

The Hermeneutics of Consecrated Power; A Critical Semiotic Analysis of Witchcraft Cleansing in Wimbun Society.

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ABSTRACT: Language use, mediated through the written text of the spoken form, is without doubt the most important and fascinating method Wimbun people employ to enhance the communication process for the expression and transfer of their social facts, scientific and cultural knowledge and skills to achieve social stability. This study, sets out to collect, examine and describe this special kind of spoken text in which is manifested the consecrated power of language as observed during witchcraft cleansing rite among the Wimbun of Donga Mantung Division. The objective is to analyse and explain typical utterances, nonverbal signs, and symbols used during witchcraft purification in the Wimbun community as a demonstration of the extraordinary nature of language of power operating within the context of the Wimbun tradition and culture. The ethnography of speaking, propounded by ethno-methodologists provides relevant techniques in the collection and treatment of typical utterances, nonverbal signs, and symbols that occur during its enactment. The case-centric approach was used including reports of cases of observable life accounts, instances of speech acts in Limbum, as well as audio and video records were obtained directly from informants, transcribed and translated into English. The data was then analyzed following a combined theory of the sign and the critical semiotic theory to text analysis. After the analysis, one interesting finding, amongst others, reveals that in Wimbun society, the chief celebrant is endowed with consecrated power in order to play a multiplicity of important roles including that of the custodian of the palace, village exorcist, judge, magistrate, and attorney general. As a result of these powers, he is the only competent authority to reverse any witchcraft spells. Besides, this cleansing rite, which involves the participation of several actors, assumes the character of a dramatic performance staged in one act seven different scenes as stipulated by the Wimbun tradition, synonymous to any modern court procedure for establishing and sanctioning an accused; beginning with the court hearing, cross examination, establishing the truth, revocation, applying the law, passing judgment and implementing the sanction, meant to perpetrate social justice and restore social cohesion in mbumland.

Keywords: Consecrated, hermeneutics, power, semiotics, the Wimbun, withdraft

I. INTRODUCTION

Linguists have long demonstrated the intricately interwoven relationship between language use, thought and perception and that, for their social and cognitive development, all children need to learn and understand language use and usage on which to underpin and develop their thoughts and perception. The spoken language is used in Wimbun society to express and describe their social world, but also in the manifestation of different social processes by which they make meaningful interpretation. Specific words and utterances carry in them the necessary energy needed to function in the process of establishing meaning between the esoteric world and our actions, experiences and perception. In this guise, though language influences society, language helps users to build and maintain good social relationships and cohesion.

In both western civilization and African traditional societies, and in particular, among the Wimbun, language constitutes an efficient instrument of transmitting social and cultural knowledge of witchcraft, manifesting its power, and ability to control others. For decades, many people have believed that being cursed,

battled, battered or bewitched with negative energies is an inevitable human plight. The point is that our world has entered a period of dire straits. It pains me to admit this, but human beings tend to be wicked and power hungry that some would not hesitate to tempt or initiate innocent children into all sorts of evil practices and in particular, witchcraft, which has led to the decrease in human energy and diminishing level of happiness. Entire traditional societies in modern times continue to feel the devastating weight of witchcraft practice and this has brought untold misery and fear to families and the community. For long, the practice of witchcraft and its effects on individuals has baffled the clergy, neophytes as well as adepts and acolytes. However, in mbumland, whenever one is declared a sorcerer or witch, known in Limbum as 'Nwetfu', the least sanction meted to the accused is corporeal punishment and pronouncement of exile. Once the facts are established, the TantohNwarong pronounces that 'You no longer belong to this land' and this act is power and takes effect. With such example, only a semiotic analysis of the utterances, signs and symbols can highlight on their deep meaning relating these utterances to the social world and social processes practiced by the people. The investigation of witchcraft practice and the process of purification in the Wimbun community is the focus of this study.

Linguistics has greatly contributed to an understanding of different sociological facts, beliefs and practice including witchcraft. A majority of people today believe that there is no known course of action to battle externally-transmitted negative energies used in witchcraft. These negative energies originate from some jealous 'frenemies' and toxic members of a society, who, for selfish reasons, and sometimes, are the least suspected of such mal practices affect and influence thoughts and actions. Ordinary folks in traditional settings are not spared from this hard situation, and hence seek different means to cope with the esoteric world. From battling against the crippling stresses of life and facing financial difficulties, many resort to gain and use esoteric knowledge and power called witchcraft practice. Paradoxically, even though witchcraft has been existing as a hidden system of operation in both western and African societies, it is very hard to see witches carrying out their activities in broad daylight as their activities are done in the night as darkness is a favourable time for calling on the forces of darkness, hence, it cannot be scientifically proven. In order to discover the principles underlying Limbum language as a system and to explore the ways in which Wimbun native speakers use the system at their disposal in their everyday social life, linguists, sociologists and anthropologists, have come up with various fundamental concepts.

The fundamental idea of language in this light is that of the Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, semiotician and philosopher, known as founder of theoretical linguistics. He holds that language is really a borderline between human thought and sound, where thought and sound merge to provide communication. Spoken language includes the communication of concepts by means of sound-images from speaker to hearer. Ever since Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique générale*,¹ published in 1916, his ideas laid the foundation for theoretical linguistics, semiology, 'langue and parole', signified and signifier, etc., and today, linguists continue to sort out the relationship between 'la parole', the individual written or oral language utterances that are based upon that underlying system, 'la langue', shared by speakers of the same language. Although not entirely identical, Noam Chomsky's (1968)² dichotomy competence versus performance comes close to the 'langue/parole' opposition as it also distinguishes between an underlying virtual stratum and a level of actual, individual manifestation. We are concerned here, not only with the actual, spoken, individual use of language, stressing that certain linguistic data of witchcraft discourse and the process of purification as the object of study are of a special kind and must be handled in a special way to deal with other considerations introducing the underlying semiotic system, norms and usage.

A mode of sociological inquiry, known as ethnomethodology and devoted to develop practical methods to understand social facts of common reasoning by which members of the same society, in an effort to address and describe certain fundamental problems of social thought, action and behaviour posed by Talcot Parsons' theory of action was also developed by the linguist, Harold Garfinkel³ around the 1960's. In Garfinkel's own words, 'Ethnomethodological studies analyze the everyday activities people sharing a common linguistic and social identity, customs, sense of belonging, and destiny, participate in more visible. In ethnographic research, the semiotics model helps the researcher to analyze how these people interpret certain daily activities and happenings. In this light, semiotics can enable one to understand why certain signs and objects are interpreted differently in different cultures and different geographies. In line with this, Saussure viewed language from two different perspectives. On the one hand, language is a system of signs. That is, a semiological system, and language as a social phenomenon; a product of the language community. The present investigation is

undertaken as an attempt to linguistically x-ray certain sociological facts, notably, the witchcraft cleansing act as performed among the Wimbun.

In this respect, the language spoken by the Wimbun is a potential tool to reveal that such a practice is couched through verbal and nonverbal signs and actions, often interpreted as spiritual power, experienced and known only by the initiates. Any uninitiated can neither see nor understand what is going on around him during the purification rite. In some parts of the western world today, witchcraft is regarded as mere superstition, and no longer respectable, yet, it has been transformed into occultism and sects. The young, for want of fast money and power are easily attracted to this modus operandi. Older persons were initiated early and continued to influence others to perpetuate the practice. Life is essentially about three things: producing objects, organizing these objects into functioning systems, and interpreting the world. The study of certain traditional beliefs and practices and social facts are intricately interconnected and inseparable from language people use. This is the case with witchcraft practice and the Wimbun people and their traditional beliefs, practice and culture as semiosis. The idea that these semiotic processes are deeply and extensively considered than we think tells us that life depends on man's interpretation of the meaning of the objects, signs and symbols or semiosis in the construction of reality. Consecrated language is considered as a unique, powerful and non-instinctive means of verbal and nonverbal communication of ideas, emotions and feelings of carefully selected signs and symbols to influence and control the individual's mind in the construction of social and cultural reality.

II. THE WIMBUN

The Wimbun tribe of Cameroon number over 400,000 inhabitants, and occupy the grassland hinterlands of the Nkambe high Plateau in Donga-Mantung Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. Settling in three waves, they are found scattered over the Nkambe high plateau known as the mbumland. A member of the mbum society is called 'Nwembun' and the people 'Ngaambun', while the society is called Wimbun, 'Wi' stands for people. Several studies hold that the Mbun, Yamba and Mfumte are the three main ethnic groups that make up the Donga Mantung division. The Wimbun people are believed to have migrated into the area from the Adamawa plains more than four hundred years ago in three successive waves. The Wimbun consists of three Clans; the Warr Clan headquartered at Mbot, Tang clan at Tallah, and Wiya clan at Ndu. Consisting of 32 Mbun villages, each headed by a chief or 'Nkfu' in Limbum, These three clans are geographically interspersed to the east and west of the Nkambe plateau, share a common language called Limbum. "Li" means language and "mbun" refers to the speakers. Limbum is a grassfield language of Cameroon with a small number of speakers in Nigeria. Limbum, primarily the mother tongue of the Wimbun people, is therefore the language spoken by the Nsungli people of Mbun land, referred to as the Wimbun. notes Bongmba. (1998)⁴.

The landscape is a high plateau with endless hills and rocky-mountains interspersed with fertile plains. They are mostly small scale farmers and keepers of cattle, fowls and goats. Traditionally, they like to build their houses with red bricks made out of the red soil and thatched with grass along the valleys, so they could easily do farming. The Wimbun are basically a dynamic social, highly organized and peace loving people, who believe in their customs, tradition and culture. To the Mbun man, however, witchcraft is extremely significant, because even the most sophisticated African cannot ignore their belief in deities, divinities, spirit worship and witchcraft practice, to whom everything success or failure in life, sickness or sudden death to witchcraft is attributed. Their perception is that life is not as simple as many take it to be, for there is a hand behind every person's affair. Since witchcraft will probably persist for many years to come, whoever wishes to understand African social behaviour and perception should learn as much as possible about their belief systems and practices in their attempt to construct reality. The fact is that witchcraft practice, among the Wimbun, is considered evil, and brings untold agony, pain and suffering detrimental to the social wellbeing of the people. It is important to know that some members, as the village chief, his notables, seers and even the Nwarong secret cult, legitimately possess such powers to work for the general good and do so by dint of the consecrated authority vested on them by Wimbun tradition. Other members, who illegitimately exercise witchcraft, do so to possess, influence and control other members for selfish and destructive purposes.

With modernization and increasing urban exodus, Wimbun youth have seemingly been caught up in the age of globalization and information technology, forgetting their rich cultural values and heritage imbued in traditional folktales, legends, myths, riddles, rites, rituals, songs and proverbs, and today, much effort is being made to promote these values, through the study of their indigenous language, facts about their social life,

beliefs, traditional medicines and healing, exorcism and practices as a way to preserve these heritage practiced by their forefathers, and today, are almost dying out if nothing is done fast. In effect, if authentic data on these different modes of life is not collected, described and well documented, the quintessence of this knowledge will be lost forever.

Several research methods exist to gather adequate information about a people's way of life, their beliefs, practices and perception. Ethnomethodology was developed as a valuable technique to collect tangible data in anthropology in order to delve into a native speaker's perception and manifestation of this knowledge and mastery of the society's culture. It focuses on the native speaker's tacit knowledge and express manifestation of social action, their common stream of consciousness and interactional activities with other members of the community. Through the study of witchcraft data, social practices, songs, rites and rituals as oral literature, it is possible to address how the Wimbum people effectively use language as a medium to participate and transmit valuable knowledge of everyday activities to maintain a sense of belonging, social order and social reality. Ethnomethodology is a theoretical construct in sociolinguistics and anthropology based on the belief that you can discover the normal social order of a society's code and mode by studying their way of life.

Language has been used to determine an individual's or group's role and potential in society, create social order and establish social identity. It equally plays an important role in creating either a positive or negative identity. However, spoken language has been used in casting spells and incantations in witchcraft practice as well as to afflict negative energies and vibrations, illnesses, diseases, accidents, stagnation and even death on people is a deterrent factor in the development of the Wimbum society. Witchcraft is the negative use of magical powers or supernatural incantations to harm a person or a group of people. For the most part, it entails the use of specific utterances, words or phrases as formulas infused with powerful charges. Certain words are infused with strong energies and can be transmitted to affect the listener. Traditionally, it is the exercise or invocation of alleged supernatural powers to unconsciously influence and control people's minds, hence their actions and events. Broadly speaking, a witch is a person who employs magical formulas to invoke particular entities and spirits at his disposal to hurt others. Those who possess such occulted knowledge practice it to destroy or harm others are considered witches. It is interesting to understand why these persons are feared, castigated and banished in Wimbum society.

The Wimbum have a matrilineal system of social organization. This matrilineal society is based on the respect of established tradition, cultural beliefs and practices. In a way, the Wimbum community is well organized with the village chief or *Nkfu* as head, at the highest position, assisted by the Wifas and Fais or subchiefs, who control the subjects in each faidom. Tantoh, or father of the land, and the Mayaa, queen mother are part of local administration and caretakers of the land. Ascension to the throne in Mbumland, for example, was, and continues to be a highly coveted exclusive privilege of male members of the royal family. The *Nkfu*, upon ascension, is bestowed with the properties of kingship, the 'seat' or '*Kabarah*' including all sorts of witchcraft powers through his initiation into all the secret societies and cults of the village. This gives him the status of a semi-deity, venerated with divine nature to commune with his ancestors and the guardians and protectors of the land in the spirit world. These forces, it is believed assist, counsel and direct him on administering his people and redefining his power. By implication, the Wimbum believe in the concept of existing spiritual powers that can be used to either positively or negatively influence human actions, life and destiny. The Wimbum strongly believe in the concept of life after death and hold that the *Nkfu* does die but travels to meet his ancestors. They point to a far distant land referred to as '*Njinchang*' or the land of spirits. They believe that certain notables and elders who pass away from this physical life, continue to inhabit the earth and can be seen during important ceremonies. They can be easily contacted through the shrines. Ancestral worship is strongly perceived as spirits who inhabit the earth and oversee the affairs of the village for the good of the people. There is also the belief that there are some people, who equally possess negative power intended to destabilize the village through witchcraft practice. They entice children with various objects including food 'meat' to initiate them into their witchcraft society.

There are also various important bodies and secret societies in Mbumland to assist the chief carry out his administrative responsibility such as the traditional council, the '*Nwarong*' and '*Ngiri*' secret societies. The *Nwarong* society is one of the strongest arms of the tradition, charged, among other things, with collecting and preserving all mystical powers of the village, making and reinforcing the laws of the land. The *Ngiri* club, is an assembly of princes of the palace, and Wimbum *Nwarong* war lords are the *Mfuh* and *Samba (Manjong)* secret societies, whose members consist of healthy men responsible for village security and the '*Mfuh*' society in

charge of fighting wars and defending the integrity of the community. Masquaradesor jujus as ‘mbuhNwarong’ form part of the executive body in Wimbun culture and play an important role in the execution of actions.

The Wimbun cosmogony is quite elaborate and complex. AMbum man believes in the existence of the almighty God, *Nyu mi buu*, and also in the existence of smaller gods, whom he created to intervene whenever the need arises in the society. These include nyukong or the god of war, *NyuMrohoh* the god of water, *NyuRlah* or the god of the compound, *NyuNgong* or the god of the land. Shrines exist in compounds and the palace, as entry spaces for the spirit. These elements depict the cultural artefacts and values that identify the Wimbun people as unique and dynamic. But to what extent does linguistics and sociological analysis of a cultural text form a happy alliance? Ethnomethodology is a method of sociological analysis that examines how individuals participate and use language in everyday social interaction to or construct or deconstruct their social reality, perception and worldview.

Though christianity was introduced into the society long ago, over 90% of Wimbun people continue to believe in a multitude of gods and divinities as they continue to maintain their connection with their ancestors, strongly believing in their influence over their daily activities and life. In the same vein they believe in the existence of forces of witchcraft. They basically come from a worldview that traditionally considers God to be highly transcendent, who could be reached through intermediaries, such as ancestors, spirits, and lesser gods. While they have no problem about the existence of God, he is not present in their life situations. This leads to the practice of witchcraft through consultation with human mediums or spirits. Wimbunchristians, therefore, find themselves in a dilemma. They want to be Christians during day, and go to consult traditional practitioners, healers, seers, diviners, etc., at night, who provide fortification against the machinations of witchcraft.

Having been raised in the Wimbuntradition and having experienced the negative consequences and realities of witchcraft among the Wimbun, it is important to address the issue of witchcraft using a critical semiotic framework to serve for analysis and description of data collected on the consecrated power of language and hermeneutics of witchcraft cleansing.

Several terminologies require better understanding in this work including hermeneutics, consecrated, power, Witchcraft, Wimbun, and semiotics.

III. DEFINITION OF SOME CONCEPTS

The term ‘consecrated’ is used to delegate power as in the French expression ‘Sous le haute instructions de.’ commonly used in Cameroon administration, gives one the impression of the power of language. In a way, this expression designates amalgamation of functions with the intention to manipulate people’s thoughts. This utterance can represent the verbal instruction from a high authority as the president. The second version is the written instructions, delegating power through specific directives to execute a certain mission. This form of power is conferred or consecrated on certain people in the community to manipulate and control the decisions and actions of others.

Traditionally, witchcraft is believed to be the use of magic spells or language to cause harm or misfortune to others. It is used by the witch against his own community; it is seen as immoral and often thought to involve communion with evil beings. The term ‘witchcraft’ is interpreted in Wimbun as ‘*tfu*,’ to signify ‘night’ and distinguish it from the English term ‘witchcraft.’ The practice of ‘*Tfu*’ within Wimbun tradition is a term used to signify ‘darkness,’ ‘hidden,’ and ‘*ngaatfu*,’ refers to people of the night or those who act in the night. I argue that the Wimbun terms *bfui*, *brii*, and *tfu* have multiple meanings, and are often employed to discuss and critique lived experiences. The objective of witchcraft practice is to manipulate the mind in order to influence and control the actions of others, hence condition their social behaviour. There exist two types in Wimbun society; ‘*Tfu njee*’ or negative witchcraft, and ‘*Tfu raara*’ or positive witchcraft. Postmodern perspectives help us interpret *tfu* as power, from a linguistic, sociological, and religious discourse thus making it possible for us to attempt an ethical critique of the negative aspects of Wimbun *tfu*.

The term ‘semiotics,’ originates from the Greek words *semeio* (interpreter of sign) and *tikos* (pertaining to) in which semeion, means anything that is used to indicate, code or stand in place for something else. The main proponents of this theory were Ferdinand de Saussure (1957)¹, a Swiss linguist, who studied the meaning of signs within a particular group or society, and Atkin, Albert (2013)⁵, and Charles Sanders Peirce (1994)⁶, an American philosopher and logician, who studied how the use and perception of signs shape our individual understanding of physical reality. In effect, according to Saussure, signs consist of a signifier (a word, an image, a sound, and so on) and its meaning – the signified. The denotation of a sign is its literal meaning (e.g. the word

'dog' denotes a mammal that barks in the same way as 'meat' denotes food). Saussure contended that language must be considered as a social phenomenon, a structured system that can be viewed synchronically (as it exists at a particular time) but also diachronically (as it changes its meaning in the course of time). It is in this light that semiotics investigates into how meaning is created and communicated through the use of linguistic signs and symbols and their significance. (e.g., the word 'dog' may denote a mammal that barks, but it can equally signify restlessness in the same way as 'meat' denotes food, but also human flesh or sacrifice). Semiology, therefore, is the science which studies signs, signifiers and signifieds within social and cultural context. Sociological semiology seeks to study significations and meanings within society. The core of sociological semiology is to uncover the myths or ideology that underlies examples of signification systems. The principles and laws of semiotics apply to the study of a natural language as Limbum, as well as other signaling systems. Each sign is made up of the signifier (the word) and the signified (the concept).

Therefore, a critical semiotic study of consecrated power of language in witchcraft cleansing rite among the Wimbum must be regarded as a part of linguistics that deals with natural sign systems, as sign-using behaviour. In Limbum, signs and symbols form a part of the existing system, called 'la langue', or norms used by native speakers to communicate sociological facts and cultural values. Here, semiotics theory provides a framework for understanding how humans use signs to make meaning of the world around them.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several European sociologists, anthropologists, and African scholars as well as religious mentors have attempted to understand this strange and often mystical experience practiced as witchcraft. Anthropological literature gives evidence for witchcraft being present in every world culture in a variety of forms. The anthropologists, Lehmann and Myers (1985)⁷, for example, hold that the belief in witchcraft is universal. Other European writers of the 15th and 16th centuries have demonstrated that the practice of witchcraft to wield power in order to influence others was widespread at that time. In a survey of Western philosophy from the pre-Socratic philosophers to the early 20th century, Russell Bertrand has discussed man's search and love for power. Russell's book is an argument that power is a fundamental concept to understanding and explaining the state and progress of the world; that the history of the world cannot be properly interpreted without recognising the role played by the pursuit of power. Russell⁸ writes in the preface: In human affairs, we can see that there are forces making for happiness, and forces making for misery. We do not know which will prevail, but to act wisely we must be aware of both. Russell's central point deals with our civilizational allergy to uncertainty, which humans try to alleviate in ways that do not serve the human spirit. Theories of what motivate human behaviour tend to rest on economic explanations (as in Marx) or on sexual explanations (as in Freud). But, as Russell points out, neither can explain why people continue to pursue power after their material or sexual needs have been satisfied. He affirms that sorcery is "the oldest and deepest element in the historical concept of European Witchcraft, which was formed out of pagan religion, folklore, Christian heresy, and theology"⁹. *Power* is Bertrand Russell's attempt to explain the mechanics and motivations behind the men who control the world and have an inordinately large influence on history. The contribution of Russell, in this respect, is fascinating. He writes, "The sun has gone down, and honest people are asleep. The witches, including some men but mostly women, creep silently out of their beds, making sure that they do not disturb their husbands or wives" (Ibid.: 37). Russell suggests that witches are creeping silently at night instead of sleeping, as other people (and not disturbing their partners) testify to the belief that witchcraft is secretive and that practitioners do not want the rest of the society to know what they do in darkness. The amazing thing is that some of these witches and wizards, who work in secret, are caught red handed as the present study will illustrate. Nevertheless, the belief is that God created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but that God did not create evil and is not responsible for its occurrence, hence, witchcraft is under condemnation by the Church. Greater emphasize is that pagan magic, religion, and sorcery were all invented by the devil for the purpose of luring humanity away from Christian truth. Some of the effects of sorcery are illusions, others are real. But both reality and illusion are works of the devil.

The history of *witchcraft* is complex, and often raises more questions than it answers. Where did witches come from? Is witchcraft real? How is witchcraft being practiced in daily life situations? This reiterates the fact that evil is not attributed existence in its own right, but is described as the privation of good- the

corruption of God's good creation. In this light, the Church has always faced difficulties of witchcraft, but has failed to deal with it. When he postulates that, some effects of witchcraft and sorcery are illusions, he fails, perhaps, to fully accept its reality. Witchcraft is not a misconception. It takes its source from the enemy of Christ the Devil. But this does not preclude pure dealing with it or considering its implications upon the lives of Christians. We cannot neglect the devastation it has brought to the unbelieving community. This idea is even truer in the Wimbun society as witchcraft is neither a misconception nor a myth. The study presented here on young boys in Watt village illustrates the devastation it has brought upon members of the community who strongly believe in it.

Different cultures in most Western and African countries strongly hold on certain supernatural beliefs wondering why the colour black is used traditionally for mourning and that the owl sitting on the roof of a house is a premonition of befalling evil? Or why the eagle symbolizes strength and power in various societies? I have often wondered too why even in Wimbun tradition, the black colour is associated with death and the owl forestalls evil. Why is blood, some white or black fowl, white piece of cloth and white wine often used at shrines for sacrifices to the ancestors? Modern culture shows that we remain both haunted and fascinated by ideas about witchcraft and the supernatural that we have inherited from previous centuries. It was thought witchcraft could be thwarted by protective magic or counter-magic, which could be provided by cunning folk or folk healers. Suspected witches were also intimidated, banished, attacked or killed. Often they would be formally prosecuted and punished, if found guilty or simply believed to be guilty. Semiotics is a science that explores the relationships between signs, including talk and text, and their intended specific meanings. In essence, semiotics is the study of "signs" and of anything that stands for or represents something else.

There are various interpretations regarding the origin, nature and manifestations of witchcraft. The first interpretation is the liberal view that witchcraft does not, in fact, even, exist, but is a monstrous invention of ecclesiastical authorities in order to enhance their own power and enlarge their purses. The second interpretation is taken from Murray (1976) who argues that witchcraft was an ancient fertility religion rites based on the worship of the horned god Dionysius. Perhaps the third interpretation is the most influential. It emphasizes the social pattern of witchcraft and witches. The advocates of this school hold that witchcraft exists as a superstition, but fail to agree with the existence, and possible wadding off of the victim.

In medieval and early modern Europe, where many claim the term originated, accused witches were usually women who were believed to commune with evil beings and attack their own community or some of its members. Several scholars point to the AZTECS, American Indians, Shamans and Africa as the cradle of mysticism and witchcraft practice long before the Europeans. Malinowski's study of the Amerindian Trobriand Islanders demonstrate that these people believe there are spells for black magic, for weather, healing, agriculture, fishing, dance, beauty, love, sailing etc. No matter its origin, it is perceived as the ability to summon evil beings for different purposes; give power or cause harm to others, hence witchcraft ought to be thwarted using protective amulets and magic or counter-magic, known and used by certain powerful invocations and incantations. In all societies, like that of the Wimbun, suspected witches were also intimidated, banished, attacked or killed.

Some 30 years ago when I was still quite young, my mother and I went for summer holidays to Binka village to greet my aunts and grandmother in Ngwemeng and spend some time with them. On the eve of our return to Buea, we went to tell them goodbye and just as I was about to step out of my grandmother's hut, I tripped on a stone and fell at the doorpost. Immediately, my mother started shouting and warning anyone who is trying her and ordered that I should be released, insisting that should I go and feel the slightest headache, she will finish with all of them. I was still so young and never understood what was going on until twenty years later when she took time to explain that it was witchcraft practice on me. Another incident I witnessed some ten years ago is the case of my late brother, Killah Emmanuel Njeba, who had just completed from the college of education and posted to teach in Bangou. He suddenly got sick and died mysteriously and as it is said in Limbum, 'He was eaten' in witchcraft. Since then, I continue to ask the same very important questions: Is witchcraft a reality or merely a myth? Should witchcraft be addressed or ignored? The recent eye-witness of this event in Watt village pushed me to document the aftermath accusation and reversal rites as it is performed in mbumland. The issue of accusing people for witchcraft practice is not new. Anthropologists have applied the term witchcraft to similar beliefs and occult practices. The above perspectives reveal that witchcraft practice exists in all human communities and, is accepted as such though with mixed feelings, yet, little is really properly

understood by outsiders. In approaching witchcraft in Wimbun society, the following questions must be raised. How is witchcraft perceived by the Wimbun?

Contemporary cultures which still believe in magic, superstitions and the supernatural as the Wimbun hold witchcraft in awe and disdain. In Wimbun culture, there are some cases in which the acquisition and use of supernatural powers are beneficial for the community. Most mediums, soothsayers, and traditional doctors make use of supernatural powers to establish social stability, sanction members whose objective is to destabilize the community, while many witches use their power to afflict people with sickness, destroy crops, cause conflicts and even kill prominent members of the community. Indigenous communities that believe in the existence of witchcraft define witches as the opposite of their healers and medicine people. Early European culture and religious bodies describe witch hunts and witch trials in the early modern period which led to tens of thousands of executions. Today, though western civilization believes in witchcraft, this belief has gradually dwindled during and after the age of Enlightenment, resorting to the so called civilized occultism and sects. Some of these sects continue to function with the same principles and apply the same techniques to influence, control and subjugate world communities. The situation of witchcraft in Africa is still pertinent and worthy of scientific enquiry as many believe it has delayed development of the continent. So far, the phenomenon of witchcraft practice continues to defy scientific principles and human understanding and perhaps a critical semiotic analysis of utterances that occur during the occasion can better throw more light on this social fact.

A theory of witchcraft was a survival of European pagan religion gaining popularity in the early 20th Century, but has since been discredited. Nevertheless, the concept of witchcraft and the belief in its existence have persisted throughout recorded history. It has been found at various times in various forms among cultures worldwide. Most societies believe in, and fear the ability of some ill-intentioned individuals to cause supernatural harm and misfortune to others using dark forces. As a result, witchcraft is seen by historians and anthropologists as one ideology for explaining misfortune and fearing that strange misfortunes were usually caused by gods, spirits, demons, or by humans who have unwittingly cast the evil eye. Other scholars argue that the practice continues to have an important role in some cultures today.

Mbuva James (1992)¹⁰ carried out research on witchcraft among the Akamba and Africa Inland Church congregation, Kenya, addressing the on-going practice among Christians. He investigated the impact of witchcraft practice on both Christians and non-Christians, and proposed a ministry method for confronting witchcraft. The study presents the ethno-history and worldview of the Akamba studying the Kenyan setting, and how the Church is affected by *witchcraft*. He also examined the transmission and function of witchcraft in view of biblical perspectives on such practice. It delves into the formation of Africa Inland Church among the Akamba (and the rest of Kenya), missionaries' understanding of witchcraft, early Christian responses, and the attitude of non-Christians toward the Church involved with witchcraft. The Study demonstrates that witchcraft is real, and as a universal phenomenon, it is rooted in the core of the Akamba worldview, and has the power to drive villager's trust away from the Creator God and toward the created beings (e.g., witches and mediums), but the Church has resources to effectively remedy problems of witchcraft.

In his enlightening studies, Hutton (1991¹¹, 1996¹², 1999¹³, 2001¹⁴), on his part, intrigued by paganism, folklore, customs and religion of seventeenth century British society, outlined five key characteristics ascribed to witches and witchcraft by most cultures that believe in the concept. Traditionally, witchcraft is believed to be the use of magic spells or language to cause harm or misfortune to others. It is used by the witch against his own community; it is seen as immoral and often thought to involve communion with evil beings, with evil intention. Powers of witchcraft are believed to have been acquired through inheritance or initiation; and witchcraft can be thwarted by defensive magic, persuasion, or physical punishment of the alleged witch.

In his book, 'Samba (2012)¹⁵ present a personal account of how life has been permeated throughout by belief in witchcraft and discusses how even today, witchcraft is not only widespread but strongly influences the life of the people. Witchcraft exerts a profound power on society and in Cameroon. It provides accounts of the experiences of others, some of them very recent and gives examples of what injustices and suffering can be caused by the notion that any misfortune must have been caused by witchcraft. He notes that for the overwhelming majority of people in Wimbun, Samba argues, that anything not immediately understandable and rational is witchcraft, synonymous with mystery. Many educated Africans, too, revert to such traditional attitudes in stressful situations. Actually, misfortunes, sudden illnesses and death are ascribed to witchcraft. It may be thought surprising though, that in spite of the impact of Christianity, western culture and the improved level of education, the majority of people continue to believe in its power to influence human actions and destiny.

While several fervent christians including St Augustine strongly believe that some of the effects of sorcery are illusions, others have lived it as real. We can say that both reality and illusion, which are the works of the devil, has led Samba to interrogate whether witchcraft is real or base imaginations.

Nevertheless, whether some of the effects of sorcery are illusory, and others are real and that both reality and illusion are the works of the devil, language use is fundamental in witchcraft and plays a big role in how we speak, think and perceive others and the entire world. Linguistics work to discover those underlying constructs (words and phrases) that does influence people's perception, unknowingly. Several social and cultural events, ceremonies, rites and rituals performed among the Wimbum, aims to achieve social cohesion and stability, but witches also perform their own rites to work against people and the society. One of most important ceremonies in Wimbum culture is the 'BfuBfu' or the enthronement ceremony, in which power is consecrated to an individual as the village chief. At such solemn moments, language is power. Similarly, the fight against witchcraft practice called 't'fu' and the performing of other types of rituals form an integral part of the Mbum man's everyday social life, where language is the primary tool for its expression, execution and exercise of consecrated power. A combined in-depth linguistics and sociological study, using a critical semiotic theory may provide some useful insights to answer these questions.

Several research studies have been carried out on witchcraft practice in Africa and Cameroon, but little has been done on its manifestation through a cleansing rite as that which is carried out in the present study and reported on this topic. Note however, that not all incidences of audience applause are valid measures of the power of rhetoric. An authentic incidence, like the witch cleansing ritual under analysis occurred in a natural setting involving the speaker and synchronized with the flow of the speech, occurring at the appropriate time and place as indicated. This spiritual and mystical rite is theoretically informative, linguistically communicative and symbolically theatrical to merit much scientific attention.

V. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Modern witch hunting is still very prominent in various traditional societies and the case of the Wimbum society is no exception. While this practice is often carried out by women, the problem is that children, under the age of ten, are often the victims. Several reasons can be advanced for this. Some people argue that they are the vulnerable group, as they are still naïve, irresponsible and cannot understand practices of the underworld. To a child, presented with a piece of 'meat', what he sees, in the physical, is food and believes it as such. He may even, out of naivety, share it with others as ordinary food. Little can he imagine that it actually represents human flesh or 'Nyanwe', in the spirit realm. Of course, accepting the 'meat' as food creates a contact point with the witch society. In the night, members of the secret witch society would come and take him out of his body, incognito, for further practices. For the most part, the child's parents are unaware of all these. Having established a connection with the supernatural world, their spirits can be sent on various assignments to commit several atrocities with no qualms. Others hold that the mind and spirit of a child can easily be manipulated to engage in unorthodox witchcraft practices without his explicit knowledge nor measuring the implications. Witchcraft practice in which they drink human blood is further considered a source to reinforce spiritual powers, and its exercise in controlling human affairs.

Semiotics, put simply, is the study of how an idea or object communicates meaning, and what meaning does a text communicate. One of the most elusive problems involving linguistics and sociology is the question what features make witchcraft practice a social fact. For example, how does what seems as a normal fowl meat might be considered human flesh? How can beating an old mother with a life fowl ward off witchcraft and how does the utterance 'I have taken it back' stop bewitching. Similarly, how do we understand that "coffee" is a brewed beverage, but it also evokes comfort, alertness, creativity and countless other associations? From this perspective, the importance of semiotics cannot be overemphasized in research like this. In ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic research, this semiotics model can help researchers and people understand which verbal, nonverbal and visual signs might convey desirable psychological effects on participants. The semiotics model reveals how to increase understanding of how the Wimbum make meaning of deities and divinity through analyzing written texts produced orally as representations of witch cleansing rites.

VI. AIM OF STUDY

This study sets out to observe utterances used, collect, examine and analyse them as a special kind of spoken text produced during witchcraft purification rite in Watt village and described as consecrated power of

language. Typical utterances and nonverbal acts were collected from the communicative performance of TantohNwarong. The study focuses on analyzing wadding off rite using the critical semiotic theory of signs and symbols used therein among the mbum people of Donga Mantung division. At the micro level, the power behind language is the individual speaker's knowledge as native speaker competence, high social status, or other personal qualities by which the speaker influences the hearer. At the macro level, the power behind language is the collective power (ethnolinguistic vitality) of the communities that speak the language. While Saussure developed the principles of semiology as they applied to language, Roland Barthes extended these ideas to the study of messages (word-and-image relations) of all sorts. Semiology is the study of signs: how they work and how we use them. We note again that almost anything can signify something for someone. Take for example the concept of 'meat' to a little child is that of food while to the witch, it is a connection point for initiation. Eating the 'meat' is a sign of acceptance, voluntarily or unwillingly. In such instances, what is going on around the concept of 'meat' as a sign is usually as important for us to know as the sign itself in order to interpret its deeper meaning. Semiotics is a key tool to ensure that intended meanings of, for instance, a piece of communication, are unambiguously understood by the person on the receiving end.

VII. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present study is to analyse verbal and nonverbal acts used during witchcraft cleansing rite in order to describe how these verbal and nonverbal signs influence and control human action in which an old mother is accused of practicing witchcraft on children in Wimbun society. Keen attention is paid to how these utterances and nonverbal acts create meaning to their intended recipients and look for ways to intercontextual meaning. Semiotics studies (i.e., the formation and comprehension of signs) consider utterances and nonverbal language the object of linguistic analysis. Until now, witchcraft data or texts form a special category of folklore in Wimbun social life. The interrelationship between linguistics, ethnomethodology, and in particular, semiotics could provide adequate explanations and a list of necessary concepts and sufficient criteria as answers to understand witchcraft in this Wimbun. The purpose of this study is to establish the reality of witchcraft, by understanding its dramatic artistic performance among the Wimbun people of Donga Mantung Division. The major concern is that of describing the witchcraft cleansing rite with special focus on its communicative performance. Linguistic scholars seek to determine what is unique and universal about the language we use, how it is acquired and the ways it affects people.

The theme of witchcraft explores the relationship between the power in language and the language of power exercised in a given society. The term 'language' is used here in a wider sense and comprises not only spoken and written language, but also other semiotic and multimodal systems of meaning. Studying the extent to which some title members in Wimbun society have power in language and use it, can help us better understand how some of the words we use have power to influence human action and behaviour.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The data for the present study were obtained using ethnomethodology or the ethnography of speaking. It follows a qualitative research methodology which has recently gained momentum across disciplines including language, sociology, anthropology, and ethnicity offering a new way of understanding deeply ingrained Wimbun cultural knowledge. For example, it is customary for members to greet each other with a warm handshake upon meeting, yet it is not everyone who is greeted in this manner. Children do not have to extend a handshake to elderly people and it is prohibited in Wimbun land to greet a village chief or 'Nkfu' with a handshake or seat on the throne. Whenever their way of life and norms are threatened and thwarted and not observed correctly, it is considered deviant behavior tantamount to disrespect. This sociological and ethnographic approach enables us to understand language use in Wimbun society as linguistic data and to analyze and document the methods and practices through which the society's members, as rational actors, perceive and make sense of their world.

The data of written text were collected in spoken Limbum form from a cross-section of members of the Wimbun society, including title men (Tantoh), women and children in particular speech event then transcribed and given a literal translation into English. It consists of utterances, nonverbal signals and symbols typical of the Wimbun, transcribed, translated and analyzed as language of power. The written translated version is put in square brackets as sample data as text carrying the implied interpreted meaning of the text under analysis.

Talking about the data, note that not every text and not every oral utterance requires the same attention and the same interpretative effort from the receiver/decoder. As observed here, sometimes the only function of an utterance is to manifest the willingness of the speaker to communicate with the listener. Schogt(1985)¹⁶ stipulates that the function, called the 'phatic function,' is characterized by the fact that the denotative semantic content of an utterance is of little importance. Greetings, routine inquiries about the interlocutor's wellbeing, and remarks about the weather belong to this category. He points out that routine inquiries such as 'how are you' do not solicit an answer, and that is the reason why the answer is inevitably 'Fine,' no matter how miserable the answerer feels. But with an utterance such as;

[xx]Boy: ' Take back your meat'. [beating her with the fowl three times]

Note in this utterance here that the speaker's nonverbal action, '[beating her with the fowl three times]' is more important than the verbal expression ' Take back your meat,' as the nonverbal action is not so frequent in written texts, yet, in witchcraft discourse, the fowl is the contact element with the invisible world. Why does he beat her seven time. What is the contribution of the other villagers in joining the boy to reverse the spell? ' Take back your meat'. Whether one classifies these kinds of oral and written texts together or because of the differences that exist, relegates them to separate categories, both show what Uriel Wienrich called 'subdued semanticity.'(Schogt, 1985)¹⁶ In our data, the appeal to enhanced semantic city takes precedence since in witchcraft, little or no huts are encoded or decoded, and the elements that in other texts are interpreted as additional information may not be easily noticed. Without a semiotic outreach, this denotational purity may never be reached in actual conversation or rites because all texts (oral and written) either fall somewhere short of full denotation or go beyond pure denotation. The solution applied here as acceptable is a middle stage between subdued and enhanced semantic city, where the signs are taken at face value.

Nevertheless, another critical issue arising with ethnmethodological and sociological data of this kind is that of translating the oral text into an exact written representation, as somehow the meaning is affected especially moving from a Cameroon home language to English. Understanding the chief celebrant's utterances involves the translation methods, which are highly dependent on the purpose, or *skopos*, of the translation, touseafunctionalistterm (Reiss and Vermeer 1984¹⁷; Nord 1991a¹⁸, 1991b¹⁹).*Skopos*theory proposes that every action is purposive, including translation and interpretation. Vermeer has pointed out how translation is imbued with purposes: "each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose... the *skopos*rule... enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the peoplewhowanttouseitandpreciselyinthewaytheywantittofunction"(Vermeer1989,20;translationfromNord1997,29)²⁰.Withstressontheintendedpurposes of translation, the target-side purpose is viewed as the core of translation (Pym2010)²¹. Given different possible purposes of a translation, one source text can be developedintomanypossibletranslations(ibid).Responsesobtainedfromthe target-languagereaderscanbeawaytorealizewhetherthepurposeofthetranslational action has beenachieved.

In the context of witchcraft as instruments for empowerment, influence and control, they provide the chief celebrant, TantohNwarong, with an understanding the processes going on with the children and causing sickness and hisexpectation is to reverse the situation by uttering certain phrases. It is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information between the participants involving the speaker, the reaction of the receiver and the public.

A charismatic speaker may, by the sheer force of his oratory, buoy up people's hopes, convert their hearts from hatred to forgiveness, or embolden them to take on arms for a cause or stop killing by mere use of words. One may recall moving speeches (in English) such as that of Susan B. Anthony's "on Women's Right to Vote," Winston Churchill's "We shall Fight on the Beaches." Mahatma Gandhi's "Quit India," Barack Obama's "Yes we Can" or Martin Luther King, Jr .s "I Have a Dream," Paul Biya's 'The Force of experience,'and TantohNwarong's'I am TantohNwarong,' all of which illustrate the power of language in discourse. The speech may be delivered face-to face to an audience, or broadcast over the media. The discussion below focuses on face-to-face oratories in witchcraft cleansing rite among the Wimbun. Social status power is measured in terms of the speaker's knowledge of the Wimbun traditional beliefs and culture. Note the collective participation from the villagers as audience, acting in unison as a group and having relatively high theoretical import for understanding the power of rhetoric. Such positive audience response constitutes most direct and immediate means by which an audience can display its collective support for the speaker something

which they would not otherwise show to a speech of less power. To influence and orchestrate hundreds of village people as the audience to precisely coordinate their response (jeering) together as a group at the right time and place is no mean feat. Such a feat further influences the action and represents the wider Wimbun society. The combined effect could be enormous there and then, and its downstream influence far-reaching, crossing compound borders and inspiring other generations to come.

Sometimes, during interpretation, it is impossible to understand the success or lack of success of a literary text at the time it appeared, but even when our admiration for the text seems equal to that of the contemporaries of the producer, we may end up with completely different reasons for our admiration. As a result, the literary theory known under the name 'hermeneutics,' and the linguistic views that stress the importance of a semiotic analysis of a language such as Limbum and its inherent interpretation by the people at a given moment of their existence do not contradict each other. But even if one combines linguistic theory with the postulates of hermeneutics, according to which a reader's appreciation of a text is conditioned by the norms prevailing in his society, the question of what makes the text literary remains unanswered for linguists would look at the text from a linguistic side and sociologists from sociology.

Drawing from the example cited, enhanced semanticity is found in texts containing clues that either reinforce the denotative interpretation or modify it by adding new meaning elements from different sides, the relevance of semiotics, Weinrich in Schoght (1985)¹⁶ mentions two marks of what he calls hypersemanticization: a) At the phonic part of signs assume an independent symbolic value, sound imitation, expressive sound, including signs with similar acoustic images, which may be correlated in a special way; and b) that over a given text, meanings are imputed to some signs which are richer than, or otherwise, deviant from the meanings of the same signs outside the text.

In this vein, Weinrich stresses the difference between a message in standard usage, where the utterance 'meat,' and 'beat,' that the receiver has only to decode, and a hypersemanticized text meaning where the common code is modified and guessed by the favourably inclined receiver in which it represents human flesh and the beating is supernatural. Without denying the importance of hypersemanticized texts and discussions about how to analyze them, from a semiotic point of view, Weinrich, as a true linguist, warns against the danger inherent in the tendency to concentrate on the special effects of meaning in these texts without first accounting for the semantic workings of language in its standard uses.

Literary analysis and text interpretation were traditionally in the realm of aesthetics appreciation and had an overly subjective character. It is necessary to analyze the various components that contribute to forming the pragmatic meaning of the utterances in the text on witchcraft cleansing. This warning must always be heeded, as will become clear from the examples analyzed that follows.

IX. MODEL OF SEMIOTIC THEORY (ST)

The Semiotic Theory (ST) has been used extensively for educational purposes, particularly in linguistic, sociological and anthropological research studies on language, cultures and social facts. Within the context of Berger and Luckman's (1966)²² grand theory of social constructionism, the ST model consists of three concepts (i.e., sign, context, and meaning), a construct (i.e., semiosis) and the proposition that signs, which convey precise context can trigger appropriate responses from an intended recipient, as shown in Figure 1 and described below;

Figure 1
Model of Semiotics Theory

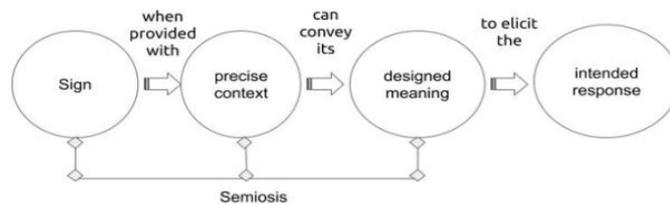


Fig. 1: *The ST model is adapted from Berger and Luckman's (1966)²² grand theory of social constructionism,*

namely, that reality is a social construct and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs. The key terms in these contentions are 'reality' and 'knowledge', terms that are not only current in everyday speech, but which have behind them a long history of philosophical inquiry. We need not enter here into a discussion of the semantic intricacies of either the everyday or the philosophical usage of these terms. It will be enough, for our purposes, to define 'reality' as a quality appertaining to phenomena recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot 'wish them away'), and to define 'knowledge' as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics. It is in this (admittedly simplistic) sense that the terms have relevance both to the man in the street and to the philosopher. The man in the street inhabits a world that is 'real' to him, albeit in different degrees, and he 'knows', with different degrees of confidence, that this world possesses such and such characteristics. The philosopher, of course, will raise questions about the ultimate status of both this 'reality' and this 'knowledge'. What is real? How is one to know? These are among the most ancient questions not only of philosophical inquiry proper, but of human thought as such. Precisely for this reason the intrusion of the sociologist into this time-honoured intellectual territory is likely to raise the eyebrows of the man in the street and even more likely to enrage the philosopher.

The semiotics model consists of three main concepts, namely; the sign, context and meaning. The first concept is the sign. When Saussure held the view that language is a system of signs, the fact is that this sign is composed of both the form it takes in the physical reality (called a signifier) and how it is interpreted by its viewer (the signified). A sign must have both; it is the integrated whole that results from the combination of the signifier and what is signified. A sign can manifest in many ways, including sounds, smells, and body language. The second concept is that of context. Accordingly, context refers to those aspects in a social interaction as conversation that provides relevant and specific meaning to the particular exchange that is occurring. This enables the recipient in this exchange to make proper sense of the interaction and derive the intended meaning from it. The third is that of meaning. In cognitive semiotics, Zlatev (2018)¹⁵ proposes that meaning is the constructed relationship between the recipient of a sign and their personal experience of the world around them. This means that meaning is created when the recipient makes sense of the sign by connecting and interacting with their surrounding reality.

In this model, the construct semiosis refers to the relationship between the sign, the context, and the meaning. Peirce (1873)⁶ described semiosis as any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. Within the context of the semiotics model used above, semiosis describes the interplay and interaction between the concepts of sign, context, and meaning. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966)²² semiotic model, they argue that of sociological interest is the questions of 'reality' and 'knowledge', thus, initially justified by the fact of their social relativity. What is 'real' to a Tibetan monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman. In a similar way, what is real to a witch is not what is real to any ordinary man. Reality is a social construction or socially constructed by each individual. The 'knowledge' of the criminal differs from the 'knowledge' of the criminologist. It follows that specific agglomerations of 'reality' and 'knowledge' pertain to specific social contexts, and that these relationships will have to be included in an adequate sociological analysis

of these contexts. The need for a sociology of knowledge' is thus, already given. Beyond this, however, a discipline calling itself by this name will have to concern itself with the general ways by which 'realities' are taken as 'known' in human societies. In other words, a 'sociology of knowledge' will have to deal not only with the empirical variety of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also with the processes by which anybody of knowledge including concepts of witchcraft comes to be socially established in reality. It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'.

As shown above, the semiotics model proposes that a sign, verbal or nonverbal is a proposition, which when provided with precise social and cultural context, can convey the sender's intended meaning more effectively, thereby increase the likelihood of prompting an appropriate response from the recipient is a social construct and can be real. This means that, in the case of bewitching, a sender should pay close attention to providing relevant and adequate context when using visual cues or illustrations to ensure that the recipient understands the sign's intended meaning clearly. By providing such context when sharing visual messages, the sender can enhance the recipient's comprehension and response to the information they receive, whether they are participating in a lesson, speech act or being asked to complete a particular request, for instance.

For the analysis, critical semiotics draws from this concept to help readers understand why certain signs and objects are interpreted differently in different cultures and different geographies. For instance, while the American "OK" hand sign may be considered rude in Brazil, the concept of through a handshake is considered abnormal and impolite behaviour among the Wimbun especially between a child and an elderly person. In fact, the *Nkfu* or chief is not greeted with a handshake, and would be a sign of dishonor and disrespect. Therefore, semiotics emphasizes on the importance of analyzing meaning within its appropriate social and cultural context for a communicant so that the message does not get "lost in translation." It helps people to think deeply about the meaning that is attached to colors, images, sounds, and events in Wimbun community and to consider how perceptions may have been predetermined by people and other external factors.

X. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Power is a value-laden concept in Wimbun land meaning different things to different people. To functional theorists and power-wielders, power is "power to," a responsibility to unite people and do good for all. As indicated, the discussion has focused on the language-power relationships, and not on language alone or power alone, in intergroup communication. The elusive and value-laden nature of power has led to a plurality of theoretical and conceptual approaches. Five approaches that are particularly pertinent to the language-power relationships need to be discussed, and briefly so because of space limitation.

10.1 ORATORICAL OR CONSECRATED POWER

Banishing a witch out of the village in the Wimbun community is not an easy affair. This involves the participation of all the members of the community in this breath-taking physico-mystical experience. Their joint efforts signify putting up a stronger force. Though the art of witchcraft is practiced in darkness, the purification act of banishment takes place in broad daylight. To accomplish the feat, the orator has to excite the audience to jeer, build up the excitement to a crescendo, and simultaneously cue the audience to synchronize their outburst of stored-up anger with his ongoing speech. Indeed, it may not be apparent but we are dealing here with a clash of two titans, the forces of evil and darkness and that of light. Such rhetorical formats that aid the orator to accomplish the dual functions include listing, position-taking, and decision enacting the banishment.

This artistic dramatic performance is segmented into seven phases. In the first phase, the case is established;

- [i] Chief celebrant: What really happened?
- [ii] Goodness: We went to fetch water by the stream and makfu gave us meat.
- [iii] Chief celebrant: Who are the others Goodness
- [iv] Where are the others who are sick?
- [v] Boy: They are up in the compound
- [vi] Chief celebrant: Did you say they also ate the meat?
- [vii] Boy: Yes

Move 1 starts with hearing or establishing the case [i] and [ii] presenting the evidence 'makfu gave us meat.' As a result the three children fall sick [iv] mysteriously. Notice the cross-examination going on here of the victims using several interrogations [1], [iv], [vi] and [viii] as is customary in modern law courts. The facts must be clear for a fair trial. Their sickness is supporting evidence that something strange happened to these children. After the dialogic hearing the accusation, the chief celebrant moves to phase 2 to ascertain the truth validity provided by the victim to establish the truth in the accusation [viii] to [ix] and [x] as he declares her guilty [xiii], [xiv] and [xv] as follows;

- [viii] Chief celebrant: So mami gave all of you meat?
- [ix] Boy: Yes
- [x] Chief celebrant: OK
- [xi] Now listen.
- [xii] You have said everything and have finished.
- [xiii] Nwarong does not stand at a junction and waste time
- [xiv] This is the arrest.
- [xv] She has been caught on the way.

Mark that once she is declared guilty of practising witchcraft on the children, the matter is taken very serious and the act heightens in Move 3, which consists of the first part of the cleansing rite;

- [xvi] [to the boy] Give the fowl to the grandmother.
- [xvii] Whip her with the fowl
- [xviii] Goodness: [Begins to beat her with the chicken,]

Again, this part of Move 3 is considered the physical cleansing rite asking the victim [xvi] to 'Give the fowl to the grandmother,' as a sign of repayment. Note that the verb 'give' used here is not a matter of just giving as you would give a child candies. The significance of 'Give' entails force her to take it even if she is unwilling to which explains why the chief celebrant urges him [xvii] in a stronger tone to 'Whip her with the fowl,' this time implying the use of force as most witches do not openly accept they are responsible for the suffering of their victims. In other words, 'whipping her' is sign of revoking the spell she cast upon her victims. Note here that her victim is a child who may not have the required physical strength to beat an old mother, and this fact pushes the chief celebrant to consecrate or transfer his own power into the child for that purpose, illustrated in [xix] instructing him to 'Rebuke her with the utterance,' [xx]

- [xix] Chief celebrant: [Continues]. Rebuke her with the utterance
[xx] Boy: 'Take back your meat'. [*beating her with the fowl three times*]
[xxi] Villagers: *The villagers join the boy to order her*
[xxii] 'Take back your meat,'
[xxiii] 'Take back your meat,' [*still beating her with the fowl*]
[xxiv] 'Take back your meat [*three times*]
[xxv] Chief celebrant: Tell her to take back her meat.
[xxvi] Boy: 'Take your meat' you must take your meat [*four more times*]
[xxvii] Grandmother: [*Seeing that the situation is going off hand*]
[xxviii] Give me. I've taken it.
[xxix] [*.forcefully seizing it from the boy's hand, picks up her belongings and tries to hurry off.*]

'Take back your meat' and at the same moment beating her with the fowl. In this dramatic text, more meaning is imputed to some nonverbal language which are richer than the words used, as in this cleansing ritual proper, where because of what the witch did to these children, at this defining moment, everything has to be reversed.

Move 4 of the cleansing rite witnesses collective action as the villagers present do not wait for the celebrant to instruct them help the child but strongly comes in [xxi]-[xxvi] to add their voices to that of the little child as if they need to reinforce his consecrated power. The motto of the Wimbum is 'AbeeyuNgir', which means that unity is strength. Notice how the chief celebrant in [xxv] continues to empower the victim with the emphatic repeated phrase 'Take back your meat,' adding 'you must take back your meat,' As illustrated by the examples in the text above, speaker and audience collaborate to transform an otherwise monologic speech into a quasi-chorus, turning a passive audience into an active supportive "conversational" partner who, by their synchronized responses, reduces the psychological separation from the speaker and emboldens the latter' self-confidence. Notice the way the audience gives the boy courage to beat the old mother with the fowl and saying 'take back your meat.' Through such enjoyable and emotional participation collectively, an audience made up of formerly unconnected individuals with a strong common group identity may henceforth begin to feel "we are all one." Their entry into the performance with 'you must take your meat' constitutes a pressure group a single person cannot withstand for fear of mob action and justice.

Move 5 ushers in the turning point given that she could no longer resist the villagers for fear of being lynched and all what she has to do is to give in as a sign of defeat;

- [xxvii] Grandmother: [*Seeing that the situation is going off hand*]
[xxviii] Give me. I've taken it

Theirvoluntary participation projects a completion point to cue the audience to get themselves ready to display their support via the repeated 'you must take back your meat,' amidst jeers, and so forth. In the performance of the spell cleansing ritual, the utterance at this juncture is called a "transition-relevance place," at which point the witch, for once, takes up a turn to speak; 'Give me,'signifying I have given up, and give me back my meat let me go. Her declaration in [xxviii] I've taken it,' signifies that she has freed the victim (s) from any witchcraft grip and they are released. Notice how at this juncture, the skillful orator micropauses to create space for the audience to take up their turn in jeering and agitation. Notice that at this point, she does not have spiritual power to influence the whole community present

Move 6 witnesses the transition awaited in [xxix]; in which the witch forcefully seizes the fowl from the boy's hand, picks up her belongings and attempts to hurry off, and at the same time the Nwarong, the most feared masquerade of the land steps in to commence another phase of spiritual cleansing. The Nwarong in Mbum land is the highest secret society with the strongest spiritual power and its members are revered anywhere. This time she is beaten with long black striped bamboo stalks. It is believed that witches fly on bamboo sticks given that the bamboo grows very high. The chief celebrant has to quell down the euphoria from the audience, [xxx] 'Let's listen.' When he succeeds to get the attention of the villagers, the chief celebrant begins to spell out to her what the Wimbum tradition states in such cases in [xxxiii] to [xxxv];

[xxxi] Chief celebrant: Look Nwarong, Let's listen.

[xxxii] *[turning to the old mother]*

[xxxiii] Don't go yet. Wait. *[She stops]*

[xxxiv] Nwarong has to lead you. Nwarong

[xxxv] Nwarong has to usher you away

[xxxvi] *[Addressing the villagers]*

[xxxvii] I stand here as Tantoh Nwarong

[xxxviii] I'm Tantoh Nwarong of Watt

He has to assert his role in the village [xxxvii]-[xxxviii], reminding them of his mission. As he indicated early, Nwarong has no time to waste so he came for action. This process of social class identity confers on him consecrated power vis a vis the audience further strengthened by the speaker's frequent use of "I" as a first person singular personal pronoun. Language is a natural human system of conventionalized signs and symbols that have underlying meanings. Through it humans express and communicate their social status, role, perception, beliefs, private thoughts and feelings as well as enact various social functions. The social functions include co-constructing social reality between and among individuals, performing and coordinating social actions such as this one and letting people know what they should or should not do.

[xxxix] Who has been sent to do this.

[xxxx] To do this so people will not die

Their function as Tantoh is to maintain social equilibrium, cohesion and the wellbeing of the people. Thus, learning and speaking a language empowers humans to master an elaborate system of conventions and the associations between words and their sounds in order to dominate the world, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to categorize objects and relations to which they refer, after mastering the referential meaning of words. Apart from their referential meaning, his choice of words also has denotative and connotative meaning with their own social-cognitive consequences. The second phase of Move 6 demonstrates his level of accomplishment in the assignment which was given to him. He goes on to reassure the villagers of their commitment not to allow witchcraft practice in the land unpunished and speaking conditionally. In [xxxiii] below. He exhorts the witch;

[xxxxi] If really you practice witchcraft

[xxxxii] You will take this bamboo with you.

[xxxxiii] Wherever you go as a sign.

[xxxxiv] Eat your fowl for yourself.

Note that in mbumland, anyone accused of sorcery and witchcraft practice is given a bamboo by the Nwarong secret cult, which the person has to carry with her as a sign of witchcraft practice. The expression 'eat your own fowl for yourself' is replete with pragmatic interpretation. It is similar to the English phrase 'back to sender,' to say that whatever someone plants is what he will reap. If her intention were to kill the children, then she will die. The bamboo is further significant in interpreting Tantoh's discourse, for it will also serve as a walking stick for her to wander to far off land until death consumes her. Note that the bamboo carries the sign of the Nwarong secret society, hence anyone in Mbum land who comes across her will immediately know what she did and the sanction according to Wimbum tradition.

[xxxxv] Nwarong will tie this bamboo on your legs
[xxxxvi] As they should never see this sacred soil of Watt

Saying a bamboo shall be tied to her leg is another way of saying a rope has been tied to leg and, otherwise reiterating the fact that she cannot hide from the sanction, whereby the concept is interpreted as a connection. A ban is further clearly stated in [xxxxvi] warning her never to step her legs on the sacred soil of Watt, emphasizing the fact that there is no place for those who practice evil in Watt. Though he is addressing the witch, he is also making an appeal to the rest of the villagers to abhor witchcraft practice.

Move 7 is the last phase of the cleansing rite, this time of the land. The chief celebrant publicly declares her unwanted as she is no longer considered a member of Watt village adding the reason in;

[xxxxvii] You are no longer one of us, evil one.
[xxxxviii] You must never return to this village,

And he uses the imperative form 'must' and 'never,' two very strong words successively charged with meaning. This supposes that she cannot visit any relative or member of the village as this rite signifies that she has been cut off from the land and the people. It is worth noting that banishment is the punishment reserved for such a crime as stipulated by Wimbun tradition and culture. In old England, during puritanism, witches were burnt but the Wimbun belief that a witch is someone possessed by evil spirits and a spirit cannot die or be killed. So they cannot pretend to kill witches [xxxxi]. In fact, the understanding in Wimbun land is that a spirit is an entity with the ability and potential to transform or transfigure someone who seeks it. That is to say, an entity can take any form or figure predisposed for it to enter, and manifest, after which it can leave the body and find another abode. In as much as there are entities with positive or good energies, others produce negative energies which lead to wickedness and destruction. The fact is that many victims are sometimes unaware of its manifestation but only realize its effect when it is too late. The Wimbun have a deeper knowledge of this esoteric science transmitted from generation to generation, reason why they strongly believe in the supernatural world and its influential character. Ancestors for example, fall into the category of positive energies, who, are often called upon whenever the village needs help. This ties in with the Wimbun belief that their chiefs do not die but live with their forefathers and are ready to come to rescue the village whenever there are in difficulties. They have the power to influence and control human affairs and social events such as hold the rain from falling or send down rain when the land is dry. Besides his belief in the existence of a supreme God, *Nyumbibu*, or God in heaven, the Mbum man equally believes in spirit worship including *Nyumroh*, or water spirit, *Nyurlah*, or caretaker of the family as well as *Nyungong*, God of the earth. This belief corroborates with the concept and belief in shrines, which are the entry points to meet with the different spirits of the land.

10.2 LANGUAGE REFLECTS POWER

The language that a person uses reflects his thought and that of the language community's power. A useful way to think about a language community's linguistic power is through the ethno-linguistic vitality model (Bourhis et al., 1981; Harwood et al., 1994). Similarly, in Wimbunland, some title holders of high social status have considerable power.

[xxxvii] I stand here as TantohNwarong
[xxxviii] I'm TantohNwarong of Watt
[xxxix] Who has been sent to do this.

In [xxxvii], the chief celebrant asserts the authority by which he has come, reminding the people that he has not come here on his own but by the power conferred upon him as 'TantohNwarong.' Collectively, these factors form the demographic base of the language community's ethno-linguistic vitality, an index of the community's relative linguistic dominance. Another base of ethno-linguistic vitality is institutional representation of the language community, which can afford its members intuitional leadership, influence, and

control. The title 'Tantoh' in Limbum designates 'father of the land' given that 'Ta-' stands for father and 'ntoh' is the palace or country. In fact he was sent by the chief. Cleansing of the land is part of the responsibility of someone holding this title.

An important finding of ethnolinguistic vitality is that it is perceived not so much as an objective demographic-institutional-cultural strength that influences language use and behavior in interpersonal and intergroup contexts, but a perpetrator of a social fact. By dint of the power consecrated on him as a Tantoh, acknowledged and accepted by all the other members of the community. In other words, he is operating as a representative of the Watt people and not by himself. Here, language reflects consecrated power [xxxviii] 'I'm Tantoh Nwarong of Watt'.

It is equally in this capacity that he can order the little boy;

Whip her with the fowl

[xviii] Goodness: *[Begins to beat her with the chicken,]*

[xix] Chief celebrant: *[Continues]. Rebuke with the utterance*

And with the power he has from the people, later declares her 'evil one';

[xxxxvii] You are no longer one of us, evil one.

[xxxxviii] You must never return to this village,

He uses prohibitive speech acts to banish her from the land as indicated in [xxxxviii]

10.3 CONSECRATED POWER OF LANGUAGE

The power of language lies in the speaker's ability to imbue words with energy. Note that the mind is an important component of human thoughts. The words someone uses can easily affect the listener's mind, actions and social behaviour. In the extract, when the chief celebrant tells the boy to reverse the spell, the child gathers more power and keeps on saying 'take your meat back' and beats her with the fowl. In normal circumstances, it is impolite and forbidden in Wimbum society for a child to dare beat someone of that age and caliber. Those words renewed his mind and energize him, transforming the child into an adult ready to face not only the woman but one who is a witch, whereas, in their previous meeting during initiation, he was the naïve and submitting child. The renewal, transformation or creation of greater consciousness of the mind provides the person with power. Note that the English word 'transformed' is from the Greek word 'metamorphoo,' which means 'to be transfigured or changed from one form, state or level to another' Thus, language has the consecrated power to change one's state of thinking as it does the boy in this text. While it was still through language that the woman's mind was transformed to that of a witch and evil thoughts considered lower, the boy's spirit is equally transformed by the chief celebrant's utterance to a higher and better force. This illustrates that the human mind is fathomlessly unlimited but it is the individual who limits its manifestations. This is proof that the human mind is unlimited in its potential to create whatsoever it desires. It equally demonstrates that when you put your mindpower to work, as did the woman and the boy, the possibilities are endless. There are no limits to what one can achieve and absolutely no restrictions as to how low or high one can propel himself in life. Former US president Barack Obama understood this potential when his presidential campaign watchword was 'Yes I can.' What you become in life is largely determined by the content and quality of your mind because with your mind you can change anything about you with it. Note that the child could not think like Tantoh except by having the right material to think on till when he was imbued by Tantoh's knowledge of tradition when dealing with cases of witchcraft practice and cleansing, choosing the right words to set in the right mind clothed in vocabulary.

Chief celebrant: Look Nwarong, Lets listen.

[turning to the old mother]

Don't go yet. Wait. [She stops]

This text makes us understand how important it is to manage our minds for it not only determines the character of your personality, but it influences your thinking and the results of your actions, your social behaviour and the quality of your life. Note further that, the child, Goodness, and his friends who ate the 'meat' were all sick and might have died.

10.4 LANGUAGE-POWER RELATIONSHIPS

In the language power relationship, five dynamic language-power relationships in communication have emerged from critical language studies, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and the social psychology of language and communication. Such powers exist at both the micro and macro levels, i.e., the physical plane, which are the words used and the spiritual plane, i.e., which is experienced in its response manifestation. The power of language, for example, has less to do with its linguistic quality of the ethno-linguistic vitality of Limbum-speakers that it reflects. The other three language-power relationships refer to the powers of language that are based on a language's communicative versatility and its broad range of cognitive, communicative, social, and identity functions in meaning-making social interaction. Such language powers include, first the powers of language to maintain existing dominance of individualism versus collectivism that serve general interest over personal and egoistic users. The third language power is its ability to create a stronger impact and influence over the listener through the use of certain utterances by specific consecrated persons.

In the former, language is viewed as having no power of its own and yet can produce influence and control by revealing the power behind the speaker. Language also reflects the collective power of the language community that uses it. The chief celebrant reassures the people why he has to mete out sanctions and purify the land [xxxx] 'To do this so people will not die.' In the case of the Wimbum, his preeminent social status enables him use consecrated speech to shape the affairs of the community by the fact that there is power in the utterance, which allows the user to influence, maintain and control others.

XI. CONCLUSION

Drawing from the analysis, enhanced semanticity and hypersemanticization found in witchcraft texts contain clues of the power of language to reinforce the denotative interpretation or modification of meaning and added new meanings of certain words and expressions with independent symbolic values correlated in a special way through semiotics. Besides, notice that over a given text, meanings are imputed to these utterances and nonverbal signs which are richer than, or otherwise deviant from, the ordinary sense of the same words and signs outside the text. In this vein, it was important to stress the difference between a message in standard usage, where the utterance 'meat,' and 'beat,' must be interpreted together with the context of Wimbum tradition in which the receiver has only to decode, and a hypersemanticized text meaning where the common code is modified and guessed by the favourably inclined receiver. While the word 'meat' refers to food in ordinary sense, it stands for sacrifice in spirit world in which the utterance 'meat' represents human flesh and the 'beating', though seemingly physical, is actually in the spirit realm and supernatural than ordinary. Without using a semiotic theory, guessing the sense meaning of a word and its modification, it is impossible to decode the message appropriately. The word 'Tantoh' may be considered a title, yet semiotically, he is the custodian of the land and the people. To a greater extent, it is one of the highest titles in Wimbum land conferred with the highest mystical powers capable of talking with the spirits (Nwarong); [xxxi] Chief celebrant: 'Look Nwarong, Let's listen'. Saying 'Let's listen,' he demonstrates that 'he' and the Nwarong have equal powers and in other words they belong to the same spirit world.

The cognitive, communicative, and social functions of verbal and nonverbal acts in Wimbum witchcraft rites make language a fundamental medium of effective communication. Here, there is not power in language, but the power of language is a versatile medium of communication, often and widely used in tandem with music, pictures, and actions to amplify its power. Silence and other nonverbal cues, too, add to the force of speech when it is used strategically to exorcise and exhort and demonstrates the dynamic nature of signs, signifiers and the signifieds in the relationship between language and consecrated power in Wimbum community.

In conclusion, witchcraft is not a recent discovery in Wimbumland, it is as old as man began to live in society, developing different strategies for survival and social control for different purposes, and used both with good and/orevil intentions. Different cultures perform different purification rites for witchcraft victims. This

situation is often handled in a way similar to what obtains in a law courts, except, perhaps for the artistic dramatic aspect involving several actors and moves. In Wimbun society, witchcraft cleansing rite is carried out as a dramatic performance in seven calculated moves, namely; (1) hearing the case, (2) establishing the truth validity, (3) verbal and physical revocation by the victim, (4) recognition and acceptance of the accusation by the accused, (5) spiritual cleansing of witchcraft spirit by the juju (Nwarong) (6) exhortation of the villagers, and meted sanction to the accused as per Wimbun tradition, and (7) sentence or banishment from the village, meant to perpetrate, promote and preserve the Wimbun tradition and culture, and restore social cohesion.

And in so far as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge on the subject of witchcraft and the concept of cleansing rite is greatly concerned with the analysis of the Wimbun social construction of reality.

ENGLISH TRANSLATED SAMPLE TEXT

[Situation: accusation of witchcraft practice on children in Watt village in March 2022. The victims have to be exorcised to ward off the spirit of witchcraft. Following Wimbun tradition, the old woman has to be banished from the village to err in nature. Participants: The villagers are present and participate. There is the high priest, Tantoh, holding a staff; the child, Goodness, 9 years old is holding a chicken, and the witch, an old grandmother holding a mat and a bamboo, 02 jujus of the nwarong secret society holding bamboo sticks]

- [i] Chief celebrant: What really happened?
[ii] Goodness: We went to fetch water by the stream and manku gave us meat
[iii] Chief celebrant: Who are the others Goodness
[iv] Where are the others who are sick?
[v] Boy: They are up in the compound
[vi] Chief celebrant: Did you say they also ate the meat?
[vii] Boy: Yes
[viii] Chief celebrant: So mami gave all of you meat?
[ix] Boy: Yes
[x] Chief celebrant: OK
[xi] Now listen.
[xii] You have said everything and have finished.
[xiii] Nwarong does not stand at a junction and waste time
[xiv] This is the arrest.
[xv] She has been caught on the way.
[xvi] *[to the boy]* Give the fowl to the grandmother.
[xvii] Whip her with the fowl
[xviii] Goodness : *[Begins to beat her with the chicken,]*
[xix] Chief celebrant: [Continues]. Rebuke with the utterance
[xx] Boy: 'Take back your meat'. *[beating her with the fowl three times]*
[xxi] Villagers: *The villagers join the boy to order her)*
[xxii] 'Take back your meat,'
[xxiii] 'Take back your meat,' *[three times, still beating her with the fowl]*
[xxiv] 'Take back your meat *[three times]*
[xxv] Chief celebrant: Tell her to take back her meat.
[xxvi] Boy: 'Take your meat' you must take your meat *[four more times]*
[xxvii] Grandmother: *[Seeing that the situation is going off hand]*
[xxviii] Give me. I've taken it.
[xxix] *[.forcefully seizing it from the boy's hand, picks up her belongings and tries to hurry off.]*
[xxx] *[Nwarong immediately starts beating her]*
[xxxi] Chief celebrant: Look Nwarong, Let's listen.
[xxxii] *[turning to the old mother]*
[xxxiii] Don't go yet. Wait. *[She stops]*
[xxxiv] Nwarong has to lead you. Nwarong
[xxxv] Nwarong has to usher you away
[xxxvi] *[Addressing the villagers]*
[xxxvii] I stand here as Tantoh Nwarong
[xxxviii] I'm Tantoh Nwarong of Watt
[xxxix] Who has been sent to do this.
[xxxx] To do this so people will not die
[xxxxi] If really you practice witchcraft
[xxxxii] You will take this bamboo with you
[xxxxiii] Wherever you go as a sign.
[xxxxiv] Eat your fowl for yourself.

[xxxxv] Nwarong will tie this bamboo on your legs
[xxxxvi] As they should never see this sacred soil of Watt
[xxxxvii] You are no longer one of us, evil one.
[xxxxviii] You must never return to this village,
[xxxxix] Nwarong, escort her far beyond the village
[xxxxx] *[The jujus start beating the old mother, and leading her towards the
outsketch of the village*

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