white in his forge and everyone fled the forge.

An old man returned from the bush with his grass. "Wait, who has left this horn here? I will take it to smoke my tobacco with. What kind of horn is it, anyway?"

"I am the horn that binds the man with the rope he came home with."

"Are you able to bind me with my rope?" He was still speaking and the horn had already bound him with the rope and made him all white, the old man.

An old woman came back from the bush with her grandson on her back and a basket with peanuts on her head.

"Oh, who has left this horn here, grandmother? What kind of horn is it anyway?"

"I am the horn that kills the old woman when she returns with her grandson on her back and has a basket full of peanuts."

"Are you able to kill me now?"

"I can kill you." The horn threw the peanuts on the ground and made the old woman completely white. When the mother of the little boy came home, she asked him: "Where is your grandmother?"

"The horn threw her down."

"What kind of miracle is that? Where does it come from? Horn, are you protecting me?"

"I protect nothing here." The woman ground the horn on a stone into pieces.

VVung

The 'Thing' from the bush in this tale has a double ambivalence; first, it originates from another formless object in the bush. That particular 'Thing' was the ultimate bush, in that it made the weeds grow doubly quick. Natural re-growth in itself is crucial for survival, but too quick re-growth is a nuisance and a threat. Beating the bush-Thing with the help of the bush divination produced a miracle object, the horn, which is even more ambivalent. In itself it is a potential boon, when properly used, like

many of the horns mentioned in Kapsiki magic.[48] Its power resides in the interaction with humans, whose wishes it can fulfill if properly managed. But the point of the story is in what the Kapsiki call *kambe*, to doubt someone. One never believes the other at face value, and the other always has to prove his or her worth and power. In this case, the habit of doubting turns out to be pretty stupid, and the object destroys all who do doubt its strength, and as such it accrues more power and becomes a serious threat. In the end, it needs the vaunted female practicality to render it harmless by grinding it to dust.

So the narrative structure is relatively straightforward, hinging on the oppositions bush–village, male–female, and natural-magical. In Kapsiki magic the surplus delivered by non-natural means always carries a price, as the magical boon has to be paid somehow, somewhere. A special stone or horn may boost one's harvest or multiply the content of a granary, but then a price has to be paid in living years or even lives: someone with a miracle object may have a shorter life or will have less children or grandchildren.

> Super-nature against man ➔ Defeated ➔ Supernatural object at the service of man ➔Underestimation ➔ Misuse of power ➔ Semi-suicide ➔ Redress by woman

Here the supernatural thing is the very object of wonder. It is extremely powerful, but only through the doubts of man: it can perform anything man does not believe it can do. In a way, this tale is an inversion of the three wishes folktales that are so well-known in Eurasia:[49] there the object has power to do exactly what its possessor wants, who then fails in good judgment. Here, unbelief in its powers is the motor, and the thing is stronger than man suspects, meaning stronger than man him/herself. The power of the thing itself remains latent until triggered by human disbelief and especially by human speech. Also, it is ethically completely neutral, good or bad, productive or destructive—just a force one has to manage with care. In the end, a woman is stronger only by not expressing any doubt or wish, and can then destroy it.

This strange relation between man and object resembles to a high degree the notion in Kapsiki of *rhwè*, medicinal or magical 'means.' These means, be they plants, animal parts, or special stones, work only when triggered by human speech, and in this case can be used for healing if and only if the possessor uses them wisely and with the correct words. In

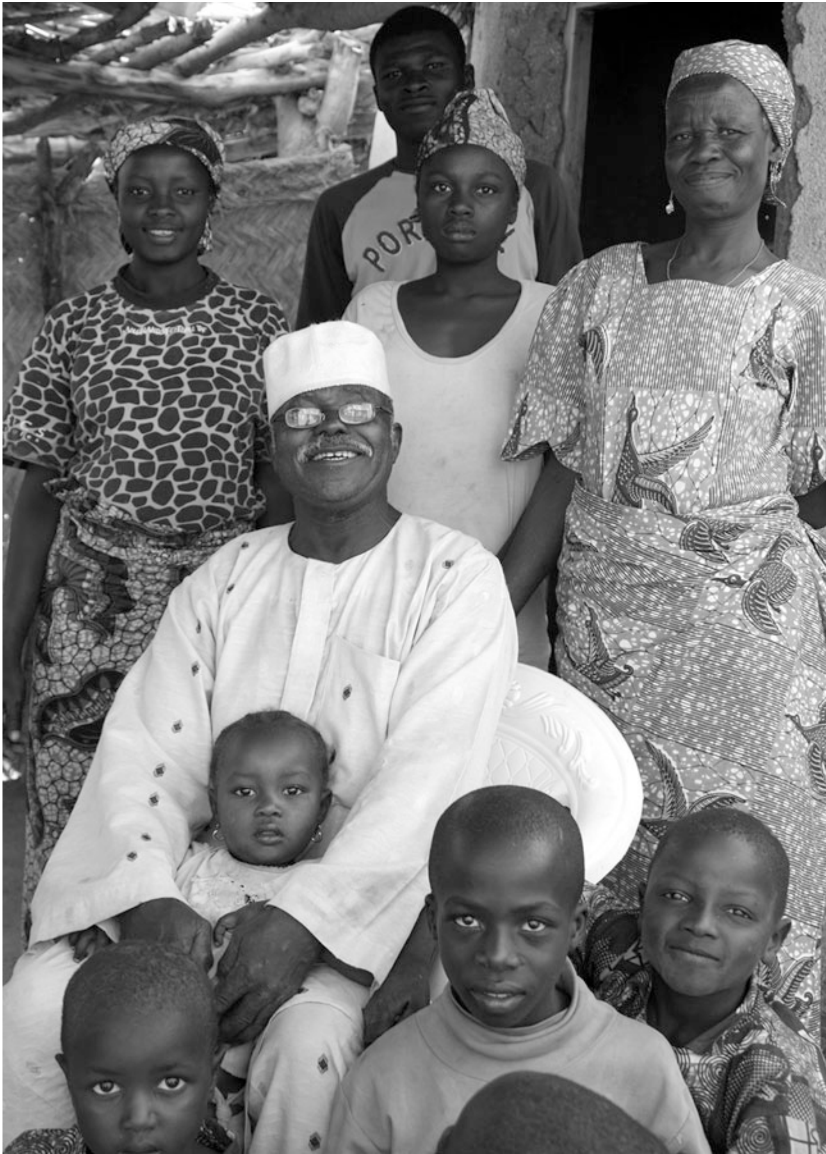

Fig. 3.5 Luc, Marie, and their family in 2008

their latent form, *rhwè* can be harmful; they are a danger to those who do not really know how to use them properly. The closest Western notion is that of the *apprenti sorcier*,[50] and, as I have argued elsewhere, the prevailing Kapsiki attitude toward magic is that of the pupil facing a task of insurmountable complexity. In Kapsiki religion, magic is not something to be dabbled in by non-experts, so we are never more than *apprentis sorciers*, pupils unable to handle the 'real' powers, blundering about in the alien realm of the 'other world.'[51] But *rhwè* can also be destroyed simply by breaking it or grinding it, ignoring for the moment any notion of its power. A related tale highlights such a miracle object, which interferes in interhuman relations, told by Tlimu Vandu Zratè, and given in shortened form here. An apposite title would be *The swinging stick of the lazy man*:[52] A lazy man had a large family but did not provide for them as he was an avid *tserhwe*[53] player. His hard-working wife found a calabash in the bush, one which filled itself at her request. The family ate well through this, until the youngest daughter betrayed the secret to her lazy father. He immediately showed the calabash to the chief, who confiscated it and gave nothing in return. The next day the wife found a stick in the bush, one which, with the proper formula, would strike out. The woman took it home, but again the youngest daughter betrayed her. After being beaten up by the stick, the man took the stick to the chief's court and demonstrated the power of the stick forcefully: the court was emptied, the man took back the calabash, burned the palace down, and went home.

The structure of the narrative is an inverse repetition:

> Inversion of roles ➔ Miraculous food ➔ Betrayal by kin ➔ Betrayal by superior ➔ Inversion of roles ➔ Miraculous weapon ➔ Betrayal by kin ➔ Punishment of superior

What is striking here is the social stupidity of the lazy game player—even if, as a draughts fanatic and checkers player myself, I can empathize with his choice of activities … But miracles still occur, are important in this tale also, and indeed come from the bush. Not only does this fit well with the general notion that wealth originates from the bush—and is available to be consumed in and by the village—but it also indicates that all miracle objects people speak about in Kapsiki society—such as special stones for riches, harvest, health, and cattle—indeed originate from the bush.

The final evil, thus, is inside man himself, as illustrated by the following—admittedly rare—cannibal story,[54] which epitomizes the ambivalence inherent in eating meat, and the power of the outside—in this case a bird. The story is told by Masi Bezeya:

The cannibal

It came about…

A man had a lot of children, and once a buzzard flew over and dropped something next to him. The man grilled it in the fire and ate it. It tasted good. Then a child of his came home with his food, and he killed and ate the child. The same with another child. In the end, he ate all his children. When his first wife left home with her son, he pursued them, but he had become very meager. The other wives realized he had eaten all their children and said to the last girl: "When you bring him the bowl of food, put it in front of his door, and carry a whip." The man ate the food, as because of the whip he could not get to the 'meat.' Later at night he went to his daughter's hut, as he had eaten no meat yet; he had lost all his flesh, so his bones clattered while he walked. But her whip cried out and he left. The girl woke up, took her calabashes, and made a hole in the wall and fled. He came back, looked everywhere, but sat down: "My meat has escaped." He went out in the bush to look for her, his bones clattering as all his own flesh had been eaten by now. His girl heard him coming and climbed a tree, and he sat in the hollow stone at the foot of the tree. He ate the last tendons between his bones, and she shat from fear. Her shit fell into the stone: "Ah, my meat is giving me food," and he ate it. But nothing else came, so he went home, a clattering skeleton. There he sat down in his entry hut, picking the last edible parts out of his body. And he still sits there, each day trying to find some meat.

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This is seemingly the most human of all evils, but in fact this depiction of an evil carnivore is the closest to a witchcraft story I have come across; and in its self-consumption it is much less than human without any eventual boon or power. The fabula is clear, I think:

Exaggerated craving ➔ Denial of kinship ➔ Destruction of kin ➔ Self-destruction ➔ Loss of humanity

In general in these tales, mankind faces faceless powers that in themselves are surprisingly dependent on man himself and are very vulnerable to arguments of brute force or trickery, such as a war stick, being ground between stones, or Elephant being eaten from the inside out. Other stories

in this genre relate how someone sees 'SomeThing' in the bush and then is pursued by that 'Thing,' who wants to know what exactly he has seen. Fleeing before the 'Thing' gives it strength and speed, but in the end straightforward measures suffice to bring it down. Even against the black hole of Thingness, we are not without recourse—at least if we stick to the materiality of our existence. The 'other world' is to be respected, but not overly feared.

People Among Each Other

The largest genre of tales, approximately 29 %, features people only, but of course in all their relevant variety. So these tales hinge on the oppositions man/woman, chief/follower, common Kapsiki/smith, village/outside, and Kapsiki/Fulbe, in any combination, an opposition we saw mentioned in an earlier story. Rarely do animals enter, other than an occasional bird to tell secrets, or a frog or toad to borrow a vulva and vagina from; and supernatural elements are just as few and far between. If Death appears, the story is usually quite moral, resulting in advice to people to heed their obligations to their fellow men, and the influence of the religions of the Book is clear. The stories in this group form the arena between humans, where power is pitted against smartness—the vaunted Kapsiki *ntsehwele*—where the loved wife vies with the spurned one for the favors of their joint husband, where three brothers compete over a scarce resource, usually a woman. The same motifs as in the trickster tales occur frequently here: the clever, weak one trumps the powerful brute; the neglected wife is the one who really loves her husband; the youngest brother has the deep insights and wisdom that his older siblings so clearly lack. The challenges come from outside in these tales and show the Kapsiki village as a self-directed sociopolitical unit with structural distrust toward other villages. In Kapsiki marriages, we saw that women have to go elsewhere for their secondary marriages, and that women always come into the village from the outside. This is exactly what the tension is about: an unknown woman enters the village from afar—so who is she and, especially, what is she? Appearances are deceptive in all tales—we saw that clearly with the supernaturals—but here the distrust between villages adds to the structural distrust between the genders.

In Kapsiki tales the chief–commoner distinction takes on a special flavor, because village chiefs are relatively powerless, primus inter pares more than hierarchical relations, ritual functionary more than political figure. But the tales do need an autocratic chief, so the story is set in a neighboring group

with a large political and ritual reputation, such as the one noted before, the northern neighbor Sukur, the old center of iron production.[55] Again, it is Timoti Teri Puwe telling the tale:

The bull of the chief

It came about…

The chief of Sukur had slaughtered a bull, and there was a lot of meat left. When his people were at his compound, all with their friends, he asked them: “Who among you could keep that meat fresh for me, for about a month?”

“Ah, Sir, we can keep it and render it to you in a month.”

“Can you really keep it so that it will not rot?”

“Yes, I will bring it back to you.”

“Can you do it with just your own *ntsehwele*, or are you going to add another one’s brains?” the chief asked.

“No, I can do it just with my own cleverness; I do not take others’ wits to mix with mine,” the first friend said.

“I can do it as well, but I will add the *ntsehwele* of others to mine,” a second friend said.

The first one, relying on his own *ntsehwele*, took a leg and put it inside a new jar. He gathered leaves of various trees, laid the meat on the leaves, and filled the rest of the jar with them. He then shut the jar with beeswax.

But the one who said he would use the wits of other people to add to his own, took his part of the meat, went to a butcher friend, and asked him to take a long and hard look at that meat.

“OK, I have seen it well,” his friend said.

“Well, this is the chief’s meat, and I have to keep it for him. That is my problem now. So, please, when you are selling meat, use this meat in your business. But when the chief asks me to give his meat back, you bring me the same amount and type of meat.”

“OK, I do not want you to be apprehended, and I will do this for you,” his friend said. So the second guy rested at ease.

The first one, however, each day poured water over the jar—day in, day out—the whole month.

After that month, the chief announced: “The day after tomorrow I want you to bring me my meat.”

The second one went to his friend: “The chief wants his meat back; please bring me the meat.”

“You can assist me in the slaughter,” his butcher friend said. They slaughtered a bull, a fat one like the chief’s, took the meat, went to the chief, and laid it in the courtyard.

“Yes, truly it is so. You have used two *ntsehwele*,” the chief said, “but where is the one who used his own *ntsehwele* only?”

The first guy came with his jar, put it in the courtyard, and a loud sound of flies came from the jar. The chief scolded him: "I do not think even one person can rely on his own *ntsehwele* only. You said your own *ntsehwele* was enough. What did you do with my meat?" The first one opened the jar and a terrible stench filled the whole village. They arrested him.

They asked the one who brought the good meat how he had done it. "I cannot rely just on my own *ntsehwele*; I develop my thoughts together with other people, and thus I have been able to keep the meat." Indeed, the meat was as fresh as it was a month before, and he became a notable in the chief's court.

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The setting is familiar for the Kapsiki. The northern villages of the Kapsiki territory follow a general custom in the Mandara area, the feast of the bull, *henetla* in Kapsiki.[56] Every year, in the dry season, the rich men of the village slaughter a bull they have been feeding at the stable for years. This is one ritual that forms a transethnic pattern in the rich tapestry of cultural differences in the northern Mandara Mountains, and the tale follows its usual procedure. After the elaborate rituals leading up to the slaughter, the bull is finally told that it has brought its fate upon itself by "grazing in the fields of the chief of Sukur," a transgression worthy of death. After the kill, the remainder of the meat is stored in new jars and covered with leaves and beeswax, just as in the tale. In contrast to the story, the Kapsiki do not mind eating the almost rotting meat, which is relished for weeks—but not for a month, to be sure (Fig. 3.6).

The new element in this section of tales is overt moralism, which we saw already in the fabula of the hitting stick. The moral of this tale is brought home overtly and forcefully; one should not rely on oneself alone but always work with others. In the tales of the former sections, this was either much less clear—though overeating was severely punished—or absent in the trickster tales, even inverted. This reflects a Kapsiki dialectic between sociability, the theme of this tale, and their admiration of *karhwete*, to trick someone, to outwit the other—two contradictory values. Here the sociability of friends, advocated by the chief, is used to trick him, leading to the just reward of a well-paid sinecure at his court. The fact that this latter reward holds much more value for the Fulbe courts in the central administrative Kapsiki/Higi towns, such as Mogode and Michika, than for the Tlidi of Sukur, who does not really command a formal court,[57] does not detract from the moral of the tale. Again, we have a straightforward fabula structure:

Fig. 3.6 Showing the bull in *henetla*

Challenge ➔ Two options ➔ Disregard of values ➔ Punishment ➔ Combination of conflicting values ➔ Reward

The moralistic nature shines through even in the structure.

Another duet of conflicting values surfaces in a related tale, also centering on the bull of Sukur's chief. In the same setting of a bull slaughtered for *henetla*, someone boasts that he can eat the whole bull. Immediately, he is challenged to 'put his money where his mouth is' and is ordered to eat the next bull, completely. In desperation—those bulls are large!—he consults a smith, and together they devise a stratagem. After the slaughter he instructs the butchers to divide the meat in many portions and to put these all over the chief's courtyard. He then runs through the yard, nibbling on one piece, taking a small bite from another, hopping through the yard, until one of the spectators, exasperated, cries out that he is not really eating anything. Immediately, the hero shouts that the spectator has no business meddling in the endeavor, and if he seems to know how to eat it all, he has to demonstrate it! The other spectators agree, and the 'meddler'

has to take over. Of course, he fails the test and is arrested, liberating the first boaster from his big mouth.

Here the relevant values are that one has to make good on promises and boasts, on the one hand; and on the other hand, one has to mind one's own business, a very strong injunction in the privacy-oriented Kapsiki society. The infraction of the first value here is resolved by an infraction of the stronger second value by someone else.

Impossible challenges abound in all tales, often to be solved by supernatural means; but sometimes the challenge itself is punctured. Throughout the world the prime person to demand completion of an impossible task is the father of a young nubile girl, the future father-in-law. In the following tale, his position itself is challenged.[58] Teri Pierre, another great raconteur, tells the story:

The rope of smoke

It came about…

A certain father had a very beautiful daughter. All the boys came to court her. The father said: "Anyone can have my daughter on condition that he gives me as bride wealth a large amount of water held together with a rope made of smoke." Suitors came with large jars of water, but he said: "No, the water has to be just tied to the head with a rope, not in a jar and not fetched in a calabash." The men went down to the river and tried it, but nobody succeeded.

Then a suitor came along and said: "Father, I have come to greet you and ask the hand of your daughter." The father smiled and said: "Anyone can have my daughter on condition that he gives me as bride wealth a large amount of water held together with a rope made of smoke. The water has to be tied to the head, not in a jar and not fetched in a calabash."

"Ok, I will come back tomorrow."

The suitor went home. He took a large brass pipe and a sack full of tobacco and went to the father-in-law. "I have come to do it. Please give me an assistant who can help me." The father sent for a friend to help the suitor, and the two set out for the river. There, the suitor said to his helper: "I suddenly remember; we have to plait smoke from a pipe into a rope. Here is a pipe and tobacco; please ask your friend to show us how it is done." So the helper went back with the pipe and tobacco to his friend, the father, and said: "A large amount of water has to be held together with a rope made of smoke. So I brought you a pipe and tobacco; please show how it is done."[59]

Embarrassed, the father of the bride simply had to grind the tobacco, put it in the pipe, and light it. But any smoke from the pipe went up straight; and when he tried to catch it, it dispersed. He again ground tobacco, and

again the smoke disappeared before he could plait it, until all of the tobacco was finished. "O, mother, how do I do this?" he made a show of scratching his head. The father asked his friend: "Please call the one at the riverside." When the suitor arrived with the friend, the father asked him: "How can anyone make a rope from the smoke coming out of the pipe?!"

"But it was you who said to tie the water on the head with a rope of smoke. For that I need smoke from a pipe plaited into a rope. So that is why I had your friend ask for it."

"Yes, you are right and I should not have asked you. You can have my daughter." He took his daughter and gave her to the suitor.

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The story has a strange twist. It first seemed as if the father of the bride really thought he could plait a rope of smoke. However, when speaking with the one who told the tale, the gist became clear: the father did not want to acknowledge before his own friend that he had saddled the suitor with an impossible task. So he had to pretend to try himself; and, failing, he thus had to acknowledge that he had made a mistake. Saving face in front of his friend—a definite value—meant the end of his position as a father-in-law, and so of his right to ask any bride wealth. So in the story as edited above, the friend is the ingénue who has to be kept in the dark and for whose innocent eyes one does not want to appear bad. The focalizer, to use a narratological term,[60] is the father-in-law. Friendship is important in Kapsiki, one of the few relations that bridge the divide between different villages; and the Kapsiki have quite a ritual repertoire to highlight friendships in this lineage-based society. Again, the tale has a straightforward narrative structure:

Misuse of position ➔ Use of contrasting central value ➔ Redress of wrongs ➔ Just reward

Though less blatantly moral than the preceding tales, the notion of justice and fairness is never far away in this story: even unequal relations have their rules and norms, and misuse of an uneven playing field threatens to disrupt society. This moralism seems absent when the field is in fact level, as between the genders, who in Kapsiki society have such a mutual dependency that the balance is never far out of line. Marriage forms another setting for impossible challenges, owing to the structural tensions between husband and wife that go with the high divorce ratio in Kapsiki/Higi society.[61]

One story highlighting this speaks of a couple that want to 'educate' (*yè*) each other—in fact, who try to induce each other to make a mistake and then set an almost impossible task as redress. The wife starts with asking her husband to fetch a calabash with millet from her granary; but if he breaks it, he has to repair it with the tail hairs of the youngest of the lion cubs.[62] She has the calabash smeared with hibiscus,[63] so it slips from his fingers and breaks. So he sets out to the lion's den. The story recounts at length how he befriends the lioness, using honey as a bait, and finally succeeds in getting the necessary hairs. After repairing the calabash, he returns it to his wife. Then it is his turn. He catches a pigeon, adorns it with chicken feathers, and puts it among the chickens inside the plaited pen. He then asks his wife for an egg; but if one of the chickens escapes, she has to get it back. The pigeon flies away, and she spends years looking for the bird. At last she acknowledges defeat, gray and old.[64]

Not much of a marriage here. Prohibitions among spouses against touching each other's belongings, with exorbitant sanctions, are not uncommon and reflect the distrust woven into the marital relationship.

Marriage is the source of many stories the world over, but in Africa it has the specific flavor of polygyny. As indicated, in Kapsiki this takes the form of the contest between the co-wives, vying for the favors of the husband, especially between the *kwajuni*, the favorite, and the *kwazerema*, the unloved one. Although the favorite wife usually proves in the end to be completely selfish, while the neglected one has the best interests of her husband at heart and loves him best, the theme can also go the other way, as told by Masi Kwada:

Burying Kwajuni

It came about…

In a chief's compound are several wives, the loved one (Kwajuni) and the others. Kwajuni is always at home; she has just given birth to a child. The other wives put their clothes out in the sun to dry in the morning, but she stays inside. The chief says to the other wives: "I am going on a journey. Please, when the day heats up a bit, let the young mother bask a little in the warmth. So bring her out and make her warm."

The chief goes on his trip. The other wives dig a hole in the middle of the courtyard. They put a mat over it, with a little bit of sand. They tell Kwajuni to come out, but she thinks it is not yet warm enough. So they light a fire under the mat and put her over it. Kwajuni reclines on the mat and falls into the pit. They cover her with earth.

A bird finds the chief on his route and sings: "Your Kwajuni is near the fire." The chief jumps on his horse and rides home at full speed. The bird keeps singing the same song; and when the chief gets home it shows him the pit, singing all the time. The chief asks what has happened. He digs up Kwajuni with her young first-born. "Who has done this?" Nobody answers. Kwajuni indicates who was culpable and the chief punishes them all.

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Few tales are more straightforward than this one: the loved wife suffers at the hands of her co-wives, and they are duly punished. *Kwajuni*, like her opposite *kwazerema*, is used as a proper name in tales; in daily life the terms are shunned, as no husband will declare who is one or the other, always trying to hide his preferences—in which he not always succeeds, by the way. The structure is as follows:

Relational norm transgression ➔ Revolt ➔ Help by (super)nature➔ Status quo re-established

The reverse theme, where Kwazerema is the good wife after all, is much more common; and resetting the balance inside the polygynous family is a much more frequent theme.[65] Souleye Feydou, a Fulbeized Kapsiki, tells the story:

Kwazerema and helpful Ant

It came about…

A man had Kwajuni and Kwazerema; the latter always had to fetch water at the river. On a certain day she saw Red Ant there, who asked: "What are you always looking for here?" She answered: "They make me suffer back home. They have me fetch water; they use it all, and in what is left they piss." Red Ant gave her medicine, *hwèbè*, and told her to put that in her jar in the morning and to tell no one.

The next morning the husband wanted to urinate; and when he pissed into the jar, his penis stuck to the jar. He could not get it loose, so he called his children. They tried to shatter the jar but could not break it. The jar started to sing: "*Si mbal mbal sala ma cimbale mbal.*"[66] Each time they struck the jar it sang out in this way. Then Kwajuni arrived: "You cannot even break the jar that has taken the penis of your father?" She brought out the *sese*, the large stick women stir the mush with. She struck out, but the jar just sang again its hateful song.

Kwajuni went to the river and met a woman there, who asked her: "Where is your husband? I never saw him." Kwajuni said: "My husband is

at home and suffers greatly." "Why?" "Because his penis is stuck to the jar." "Let us go and see," the woman said. Kwajuni went home even though she had not filled her jar yet. She left her water outside the door, where the horses drank it. Inside the house they found the penis still stuck to the jar. The foreign woman asked for a flail, but even then the jar simply chanted. Striking out, the woman flung herself against a wall. At long last they asked Kwazerema to undo it. They begged her, gave her a lot of gifts—a whole feast. The penis got loose, finally, and Kwazerema was number one. Later, Kwazerema went to the river to thank Red Ant.

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The narrative structure is similar to the last one, only this time the husband's choice is not re-established but reversed: he has learned his—painful and embarrassing—lesson.

Relational norm transgression ➔ Revolt ➔ Help by (super)nature ➔ Status quo reestablished

Two other major types of family relations generate tales. The first is between parents and children, and the second between siblings. The first theme can be found in many tales but stands out in one particular type of tale, the enfant terrible story. In Kapsiki, I have just one of these tales, told by Kwada Deli,[67] which in other cultures seem to be more abundant.[68]

The antics of the only child

It came to pass…

A man without a wife had an only child, a son. One day when they went into the bush together, the father said: "As I have no wife, you have to go home and butcher a calf. Then you cook it." The son went home, collected all the calves and cattle of his father and killed them all, except for that one calf. When the father came home, he asked for the butchered calf. His son said: "Here are the cattle you asked me to slaughter." "I spoke only about a calf, not all the cattle," but he could not really protest much.

Early in the morning they went into the bush another time, and his father asked him to take some sorghum from the granary to make *zhazha*. The son returned home, emptied the whole granary, and cooked it all. When his father came home and asked for the *zhazha*, he said: "There it is." "Where is the rest of the sorghum?" The son said he had cooked all of it. His father got angry this time, and the son left the house.

The son met a marabout in the bush and greeted him: "I have come." The marabout read his Koran and said "If you want it so." Together they

set out into the bush. The marabout confided his Koran to him. They sat down, and the marabout said they would go fishing. They went into the water and caught fish. The marabout told him to grill the fish, but the kid grilled them using the Koran as fuel. After eating the fish, the marabout asked for his Koran back: "Where is my Koran?" The kid asked: "Did you give me any wood to grill the fish with? I have used it to grill the fish." The marabout said: "OK." They set out, and found a place for the night in the compound of a chief.

In the house of the chief was a woman that the marabout loved. The kid said to the marabout: "That wife that you love, I will kill her." The marabout said: "We are guests at the chief's; do not make trouble." "You wish me to kill you instead?" the kid asked the marabout. He went, killed the woman, and shut the door of her hut, and they left together.

After a long march, they found a tree and climbed it. In the house of the chief, the people were numerous and found the dead woman. They looked for the strangers, but they had left; so the people set out to look for them. They could not find them and grew tired, so they sat down to rest beneath the tree the two were in.

The kid said to the marabout: "I am going to shit on these people." The marabout said: "Those are the ones who are hunting for us." The kid asked him: "Do you want me to push you down?" The marabout said: "In that case, you'd better shit." He shat twice on the people, and they at first thought it was birds; but when they looked up they saw the two high up the tree. They looked for an axe and started to hack away at the tree. SomeThing came at the two and asked: "What are you doing here?"

They answered: "The people down there want to cut down the tree we are sitting in."

"I will take you on my wings, but please do not touch my tail." They climbed on the wings and went off, just at the moment the tree fell. The marabout and the kid flew over the sea, and the kid said he wanted to touch the forbidden thing at the tail. The marabout told him not to do so, and the kid said: "If you do not agree, I will throw you into the sea." The marabout said: "Then touch it," and when the kid touched it, the Thing flew upside down and both fell into the water.

VVung

Of course, an only child has an iron-clad position, as his single father is completely dependent on him to have any progeny at all, so the notion of the 'spoiled only child' comes easily to the Kapsiki. The structure of the tale closely resembles similar enfant terrible tales in Africa,[69] but it is the only one in both sets and may be a tale borrowed from the Fulbe, as is sug-

gested by the prominence of the marabout and his Koran. The fascination with the anus, though, is fully Kapsiki. *Zhazha*, a dish of cooked sorghum grains and beans, is a typical poor man's dish, cheap and easy to cook for a *rhumzhi*, a man without a wife. The narrative structure consists of a series of escalating infractions and stupidities.

Infraction against kin (2x) ➔Beyond kinsmen ➔ Infraction against non-kin (2x) ➔ Beyond society ➔ Infraction against own interest ➔ Death

One major example of the tension between father and son—in a quite oedipal struggle, in fact—is found in a tale which is quite popular, but only in the new set. It was collected three times, in slightly different versions from different raconteurs, and I give the most elaborate version of undoubtedly the best storyteller of the three, Zra François.[70] The story reminds one of stories among the Fulbe and might well be a recent borrowing—but this is discussed later:[71]

The girl with the donkey skin

It came about…

A man had two wives, Kwajuni and Kwazerema. Kwajuni had two children; Kwazerema had none and nobody in the house respected her. The good god decided to give Kwazerema a child anyway; but when born, the little girl was covered in a donkey skin, which gave rise to quite a few nasty jests. Kwajuni said, of course, that her co-wife had slept with a donkey, and she broadcasted this throughout the village.

Fifteen years later the girl with the donkey skin walked and talked, but she never left her mother's hut. When her mother set out for work, she left her daughter at home to do the chores and to wash herself. There was a blacksmith in the village who came to look at the girl while the others were in the fields, and he set out to watch her bathe. Before her bath the girl took off her donkey skin and proved to be a very beautiful girl. Immediately, the smith went to the prince, the son of the chief, and told him that the donkey-daughter of that neighbor was beautiful, like no one else in the village or region.

So the prince decided to call on that family, looking for his mother-in-law. Kwajuni first thought that he had come for her, for one of her daughters, never thinking of the donkey-skinned one. After all, he had brought flour, honey, and jewels for his bride-to-be. But he wanted to see his bride, and the smith came up with an idea. He asked Buzzard to steal the skin when the girl was bathing, and so it happened. The prince saw the girl and decided to take her. Without her skin the girl cried all day in her room, *kwaw kwaw kwaw* [ideophone for crying]. When her mother came

she asked who had done that. The smith cleared things up and the wedding was to be the next day.

During the wedding, the chief was struck by the girl's beauty and he fell in love with her. "How can I get hold of her?" he asked himself. Ten days later he called his son, to send him on a journey accompanied by five warriors, who were instructed to kill the boy on the road. The blacksmith, who served as diviner for the prince, consulted the crab and informed the bride. So when the prince left home for his journey, his wife gave him a ring for luck, and the smith gave him a palm [*peha*] seed that would execute any order.

The prince set off with the five warriors. After a long journey they came to a crocodile-infested lake, and there the five pushed the prince deep into the water. Confident that the crocodiles would finish the job, they went home. Back in the village they explained that an accident had befallen the prince, and the chief mourned with the whole village. Then he decided to take his son's wife.

But thanks to the ring, the prince could not drown, and he ordered the palm seed: "Seed, grow for me," and the seed grew into a tall tree inside the lake. "Now seed, bend over," and the palm tree bent over, *gwelede* [ideophone for bending over], and the prince was on dry land. Avoiding the main roads, the prince walked home by a long detour. After a month on the road, he came to his father's pasturage, where the herdsmen did not recognize him: he was thin and had long hair like a madman. The prince asked for some milk, but they refused. Girls came from the village to fetch the milk, and the prince, without being observed, placed his ring inside the pail for the chief's wife, and then some sand. He told the girl to watch that milk, as it had some sand in it. That girl explained to the wife that a madman in the fields had put sand into the milk and that she had to watch the bottom of the pail. The wife poured out the milk and found the ring, so she knew it was her husband out there. She went into the field and found her husband, with long hair and a fluffy beard. The next day she arranged a place for him in the stable that housed the horse's fodder, and during the night she led the prince to it. With the help of the horse's groom, she lodged her husband there. After feeding him well for a month and grooming him carefully, she nursed him back to strength.

The prince then invited his old friends and conspired with them to kill his father, who still believed him dead. At the next feast, mounted warriors usually would perform a horse parade before the chief, in which the prince would have taken part. So the prince and his friends dressed up, mounted their horses, their lances in hand, and went to the feast. The chief thought the feast was going according to custom when the horseman galloped towards him and lifted their lances. Once, twice they did it, and the

third time they went for the chief. His assistants recognized the prince, but the chief did not believe them. Then the prince and his friends threw their javelins at the chief and he was dead (Fig. 3.7).

People were astounded, but the prince explained all that had happened. He took the place of his father, and the five guilty warriors were thrown into the fire. And then the prince had his wife back.

VVung

Although indeed popular, this is clearly not a Kapsiki tale-of-old: the motifs of rivalry between a king and a prince, the ring, and the lanced warriors, all these betray a Fulbe provenance; even the crocodiles, present in Fulbe tales, are aliens in the mountains.[72] Kapsiki details, such as the crab, the *peha* tree (important in initiation rituals in Kapsiki), and of course the blacksmith as diviner and know-all, may add a local flavor to the tale, but the main motif of a struggle between father and son for a wife does not resonate at all in Kapsiki society. Rivalry in Kapsiki is between brothers, especially half-brothers, not between father and son. And though a father

Fig. 3.7 The cavalry greets the chief

does call his son's wife *makwa*, bride, this is because he has contributed to her bride wealth and she is more an acquired daughter for him than a nubile bride. Marrying her after his son's death would violate a strong *mehelegu* (taboo), as it would be like killing his son all over again. In the hundreds of remarriages of women that I recorded, none were with a father-in-law.

The fabula structure is quite elegant in its inversed repetition:

> Power of piety ➔ Hiding humanity ➔ Revelation ➔ Incestuous rivalry ➔ Elimination of son ➔ Power objects ➔ Hiding humanity ➔ Revelation ➔ Elimination of father

The double theme of hiding humanity ➔ elimination is striking, as the story treats this twice. The forces from on high (god, buzzard) lead to an attack on the younger generation, while the forces from below (palm tree, ring) generate the elimination of the older generation.

Brothers can be at odds; often they are half-brothers, but they can also be full siblings. A curious variant on the Ngemburu tale is the story of the eat-all who saves his brothers. Here is a brief synopsis:

A couple has three children. The first two are fine, but the third one, Deli, eats everything and does not grow; he just gets an enormous belly. With parental consent, the eldest throws ugly Deli far from the house, onto the refuse heap of the chief. The chief's daughter finds him and takes him in, and he eventually takes as a wife the girl who found him. She is angry and feeds him bad food. When she goes off to the market, he vomits everything from his stomach, all the riches of the world, including a bicycle. On the bicycle he joins his wife, who does not recognize him, and she agrees to marry this cool, slim rich guy. Back home he changes everything back to normal, and his wife boasts of the suitor she has found. On the next market day, he again vomits all the riches, this time with a motorbike, and the story is repeated. A blacksmith sees what is happening, keeps Deli from swallowing it all back down again, and reunites him with his wife, after her deep apologies. Then Deli wants to see his brothers again, so the smith makes a pot full of meat walk by itself to the brothers. When they try to take it, it escapes, and they follow the pot to Deli's house. He then reveals himself to them, and they share the riches that have all sprung from his belly.

Some heroes are ugly and detestable to begin with, but on closer inspection seem to be not so bad after all. The preceding tale not only contains

quite a few modern items, such as the motorbike, but also resembles too much the tale of Joseph in Egypt, reconciling with his brothers,[73] to be just an old local one. Evidently, this is a recent tale, inspired by the Old Testament stories, but with definite Kapsiki elements woven into it. The walking meat pot is understandable, as meat pots have legs in Kapsiki, *shaga*.[74] More important, however, are the presence of the all-seeing blacksmith, the rivalry between the brothers—a trait shared with the Old Testament tale—and the overt threat of a wife to leave her husband. The attraction of wealth, of course, is ubiquitous. The narrative structure is clearly repetitive:

> Denial of siblinghood ➔ Reverse of fortune ➔ Denial of spouse bond ➔ Production of wealth ➔ End of secrecy ➔ Sharing of wealth

The almost morbid fascination with eating is found in a great many tales, both old and recent: eating meat, eating too much, gobbling up everything, leaving nothing for anyone else. This is found mostly in genres 3 and 4, as this kind of gluttony is found mainly among mankind. It is the mother-in-law who cleans out the larder of her son-in-law, the monster who devours everything, and, in the latter case, the youngest brother—usually by far the smartest—who has an infinite belly. Eating great amounts is in this culture not as much an indication of dominion as in Central African cultures;[75] in the Mandara Mountains, it signals lack of restraint, disregard of proper relations, and shameless behavior. In Central Africa, the elephant is the symbol of power as all-eater, and power is said to reside in the belly.[76] In the Kapsiki tales, the elephant is the drinker, the animal that can empty a pool of water, usually to find Tortoise, and then for a short time only, as the whole pool will exit again through the same trunk. Wealth is indicated by meat, and thus by eating. It is crucial that communal elements of eating seldom feature in the tales: food, especially meat, is an indication of difference, separating the haves from the have-nots, those who know how to behave from those who lack restraint.

The tales focus on excesses, and the eating tale is quickly followed by what might well be the principal fascination of the Kapsiki tales: excrement. The mother-in-law fills all huts in her son-in-law's compound with excrement; people cannot sit in a tree but they immediately want to defecate on the people gathered below; frightened girls defecate in the tree they have fled into for cover—we saw the examples. The most spectacular aspect of excrement is not only that it stinks—the opinions in the tales seem to vary

on this point—but that it sings. We noticed that women sing, often in order to escape from the minions of death, and that their excrement keeps up the song while they beat a hasty retreat—of course, at least as long as it is warm. Cold excrement does not sing. Excrement not only has an auditory appeal, but also a culinary one. The mother filling the house with excrement is smelt, even if mainly by the animals; but much of the excrement may be eaten, often by Leopard, in fact, and then highly relished. Eating excrement, of course, is the ultimate shortcut—albeit an inverted one—between eating and defecation, and the motif of the gustatory attraction of excrement surfaces in many tales. This is especially the case in genre 3, where frail humans have to cope with the powerful 'Things' from the bush. Here the main defense against overwhelming odds is precisely through fear, through 'shitting-in-the-pants' when facing a serious danger. Without pants, excrement is indeed the ultimate weapon of the weak.

With this anthology we have gained an impression of the actors, themes, and particularities of the Kapsiki tales in the total corpus of *rhena heca*, with those collected in 1972 and in 2008 equally represented. I selected the examples in order to show the major themes, the main characters, and the core plots, as well as the fears and fascinations of this culture, which are also apparent in the internal contradictions of the tales and in the errors made by raconteurs. In short, we saw how these tales dwell in Kapsiki culture and how this culture resonates in the tales. Yet, many of the tales are not exclusively Kapsiki, since they are also found among the neighboring Mafa, Mofu-Gudur, Mundang, and Fulbe—if we stay within the borders of North Cameroon. A few of them are pan-African, and we have referred to the global indexes wherever possible; this was fewer than I had expected at the outset of this project, so African tales seem to have a significantly different repertoire of themes. This exercise in situating the Kapsiki tales, within their own corpus and beyond, suggests some lines of enquiry to follow up, such as the relative weight of proximity versus linguistic provenance in shaping and borrowing of the corpus, which I will pursue later.

Notes

1. Bal (1999).
2. ATU 1529; 73 & 5. For African and Afro-American parallels of supporting the rock, see Bascom (1992: 114 ff.).
3. Peanut, Arachis hypogea, sprouts from a peanut, forms a stem above ground, and then grows stalks that bend down to re-enter the ground, the new fruits being formed in the soil.

4. A place of god: in the bush any place with water is a 'place of god,' where emotions are not welcome.
5. The corpse in Kapsiki is fully clothed and elaborately decorated, especially the head, and all kinsmen have to come and greet it.
6. A corpse is also wrapped in long fabrics of various colors, so a pseudo-corpse has to be unwrapped in order to become mobile again. See Van Beek (2012).
7. The *dabala* is the entrance hut, with two doors between the forecourt and the house proper; in the wet season, cooking is done in the *dabala*. It is a hut anyone can enter.
8. Luc Sunu told this one to me, having listened to many versions, December 1972.
9. ATU 66B.
10. Van Beek (2015).
11. Van Beek (2015: 229–30).
12. ATU 1004, 175.
13. In another version, by Kwada Sayaka from Rumsiki and recorded in 2004, Tortoise refuses any gifts, as he has no room left under his shell. The widow insists on oiling his carapace, but he can hardly move a leg because of all the chicken tucked under his shell. In the end the widow puts Tortoise in the basket of vegetables that Hyena is carrying. In this version, the widow later discovers her chickens are missing and runs after the three, but in vain.
14. In the version—a much longer one—mentioned in the previous note, Hyena woke up the rooster by beating him with a stick, so the rooster started to crow. Hyena woke up Squirrel, but the latter retorted that this seemed more like a mad rooster than a wake-up call: "Just wait for the first light." Hyena then set his own granary on fire and woke up Squirrel, who remarked that this looked very much like a granary on fire. Hyena went to sleep, and then Squirrel with his wives went into the bush. This motif is also known from Fulbe stories, Eguchi (1984).
15. The other version has Squirrel's mother dig into the soil and hold the tail, in order to make Hyena fall.
16. Like Leopard's wife; but, as already noted, Hyena and Leopard are practically doubles in Kapsiki tales.
17. Paulme (1976). See ATU 175; Thompson (1955–8) motif K 741.
18. ATU 68. For African and Afro-American parallels to entering the belly of Elephant, see Bascom (1992: 114).
19. Here an ATU parallel is hard to find.
20. Like found for dilemma tales, see Gugelchuk (1985).
21. ATU 275C.
22. Again an ATU parallel is hard to find.

23. The Kapsiki have groups who play open flutes (*zuvu*) of various sizes, a performance that is part of funerals (Van Beek 2015).
24. ATU 66B.
25. Kapsiki divine with crabs, so in the tales Red Ant or Ant-Lion also uses a crab for divination. See Van Beek (2013).
26. Görög and Seydou (2001) and Abrahams (1983:13).
27. Cf. ATU 901.
28. In the marriage of a girl, a separate and elaborate ritual is performed in which she is given her trousseau, mainly consisting of food and kitchen utensils, see Van Beek (2012).
29. A tall tree of West Africa, *Khaya senegalensis*, whose wood is specially adapted for joinery, with bark furnishing a bitter tonic. The fruits are used to make oil for skin care.
30. ATU type 480. For the importance of smell in Kapsiki see Van Beek (1992, 2010a).
31. *Grewia mollis*; its fruits are used for sauce, and the bark is considered medicinal.
32. These terms are ideophones for opening a door, grinding, and cooking.
33. Kwazerema realizes that her co-wife had forgotten the correct exit codes, and in the song she mocks her singing of the wrong codes.
34. The *livu* is the iron skirt Kapsiki girls wear during their wedding, Van Beek (2012, 2015).
35. Kosack (1997b).
36. In the Fulbe tales from the same region, female excrement talks and the woman is thus saved, Eguchi (1982: 1083–85).
37. ATU 327B & 1119, with a related type ATU 303A.
38. ATU 327B, 303A.
39. Tizhè, Zra, and Deli are birth order names, according to their mother's pregnancies. All Kapsiki have such a name and then may also carry another specific name. Ngemburu is the third son and so is also called Deli; in fact he *is* a Deli. See Van Beek (2012, Appendix).
40. Like in many African cultures, Death is visualized as a one-legged being (Van Beek 2012).
41. The sap of most euphorbia species is toxic, an extreme irritant that may cause inflammation and blindness.
42. ATU 500.
43. Kosack (1997b) and Geschiere (2013).
44. ATU 47D.
45. A ATU parallel type is hard to find.
46. Myrmeleon, an insect that catches ants and so is considered even more proficient in divination.

47. In Kapsiki magic, horns often serve to carry potent medicines and magic; in addition, some of the miracle objects deemed to increase the harvest are horns of indeterminate animals (Van Beek 2015).
48. Van Beek (1994, 2015).
49. ATU 592, 675, 330, 750A.
50. ATU 325, 1525.
51. Van Beek (1994, 2015).
52. ATU 563.
53. A board game popular among Kapsiki men in which both players try to get three-in-a-row. They compare it to draughts, popular in urban circles in West Africa.
54. See ATU 334.
55. See David and Sterner (1995). The type of this story is more or less ATU 454*.
56. Von Graffenried (1984), Sterner (2003) and Van Beek (2012).
57. David and Sterner (1995).
58. A related ATU type is 875B.
59. For this motif see ATU 875.
60. Bal (1997).
61. See Van Beek (2012).
62. Up to this point, the story parallels ATU 461.
63. Hibiscus sauce is very gluey.
64. ATU 1351B & 461. The story is also found among the Fulbe, Eguchi (1984).
65. ATU 571B might be the closest type here.
66. These words seem to have no specific meaning in *Psikye*.
67. ATU 915.
68. Görög and Seydou (2001).
69. Görög et al. (1980).
70. Zra François is the son of my assistant Luc Sunu and has been schooled in Ngaoundere, Fulbe country.
71. This complicated story shares some motifs with ATU 301D*, 409A, 430, 883B, and evidently of Cinderella, ATU 510. The closest is probably the swan-maiden, ATU 400, plus the groom persecuted for the beauty of his wife, ATU 465. For an extensive treatment of this type in Africa, starting from a Tuareg version, see Calame-Griaule (1987: 253 ff.).
72. Eguchi (1984); for the Fulbe tale of the donkey-skin girl, see Eguchi (1978).
73. See ATU 725.
74. Van Beek (2015).
75. Fabian (1994).
76. Van Beek (2011).

CHAPTER 4

Tales That Went, Tales That Came

Who knows the word, knows the world.
Dogon saying

Thus far I have made little distinction between the two sets of tales, those from 1972 and 2008, but have concentrated on the general characteristics of both sets. Let us look at the differences now. First, I will compare the content of the *rhena heca* in both samples, an exercise which demands identification of tale types, the exercise that lies at the base of all comparison in folklore. This produces overall figures for the overlap between the two samples and for the number of tales that disappeared or newly appeared, thus offering a first window on processes of selective retention, borrowing, and creativity. Then we focus on the main actors of the tales, to see how they move through the genres. The second section explores shifts in the various themes in both samples, arriving at subtle but pervading changes in the Kapsiki stories over two generations. These changes will be illustrated by a few more *rhena heca*, selected for this purpose among both the old and the new tales.

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Numbers

When I set out to collect a new sample in 2008, I expected to find a major overlap between the two sets, from the assumption that this kind of cultural heritage was relatively stable; also, I thought I would find significantly less tales, being still influenced by the notion of culture loss that pervaded folklore as I knew it; in fact it also reflected the ideas of the Kapsiki themselves about the fading of their own culture. The actual outcome proved a slight surprise, the changes were larger than expected, and especially many more 'new' tales had come in than surmised. Table 4.1 provides a first impression. The first column gives the number of tales found in 1972 that were not present in 2008; the second column gives the number of tale types we found in both samples; the third column gives those appearing only in the last batch.

In 1972 we collected in total 91 different tales. The number of actual recordings was higher, but I edited out the doubles and integrated variants into one type, in addition to taking out a few tales which were clearly not folktales but local histories. Some such stories recounted a row between two named persons in a named village—and though interesting in themselves, they have been struck from the list. The same holds for the new set, where some tall stories about neighboring villages did not make the list of folktales. In principle, Kapsiki folktales are nonlocalized and situated in a timeless present, featuring iconic players and predominantly miraculous interventions. I did retain stories on known chiefs, such as Sukur and Gudur, as they are the very icons of chieftainship in the larger area, but none of the tales contains any personal name of a particular chief.

So in 2008 we collected 68 stories, slightly fewer than in 1972, and the first question guiding this project was how many of these were identical

Table 4.1 Distribution of tale types in relation with the year they were collected

	1972 only	*1972 + 2008*	*2008 only*	*Total 1972*	*Total 2008*
1. Squirrel	8	9	8	17	17
2. Other animals	14	10	6	24	16
3. Humans plus	12	6	5	18	11
4. Humans only	26	6	18	32	24
Total	60	31	37	91	68

or recognizable from the past set. This number is also shown in Table 4.1. Of the 68 stories collected, 31 (46 %) could be identified with a tale from 1972. Some 54 % appears to be new. This was unexpected; the scant literature on tale transmission suggests a much higher retention rate, as in the comparison performed on Dogon tales.[1] Of course, these other studies examined a smaller sample and a much shorter time span, but they do suggest a more stable corpus of tales. Also, as stated in the introduction, classic folklore theory considers folktales as semi-perennial, slowly disappearing before the onset of modernization and globalization.

The rather low rate of transmission becomes more meaningful when we consider the genres 1+2+3, apart from 4. When looking at the first three groups, they number 44 (17+16+11) in the 2008 tales, 25 (9+10+6) of which are found in the 1972 sample. Therefore, 57 % stem from the past, and 43 % are new. Genre 4 shows an even stronger trend toward 'rejuvenating': 18 (78 %) of 24 are new, while 22 % are 'traditional.' Tales about humans-only seem to change quicker than the other ones.

The statistical question one always has to pose at such a distribution is whether it might stem from chance. Since for statistical purposes the numbers are rather low, also when we compare 1+2+3 >< 4, we have to combine the cells slightly differently to arrive at a chance probability of less than .05, the standard test mark. When we take the less specific division of the tales into 'animals' versus 'humans', that is, genres 1+2 >< 3+4, and consider simply whether the 1972 and 2008 samples overlap or not, we get the following Table 4.2.

According to Pearson's Chi-square test the chance that both distributions are actually the same is 0.018. Since this value is less than the conventional 0.05 level for statistical significance, we may conclude that the distributions really differ from each other. A more refined table with three columns gives the following distribution (Table 4.3).

Here the same test gives a chance probability of .061, slightly above the 0.05 mark. So we can state with reasonable certainty that the two samples of 1972 and 2008 show a systematic shift.[2]

Table 4.2 Major categories, shared or not

	Shared in 1972 and 2008	*Unique for either 1972 or 2008*
Animals	19 (61 %)	36 (37 %)
Humans	12 (29 %)	61 (63 %)
Total	31 (100 %)	97 (100 %)

Table 4.3 Major categories, in the years 1972 and 2008

	Unique for 1972	*Shared in 1972 and 2008*	*Unique for 2008*
Animals	22 (37 %)	19 (61 %)	55 (43 %)
Humans	38 (63 %)	12 (39 %)	73 (57 %)
Total	60 (100 %)	31 (100 %)	128 (100 %)

How large are the universes those two samples have been drawn from? The 1972 corpus resulted from an exhaustive search for folktales, conducted, as I said, by my assistant. He himself also added some tales he had heard as a kid. Soon he established the real raconteurs, the ones who not only were interested in tales and knew them, but also the ones who knew a story and could really tell it well, like the two men I dedicated this volume to. So gradually Luc concentrated on them, while trying to find new storytellers as well. At the time Jean Zra Fama had to leave, Luc was slowly running out of informants, at least as far as new stories were concerned. In principle, we tried to avoid those tales the school children encountered in their reading primers; they were easily recognizable, featuring as they do a completely different set of characters, with names from the south of Cameroon. Some motifs from these tales have certainly slipped in, but this is not a problem at all since new items enter all the time. However, with the 109 recordings Luc had made in 1972, we were reasonably certain that saturation point was near and that we had covered the large majority of the stories circulating in Kapsiki country at that moment. Of course, the number can never be established with any certainty, because folktales are hard to delineate, do not form a closed corpus, and in any case show the constant flux of any dynamic system. Consulting with some colleagues who have worked all their lives with folktales,[3] I arrived at an estimate that with these 91 separate tales in 1972, we have around 80–90 % of the total number of *rhena heca* circulating at that time in Mogode.

For the 2008 corpus our coverage can be expected to be less complete. The reason is that we did not aim at getting as many as possible but focused first on the younger informants, as the goal was explicitly to gauge the transmission over generations.[4] Collecting the maximum number of different tales was secondary. So we have a narrator population here which is definitely younger than the one of 1972, an average of 40 years old in 1972—ages are difficult to determine in African villages—against 28 years old in 2008. This has the advantage of covering two generations; it

has the disadvantage that we may have missed quite a few tales which are no longer—or not yet—known by the youngsters. The older raconteurs, quite important in our first collection process, are under-represented in our second; we increased the span of transmission at the expense of limiting the total number of tales.

So, our catchment area being smaller, I estimate that the 2008 corpus of 68 tales does not represent a shrunken corpus, but a more focused one; it is likely that the total corpus has not significantly diminished. In this part of Africa, folktales are not relics of the past, but the core of a storytelling culture which is very much alive. Natasha Zwaal, in her study of the potential of these folktales for nature conservation,[5] worked in five villages in the plains of North Cameroon and collected 174 folktales, among a population that comprised Tupuri, Massa, Mundang, and Fulbe, as well as 158 stories from three villages in Central Cameroon, with a population of Babuti and Baveck speakers.[6] So the estimate of slightly over one hundred tales in a particular mono-ethnic village at one given time seems reasonable.

Let us look at some specific differences that are discernible between the two sets. Animal tales, genres 1 and 2, make up half of both corpora; that has not changed, but what about the animal actors themselves? (Table 4.4)

Compared with 1972, the tales of 2008 contain fewer animal species; even when controlling for the difference in number, we see that in 1972 those with at least three appearances outnumber those with two appearances in 2008. The second set is more dominated by the top four actors: Squirrel, Hyena, Leopard, and Tortoise. Elephant seems to have almost disappeared, and so have Cat and Lion and to some extent Hare, Frog, Snake, Duiker, Owl, and Scorpion. For the other low-scoring animals the score is too low to draw any conclusions. Squirrel has not moved at all; the main shift is from Leopard to Hyena. As I said before, they are almost interchangeable in Kapsiki, and their names resemble each other closely: Leopard is *derhwava*, Hyena *derhwavangwe*, the suffix *ngwe* standing for 'mouth.' In Kapsiki, a hyena is a 'mouth-Leopard.' In 1972 Leopard is not only the main counterpart of Squirrel; he is also an actor on his own, against other animals as well as in the human sphere. For instance, when the proud bride rejects all human suitors, she ends up with either a demon or Leopard, never Hyena. Hyena does not seem to measure up as a spicy groom. So, if Squirrel is the main trickster-hero, the combination of Leopard and Hyena carries the day in both samples: 37 in 1972, 31 in 2008.

Table 4.4 Animal character in the stories

1972		*2008*	
Animal	*Total*	*Animal*	*Total*
Leopard	28	Squirrel	18
Squirrel	18	Hyena	16
Elephant	12	Leopard	15
Hyena	9	Tortoise	8
Tortoise	6	Ant	5
Cat	6	Monkey	4
Lion	5	'Bird'	4
Frog	5	Dog	3
Hare	5	Elephant	2
Snake	4	Hare	2
Dog	4	Cat	2
Vulture	4	Donkey	2
Duiker	4	Pigeon	2
Monkey	4	Rooster	2
Owl	3	Buzzard	2
Toucan	3	Frog	2
Scorpion	3	Kob antelope	1
Pigeon	3	Lion	1
Kob antelope	3	(Billy) Goat	1
Termite	2	Mouse	1
Porcupine	2	Swine	1
Guinea fowl	2	Buffalo	1
Mouse	2	Toucan	1
Ant	2	Vulture	1
Rooster	2	Guinea Fowl	1
(Billy) Goat	2	Hamerkop	1
Boa	2	Lizard	1
'Bird'	2	Toad	1
Swine	1	Duiker	–
Toad	1	Porcupine	–
Crow	1	Camel	–
Chameleon	1	Hippo	–
Camel	1	Crow	–
Hippo	1	Owl	–
Hamerkop	1	Chameleon	–
Donkey	1	Termite	–
Buffalo	1	Boa	–
Adder	1	Adder	–
Lizard	–	Scorpion	–

It is possible that the changes in animal appearance reflect the changing ecology of the region, where under the increasing demographic pressure animals are disappearing. Natasha Zwaal's[7] study explores in depth the environmental messages in the tales; her guiding question was whether the folktales reflected ecological dynamics. Some mini-ecology does come up. For instance, Termite does provide a readymade hiding place through his home, and the well-known holes in termite mounds show up often in the tales as an environmental feature.[8] Termite, however, is not the main hero, nor the main opponent of Squirrel, a situation which is different in Mafa tales, the northern neighbors of the Kapsiki, whose Squirrel sees himself competing with an insect, 'Dithyque,' the water beetle.[9]

What is the relationship between the animal actors in the tales and the factual fauna of the region? Zwaal does note some indicators of ecological dynamics in the stories, like Kob antelope begging for their life, or another Mundang story that explains why elephants have just one calf. However, even if a story may start with an ecological issue, the gist of the story is always social, ending in a new relation between various animal actors. "Apparently clear ecological messages is not what we can expect from these stories."[10] In his study of Chilean school children's attitudes to animals, Benavides found that the symbolic dimension of predators in their folktales had little to do with the way the predators were seen beyond the narratives: "Animals constitute effective vehicles for embodying highly charged ideas … representing human and animal modes of conduct."[11] The fact that in Kapsiki tales the DUB is often carnivorous helps in building his ugly character, as he is an eat-all, but the more ambivalent tricksters in the tales are hardly less carnivorous. What might well be important is the crossing aspect of tricksters, such as hare, fox, spider, squirrel, crow, or coyote: they cross the gap between the domesticated and the wild space in the human environment.[12] In the end, it is not biology that matters but the story, and not the ecology but social relations. We are not reading nature here, but culture.

Shifting Content

So tales have gone and tales have come, while just under half remained. Is there a difference in type and content between the first two? Do the disappearing tales purvey a message that is changed in the new arrivals? The first change is in the cast of players. As the main antagonist for Squirrel, our Leopard has made way for Hyena in both types of animal tales.

This might have two causes: the disappearance of leopards from the mountains; and the fact that Hyena is the dumb-brute-of-choice in the folklore of the surrounding groups, Mafa, Mofu-Gudur, Fulbe, and the plains.[13] External ecology does have some influence; but the argument of the influence of surrounding groups, I think, is the stronger one. In a sense, folktales are becoming homogenized; and with the heightened mobility and inter-ethnic contact this is a plausible process. In addition, the supporting cast has changed to some extent. Scorpion is out of sight now; his sting no longer generates the loud cries of pain that disturb the animal kingdom. So is Porcupine, an intelligent marksman with his quills; and in these two cases, ecology can hardly be blamed. The number of minor supporting roles has shrunk in any case, as many of the animals who made an incidental appearance have also drifted out of sight: Boa, Hippo, Frog, Mouse, and Cat. The figure of Hare, trickster in tales elsewhere in Africa,[14] plays a larger role, probably an immigrant from other regions.

The ominous side of the world, such as Death and 'It,' has changed its stripes. In the old tales, Death is a family father whose weaknesses like vanity and greed can be exploited, and for whose daughter one can deliver a suitable bride wealth; the major threat for the simple-minded older brothers comes from his wife, but she also can be tricked. In fact, the difference between the old Leopard and Death is not overly large anyway, as they have similar powers and emanate a comparable threat. This is no longer so. In the new tales, Death is more of a grim reaper and an eat-all; and when his children figure in the tale, they are a nuisance. The gentle reasoning with Death about one's length of life—one old tale relates this as a charter of the institution of the *tè derha*, the social drinking of the Kapsiki—has given way to confrontations with an unaccommodating figure bearing no trace of kinship. His wife has receded to the background. Death now is death, it seems. When 'Something' or 'It' appears, it still has an undefined characteristic, but even stronger; it never takes a shape at all. The exciting stories about shape-changing 'SomeThings,' with the protagonist going through a related series of transformations, seem to have gone.

What has remained is the notion of total ingestion: Death, It, the third son, Hyena—they all eat, all gobble up everything. The symbol of power has become the belly; and here a political analogy is easier to find than an ecological one, as we saw above. In a typology of African cultural models of power, I used the elephant as the model of the usurper,[15] all too discernible in African politics. In the South, the belly is the locus of witchcraft; in the Mandara Mountains, and certainly among the Kapsiki, a large belly

means greed. In principle, eating is a potential problem; on the other hand, eating does produce something in the tales, either riches (a new theme) by regurgitating, or excrement (an old and persistent theme). The new tales are as excrement-oriented as the old ones, brides' mothers and co-mothers still fill a whole house with their anal products. One change is a pity, however: the excrement sings much less than in the old days. Although singing is still important—no change there—human mouths have to sing, not the anuses. The singing excrement used to be a way of escape, a means to gain time in an impossible situation, and, consequently, the new stories feature less happy endings: more heroes and heroines get eaten in the end. There is something to say, it seems, for a musical anus. The single enfant terrible story in the new corpus is a fitting example: the annoying child ends his life by touching an anus.

That more actors die in the modern tales and that there is a newly uncommunicative Death—together hint at a polarization of good and evil. The happy jumble of good and evil that is the core of trickster stories is still present in the Squirrel tales, but beyond that there are more morals in the stories; black, at least, is more black. Etiology has never been a dominant element in the Kapsiki *rhena heca*, but the new tales do exhibit some of these endings and explain how things have come about; this does make them more rounded, but also very decent and moralistic. This polarization may result from the increased presence of Christianity and Islam among the raconteurs. Among the Nama and Dama of Namibia, Schmidt noticed a similar process in the figure of the trickster Haiseb, who in the course of over a century and a half not only loses his ambivalence but also has to cede place to Jackal, a trickster with a much more one-dimensional character.[16]

Among the older tales quite a few hinged on sexual issues, such as the one about the man who invented sex, or the one about a man who kept asking about sex during his wedding night but never got to the act, his bride in the end leaving in exasperation.[17] The fewer tales about sex in the new set may also stem from the lower age of the informants, not because younger people are not interested in this topic, but because of the age difference between the speakers and the person recording the tales; in 2008 Luc Sunu was a dignified old man, quite a contrast from his dashing presence in 1972.

To illustrate these shifts, I provide an example of an old tale and two new ones. For the old one we look at Scorpion, our small, disappearing warrior with the painful sting, and the raconteur, Tlimu Vandu Zratè, as male nurse in the dispensary knows about pain:

Leopard and Scorpion

It came about…

Leopard and Scorpion made a wager. Scorpion said: "Even if you see me as a small guy, I am the one who can keep people awake best."

"No," Leopard retorted, "even if you look as rugged as tree bark, do you really think you can keep people awake? Instead, I am the one who can rob people of their sleep."

"OK, let us go into the bush and try out in the middle of the road. Some courageous humans will pass by, and we will see from which of us they will flee most," Scorpion said.

They selected a spot in the bush, and after some time a hunter with a large quiver came along. "Who will start?" Scorpion asked. "I will for today; for tomorrow, you may be the first," Leopard answered. He took a large leap, just in front of the man, who ran away scared to death. But when he was almost at home, the man thought again, turned around, came back to Leopard, and chased Leopard away with his weapons. Leopard fled, and the hunter followed him inside a house. There he dropped his bow and arrow so the tables were turned again, and Leopard chased the hunter home. He sat that night between the other men, telling tall stories.

"You are finished? Morning is coming again."

"Yes," Leopard answered, "I am finished. Did you see how he stayed awake all night?"

"If I touch him, small as I am, you will see that his wakefulness is much less pleasant and calm," Scorpion promised. "Let us wait here and you will see you cannot even be compared with me." They waited and a man came along with a lot of luggage on his head and two daughters. Scorpion jumped and stung the man who walked in front, and then *pam* [ideophone for stinging], stung the girls. "Ah, we are stung, stung," they cried, and ran home.

"Come, let us follow them and we shall see how long they will stay awake. Probably the whole day and night, till the next night," Scorpion said. They followed them into the house, where the people kept wailing and crying because of their stings.

"Yes, you are right," Leopard said. "Even if someone is as small as you are, they better not make war with you. Just one of you has made them cry the whole night. Yesterday, I had to save myself; but now I know you can really make people suffer."

VVung

This rather simple story of a wager has a clear moral—beware of the mean little ones—and portrays the animals in their dangerous but real aspects. The more recent tale features a new trickster, Hare, and a new version of an old acquaintance, Death.[18] Djassoua Bere is telling the story:

Death, Hare and the just-married couple

It came about…

A youngster was looking for a wife. When he had found her, he asked what the bride wealth would have to be. Her father-in-law (*mekwe*) asked thirty goats, thirty sheep, and thirty cattle—a huge bride wealth. The groom went home, gathered in all the animals, and set out to the house of his in-law, proudly singing: "Thirty goats, thirty sheep, and thirty cattle." He walked the whole day to the faraway village, and there on the road was Wusukwarerhwu [indicating Death]. Death asked him: "Where are you heading?" He said: "I'm going to my father-in-law." Death said that he would go with him. On the road Death asked for a goat and ate it, but when Wusukwarerhwu ate, the groom kept the tail. Death ate all thirty of the goats and all of the sheep. But our suitor kept all the tails. Then Death started into the cattle, and the groom had to comply, afraid he would be eaten himself. Death ate the first of the cattle, and the man kept its tail. When they finally arrived at the compound, only one cow was left. Some 200 meters before the compound, Death asked for the last cow, and the groom said: "But we are very close." "Do you wish me to eat you?" "No, take the last one."

The groom came to his *mekwe*, who gladly received him, believing all the animals had arrived, and installed both visitors under the firewood.[19] He then called in his son-in-law.

"*Mekwe*, what can we do? Look at what I have brought you. Death ate all of it when we were on the road. God seems not to want me to marry your daughter. As he wanted to eat me as well, I simply had to let him eat all the animals I was bringing you, just to save my life." He showed the thirty tails of cattle, thirty of sheep, and thirty of goats.

"Where is Death now?" his *mekwe* asked.

"He is under the wood, outside."

"What can we do now, my son-in-law?"

The groom said: "I don't know. I seem to have failed your daughter."

His *mekwe* answered: "As for me, you have paid the bride wealth; go, grind some millet, take your wife, and go home with her." To the groom and Death he said: "The woman needs water when she carries the flour of the trousseau. Both of you, fetch water; fill your baskets and return home with her."[20]

The father of the bride gave Death a chicken basket to fetch water, to keep him busy at the well. The groom took a sorghum basket,[21] lined it with dung, and both set out for the well. The groom got his basket of water and came back to his *mekwe*, who told him to take his new wife with him. Death ladled water into his basket, but, *RRR* [ideophone for running water], it ran out immediately. Death became tired and said: "This is too much work. I do not want the woman any longer." He left the basket at the well and went back to the bride's father. "Where are they?" "They are already home."

Death went after them. They were way ahead of him. Death ran, *rutututu* [ideophone for powerful running]. He ran and ran, *dlenza dlenza dlenza* [ideophone for running like a madman]. "These guys may not get home before I overtake them," Death said, because he wanted to eat the couple. But they were still far ahead. Death walked and walked, *satatatata* [ideophone for walking away]. The two were way ahead, entered the house, and mounted the ladder to put the flour in the granary. Death came, threw his stick, and hit them on the foot. They came down and Death asked them: "What are you doing? Give me the flour." They gave him the flour and went to the bush. There they saw Sun and asked him to extend them his leg, *susususu* [ideophone for extending a body part, such as the penis of a horse], and they grabbed the legs of Sun.[22] Death saw them at the legs of Sun. Death threw his stick and hit Sun's legs, and the two fell down into the bush, where Death started to look for them.

The two met Hare and told him: "We are lost and will die. Death wants to kill us." Hare said: "Who is Wusukwarerhwu? I will kill him. Go collect all kinds of fruit in the bush." When they had given him these, he went to Death and asked: "What are you doing here?"

Death said: "I am waiting for my people."

"For three months I have been looking for you. All the people in this world I have had. I take the testicles of all; you are the only one remaining. Look, here is for the mice, here for the ants, and even the elephant. Look, they have the largest ones," and Hare showed Death the various fruits. Hare made a move to take the testicles of Death. *Viwww* [ideophone for flying] Death flew away. "Stop him, stop him. I have to cut off his testicles; he is the only one left," Hare cried, running after Death; but he fled far away into the bush.

The two, the man and his wife, asked him what they could give him. "Nothing, just cultivate peanuts, and then I always have enough to eat," Hare said. The two started out to cultivate peanuts in order to provide Hare with a gift. They were happy and so was Hare. They cultivated, and each day Hare came to eat some. But in the end no peanuts were left—Hare had finished them all—and the two started to complain. They put a trap in the field and caught Hare. Then they killed, cooked and ate him. After eating, the wife wanted to shit, but could not. One bone of Hare was blocking her anus. The man took a stick to open her anus, but she died. Then the man had to shit, and he could not either. The people tried to open his anus, and he died like his wife.

VVung

A disconcerting end certainly, but the moral is clear: ingratitude is lethal. The dwelling in Kapsiki culture is clear: with the ideophones, the bride wealth, the various baskets, and especially with Sun as a huge ram, this tale is as Kapsiki as can be. The ever-present anus ends it all, as usual, and the

testicle hunt is a permanent feature in the tales too; but new is the notion of Death as a devourer and a person to be outwitted. Death has become more like 'It,' and its name Wusukwarerhwu indicates just that, 'thing in the *rerhwu*,' a tree.[23]

The second new tale illustrates the increased piety of the raconteurs, in this case Marie Kwafashè who is an elder in the Evangelical Church of Cameroon—and the wife of Luc Sunu (Fig. 3.5)— a story combining God, etiology and morals:

Why Chicken cannot fly

It came about…

God created the birds and was handing out wings, both for the birds of the wild and the birds of the compound, like Chicken. First, God had given all birds wings, but not all birds were sure they could really fly. Buzzard decided they should go all together to God in order to ask him for the power of flight. They set the appointment for the next morning at seven. Everybody would be there to beg God for the power of flight, to see what was in heaven. Chicken said: "I will not beg God because he already gave me wings. Why ask God again? I am sure I will be able to fly. Will God take away the wings he gave me? I will not beg. Tomorrow at seven, I am sure I can fly wherever I want," *patak patak* [ideophone for wings flapping].

Next morning at seven all birds were gathering, *deba deba* [ideophone for sitting down]. Buzzard said: "I will be the first, and I will see who will follow." He stood up and flew away fast to catch chicks. Eagle followed him, Vulture too, and all other birds, even the smallest ones. At home, Chicken tried to fly but could not; he fell down on the same spot, *patak patak*, no way. All birds settled down. Buzzard asked: "Who was not on high to see everything?" All other birds answered: "I was there; only Chicken was not." "What did you say yesterday?" they asked Chicken.

That was the moment they gave Chicken the name Ka-nka,[24] the one who is chased away. "You will be chased into the house in order to be eaten. You are the one people will eat." Buzzard said: "Whenever you have chicks, if these are not well-guarded, I will come and take them, because your children are for me to eat." That is why Chicken is called Ka-nka in Kapsiki and why Buzzard eats the chicks—because Chicken was too proud to ask God. That is why, whenever one wants to eat Chicken, one eats. All other birds are very hard to catch, but Chicken, who is chased into the house, can be caught any time.

VVung

This last one is definitely new, and clearly Kapsiki—the wordplay on *kanka* does not work in Mafa or Mofu—so it is not taken from any other group. It is the first tale I found that reflects on its own language, which

fits in with increased exposure to the outside—and in this case exposure also to Christianity, as creation stories are new to Kapsiki culture.

So far I have discussed non-human actors only, but did the human actors change? When looking at the characters of old and new stories, I see principally the same cast: the brothers, the friends, the chief, the widow, the blacksmith, the leper, the Fulbe, the problematic co-wives—indeed, the usual suspects. The pious boy was already present in 1972, but he has been joined by more borrowings from the Book(s): the Potiphar motif (wrongful accusation of infidelity), a creation account (Chicken), a story about using one's talents, and the Joseph-reconciling-with-his-brothers scene. The new stories tap into the stories of the world religions slightly more, just as they contain slightly more of the general West African types: the proud bride, the enfant terrible, and the donkey-girl. But on the whole, the cast of human actors seems quite perennial. It is more the event that shifts plus morals, than the cast. Indeed, it is a shift, not a landslide, but continuous shift can dramatically change the oral legacy of a group.

Kapsiki society has changed and we see that the tales have changed with the times. But tales are still told, and are picked up by the youngsters wherever they may hear them, at home, in school or among their friends. Though rapidly modernizing, Kapsiki culture is still predominantly oral, listening to tales in time-honored settings. The mobile telephone may have swept the Mandara Mountains like the rest of Africa,[25] but TV and internet are still scarce with the flood of screen stories still to come. And the telephone for the Kapsiki is mainly another voice, not a screen, another person speaking, not a virtual world. After this exercise in change-in-stability, the last question is why some stories are remembered and others are not, a question surprisingly little addressed in folklore, and for which we have to construct a theoretical framework.

Notes

1. Paulme (1984) and Calame-Griaule (1987).
2. I thank my Tilburg colleague Carel van Wijk for the statistical calculations, and for his general remarks on the way to apply these in the argument.
3. Sigrid Schmidt, Veronica Görög, Godula Kosack, Suzanne Platiel.
4. See also De Sterck (2012).
5. Zwaal (2003).
6. Zwaal (2003: 60, 100). Her total number is higher, as she includes historical and mythical tales, which I do not.
7. Zwaal (2003:102).

8. Termite mounds have not been included in the above-mentioned list. Only the tales in which Termite was an actor have been counted.
9. Kosack (1997a, b); probably *Dytiscus latissimus.*
10. Zwaal (2003: 147).
11. Benavides (2013: 77).
12. Ibid. 70. This raises a question about the human tricksters in African tales, who are not very numerous but definitely present. Among the Nama speakers of Namibia it is Haiseb who is human and male, but he functions next to Jackal as a trickster and associates with Kaggen, the San trickster; as Schmidt (2009) stresses, they are always human, young-but-ageless, and thoroughly ambivalent. Other African groups also feature human tricksters; see Pelton (1980).
13. Respectively, Kosack (1997a, b, 2001), Sorin-Barreteau (2001), Eguchi (1978–84) and Zwaal (2003).
14. Pelton (1980).
15. Van Beek (2012).
16. Schmidt (2009). She relates this to a shift from myth to folktale, which is not completely irrelevant for the Kapsiki but much less clear. Among the Dogon, Calame-Griaule found over a much shorter period—about one decade—that the young raconteurs used similar tales to explain a different situation, highlighting the predicaments of present-day Dogon; see Calame-Griaule (1987). Among the Isawaghen she did not engage in a longitudinal comparison, though the material seems to suit such an analysis (Calame-Griaule 2002).
17. Van Beek and Tourneux (2014).
18. This tale combines several ATU types 80, 126 & 103C.
19. The reception area, *derha*, is encircled with the firewood the women of the house have collected.
20. When the bride joins her groom, part of the sorghum of the bride wealth returns in ground form as part of the *berhe makwa*, the ceremonial entry of the bride into her husband's compound; Van Beek (2012).
21. The chicken basket is loosely made, with large holes; the grain basket is tightly plaited. In fact, Kapsiki culture has a plaited drinking cup for the blacksmith; see Van Beek (2015).
22. In Kapsiki thought, the sun can be seen very early in the morning as a huge ram walking over the horizon; Van Beek (2012).
23. *Nauclea latifolia L.*
24. In *Psikye*, chicken is called *kanka. Nka* means 'to chase'.
25. Van Beek (2009).

CHAPTER 5

Remembering Folktales

To speak well is to hide the truth from outsiders.
Kapsiki definition of public speaking

All in all, the shifts are not monumental, and the difference between the 1972 and 2008 sets is one of degree, not of kind. True, only half of the tales are the same, but the new stories are still folktales, recognizable either as identical tales or as tales that easily fit into the *rhena heca*, and they all fit well into the same culture. The relish about the Squirrel antics is still tangible, the young tellers still giggle at the house full of excrement and easily relate to the spurned wife who sets the record straight with her husband, so the scene of storytelling is still very much alive in Kapsiki. The young children practice the *VVung* sound, pressing their lips between thumb and forefinger, and when someone says "*Pekwuke*" ('It came about'), there is immediate attention.

Our final focus is on stability, on what has remained, to form a view on the transmission and retention of these tales—as our controlled historical comparison aims to detect change as well as continuity. Three factors are examined. First, cognitive theories sketch the exigencies for a 'memorable' story; second, the logic of storytelling and the dynamics of the fabula inform tale type and continuity; and third, when set in a longer time frame, or in a comparison between neighboring ethnic groups, the processes of transmission show these oral legacies to have deep roots. This

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Fig. 5.1 A chief being honored at a funeral by smiths playing their *shila* flutes

leads us back to our final angle, the ecological approach of the tales, the way we tell our own story inside the tales (Fig. 5.1).

Theories of Transmission

Folklore is not highly determined by theory, but from ecological and cognitive religious theories two approaches present themselves as apposite. The ecological angle is that tales are part of a culture, both in the sense of a culture of storytelling and in the more rooted sense of its themes, actors, and personages belonging to that culture. In present anthropological parlance, tales 'dwell' in their culture, in the cultural environment where they belong. This is not to say that they are exclusively Kapsiki—that is clearly not the case—but just that the actors, motifs, and themes have settled in and are part of Kapsiki life. The notion of 'dwelling,' which stems from Heidegger, has been put forward forcefully by Tim Ingold. Dwelling, in his approach, means "the immersion of the organism/person in an environment or life world as an escapable condition of existence […]. From this perspective the world continuously comes into being around the person."[1] Ingold contrasts

this with 'building,' the notion that man has to construct a world before he can live in it. "The essence of the building perspective [is] that worlds are made before they are lived in."[2] In the dwelling perspective, "[h]uman beings inhabit discursive worlds of culturally constructed significance, laid down upon the substrate of a continuous and undifferentiated physical terrain."[3] The dwelling perspective recognizes that we grow up in an environment imbued with the practices of our forebears and that fitting into that environment implies recreating it in a process of action-cum-thought, in which the two are never really separable.

This perspective allows us to approach the tales and their environment as a complex interdependent relation, a mutual construction, with the tales both reflecting social reality and constructing it. The latter aspect may hold for mythical charters more than for tales of amusement, but the line between these is very thin in Kapsiki, and the way the social norms and dynamics of cultural interaction manifest in the tales has often been commented upon: the tales dwell in their respective cultures.[4] Not only are the *rhena heca* at home in the mountains; the tales also construct their own reality, reinforcing as well as redefining Kapsiki culture for both the storytellers and their audiences. So the tales dwell among the Kapsiki, and the Kapsiki dwell in their tales. But—and this is the important point—not all tales dwell in the same fashion and degree. For retention, this is thought to be important; the idea is that tales that dwell will be remembered better than those which are less at home in the Mandara Mountains. An example is the research on retention of the parable of the prodigal son. After reading the text of this well-known story, American and African students were asked to give a synopsis. Most Africans noted the reason for the return of the prodigal son to his father's home in their synopsis: there was a famine. The majority of the American students did not mention it: they do not dwell in a hungry country.[5]

What I call dwelling, for quite a few authors implies an educational aspect: they claim the tales have a teaching role in highlighting the norms and values of that particular culture. Though this view is almost a hobby horse with African scholars of tales,[6] for me it is highly debatable whether the folktales are used for educative purposes, and whether they are even suited for that goal. Some may have a clear message, like the uppity girl who wants to marry above her stature. However, I doubt whether many young girls will be swayed by that tale to accept a more humble spouse, or the one that her parents selected for her. And most tales do not have a clear moral at all. Lallemand in her overview of bawdy stories[7] also does see them as instructive, but especially these stories never state the cultural norms, they play around with them. After all, the sexual stories are all

meant to be funny, meaning they infringe on a preexisting expectation by the audience; thus they do demand advance knowledge on the topic, a concrete and precise knowledge that is not given at all in the stories themselves. Education and fun are not natural partners.[8] Here Abrahams' point of the openness of the tales is important. We saw with the trickster tales that ending the tale is often difficult, but anyway tales often have an open-endedness that precludes a resolution, ending as they do with a question instead of with a message. They do not instruct, but they might be used as discussion starters: they do not stipulate but they do evoke. Tales are in the definition of Abrahams 'permissible lies', that do not teach values, but may make sensitive issues debatable that in a socially restrictive situation are usually kept under a shroud of silence.[9] Dwelling implies a self-evident fit into the culture, not a systematic or moralistic commentary on it.

The second angle is the cognitive approach to religion, that of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts (MCIC). In order to carry a plot that is understandable, funny, and easy to remember, the tales share a characteristic noted in most of the supernatural beings that populate the 'other' worlds anywhere and also here in Cameroon: they form an MCIC.[10] We form concepts, these studies maintain,[11] on the basis of fixed ontological categories, such as 'man,' 'animal,' 'plant,' 'object.' Once we know to which category a being belongs—it is an animal, for example—then we know a lot about it: it has a body, can move, has eyes, a mouth, propulsion, and a certain unpredictability—it is not an automaton. We also know it cannot speak, though it probably makes sounds; that it lives in groups; that it relates in some fashion to mankind; and that we may or may not eat or use it. That is a lot of 'inferential knowledge' from one concept. If one of these expectations is not met, if one aspect is missing or inverted, anyway infringed upon, this is an MCIC. Such as a horse that can count and calculate. Religious concepts are often MCICs: a spirit or a ghost is a human being that has one 'infraction' on our expectations—it has no body. For the rest, it acts, thinks, and complains as a human would do: we can understand it and predict and explain its behavior without ever learning specifics about this particular spirit or ghost. Notions of gods, witches, and ancestors all share this MCIC characteristic. For instance, gods are human-like beings who are powerful; a witch is someone with an aberrant soul that leaves his or her body in order to make mischief; an ancestor is an old and respected kinsman who happens to be dead.

Because they differ in only one aspect from our expectations, the MCIC are easy to learn, quick to be remembered, and difficult to forget: they stick

to the mind: they are 'memes'. Important is their 'inferential potential',[12] the way they generate as a starting point for further cognitive speculation, they function as a hallstand on which further ideas about reality can be hung. Not just concepts but also actions share that characteristic, as some sequences of counterintuitive actions, such as rituals, are recalled better than others. A single deviance from the expectations stimulates the mind, a large number creates a cognitive problem, also in acts.[13]

This MCIC notion is important for folktales at two levels. The first is at the level of the actors. For instance, since most of them are animals-plus, cast for their biological characteristics plus a human extra, they are easy to visualize and to remember: Leopard is in most respects himself, but terribly gullible; Tortoise is a swimming box, but quite clever. Only Squirrel is too complex a character, but his unpredictability is a necessary counterpoint to the other actors that the audience can easily understand. The exact nature of the added MCIC characteristic is less important than its value as an unexpected item. This probably explains why the attributes of some animals can be quite different between neighboring groups: Water Beetle in Mafa, Dung Beetle in Chamba, Crocodile in Mofu-Gudur or Dassouo, the named non-person of the Mundang tales[14]—all these can serve well as parallels to trickster Squirrel, sharing the MCIC aspect. But once their 'plus' is defined in the tales, it remains stable and ethnically specific: there is no Beetle in Kapsiki and no prominent Hyena in Mafa, even if the two groups communicate a lot, especially through children at secondary schools.[15] In storytelling, these specific characteristics are highlighted by the way the actors heap invectives upon one another. Squirrel, especially, is creative in his scolding: Tortoise is called a broken calabash, Scorpion a nasty piece of tree bark (also in Mafa tales)—funny because they are correct. Memory is in the details, and those particular details are among the most stable elements of the stories.

Secondly, the MCIC mnemonic advantage also holds for the fabula itself. Take a story in which plants have a 'plus.' We 'know' that any plant is rooted and fixed, cannot walk, reacts to light, usually has green color, and has especially striking parts for procreation—that is our intuition. The plant may have healing qualities, be edible, or provide building material, but those are options within the ontological category of 'plant.' If a plant in a story does walk, this is immediately noted and remembered. For instance, the Dogon of Mali have stories in which certain trees walk. But such an MCIC tree means much more than just 'dangerous to sleep under,' since an infringement of the default inferences brings along further

expectations: thus, these trees host (or even are) spirits, generate speech, and in this case form the source of the mask language.

> A parallel European example are the Triffids, a science fiction plant species that took over human civilization in John Wyndham's classic 1951 novel. These plants were mean, walked around, and attacked and subsequently blinded people; and whoever read the book or heard the radio sequel was hard put to forget them. Their cognitive staying power as an MCIC was fully underscored by Simon Clark's 2001 sequel and the BBC TV series of 1981 and 2009.

Among the Ubud of Sudan, Wendy James recorded a divination system relying on the hearing capacities of ebony trees. Any promises made in the vicinity of such a tree, any thoughts spoken or words uttered in anger were remembered and emerged in the divination session.[16] When an ebony twig was burned, the pattern of the ashes on water provided the answer from the all-knowing tree. If a tree can hear, it can remember as well and report back. Thus, the memorable angle of the MCIC translates into the story itself, rendering not just the character but also the plot easy to remember.

The core advantage of MCICs is that they stand out, both in characters and in plot, and therefore are quickly learned, easily remembered, and easily transmitted to the next generation. The cognitive and mnemonic advantage of MCICs is strongest if the M (= minimal) is respected. The tree may walk or talk; but if it also flies, changes shape, and lives in families, then the concept—and thus the tale—is in trouble. It might catch the attention; but, as McCauley points out, it becomes very hard to remember.[17] In short, a minimal infraction is optimal for transmission. The last decade has produced a spate of research findings from experimental cognitive psychology to underscore this better recall of these 'slightly strange' stories. In these studies a whole range of factors were investigated: popularity of tales, the number of MCIC characters inside a larger cast, the tendency of narrators to restrict main actors to MCI proportions, the limits of the MCIC in a tale (one or two are optimal; three are less effective), and the fit with other such items in other stories.[18]

Experimental research confirms that tales with MCIC characteristics are better remembered than tales which lack that element, both in the short term and over a three-month period.[19] So a folktale should have one or two twists, surprising elements that stick in the memory. These may be the trick enacted by Squirrel, or a miraculous intervention, or an obvious

stupidity—something unexpected and memorable. However, it should not be 'counter-schematic', that is, containing overly bizarre twists.[20] A tale should not have too many miracles, too many tricks or turns; if it has, then either the tale will slip away from memory, or the number of 'miracles' is reduced to 'minimal.'

> A classic example of this type of tale is the story of Jonah in the Old Testament; this tale is shock full of miracles, of which only one is remembered: living inside a whale for three days. The others—an impossible city, instant mass conversion and a miracle tree—are conveniently forgotten. But then, like the Balaam story in Numbers, this tale is best considered a satire, a genre in which abundant miracles are functional.

So not only can the concepts be MCI; the tales themselves can be so, too. In an experimental setting, the memorization of folktales was compared with that of just informative texts.[21] Subjects read the texts, went through a series of memory-enhancing techniques, and then their recall was measured. The difference was striking: in contrast to the other texts, recall of folktales did not depend on these techniques; they were remembered anyway. The conclusion was that the strong causal chains in the stories were a crucial factor for recall, but it was a causality that linked the extraordinary—read MCI event—with the very mundane and familiar: folktales specialize "in forging links between the exceptional and the ordinary,"[22] a notion I will come back to later. So the mnemonic effect of MCICs is enhanced even more when they are put in a coherent framework, inside a compelling narrative context: "Memory performance is dependent upon the extent to which a concept, intuitive or not, can be easily integrated with the context of the story."[23] Experimental evidence also points at the role of the general context: an MCIC is retained well, but loses this advantage of recall when it has become fully embedded in the cultural milieu. It wears out. With cultural change, like the one over a generation in Kapsiki country, these recall advantages surge again, the next context stimulating the inference potential of the concept.[24]

In addition, when images are evoked together with MCI stories, recall increases even more.[25] This is highly relevant for the African folktales that not only have tight narrative structures, but also sport a wealth of ideophones that provide image enhancement: these sound images not only enliven the tale but also provide a definite memory advantage. I will come back to this aspect later. Together, these factors of embedded MCI characters, MCI

events, and image evocation "help explain the cultural transmission of both religious and non-religious literatures."[26] These factors hold not only for university students (the usual population of psychological experiments) but also for young children who manifest the very same faculties as adults.[27]

MCIC aspects are neither random nor mistakes but balanced infractions of ontological expectations. But mistakes are made as well, an observation that struck me when reading not only all the Kapsiki tales of my two collections but also published ones from other groups. Many of the tales are told by inexperienced tellers, and they make mistakes; after all, this is 'amateur' storytelling, not the performance of a professional. Of course, the notion of 'mistake' is problematic, for what is the norm to distinguish between a 'correct' tale and a 'mistake'? We are simply recording, after all. But, again, the ball lies in the informants' court, and Luc and the others easily agreed when something went 'wrong' with a tale. These instances I called 'mistakes,' and let us have a look at them. The first 'mistake' is mixing up stories. It seems to happen more with young storytellers. Not only do they start out with Leopard and end up with Hyena—that is an understandable slide in Kapsiki—but they start out with a trickster tale and end up with a genre 3 tale with different actors. Thus, to use a Western analogue, they set out with Cinderella and end up with the heroine lying in a glass coffin surrounded by wailing dwarfs. On their insistence I have edited out these tales; a comparison with doubles and with similar tales from the neighboring groups also confirmed them as mix-ups.

The second and more important type of 'mistake' is what I like to call 'stringing', an inability to find an end, a quandary which we noticed as an inherent in trickster tales. A raconteur relates a story; and then instead of having a clear finish, the plot seems to morph into another tale, with the same actor entering a new scene with a fresh storyline, a different opponent—in fact, another theme. Such a fabula eventually consists of a string of unrelated plots and themes, as if the raconteur is desperately seeking for a convincing end and, unable to find it, looks for a nice roundup in another subplot with the same actor. Of course, plots may consist of repetition, but these are clear variations on a strict theme—the one on Hyena and the Dogs is an example. But with stringing, the tale just wanders into another storyline. In the tale of *The bull in the bush*, the first part, especially in the elaborate version referred to in the footnote, has very little relevance to the main storyline. Such a weak narratological connection between two parts is quite common in tales,[28] and with the less experienced storytellers

this easily morphs into stringing. The two adult men to whom this volume is dedicated never exhibited this tendency; their stories are well-rounded and well-finished.

Almost inevitably, these well-rounded tales find their way into collections more easily than the mixed or 'stringing' ones. In the first French collection, I have retained one example of stringing,[29] because that is how they were told after all and to maintain an awareness of our own editorial streamlining. Ending tales is difficult, and a good ending is the hallmark of the experienced teller; but the transmission of the tales to the next generation depends more on the accidental tellers, sitting around the family hearth, than on professionals. The tales do get told in garbled fashions, mixed, strung, and doubled, and as such are still remembered. The fact that they tend to straighten themselves out again—the incidence of mistakes is about the same in both samples—attests to the structural logic of the tales, the power of a fabula, and the basic discursive structure of human culture.[30]

Permanent Structures

What remained stable over the two generations are first and foremost the narratives structures. Loewenstein and Heath surmise that some plots structures are more prone to be distributed in the 'market place of ideas' than others, and consequently, that those stories that do 'make it' will be stable.[31] They mention the repetition-break plot structure as an example, a fabula that indeed nestles in many of our stories, the trickster ones and many of genre 3. Of course, as narratological treatises stress, there is not one fabula structure; any structure results from a close interaction between the text and the analyst,[32] and I choose as the window into this analysis the sequence of the events in which the actors operate. The first result of this exercise is that I have been unable to find any systematic difference in fabula structure between the old tales, the new ones, and the ones that have remained: there seems to be no shift in fabula through time. As the structures do differ to some extent between the four genres, let us examine them. For each genre, I have included one example each of old, new, and retained tales in order to compare the narrative structures.

For genre 1, in the 'old Squirrel' tales, we found the following event arrangement in *Squirrel and Pigeon in Bornu*:

Enjoyable good → Trick → Loss → Revenge
Virtual enjoyable good → Loss → Trap for actor 1 → Trap for actor 2 → Double Escape

In the 'retained Squirrel' tales, we had *Squirrel and the peanuts*:

Value from the bush → Actor 1 transgresses norm → Punishment →Setting the stage → Trick → Disaster actor 2 → Revelation of trick → Revenge → Deflection by final trick

The 'new Squirrel' tales were represented by *Squirrel and the bull in the bush*:

Conform social norm → Staging the test → Test actor 1 → Passing the test → Reward actor 1 → Transgression of norm → Actor 1 tricks actor 2 → Falling for the trick → Punishment actor 2

All three tales—old, new, and retained—share a common basic structure, a fabula that runs through the whole genre of trickster tales, the one least affected by time:

Enjoyable good → Loss → Trick → Revelation/reversal → Trick 2 → Deflection

For genre 2, tales of other animals, the situation is similar. The first tale, the 'old' one of *The Race between Frog and Buffalo*, exhibited the following fabula:

Value → Competition → Disinformation → Counterintuitive outcome → Deflection, end of DUB

The example of a 'retained' tale, *Hyena and the Dogs*, was not too different either:

Denial of relation → Trick (disguise) → Revelation → [Repetitions] → Partial revenge

The 'new' tale of *Cat*, *Tortoise and Pigeon's nest* showed a similar course of events:

> Value → Trick/disinformation → Revelation → Revenge → Deflection/disinformation → End of DUB

So genre 2 has the overarching structure:

> Denial of relation → Disinformation → Revelation → Revenge → End of opponent

In genre 3, tales of humans-plus, the structures are more varied. The *Cannibal* tale, an 'old' one, is the story of ultimate loss of humanity:

> Exaggerated craving → Denial of kinship → Destruction of kin → Self-destruction → Loss of humanity

For a 'retained' tale, we take the iconic *Death*, *the co-wives*, *and the singing excrement*:

> Valuation of reciprocity → Positive change in dangerous partner → High status for human → Undervaluation of reciprocity → Loss of speech codes → Help of marginal body part → Power of super-speech

As an example of a 'new' tale, *The swinging stick of the lazy man* will serve:

> Inversion of roles → Miraculous food → Betrayal by kin → Betrayal by superior → Inversion of roles → Miraculous weapon → Betrayal by kin → Punishment of superior

Genre 3, then, may have a repetitive structure, with acceptance of social norms in the first sequence and, if not helped, the loss of humanity by norm infraction in the second:

> Appreciation of social value → Assistance from on high → Stupidity → Loss → Negation of social value → Loss of status → Help by object → Gain → No help → Loss of humanity

Finally, genre 4, the largest and most heterogeneous genre, shows a similar conflation of structures. The iconic 'old' tale is *The bull of the chief*:

> Challenge → Two options → Disregard of values → Punishment → Combination of conflicting values → Reward

For the 'retained' example, we rely on the perennially underestimated unloved woman, *Kwazerema and helpful Ant*:

> Relational norm transgression → Revolt → Help by (super)nature → Status quo reestablished

For the 'new' tale, the much-loved *Ngemburu and the wife of Death* may serve:

> Denial of siblinghood → Problem → 1st exchange trick → Destruction of threat → Deflection → New threat by shape change → Decrease of humanity → 2nd exchange trick → Redress of normality

The latter tale is in effect a trickster sequence, a double one featuring both the first trick, the revenge, and the redress of the revenge by a second trick. This illustrates the stability of the narratological structures, but also the more heterogeneous character of genre 4; after all, the main sequence of the majority of these tales runs as follows:

> Dubious challenge → Help of seemingly inferior → Redress of balance

So, whatever the obvious variations in tales, the basic structures of the tales have remained quite stable, implying that telling a story in 1972 is based on similar cognitive operations to those in 2008: a *rhena heca* is still a *rhena heca*. A trickster tale generates its own proper structure, whether Squirrel is the main actor, or Tortoise or Hare—or, for that matter, Ngemburu. Morals still do not improve the plot, etiology is rare, and human characters are diverse and relatively one-dimensional.

Dynamics of Transmission

In Chap. 4 we focused on the tales that changed, and we saw the gentle but pervasive shifts in the transient ones. Now we turn to the stable ones, those that were retained and transmitted. Are there any specific characteristics that make them more 'memorable' than the others?

First of all, Squirrel tales are remembered clearest and best, and thus they can be considered the core of the Kapsiki folktales, the heart of Kapsiki oral culture. They hardly change, and of all tales they are the easiest to recognize, following a close event course that leads both the teller

and the audience through the tricks. The same holds for trickster-like tales such as Ngemburu, and it is the trick itself that steers the tale and forms the retentive framework of the story. The trick-plus-trickster furnish the MCIC qualities of the tales. Based on the default knowledge about family relations, hierarchy, and the environment of the Mandara Mountains, and armed with the familiarity of the figures of Squirrel and Leopard, the audience knows it can expect a flowing story with some surprising twists, consonant with the characters of the players. But the tale has to have some surprise, even for an experienced audience. The MCIC aspect of both the actors and the fabula amount to the simple experience that the story has to be fun, amusing, and good for a laugh. The well-known and endearing characters of the trickster, of the DUB, and of their families lower the threshold of reception and memory, but the core of the tale is the deception, the way in which the clever small one gains the upper hand for a fleeting moment over the stupid large one. But no cleverness ever wins permanently; the tables of hierarchy are never turned in earnest. The tale is not a dream. The virtual reality of the story is not the opposite of reality, so the tale dwells in the dominant social relations.

The tales of genre 2 are not too different in basic structure, as they also involve deception or disinformation, revelation, and revenge. The actors are less intriguing, but the same criteria hold throughout: it has to be fun and a little unexpected. Repetition of the trick helps, because repetition not only is essential in African cultural performances—music, for instance—but it also intensifies the pleasure of the audience in the stupidity of the DUB. And, of course, repetition is the core of memory. Thus, a tale type that has remained is the 'blame chain,' in which one small event by a small animal actor brings on a series of larger ones involving Buffalo and Elephant, ending usually with a bush fire. The chief of the animals then orders a court hearing, retraces the chain of events backwards, and then blames the smallest one for the whole chain of disasters. This type is well known in Africa (including among Mafa, Mofu-Gudur, and Fulbe tales)—and even beyond—and is quite stable; substitution by other animals is easy, as long as the repetition and litany of mishaps remains.[33]

Genre 3 features tales where the old, the new, and the retained have various structures. The Cannibal story has no twist, no MCIC, and is effectively predictable: this is the type of story that will not make it. There is simply not enough reason to tell it to an audience, or for the hearers to listen to it, let alone remember it. Of course, if it was told in whispers about someone they knew, as gossip, that would be a totally different matter, but here the

dwelling aspect comes in. The story does not dwell in Kapsiki culture, as stories on cannibalism are surprisingly rare in Mandara folklore; and accusations of witchcraft—in Cameroon often defined as anthropophagy—are not voiced in Kapsiki culture. The other two tales mentioned above—the co-wives in the house of Death, and the lazy man and the stick—do share all the qualities of a well-remembered story: a twist, an appealing character, and some happy ending. They are fun, whereas the cannibal is not much fun for an audience. Of course, sense of humor is culture-bound, a truism for any cultural studies scholar, but here my own experience coincides with the Kapsiki forgetfulness. The 1972 tales that I have been unable to find retained in 2008 are precisely those stories that I found difficult to understand, where the storyline was often mixed up.

Genre 4 showed the least stability. The last two tales given as examples of this genre above do well, but the forgotten *Bull of the Chief of Sukur* has a simple straightforward fabula that is clear for the audience from halfway through the story. The audience can fill it in for itself, which is the death of a tale. Although it has a sweet moral—doing things together—this does not help. In fact, many of the moral tales fare badly, as morals do not mix well with tricks, twists, and surprises. Of course, in the humans-only stories, tricks are more difficult to imagine; and in the stories that are popular, such as the Ngemburu ones, the hero performs some miracles himself, thus adding to their easy memorization.

Especially the last two genres, 3 and 4, show one retentive force that we only touched upon in the beginning: tales are a performance as much as they are a text. The ideophones that brought that notion home to me furnish the very ingredient for retention, beyond the factors of MCIC and dwelling. What are especially stable in the tales are certain specific expressions, such as—to give examples from the proud bride stories—the serpents dropping from the groom, the marriage with an animal with a tail, and the particular expressions about the beauty of the son-in-law. Retention of a tale seems to revolve around a few crucial scenes and some core sentences and expressions. The iconic scenes here are the dressing up with snakes, the immediate acceptance and departure by the bride, the gradual shedding of ornaments, the cave with cannibalism, the giving/killing on the road, and the large leap to freedom. Stories live in their vivid details: Tortoise inside Elephant, Squirrel dressed up as a Fulbe warrior, Frogs croaking at our running Buffalo, a co-wife placed over a hole in the ground, a beautiful girl under a donkey skin—there are many examples.

The raconteurs move from scene to scene, inventing direct dialogue as they progress through the mental images.

A special place in memory lane is held for the songs: quite a few tales include small chants, sung by the heroine, and these songs are essential in the tale. They purvey a message, provide power to the singer, and are transferable; as noted, often the excrement of a singer keeps singing, holding not only the pursuers but also the audience spellbound, ear as well as nose. Wherever songs are sung in the tales, these chants have remained the same, verbatim, as true signposts of memory. In Chamba tales about the 'difficult bride,' the songs sung by the bride-that-has-learned-by-experience help her escape her former beloved, who now turns into the monster he originally was.[34] Monsters also have to dance whenever there is music (making them an additional MCIC), so the girls escape by singing. Our Kapsiki versions of this story do not feature this kind of singing redemption, as the rescue is undertaken by culturally relevant outsiders, but it is in other tales that the song is crucial, both of the women and their excrement. The point here is that the singing itself is integral to the storytelling—usually simple, straightforward songs, with the many repetitions that characterize African performances in which the audience can join in, and excellent for stimulating the memory.

Not only are songs important, but so are the intoning of nonwords—such as *brejigula*—which serve as a memory code in tales. These too are often repeated and underline the special setting of the story: these are the 'words of the mouth,' as the Kapsiki definition of magic spells runs, the power of super-speech. And they are funny, as no audience can hear them repeated without giggling, especially when the dumb co-wife fails to repeat them properly and runs into serious problems—yes, into 'deep shit.' They are like the magical formulas in tales all over the world, simple but strange, powerful and funny, nonwords that trump proper speech: the African version of the 'abracadabra' or 'simsalabim' in Europe, these days replaced by the Latin words used by Harry Potter.

Iconic actions, as we saw, are underlined with ideophones, "marked words depictive of sensory imagery."[35] The actual use of these evocative sounds depends on the abilities of the raconteur, but they are mainly used to highlight dramatic moments, crucial movements and specific states of mind. Ideophones highlight the performance aspect of tale telling. They bring the action in the tale on stage, transform the ageless past into a dramatic present as the listeners hear the characters walking, falling, stumbling, crying, taking and using an axe, or whatever action or state of mind

is crucial in the tale at that moment. Here one should bear in mind the tonal quality of *Psikye*, in which, like most Chadic languages, differences in tones make for different lexical meanings. In itself this is commonplace, especially in African languages, but it does mean that the hearers are more tuned into listening to the tonal layer of the texts, and these tonal layers can be easily manipulated by a good performer. The point is that when ideophones highlight crucial actions, they stand out and bury themselves in the memory of the listening audience, as they illustrate what actually happens in the story, making the story multidimensional and almost multisensorial.[36] Or, as Philip Peek formulated: "Speech among African peoples is not just *about* something, it *is* something."[37] And speech without ideophones? According to a Ghanaian: "Ideophones are like pepper. Without them, speech is *buàà*"[38]… some ideophones need no translation. They are "those words that are such fun to use,"[39] and what would a tale be without fun? And, as recent research has suggested, humor is a powerful tool for retention and transmission.[40]

One particular means to graft words onto memories is gesturing, and in the tales that I witnessed most of the ideophones seemed to evoke specific gestures with hands and head. I have not systematically recorded Kapsiki gesturing-when-telling, but among the Siwu of Ghana, Mark Dingemanse has extensively video-recorded ideophone use in both tale telling and ordinary speech. Ideophones are words that depict rather than describe, and are routinely identified by the speakers themselves as not so much spoken as performed, acted out.[41] And that is exactly what happens: the body underlines, exemplifies, and intensifies the spoken word. In ordinary Siwu conversation, 30 % of the ideophones are accompanied by an iconic gesture, but in tale telling this rises to 53 %.[42] This conjunction of body and sound seems to be stable and standardized. So tale telling, through the combination of ideophone use and gestures, becomes a synesthetic experience in which several senses are employed at the same time, a process which has been identified as a major way to be both convincing and memorable.[43]

But there is more to these strange words. We encountered quite a few in the tales, and these form but a fragment of the total corpus of ideophones in *Psikye*. Some examples:

tsewele tsewele	cutting meat in strips
rhiya iyaglag	falling on one's back
puw puw puw	beating with a rod

wyaw wyaw wyaw	beating with a club
y y y y y	picking out
ndeng ndeng	cutting with an axe
mpelèa	taking an axe
gwelede	bending over
depweng	taking mush with meat
kwaw kwaw kwaw	crying
hwèa	arriving
satatatata	walking away

How abundant exactly these ideophones are in *Psikye* compared to other languages is hard to say, as lexicons or word lists rarely feature them. However, Noss reports for the Gbaya living on the border with Central African Republic, that ideophones comprise about one fourth of the whole lexicon,[44] and though that may represent an extremely rich case,[45] in other languages in the region they are prominent as well.[46] There is, in fact, ample reason why the study of ideophones originated in African linguistics, where it has become almost a cottage industry, but both on the global scale and on the African continent there is still much to explore.[47]

So, ideophones are the linguistic wealth of African languages,[48] but they are quite different from language to language. Mafa tales use different ones for similar actions; for instance, the ideophone for walking away in the related Mafa language is *bazlangarah*, quite different from the slow fading away of the sound in *satatatata*. The *Psikye* ideophone for the characteristic gait of Chameleon, forward and a little backwards, is *kwakedange*, while for the Mafa the obvious descriptive sound of his curious walk is *guèdèng guègèng*.[49] By being so language-specific, the ideophones in the tales achieve an additional goal, as they define the tale as 'one of us,' as a Kapsiki *rhena heca*; after all a Mafa, Mofu, or Fulbe story would sound different. Especially in the tales that came in from elsewhere, like the girl with the donkey skin, the use of ideophones files off, so to speak, the Fulbe serial numbers, installing Kapsiki ones instead.

Thus, any ethnic specificity of the tales is not so much in the content, but in the performance, both through the ideophones and the formal openings and closings of the tale itself. The Kapsiki *pekwuke* and *VVung* easily find their parallel in other groups, who have their own formal openings and endings, indicating that this particular tale is 'ours.' Judging from the use of ideophones, there seems to be no change in the linguistic creativity between the two samples, and the storytelling performance has

remained the same. Perhaps a professional or specialized storyteller would change this aspect, but there is no such specialist in Kapsiki culture. The only general specialist available is the smith, and his role is to be silent; he or she is not to speak but to listen or make music. But whoever tells the tale, young or old, gifted raconteur or not, the spoken word lives, and nowhere does the spoken word live more abundantly than in these *rhena heca*, with their wealth in ideophones.

To conclude, the tales that are remembered are the ones that are, one could say, worth remembering, a mild tautology that has to be explained. The tale has to have an extra, because people retain the funny ones, the surprises, and the small commentaries on family situations, recognizable but still entertaining, a good story that fits, a plot that dwells in our midst, highlighted by linguistic creativity.[50] In addition, the tales have to carry some tools for remembering, MCIC characters and plots, the little hooks with which they graft themselves onto our memories, the memes they carry to enter our short- and long-term memories. Finally, the memorable tales are the ones that allow for a good performance, a fair level of audience participation, through funny formulas, catchy songs, and above all the multisensorial wealth of action-in-words that places the timeless and placeless stories at the center of our life, right here and right now.

Our last comparison is regional, as stories are not a group's cultural property but part of a pan-African cultural heritage. Since the area is densely packed with different cultures, as we saw in the introduction, the chances of intergroup contact are very high for the Kapsiki. I surmised that the increased mixing of the various groups in the region would provide a source for new stories.[51] Is that the case? First, how different are the tales from other groups? From the Mafa and Mofu-Gudur we are well informed about their folktales, as we are for the Fulbe and the Mundang of this area, and the more distanced Hausa.[52] Comparing these tales brings a surprise. The three mountain populations are culturally and linguistically close, neighbors in fact, and considering the fact that tales travel widely and themes are shared all over Africa, one would expect a sizeable overlap. The surprise is that the Mafa neighbors are less like the Kapsiki than the geographically more distant Mofu-Gudur. Of the 54 Mafa tales in Kosack (1997a, b), 18 are similar to Kapsiki tales of my combined corpus and 36 are different (one-third and two-thirds, respectively). With the smaller Mofu-Gudur sample, 12 are similar and 13 are different, so about half and half. Linguistically, Mafa and Mofu-Gudur are closer to each other,[53] but Mofu-Gudur holds a special position in the area as the reputed place of origin of many groups, including the Kapsiki. These similarities in both cases reside

mainly in what I have described as the core stories. As the Mofu-Gudur stories exhibit the same partisans Squirrel and Leopard, this genre shows most resemblances (8 out of 12). In Mafa tales, the opponents of Squirrel are more varied; the Mafa Water Beetle, especially, is unknown in Kapsiki. In some way this underwrites the oral history of the area, in which the Kapsiki stem from Mofu-Gudur, not from Mafa. Fulbe stories in the area show an even smaller overlap (10 %), also mainly in Squirrel tales, and on the whole have a different 'feel,' coming from another mode of 'dwelling.' A comparison with a distant linguistic relative, Hausa, the largest Chadic language, gives a slightly larger overlap of 15 %,[54] while with the Mundang who live in the same region but speak a language from a very different linguistic family, overlap is even smaller than with Hausa.[55] For both their 'dwelling' is quite different from the Mandara one, as is their story telling tradition.[56] So linguistic kinship might be more important than proximity, which pleads for deep roots of the core tales. However, in the latter cases the distinction between same tale type and different tale type becomes more difficult, as characteristic details vary more with distance.

So, summing up our comparison by numbers, the new Kapsiki tales share half with the old ones and the Gudur tales, with the Mafa one-third, with the Hausa one seventh, and one tenth with both Mundang and Fulbe. It sounds like a family resemblance gradually diminishing with distance; linguistic first, geographical second. The determining factor seems to be the cast of main characters. Trickster tales resemble each other still more than non-trickster ones, even over larger cultural distances. A time gap, such as the two generations between our two sample sets, seems to have the same effect as geographical or limited linguistic difference: in African folktales the past is half a foreign culture.

Some themes and story types can be compared on a wider level, that of West Africa or the whole of Africa. The 'proud bride' is one—the girl that aims at a perfect husband and gets a much less desirable one. One major collection[57] finds that type in all of West and West-Central Africa, as well as in Zambia and Madagascar—also, Schmidt notes it in Namibia,[58] so we can consider this a pan-African type. The enfant terrible type has been noted all over Africa, though less uniformly,[59] as has the 'tree' theme and, of course, the inevitable kinship relations, descents, and alliances.[60] Specific images of evil are crucial to the tales, and these too are widely spread: the devouring mother, the opening of a pregnant girl's belly, or the enclosed girl.[61] Monsters come in all shapes and sizes, as we saw mainly in non-defined shapes, but here few continent-wide images seem to prevail.[62] These themes are quite recognizable, even if they vary

in several parameters, thus offering room for creativity both in content and performance.[63] But, of course, the majority of the studies on folktales focus on that most endearing of all types, the trickster. The figure of the trickster—Hare, Spider, Tortoise, or Squirrel—seems to vary more than his antics, even if in some cultures he is more counter-cultural, exuberant, rebellious, and self-destructive than among the Kapsiki.[64]

Viewing these African similarities, it is time to take a closer look at how exactly the tales dwell, the second question of our introduction. We saw many aspects of Kapsiki culture show up in the tales, but there seems to be a limit to this dwelling.[65] A host of specific Kapsiki cultural features never show up in tales: for instance, the *gwela* initiation, the large feasts of the year cycle, the rituals of the funeral, and specific smith's tasks like bronze casting. A significant silence also reigns in the tales on one aspect of the Leopard that holds large sway in Kapsiki thought: the magical power of his whiskers. Kapsiki magic knows a host of powerful and dangerous objects, mostly made of iron,[66] but none of them is as lethal as chopped-up Leopard's whiskers: drunk in beer, they will multiply rapidly, resulting in a very hairy corpse—at least, that is the belief. Hamerkop also has a special meaning for the Kapsiki. *Scopus umbretta* is a renowned nest builder, in fact a compulsive constructor of ever larger homes, which the bird then sees infested with intruder animals, like snakes and civet cats. This makes Hamerkop (called *Dambatsaraka* in Kapsiki) a dangerous bird, for if his bones are part of some revenge magic, called *sekwa*,[67] the victim will build new houses for the rest of his life, leaving each house in turn for someone else to live in. In fact, he will die of building, a horrifying prospect. Yet, no tale ever refers to the whiskers or the bones. Why are so many specific Kapsiki cultural elements absent? I think it is because it would run perpendicular to the tales. The whiskers and bones are part of another virtual reality in Kapsiki life, viz. ritual and religion, one that is not just culture-specific but has a different relation with daily life than the tales—not for amusement or distraction, but for survival and the construction of meaning. The two virtual realities, that of the tales and of ritual (including magic), do not mix.

What the tales do put in the spotlight are the family relations, problems between co-wives, the tension of the bride moving off into the uncharted territory of her in-laws, the distrust against newcomers, the position of children—all these relational issues are prominent.[68] This means that the ales dwell in Kapsiki society more than in Kapsiki culture, and especially in the compound within that society, with an occasional chief thrown in. The niverse of the tales is a small world, within eyesight, just a few people, just few types, just some core relations.

Eguchi notices a similar aspect of Fulbe tales.[69] Their pastoral life as such is seldom the subject of tales, but cattle as a symbol of wealth are present, as is especially the milk consumed inside the compound; here too, even in this wide-ranging culture, the tales dwell on the square meter. Paulette Roulon-Doko[70] elaborates on the African cuisine in folktales, another detail of daily life. Yet, some political issues beyond the level of the household do surface. Argenti shows how folktales in the Cameroonian grasslands in their very ambiguity reflect the social problems concerning fosterage, Malimabe relates tales to child abuse, while Pieterse reconstructs the social situation of women in four South African groups using their folktales, that is, the varieties of a trickster tale, like the political implications in the Khoi tales of the Bleek/Lloyd collection.[71]

For the Kapsiki this means the tales zoom in on those daily relations that the Kapsiki share with other groups in the area, in the wider region, and in Africa. Beyond that, the tales dwell, quite literally, in small cultural features and in architecture, the lay-out of the compound, the details of the granary. Thus, in the Mafa tales, the platform at the in-house granaries pops up repeatedly, just like the *derha*, the forecourt, does in Kapsiki tales. It is in these architectural details that the tales make a distinction between variant groups: they dwell within the African compound, and they get their home-feel from a plaited granary, a flute, a guitar, or the grinding mortars of the household (Fig. 5.2).

The tales dwell also in the norms highlighted by the tales, and certainly by all those standards that are severely and convincingly broken. As Zipes puts it:

> In sociological terms each character is to act out what Pierre Bourdieu calls a habitus, that is, the characters occupy the whole complex of thinking, acting, and performing of a position within the family or society: names are rarely used in a folk tale; characters function according to their status within a family, a social class, or profession; and they often cross boundaries or transform themselves. It is the transgression that makes the tale exciting.[72]

Norm transgressions are the hub of the stories. The brutality and viciousness that Squirrel sometimes embodies, the blatant jealousy between co-wives, the gluttonous eater, the uppity bride, and, most glaringly, the mother who fills the huts of her son-in-law with excrement—these are not only breaches of normality, but huge and exuberant transgressions, and very funny. They are the hilarious MCICs. Tales need these exaggerations to be remembered well and thus to be transmitted; and indeed they are better represented in the shared corpus of tales, both intracultural and intercultural. A small shiver of shock should go through the audience, as

Fig. 5.2 Grinding mortars of two co-wives

the less-than-human characters engage in more-than-human follies and vengeance. Folktales are studies in blatant exaggeration, and that aspect seems to have grown with the passage of time. Just as the notion of evil has crystallized, the fealties and foul plays of the actors have lost some of their former ambivalence as life in the tales has become even more exuberant.

In this vein Barthès refers to the *effet de réel*, "the unfamiliar promoted to the position of the prime signifier of the real,"[73] and this paradox holds well for these tales. After all, as oral tales they are very much what Fludernik calls "natural narratology," based on an "interaction between a narrative frame, a plotline level of the story proper and an off-plotline level of embedded orientation and narrational evaluative or explanatory commentary."[74] And all these profound familiarities are brought home by the very unfamiliar inside a well-known setting. It is precisely through the strange characters and unexpected twists that the tales dwell in the experience of the audience, highlighting their messages and the social setting they address. Folktales construct meaning about our lived world through reconciling "the extraordinary with the canonical. [...providing] a powerful link between the deviation from the norm and its reformulation into a canonical cultural pattern." It is this "impossible logic"[75] that generates hope and gives these tales a dwelling place in our memory.

Some tales stay, and some tales come and go. Overviewing the distribution of West African tales, there seems to be a corpus of core tales that

find their creative form in a widespread host of African cultures, a core recognizable in its variations. At the heart of these are the trickster tales,[76] found everywhere in the world, but in Africa more dominant than on other continents. Inside Africa the antics of the smart, wily one against the DUB are joined by a series of themes that resonate deeply with the basic relations of African families: mistrust between intimate family members,[77] rivalry between co-wives and siblings, resentment against uppity girls. These themes that dwell around the fireplace are set inside a compound enclosure shielding the small insider's world from the ambivalence of the outside, be it political power—the chief—or the perennial threat of anything coming out of the bush, the monsters, the 'Things' in any form, especially the form of an irresistibly beautiful woman, the familiar unknown. A certain melancholy emanates from these tales, a sense of being alone in a hostile world, surrounded by intimate kinsmen one cannot really trust, facing a faceless evil, relying for redemption on miracle objects, on help from weak animals, but ultimately on wit, on one's ability to outmaneuver hostile forces. One can never really win in this world, just break even for a fleeting moment, and then never on one's own terms. It is through both "the longing for a true home" and, as Zipes puts it, the "great refusal to be formed by the powers of domination"[78] that the tales offer a virtual escape from an unjust world, in fact a ray of hope:

> … we have been attracted to fairy tales because they are survival stories with hope. They alert us to dangerous situations, instruct us, guide us, give counsel, and reveal what might happen if we take advantage of helpful instruments or agents, of what might happen if we do not. They communicate the need to be opportunistic, to exploit opportunities, to be selfish so we can survive.[79]

Tales that stay, and tales that come and go. Beyond this trickster core and its periphery of standardized social fascinations, there is a cloud of varied types, themes, and story plots, which seem to move easily, come and go within a single story tradition as well as between cultures. These are the variegated themes we encountered in genres 3 and especially 4, the stories about people, some monsters, some objects, but mainly about a host of relations gone awry, easily exchangeable—'*rhena heca* light', so to speak—the ones that come and go. Although ideophones may always be fitted in, these tales lack the memory claws of the trickster tales, lack the excitement of song performances, and somewhat gloss over the deeper uncertainties

of human life; and thus they are remembered for a short while only, making way for new ones in the same vein. They have their own life cycle, a short one. Looking back over two generations, one sees that for these latter two types of tales the past is indeed a foreign country, quite similar to the foreignness of neighboring groups such as the Mofu-Gudur and Mafa: two generations in Kapsiki transmission brings a change comparable to the difference with the neighbors.

As the new tales seem in the majority to be really new, rather than borrowed from the neighbors as far as I can see, they reflect the narrative creativity of these mountain dwellers and the very power of narrative itself. Lévi-Strauss defined his mythology as a study of "how the myths think among themselves,"[80] and thus the transmission of Kapsiki folktales shows us how 'tales tell themselves,' illustrating the narrative forces that are so close to the basis of our humanity. The narrative core is intriguing, fun, and a great show, and these tales stay with us, as an anchor of our collective identity, a narrative definition of self, expressing our existential being in this world. They will dwell with us as long as we dwell in them. The narrative cloud around these tales forms the basis of inspiration, adaptation, and experimentation with narrative forms, adapting to changes in society, picking up new clues which are then grafted onto the old stem of the *rhena heca*. Together, the core tales and the fleeting ones express and illustrate the ways we are desperately trying to feel at home in a world that does not belong to us, where we are passengers and lodgers, fighting our uphill battles to find our roots in a world where we encounter wild and wonderful creatures, but where, after all is said and done, we ourselves seem to be the aliens.

Utrecht, The Netherlands
February 2016

Notes

1. Ingold (2000: 153).
2. Ibid. 179.
3. Ibid. 172.
4. Mölig et al. (1988), Schott (1990), Okpewho (1992), Kosack (2001), Boucher et al. (2005), Schmidt (2005), Dipio (2008), Ukala (2010) and Finnegan (2012).
5. Barrett and Nyhof (2001); for an incisive discussion of the merits of cognitive theories for folklore, see Eder (2003).

6. For example, Tsoungui (1986) and Abu-Manga (1984).
7. Lallemand (1985).
8. See Purzycki (2010, 2011).
9. Abrahams (1983: 2, 15, 23).
10. Russell and Gobet (2013).
11. Boyer (2001), Gonce et al. (2006), Tweney et al. (2006), Barrett (2008), McCauley (2011) and Johnson et al. (2010).
12. Gregory and Barrett (2009).
13. Barrett and Lawson (2001), Barrett and Malley (2007) and Harmon-Vukić et al. (2012). Time exposure and time lapse seem to have a differential impact as well, Hornbeck and Barrett (2013). See also Norenzayan, Atran, Faulkner and Schaller (2006).
14. Respectively, Kosack (1997a, b), Boyd and Fardon (2001), Sorin-Barreteau (2001) and Palaï (2007).
15. The Mundang tales form a good example: here the main character bears different names in the Cameroonian side and in the Chadian part, Palaï (2007: 15–16).
16. James (2013).
17. McCauley (2011: 167).
18. Respectively, Upal (2011), Stubbersfield and Tehrani (2013), Tweney et al. (2006) and Upal et al. (2007).
19. Barrett (2008) and Johnson et al. (2010).
20. Johnson et al. (2010) and Barret and Nyhof (2001).
21. McDaniel et al. (1994).
22. Ibid. 183. The same seems to hold for the comic book heroes, who in many ways resemble the trickster figures of folktales: Carney et al. (2014).
23. Harmon-Vukić (2009: 66); see also Gonce et al. (2006).
24. Upal (2010).
25. Slone et al. (2007).
26. Banerjee et al. (2013: 1281).
27. Banerjee et al. (2013: 1279).
28. For a published Fulbe example, see Eguchi (1982: 1153).
29. Van Beek and Tourneux (2014, story 14).
30. For an example from the famous Bleek/Lloyd collection of /Xam stories, see Wessels (2007).
31. Loewenstein and Heath (2009).
32. Bal (1997: 193). The relationship between narratology and folklore is not close; see Fludernik (1996: 55).
33. ATU 2030. For Africa, see Kosack (1997a), Eguchi (1980), Schmidt (1989 II), Sorin-Barreteau (2001) and Thomas (2003).
34. Boyd and Fardon (2001).

35. Ideophones are easy to recognize, but hard to define cross-culturally. I follow Dingemanse (2012: 654, 2011a: 19, 25).
36. Similar to more modern mixtures of verbal and nonverbal performances, called technauriture (Merolla 2014: 84).
37. Philip Peek (1994: 475). See also Dingemanse (2011a: 341).
38. Dingemanse (2011a: 133).
39. Welmers (1973), cited in Dingemanse (2011a: 31–32).
40. Purzycki (2010). In fact, humor seems to follow a similar logic to MCIC reasoning, Purzycki (2011).
41. Dingemanse (2013: 143).
42. Ibid. (2013: 151). His research on ideophone use in common parlance is crucial, since folktales have completely dominated as the medium in which ideophones occur. After all, tales are much easier to collect, transcribe, and analyze.
43. See Dingemanse (2011b) and Van Beek (2010: 265). See for a general treatment Ward (2008), and for a more theatrical application Fredericks (2008).
44. Noss (1985).
45. Some African languages seem to be less rich in them. For instance Fulfulde, though a language with a huge lexicon, seems much less dominated by ideophones. At least, in the rendition of the Fulfulde tales, both Noye (1971) and Eguchi (1978–1984) present their tale transcriptions almost without them.
46. Mundang, for instance, see Elders (2001) and Barreteau (1995) for the Mofu-Gudur.
47. Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz (2001), Dingemanse (2011a) and Van Kranenburg (2014).
48. And of many more languages, including some Asian and Native American languages; see Blench (2010: 271, 277). He even gives ideophones from English, while in Indo-European languages they are not nearly as abundant as in Africa, one reason why they have been neglected in linguistic theory. The other one is that they are extremely hard to pinpoint grammatically, as they appear in many types of word classes and syntactic slots, Newman (1968) and Galadanci (1971). They might be best considered as a separate word class with fuzzy edges, Dingemanse (2011a: 147–158).
49. Kosack (1997a, b). In fact, one can hear the difference in the way the two languages look at the animal: for the Kapsiki he moves forward and backward a little, while for the Mafa he takes a step backward first before going forward. In his encompassing comparison Roger Blench (2010) highlights this specificity per individual language in some detail.
50. Though ideophones may be constructed on the spot, as a form of individual creativity (see Dingemanse 2011a: 335), my impression is that the

ideophones in Kapsiki folktales are quite standardized, also over the two samples.

51. Calame-Griaule's rendering of the Isawaghen stories points in this direction (Calame-Griaule 2002).
52. Eguchi (1978–84), Kosack (1997a, b, 2001), Noye (1999), Palaï (2007) and Sorin-Barreteau (2003).
53. Both are in the group 'Biu-Mandara A-A.5,' while *Psikye* is classified as 'A-A.3.' See www.ethnologue.com [accessed 15 April 2014].
54. Pucheu (1982), Souleymanne and Caron (1985) and Glew and Babalé (1993). The same holds for the Lamang, Wolf (1991).
55. Palaï(2007).
56. Ahmad (1998) and Zwaal (2003).
57. Görög-Karady and Seydou (2001). An exact fit with the ATU typology is difficult to find; more or less close resemblances are ATU 311 & 312C. ATU 859 (nrs. 1 & 4) reasons from the bride's father, and in ATU 425A & 432B the animal character of the suitor is evident from the start, but turns into a prince later through the ministrations of the courageous bride. In ATU 900 the haughty princess is forced by her father to marry a beggar husband who in fact is a prince and who then exposes her flaws: the taming of the shrew type. See also Noye (1971).
58. Schmidt (2008).
59. Görög-Karady et al. (1980). In this volume Calame-Griaule posits an origin for the enfant terrible in the Bamana-speaking groups, a striking example of the strength of the comparative method when applied to a limited geographical area. Here resemblance with any ATU type is surprisingly small; tales of stupidity, such as stupid children mistaking orders (or following them too literally), have as their closest types ATU 1681B & 1218. But the enfant terrible is a definite anti-hero, not stupid but mean, not relying on his own strength but on an injunction of deceased parents never to quarrel among the siblings. The *enfant malin* type, also popular in Africa, is quite different again (Paulme 1976: 196).
60. Calame-Griaule (1987) and Görög-Karady (1997).
61. Respectively Paulme (1976), Schott (1990) and Seydou (1990).
62. See Dundes (1981) and Finnegan (2012).
63. Görög-Karady (1990).
64. See Zipes (1979), Vecsey (1981), Lewis-Williams (1997), Sougou (2001), Yenika-Agbaw (2008), Vallier (2011) and De Sterck (2012).
65. This problematic has been at the center of the debate whether traditional tales carried information relevant for collective survival of a group (Minc 1985). This is beyond the aim of this essay, but the dwelling analysis of the Kapsiki folktales is discouraging for such an approach.
66. Van Beek (2015).

67. Van Beek (1992, 2015).
68. Schmidt (2005).
69. Eguchi (1994).
70. Roulon-Doko (1988).
71. Respectively Argenti (2010), Malimabe et al. (2007), Pieterse (2010), Jenkins (2010) and Wittenberg (2014).
72. Zipes (2006: 49).
73. Barthès cited in Fludernik (1996: 32).
74. Fludernik (1996: 80).
75. Both quotes: McDaniel et al. (1994: 183).
76. Paulme (1977), Pelton (1980). Vecsey (1981), Zipes (1983b), Lawuyi (1990), Konrad (1994), Schmidt (2008), (2009) and Finnegan (2012/1970).
77. See Geschiere (2013) for an intriguing and convincing analysis of the relationship between witchcraft, intimacy, and trust.
78. Zipes (1993: 148, 92). See also Zipes (1999).
79. Zipes (2006, 26).
80. Lévi-Strauss (1964: 20).

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