Ethnomycological Notes from Liberia

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Front Cover Image: A basin of chilli peppers and *yeleh gbeleh* (*Aurucalaria sp.*) taken by the author on an upland rice farm in northern Nimba County, November 2007. The Maawe name is a contracted form of the expression *yehleh gbeh wa bay,* which means "there are no [other] means available" which evokes the idea that it is not a food of first choice. The same could be said about this piece of work: I wish it was more comprehensive.

Introduction

> "Wild mushrooms, of which there are many varieties, play quite a part in the household economy of all hinterland people. It is seldom that toadstools are mistaken for them. If a woman finds more mushrooms than she can use conveniently at the time, she dries them in the sun or over the fire and stores them for future use." (Schwab, 1947: 96)

To the best of my knowledge there has been no dedicated study of the uses of fungi in Liberia and associated knowledges, beliefs and practises. Two major literature reviews of edible, poisonous and useful fungi in Sub-Saharan Africa (Rammeloo & Walleyn 1993 and Walleyn & Rammeloo, 1994) make no mention of Liberia. A global review on wild edible fungi in 2004 categorically states that no information was found for Liberia (Boa 2004: 90). All these reviews predominantly focussed on specialised literature, but as the above quote indicates, mushroom use has been recorded in Liberia in other types of work.

Formally describing fungal uses (and avoidances) requires identifications to scientific nomenclature. The data presented here for the most part concern local names for the fruiting body of fungi without this translation. Accurately ascribing the latter to the former is important but is not without its difficulties. Though West Africa largely remains a backwater for ethnomycology when compared to central, eastern and southern Africa, major advances have been made in Benin, including the publication of a guidebook (de Kesel *et al.* 2002). Thanks to Dr. Andre de Kesel, three formal identifications of edible mushrooms from samples are included here as well as several genus level presumptions.

To give an indication of the scale of the identification task in Liberia, research in Benin has identified about 100 edible species, however about half of these concern infrequently consumed species collected only once and which may involve new species (de Kesel *et al,* 2002: 96). Furthermore, though Benin and Liberia are very similar in size, Benin straddles more diverse ecoregions, including the Sudanian savannas, which are known for their high level of edible mushroom diversity (Yorou et al. 2014). Map 1 shows the ecoregions of Liberia as these are likely to have some bearing on what species of fungi are available at a particular locality. As a working hypothesis in need of testing, only about 20-30 mushroom species may be consumed in Liberia. There are though other uses of fungi species to consider, such as medicinal and ritual.

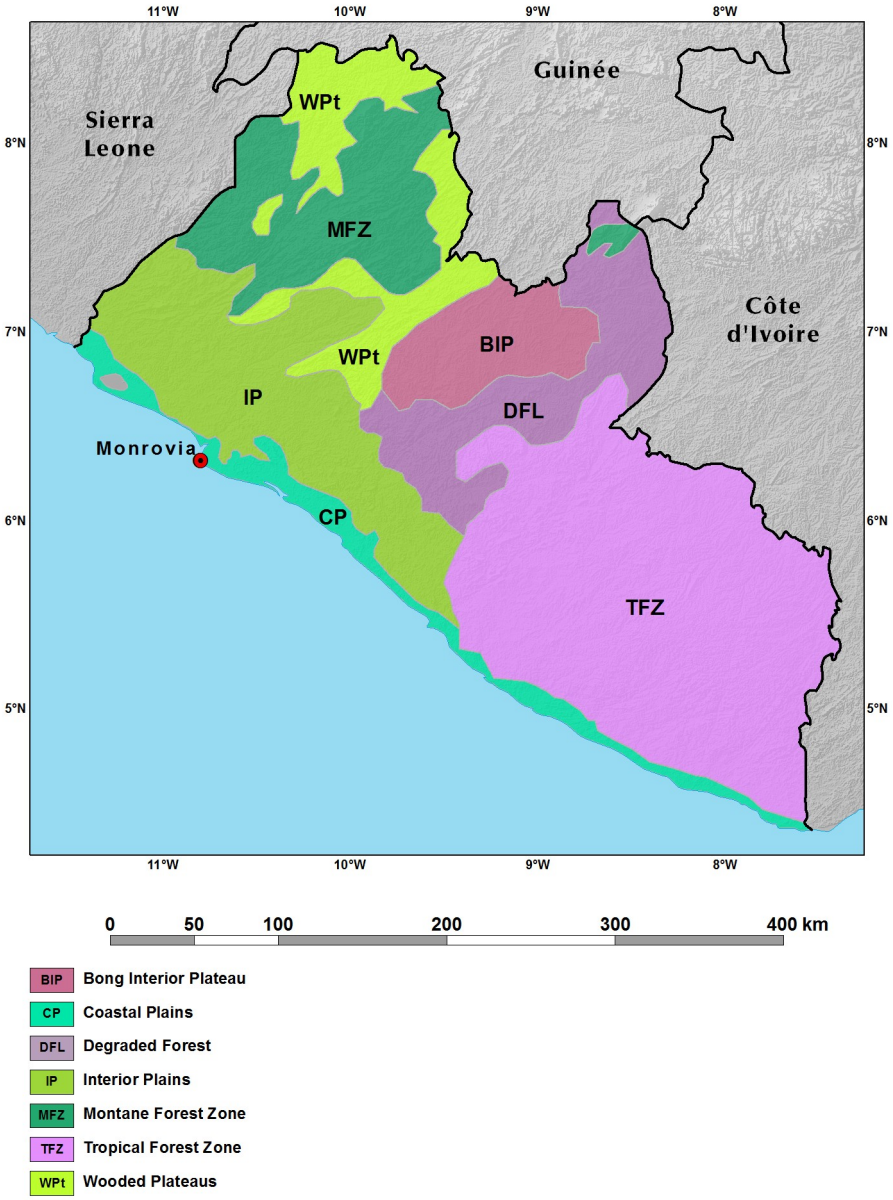
The study of ethnomycology is far more than working out which vernacular names are ascribed to which particular Linnaean species. Though there is much value in this task, and much of the data presented here would be enriched in this way, biological identification difficulties must not be seen as an impediment to studies in this field. A study based around a solid appraisal of how local names are used and understood could for example explore the spatio-temporal dynamics of harvesting practises without immediate recourse to any Latin nomenclature and still add enormously to the field.

The socially navigated activity of collecting fungi may occur within landscapes in which the harvesters themselves are entwined with some of the processes that shape the distribution of their quarry. Though it remains to be seen to what extent intentional

habitat modification to stimulate mushroom production[1] occurs in Liberia, burning and tree management practises (e.g. selection for felling, planting rubber and preserving oil palms) are all likely to impact their distribution. Knowing about fungi in Liberia necessitates familiarity with their habitats and many collectors can be expected to know where to look on the basis of mental maps that are attuned to the impacts of these anthropogenic affects within their harvesting areas. Research orientated towards understanding fungi from the users perspective, clearly offers some very interesting avenues for exploration.

Map 1: Liberia Ecoregion Map

Source: CILSS (2016)



1 Though Anderson & Lake (2013) note various practises by Californian Indians to encourage mushroom growth, I have yet to find references to similar practises in analogous environments for Liberia.

The data presented in this note are admittedly very skeletal but it is hoped that by organising these by language, they will encourage documentation of fungal knowledge in Liberia from a perspective that puts understanding local names and practises first. For several languages, the data are no more than a list of mushroom names taken from a dictionary that is often in limited circulation. In including them, my hope is that they are taken up as a reversed cryptic crossword challenge: here is a mushroom name which is assumed to have some salience but what does it look like, where is it found, how is used and is it known only by this name?

Assuming this note garners some interest, something akin to Australia's citizen science Fungimap[2], but working more with vernacular names, could with a little imagination be envisaged for Liberia. A key unknown, which such an endeavour could shed light on, is the consistency of naming practises. Whereas dictionaries often have to be economical in their choice of entries, the inclusion of minor names in an atlas project could potentially tell us a great deal about the formation and transmission of ethnomycological knowledge. *A priori* the idea of discrete and stable corpuses of mushroom lore passed down from the ancestors must be challenged. Human mobility in the modern era debunks this idea and instead we should be looking at what diversity in naming and practises tells us about the fluidity of associated knowledges, how they can both shrink and expand.

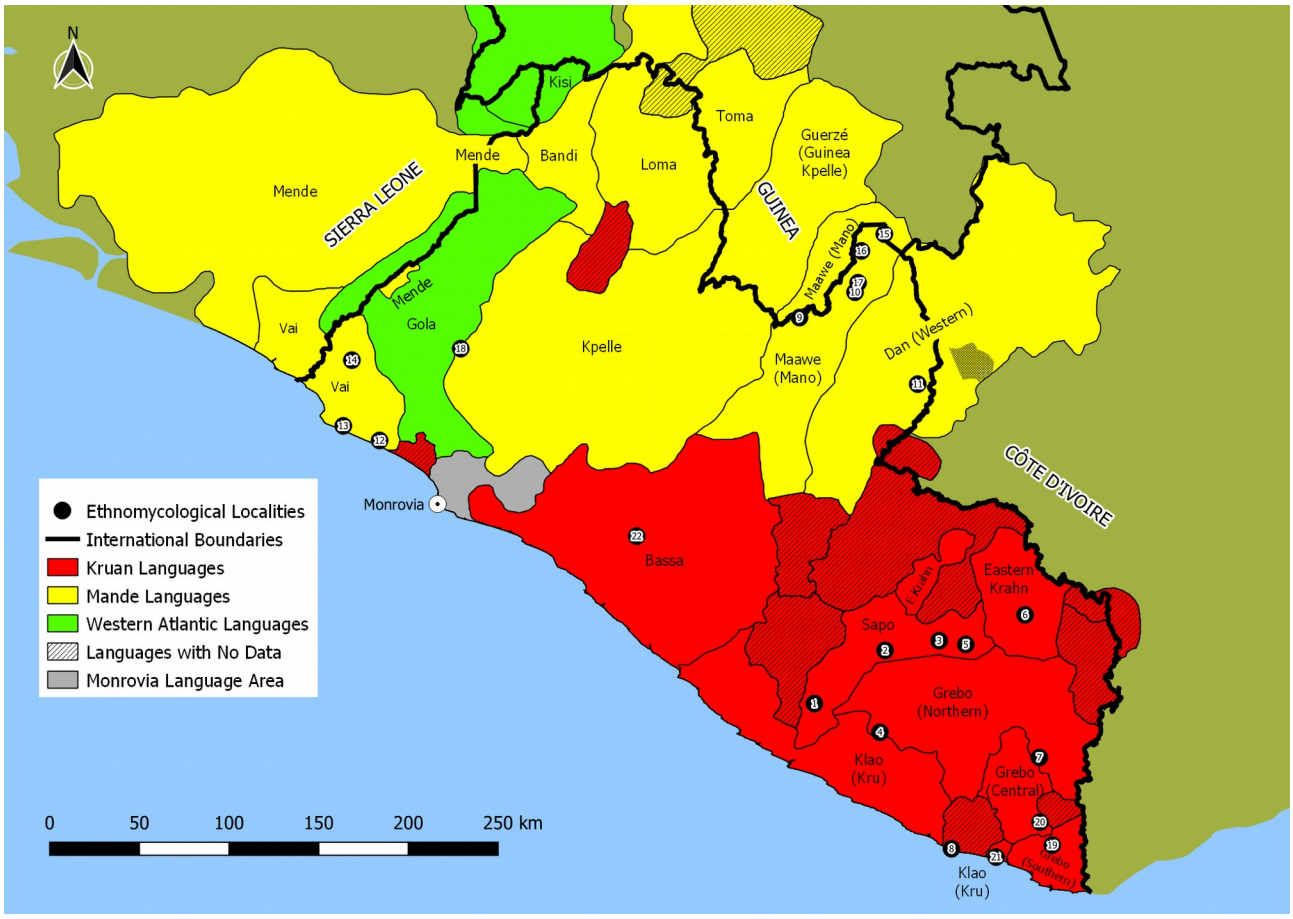
Organising ethnomycological data by languages also opens up the possibility of exploring similarities and differences in fungi naming and use practises across ethnolinguistic groups. Ethnologue (Lewis *et al.* 2016—henceforth not referenced) categorises Liberia's 26 indigenous language into three families, Kruan (16), Mande (8) and West Atlantic (2), which reflect the shared historical origins of their speakers. Language mapping inevitably simplifies speech communities which are in a constant state of evolution and obscures areas of language diversity, e.g. in urban areas or along linguistic borders. They can nonetheless help communicate the connections between land and language where populations have for several generations been relatively sedentary as in Liberia. Map 2 below, based on the Ethnologue mapping data which unfortunately is now hidden behind a pay wall, illustrates the location of data collection localities mentioned in the text as well as the ten languages for which no ethnomycological data have so far been gathered (shown as hatched). Much more coverage is needed but perhaps one day methods from historical linguistics may add something to our understanding of Liberia's past using fungal names, but care will be needed in deducing whether shared names are relics of shared history or products of more universal human responses to explaining the mysteries of fungal appearances—see Blust (2000) for a very useful discussion on this.

An important weakness to be aware of with a language-led approach to organising the data here is that it can blur how people self-identify—something which of course varies with social context. This is perhaps particularly the case among the Kruan language speakers for whom small stateless societies are the historical norm in which identities were and still are to some extent defined by how people speak. Thus where linguists have classified the similarities between the way certain people speak as a distinct language, the name they give to it may bear no resemblance to how the speakers refer to themselves, for example nobody is likely to say they are Eastern Krahn.

2 http://www.ala.org.au/blogs-news/fungimap-putting-australian-fungi-on-the-map/

Map 2: Liberian Languages and Data Localities

Source: Language areas traced from Ethnologue



Localities Key

① Tweh's Town
② Korjayee
③ New Town
④ Nikree
⑤ Penoken
⑥ Ziah Town
⑦ Watike
⑧ Grand Cess
⑨ Ganta
⑩ Sanniquellie
⑪ Nyor-Butuo
⑫ Bomboja
⑬ Latia
⑭ Goe
⑮ Gbeleyee
⑯ Bonlah
⑰ Seyhi Geh
⑱ Wealiquah
⑲ Geeworloken
⑳ Gbaken
㉑ Middle Town
㉒ Gaye Peter

Localities mentioned in the text, which are mapped above, are shown underlined.

Part 1: The Kraun Languages

According to Ethnologue's classification, the Kruan language family accounts for the majority of Liberia's indigenous languages (16 out of 26). Numerically however the combined total of people who identify with the Kruan language speaking groups made up only c.36% of the national population at the last census (2008), compared to the c.53% who identified with the Mande speaking groups, though due caution needs to be applied to these data.[3] Some of Liberia's Kruan languages are only spoken by a small number of people and indeed two, Dewoin and Gbii, are listed as endangered.[4] Unfortunately no ethnomycological data are available for these people, nor for those of the potentially fascinating Kruan isolate in northern Liberia, Kuwaa—see Map 2. The available data are presented according to the sub-ordering of languages proposed by Glottolog (https://glottolog.org/) starting with the We group, followed by Grebo, Bassa and Klao. The logic of these groupings is partly evident in some similarities between their generic names for mushroom as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Some Generic Names for Mushrooms in the Kruan Languages

Term	Language (Sub-Group)	Source
wanu	Sapo (We)	Fieldwork
wornu	Krahn: Tchien dialect (We)	Sauder & Wright (2000)
kɛɛ	Grebo: E Je dialect	Anon (2005)
kabɔ	Grebo: Glebo dialect	Innes (1967)
wɔ̀	Bassa	Hobley (1960)
wān	Klao	Poellot (1978)

A particularly interesting aspect of ethnomycology among the Kruan speaking peoples relates to similarities in their use of the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber regium*. Whilst the respective descriptive data are provided separately under the relevant language section, Table 2 below illustrates the likeness of names for this fungus. Unfortunately no comparative data are yet available for the Bassa, who numerically make-up the largest Kruan-speaking group in Liberia. Included in Table 2 are data for some Kruan languages from over the border in Côte d'Ivoire. Though analogous practises have been recorded among the Guéré-Wobé and Kroumen—see Appendix A for details—only the name is known for the Bété and it remains to be seen whether it is used by them and other Ivoirian Kruan speaking groups in similar ways. Similar enquiries should also be made among the various Mande language family neighbours of the Kruan speakers.

3 These figures are derived from Table 4.4 page A4-87 (LISGIS, 2009) which includes a small category of "Other Liberian" and hence circa. The absence of any mixed heritage category casts doubt on the validity of the data given the prevalence of inter-marriages between groups.

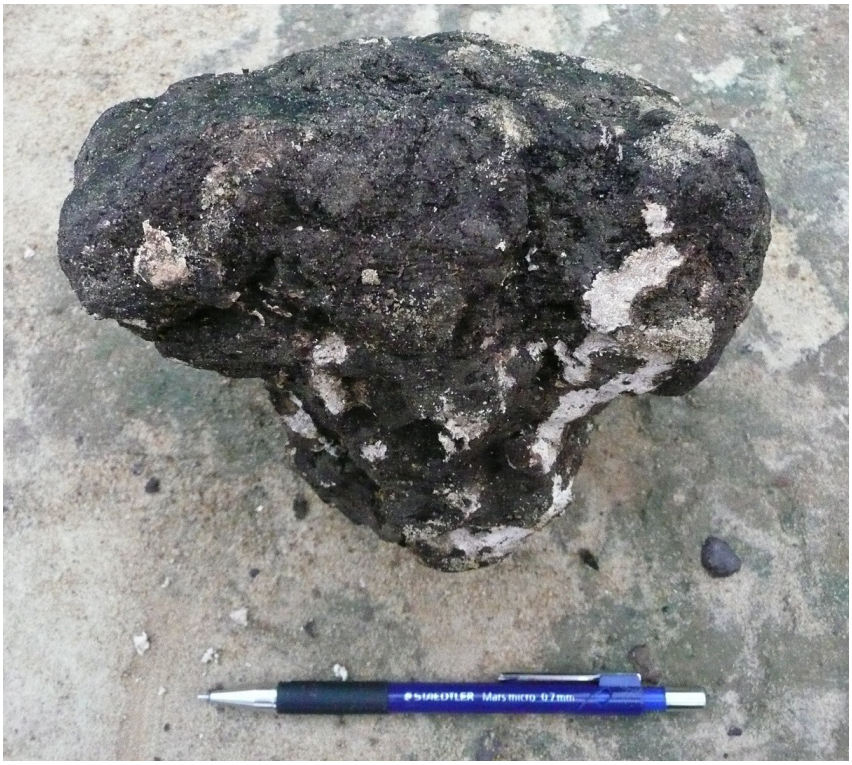
4 http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/country/Liberia

Tentative Klao data suggests that in local taxonomies *Lentinus tuber regium* is considered apart from those subsumed under the generic names above, but details of such a classification, which has been noted for this species elsewhere, e.g. among the Wuli of the Cameroon Grassfields (Baeke, 2005), remains to be examined more fully. Though generally not reported to be eaten, the report of one Central Grebo informant suggests this may be subject to variation.

Table 2: Names for *Lentinus tuber regium* in some Kruan Languages

Term	Language: Ethnic Group	Source
bloweh	Sapo: Putu & Wdjah	Fieldwork
bliyé	Krahn: Klowe (Konobo)	David Brown
blo	Kru: Nifa (Po River)	Fieldwork
gbolou	Kroumen	Holas (1980)
bloue	Wè: Wobé	Hauenstein (1979/80)
bloè	Wè: Guéré	Schwartz (1975)
boutroua	Bété	Yian & Tiebre (2018)

Photo 1: Sclerotium of *Lentinus tuber regium* Collected for Good Luck and Purity 18 June, 2011, Korjayee, Sinoe County



Sapo

Ethnologue notes that the Sapo language, (alternatively called Sarpo or Southern Krahn) has six recognised dialects: Juarzon, Kabade (or Karbardae), Nomopo (or Nimpo), Putu, Sinkon (or Senkon) and Waya (or Wedjah). These dialects correspond with the names of the Sapo 'tribes' (*bloa)* listed by Schröder & Seibel (1974: 13 & 50-56) who also list one called Drebo, but give no further details.

The ethnomycological data originates mainly from a study of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) I conducted in three towns in late 2010 for Fauna & Flora International (FFI) but also a serendipitous discovery at Putu subsequently. As FFI no longer keep the output report (Manvell 2011) on-line, the data are reproduced here with a couple of errors in the original corrected along with some subsequent identifications and additional field notes. It is important to stress that information on fungal use was not explicitly sought, but for the most part emerged in relation to freelisting for NTFPs used for 'soup' which led on to some additional information. It must therefore be considered as provisional only. The three Sapo towns in the study (shown on Map 2) are within different dialect areas: Juarzon (Tweh's Town), Putu (Putu New Town) and Wedjah (Korjayee). A couple of the mushroom names collected were specifically identified with the Sinkon dialect because the informant had moved from there on marriage. Marriage migration, especially of women, may be an important factor underlying name diversity within a community.

The Sapo names reported here were transcribed phonetically using the International Phonetics Association (IPA) alphabet of phonetic symbols by Henry D. Kai a Sapo language specialist working with LIBTRALO[5]. This was done *ex-situ* using recordings of names read out by my research assistants (both native Sapo speakers) and then repeated by a key informant in each town. Saying names in lists is an unnatural form of speech and though my assistants were present during transcription, and were able to clarify some names, it is likely that some errors occurred, particularly as regards reproducing local pronunciation nuances. Mr Kai insisted that it was necessary to add the word *wanu* meaning mushroom after each name.

I have opted to present the Sapo data on edible fungi according to the substrate on which they were reported to be associated with. Whilst this information was sometimes offered during freelisting, it was primarily obtained from key informants after master lists had been collated in the hope of aiding identification. Though informants freely used these substrate categories, more research is required to determine whether they represent valid Sapo life-form categories[6].

5 LIBTRALO: Liberian Translation and Literacy Organization (https://libtralo.wordpress.com/)

6 A study among the Tzeltal Maya of Mexico (Lampman, 2010), where substrate is an important organising character in their fungal taxonomy would be useful to emulate.

Edible Fungi Found on Soil

A weakness of the substrate category soil is that in some instances it can obscure an association with termites that do not build the type of obvious above ground structures that are considered a separate substrate category.

Sapo Name(s)	Notes	Tw	Kor	New
gbòla wanu	Overall the most frequently cited mushroom in New Town. Described as the biggest mushroom with a cap circa 10cm, which may explain its popularity. Said to be found in the forest during farming season. This name was only cited once in Tweh's Town where it was said to be brown and found on small hills made by termites, but this may not have come from the woman who listed it.	x		x
klakla wanu	A mushroom with a light brown cap found on ground in rice farms but one informant said termite hills. May have two seasons, around rice planting time (March) and Nov-Jan. One woman said she had tried drying *klakla* and the meat was sweet (good). The reduplicated name may be significant.	x		x
nana wanu	In Tweh's Town *nana* was said to mean walking without end* which relates to its periodic abundance. Different periods were cited: after termite flight, (Feb-March), rice planting time (March), June-Aug and when the rain has newly stopped (Sept-Oct). Said to be white and small. Though I originally reported a probable termite connection, this may not be the case.	x	x	x
pɔ̌die wanu	A white mushroom the same size as *tǐegbà* (about 1-3cm tall and 1-1.5 cm in diameter) found in the dry season on level ground in the forest.			x
tankɛ̌n wanu	Very small, white and flat. Found in forest during brushing season.	x		x
tùdù wanu	Name said to mean shiver as it apparently does when touched. Brownish, found on ground in cold places in forest during brushing season.			x

* Sauder (2003) notes that in the related Tchien Krahn language, *na* is the verb to walk and that verbs are sometimes reduplicated to show that actions go on and on.

Schwab (1947: 348) notes that the Kalako 'clan' had a mushroom called *bolo* as their taboo which could potentially refer to *gbola* above. Though the data are incomplete, mushroom taboos appear rare among Liberian Kruan languages speakers—the only other known is for the Jedaro—see later under Central Grebo—with mammals otherwise predominating. It would be interesting to record the legends behind these two taboos. The Kalako were presumably among the Putu, which was the only 'Sapã' place the Schwabs visited, though they provide no details about them. This name doesn't obviously feature in the Putu clans listed by Schröder & Seibel (1974: 53) but the spelling might be inaccurate. It could also potentially refer to a clan that has since died out or moved on:

the Schwabs note the population was greatly reduced at the time of their visit because of 1924 war with the Liberian government (ibid. p. 28).

Edible Fungi Found on Termite Mounds

Note that the frequently cited termite mushroom *jloh wunu* was accidentally left out of my report (Manvell 2011) and should not be confused with the oil palm mushroom *joh wunu.*

Sapo Name(s)	Notes	Tw	Kor	New
bla wanu	Found on termite hills, white but turns light brown on picking. In the related Tchien Krahn (Sauder & Wright, 2000), *'blao* refers specifically to tall termite hills, so there may be more in this name to discover. Said to be found at rice planting time (March) and also Dec-Jan.	x	x	
blafɛ̌fe wanu	Found in March around termite hills, but not plentiful. It is possible that this name, which was only mentioned once, is a compound of a termite reference (*bla*) to a similarity with the saprophytic mushroom *fɛ̌fe*.	x		
blapèbèɛ wanu	White mushroom that grows on termite mounds from top to bottom. Tastes like chicken. Though told this is a synonym of *tǐegbà* the sole person listing it, listed both. Found when it rains. The name is presumably a compound emphasising the termite connection (*bla*)			x
jloh wanu	Several comments by women suggest that there is more to be learnt about this mushroom: at Korjayee it was said you can't harvest all of them, or it will spoil, at New Town that you have luck if you find it and at Tweh's Town that if they see it plenty, the dry season will be good. It was also among only a small number of mushrooms that some women said they preserved by drying. Apparently it smells like dried meat when this is done. General consensus that it was found in the dry season on termite mounds and one person specified small ones. In the related Tchien Krahn (Sauder & Wright, 2000) *:jloo'ba* means a small, black termite hill, which again suggests there may be more in this name. Also said to be brownish, lasts only two days and tastes sweet.	x	x	x
tǐegbà ***Termitomyces microcarpus***	The name means ashes as associated with a dusty, ash like smut, which was seen. Comes up one day and spoils by the next—does this several times during season. Found Nov until rains. In the report I suggested it was probably *T. medius*, but the photographs have been identified by André de Kesel as *T. microcarpus*.			x

Edible Fungi Found on Trees

Sapo Name(s)	Notes	Tw	Kor	New
bliku/kpatala/ kumukoko wanu ***Lentinus squarrosulus* Mont.**	This mushroom was infrequently cited despite appearing to be quite common on dead trees in upland rice farms. This may be due to its need for extended cooking to reduce its tough texture (Rammeloo & Walleyn 1993: 35) a characteristic seemingly implied in the two etymologies known so far: *bliku*, which should perhaps be written as two words, means cow skin and *kumu* in *kumukoko* apparently means strong. Found Dec-April. Identified from a sample sent to André de Kesel.	x	x	
fɛ̌fe wanu	It is possible that this name is another synonym for *Lentinus squarrosulus* as suggested at New Town.		x	x
gbenmenuwon [Sikon]	This is a Sikon name for a white mushroom, found on palm trees. Though said to be found at Tweh's Town, people there don't eat it.	x		
joh wanu [*Volvariella volvacea*]	The name means "Oil Palm mushroom" and hence the supposed identification. This species was most frequently mentioned at Tweh's Town where there was a thriving industry in palm oil production due to the local abundance of *Elaeis guineensis*.	x	x	x
nuo gblogblo wanu ***Auricularia delicata* (Mont. ex Fr.) Henn.**	This was a commonly cited mushroom and though found year round was also said to be dried. Identified from a sample sent to André de Kesel, but other similar looking *Auricularia* species could fall under this name. The name was said to mean "hard ear" but the etymology requires more examination.	x	x	x
sedise wanu ***Schizophyllum commune***	It is a little odd that this species commonly found in farms was not cited at New Town. Identified from photographs.	x	x	
simeɛ jlea pɛlɛ wanu	This name, which means "catfish belly", was cited by only one person who said they hadn't seen it there but knew it from time spend in the Sinoe Rubber Company plantation during the war. White and grows on rubber trees.	x		
tòbò bòh/ bòh bɛ̌/gbla bòh wanu	"Mortar Foot"/"Foot Big"/"Stump Foot" Found on really rotten branches between young and high bush. Though said to be up to 30 cm tall, this may be an exaggeration or refer to width. Said to both smell sweet and taste sweet. As it is sometimes dried, it is perhaps especially appreciated. Found felling time (Feb) but Dec-March also given. On the basis of its reported size, odour, habitat and a medicinal use which may stem from its resemblance to the condition (see below), it is tempting to suggest *Phlebopus sudanicus* as a candidate species. NB: The sole informant who gave the name *gbla bòh* said that it is found around termite hills, comes plenty (a lucky time) Aug-Sept, not easy to find, looks brown and has a 3-4 days duration. It may therefore not be a synonym.	x		
waplu wanu [Sikon]	A white cap mushroom found growing on palm trees only listed by two informants, one of whom also listed *gbenmenuwon*, so presumably not a synonym.	x		

Edible Fungi Found on Unknown Substrates

Sapo Name(s)	Notes	Tw	Kor	New
blalo wanu	White and small. There was a suggestion that this is a synonym for *tǐegbà*, but as one woman called both, this is questionable.			x
jlekoba wanu	Means "monkey paw". Listed by one woman.	x		
kănwon wanu	Listed by one man who said it was a white mushroom found both on termite hills and on big rotten branches in young and high bush			x
koboko wanu	Listed by one woman: white, likes cold places found in March.	x		

Therapeutic Uses of Fungi

tòbò bòh ('mortar leg')

In Tweh's Town during a freelisting exercise, a 42 year old female informant volunteered the comment that the edible mushroom known as *tòbò bòh* ("mortar leg") was also used for people with elephantiasis of the leg. The therapeutic context in which this comment was meant is not known. Elephantiasis describes the painful and disfiguring symptoms that are exhibited by a minority of people infected by lymphatic filariasis.[7] This disease is endemic to Liberia where it is caused by the parasitic filarial nematode *Wuchereria bancrofti* which is spread by bites of infected mosquitoes.

The similarity of the visible swollen symptoms of chronic lymphatic filariasis with the mushroom in question—which is also known in the same community under two other names meaning 'foot big' and 'stump foot' (see above)—may be an element in its perceived therapeutic powers akin to worldwide observations of the Doctrine of Signatures (Bennett, 2007) but this requires testing (see Gaoue *et al.* 2017 for some options).

Nyangbeh ('weak legs')

During an NTFP foray at Putu New Town, our 63 year old male guide indicated this mushroom growing on a thin branch that he said was called *nyangbeh*, meaning weak legs, and is used to make children walk when this is delayed. This name has not been transcribed phonetically. The same species can also apparently be found on the ground. Note the similar use of a mushroom reported in Nikree—see under Northern Grebo: Jedepo Dialect.

7 http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs102/en/

Ritual Uses of *Lentinus tuber-regium*

In 2011, whilst conducting enquiries on cultural heritage around Mount Gedeh with the Chief Elder, Thomas Quiah (who claimed to have been born in 1925) at Penoken, where the Putu dialect is spoken, my curiosity was aroused by a large object on a plate that the old man was carrying on our visit to a sacrifice tree (see Photo 2 below). With the assistance of the youth chairman with us, I was told that it was *bloweh* [name not transcribed phonetically], a very special mushroom that symbolises purity. They do not eat this mushroom, which grows from a black potato like structure found both in the ground and on rotten trees which when peeled, is white inside. When somebody is very lucky and finds *bloweh*, they bring it to the Chief Elder—though it was admitted some keep it for themselves—and he will talk to it and take it to the *jo tu* (sacrifice tree). I didn't fully understand the explanation of how it was then used, but something was said about anointing the forehead with a bit of it as well as eating (chewing?) a small bit.

Later the same year I briefly returned to Korjayee on the 17th June and asked two male informants I had worked with previously during the NTFP study about *bloweh*. As fortune would have it, one of them had an example which helped identification (see Photo 1 earlier). When people want to 'fix' something, like medicine, I was told they take a bit of *bloweh,* chew it then spit it in a plate and put fingers from both hands in it and anoint their forehead and pull down across face saying "anywhere I go, let me see good luck". This ritual was said to be both for good luck and purity.

Photo 2: A Plate of Offerings for the Sacrifice Tree at Penoken, Grand Gedeh County, 5th March 2011

Eastern Krahn

According to Ethnologue, the Eastern Krahn language (alternatively written Eastern Kran) is distinct from both Western Krahn and Sapo and has four dialects: Gorbo, Kanneh, Konobo and Tchien (Chiehn). These dialect names obscure the various *bloa* to which "Eastern Krahn" speakers self-identify—see Schröder & Seibel (1974) for more details.

For the Tchien dialect, Doris Sauder and Paul Wright (2000) have produced a preliminary dictionary with the Canadian Assemblies of God Church which is not widely available. In addition to the generic term for mushrooms indicated in Table 1, it yields two further entries of kinds of mushroom, which merit comment:

Entry	Example Phrase
:gbola'a: [1] Sg: :gbola'a-buh:	**Ti 'ni dba-a 'do :wor on 'kpan-dih: :gbola'a: 'do tu-pubu' ken.** The time it rained is when they picked mushrooms on the rotten log. **Or 'kpan :gbola'a-buh:**. He picked a mushroom.
:ylee-dou' [1]	**:Ylee-dou'-a ne 'o tu 'bhun.** A mushroom can be on a log.

In 1928 George Schwab and his wife who constituted the Peabody Museum Expedition team to Liberia, spent six days among the Tiɛ̃ around Zwedru (or as Schwab writes, Zwadhru) where the Tchien dialect is spoken. In the write up of the expedition which appeared many years later, the Tiɛ̃ name for *Lentinus tuber-regium* is said to be "*bola,* meaning "white" (?)" (Schwab, 1947: 370)—see below. As they were correct in their uncertainty about the meaning of the name (*'puu* is the adjective for white, *'plu* to be white or pale coloured) and the name is distinct from the Klowe dialect name for the sclerotium of this fungus (see below), I think this ascription is somewhat uncertain. The similarity with the Sapo name *gbòla* for the largest capped (Ø c. 100mm) and most frequently cited mushroom in Putu New Town (see above), is worth noting though that was described as a ground or possibly termite linked mushroom rather than a saprophyte as implied in the example phrase.

For the second name I have a suspicion based on entries elsewhere in this dictionary that the name *:ylee-dou'* is a binomial meaning "a Campbell's Monkey's[8] ear". Though this needs to be confirmed, it is interesting to note the possible correspondence with the Northern Grebo name for *Auricularia spp.* (see below) *jlee nɔ̆n*, which means the

8 The dictionary ascribes Mona Monkey to this name, but current understanding of speciation among the *Cercopithecus mona* group means that this English name now only applies to those members found from the Dahomey Gap eastwards (Grubb *et al*. 2003). Those found in Liberia are now referred to as Campbell's monkeys (*Cercopithecus campbelli campbelli*), though it should be noted that a different subspecies is found just over the border in Côte d'Ivoire, called Lowe's Monkey (*Cercopithecus campbelli lowei*).

"monkey (generic name) ear". Why a monkey species with hairy ears should be associated with this bracket fungus, if indeed this is the case, remains to be determined: I would have thought that the naked ears of the Sooty Mangabey (*Cercocebus atys*) would make a better comparison but the given name for this species in this dictionary is *'kehbeh'* plural *'kaba*.

Ritual Uses of *Lentinus tuber-regium*

Though as mentioned above there are doubts about the Tiɛ̃ name given by George Schwab for this fungus, he provides three descriptions of it's ritual use at times referring to it with the confusing name 'puffball mushroom (Schwab, 1947).

> P. 244: "In Tiɛ̃ also the widows are confined to the house (theoretically) and forbidden to wash until the funeral feast has been made. This may be a few weeks, possibly as long as two months, after the burial. Women previously widowed wait upon them, cook, and bring food to them. After the feast is over they are led to the waterside by a widow or widower and pushed into the water. They bathe, return to town, and seat themselves beside their late husband's house.
>
> An old, medicine woman now comes with a quantity of the puffball mushroom chewed fine. Some of this she rubs on the face and body of each widow."

> P. 370-1: "The Tiɛ̃ and Konibo tradition for its use is this: "In far, far back times Ku, who is now called Nyesəa, sent the first man and women 'down'. As they journeyed to get to 'down' it grew so dark they were no longer able to see the trail. So they went back and asked Ku what they were to do. Upon this, Ku gave them the puffball mushroom, showing at the same time how they must chew and blow it out and thus get a light for their journey.
> "He then gave them all the 'laws' [of this bola or 'white thing'] for its use as medicine and as an offering. They took the mushroom, did as instructed, and finally came to 'down', built their town, and raised children.
> "The laws of the mushrooms as given by Ku are:
> "Chew and use it to rub on face and body.
> "Take it to the village whetstone, chew it there, and then blow it on the stone before undertaking anything.
> "Put some of the chewed mushroom near the house door to hold fast or drive away bad spirits."
>
> P. 371 ""One of the rules given by Ku to the Tiɛ people is as follows:
> "Take the machete or axe to the whetstone before farm cutting, the gun before a hunt, the fish net before going to fish, the hoe or any implement before it is to be used. Put the object on the whetstone, lay a piece of puffball mushroom near it, and tell the object what it is about to be used for. Then make a petition to the ancestors that no harm may come to you and that you will be fortunate in your undertaking."

In February 2012, the social anthropologist David Brown kindly made some enquiries around Ziah Town in Konobo district on my behalf about the use of the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium* using the photograph I had taken at Penoken. David has a long standing connection with this area having done his doctoral fieldwork there in 1974-76 and was revisiting his initial work at the time. People in the district self-identify as Klowe—written Kloi in Schröder & Seibel (1974: 13 & 19-20) which has been corrupted to Konobo, their administrative name. He provided the following notes:

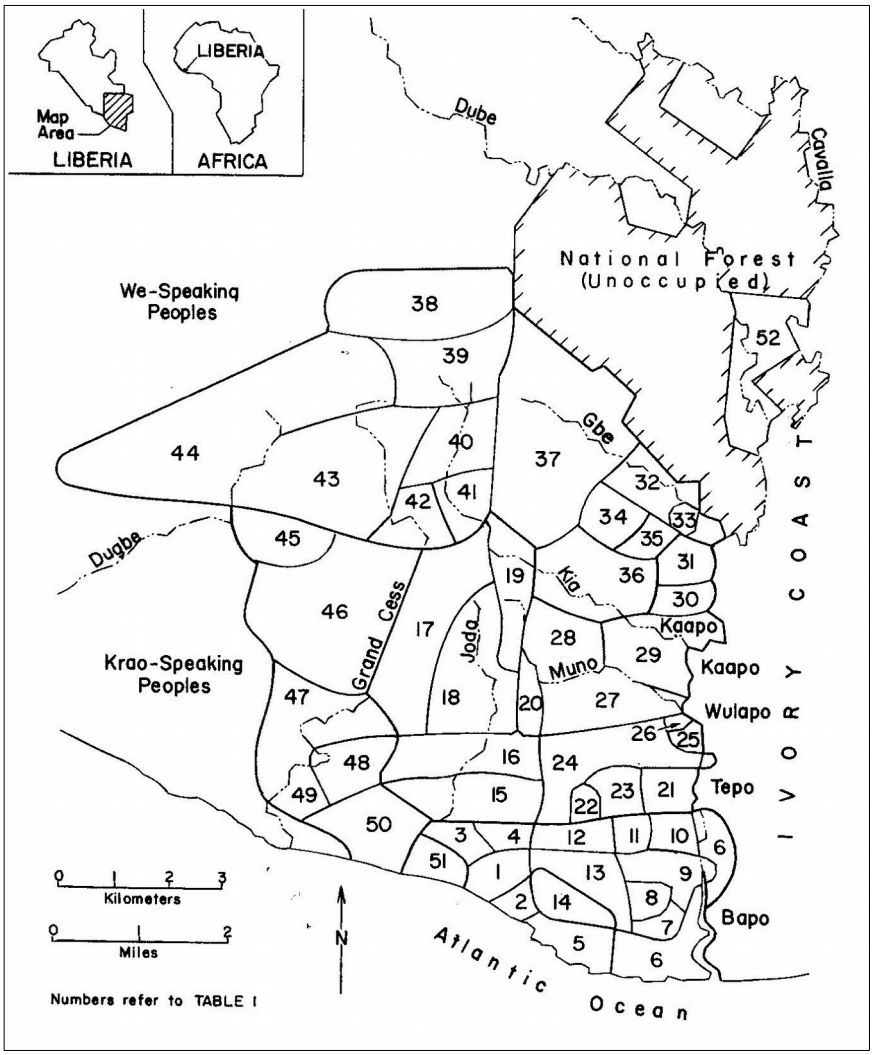
- It is known by the Klowe name *bli-è-yè* plural *bliyé*.
- Found during the farming season, sometimes in clusters, though this may be partly because it is exposed at that time.
- It is associated with the dead logs of certain tree species including one called *douloutué* [unidentified: a medium height tree, probably a pioneer species in fairly open forest, which grows notably straight with a fairly compact crown of dark leaves; used for construction, but is of poor quality]
- When cut, the skin of the sclerotium is peeled with a cutlass. It can be retained in house rafters for a long time.
- It is not eaten, but rather used for blessings; for example:
  a) For babies, after 3 days (their outings?), although talcum powder tends to substitute now.
  b) At the end of a funeral ceremony, to bless everyone, especially children of the dead person.
  c) As a welcome ceremony for important visitors who are given a white chicken, and have *bliyé* rubbed into their hair.

Grebo

Though Grebo is often considered the third mostly widely spoken indigenous language in Liberia (after Kpelle and Bassa) it is not actually a single language, but rather a cluster of dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible to a degree that they can be considered distinct languages. To give a sense of this complexity, Hasselbring & Johnson (2002) note how three different authors have classified Grebo into seven, eight or nine languages (or groups) which embrace between 25 and 34 dialects. Map 2 is based on Ethnologue's classification of five Grebo languages made up of 25 dialects: Barclayville (2 dialects), Central (5), Gboloo (5), Northern (9 plus five sub-dialects) and Southern (4). Two papers by Frederick McEvoy (1976-77 & 1977) are well worth reading to understand the social factors underlying ethnic identities and dialects in the region, though it should be born in mind that much has changed since they were written.

Map 3: Location of the Grebo-Speaking *Dako*

Source: Kurtz (1985: Map 1). See Appendix B for Key to Numbers



To further illustrate the socio-linguistic complexity in the Grebo speaking area, Map 3 above localises 50[9] *dako* (sometimes translated as tribe) that Grebo-speakers typically self-identify to, though I have some reservations that it is complete[10]. I have attempted to locate the various sources of Grebo fungal names I use in this section to this map, though it remains to be seen whether names are consistent within a *dako* or more widely.

Northern Grebo

Ethnologue identifies the following nine "quite distinct" dialects of Northern Grebo: Chedepo, E Je (Eh Je), Fopo-Bua, Gbepo (Gbeapo), Jedepo, Klepo, Northeastern Grebo, Palipo, Tienpo. In addition, they list five sub-dialects of the Northeastern dialect: Ketiepo, Nitiabo, Sabo, Tuobo, Webo.

The ethnomycological data emanate primarily from the same 2010 NTFP study that provided the Sapo data above (Manvell 2011) and come specifically from the town of Nikree. The dialect spoken in Nikree is known as Jedebo (Ingemann & Duitsman (1976-1977), which resembles the name of the district the town is located in (Jedepo), which is an alternate spelling. Hasselbring & Johnson (2002) use the synonym Jlepo.

One error in the original report is corrected here[11] along with a subsequent identification of a specimen sent to Dr. André de Kesel of the Jardin Botanique National de Belgique plus some additional field notes. As Map 2 shows, Nikree is on a linguistic border with the Klao language area and indeed some Klao speaking residents were included among informants. Probably because my assistants were both Sapos, research in this town was more challenging and informants were less forthcoming: the most frequently cited name was only cited by seven informants out of 40. The names were transcribed *ex-situ* using recordings and with one of my Sapo speaking assistants helping Sebastian Quayee a Grebo specialist with LIBTRALO using the IPA alphabet of phonetic symbols. Transcription should therefore be seen as preliminary.

A further but minor source of Northern Grebo data is from an anonymous Grebo-English Dictionary published in memory of Rev. James Doe Young, head translator for the Grebo Translation Committee (Anon, 2005). Though not stated in the work, I have been told that this is based on the Chedepo dialect (*dako* #39 on Map 3). Similarities between Chedepo and five other Northern Grebo dialects,[12] which includes the one spoken in Nikree (Jedebo), have with literacy development work led them to become identified as a specific dialect grouping called E Je.

A final source is from the aforementioned 1928 Peabody Museum expedition which spent three days in 'Half-Grebo' which falls within the Northern Grebo area (Schwab, 1947).

9 Though the map actually shows 52, two of these, Nifa (#51) and Glaro (#52) are non-Grebo.

10 These are based on discussions in an unlisted, 2-3 town *dako* called Neewinyenklo, S of Karluken, which seems to have been lumped with other *dako* in this map perhaps following administrative divisions.

11 I mistakenly noted the leafy green forka jilay nimley (fɔ̃ka ja Nimnɛ̃: Literally "Fukay loves Nemena") as a mushroom used in soups.

12 Their respective *dako* localisations in Map 3 are: Gbepo a.k.a the Gbeypo group (# 40, 41 & 43), Jlepo a.k.a Jedebo and Jedepo (#44), Klepo a.ka. Kelipo (#38), Palipo (#37) and Tienpo (#43).

Edible Fungi Found on Soil at Nikree

As with the Sapo data, this substrate category may obscure termites associations.

NAME(S)	Notes
dlǒ (drou)	Found Nov-March. Said to have long legs/roots i.e a long stipe.
gbɔ̀ tìe	Found Nov-March. *tìe* = piece, some
gbòwuǒ	A reddish mushroom found in young bush. One informant said specifically that it is found under trees of the genus *Uapaca*. Harvest time unclear, said to be found Nov-March and also July and only rarely in November. The image here is of a smoked dried sample shown to us by an informant. This practise would perhaps suggests it an esteemed mushroom. Potentially a *Cantharellus spp.* 
slàsnă	A slimy ground mushroom found in the cold season (Dec-Jan) but also said to be found over a longer period, Nov-March. A cryptic note in one of my assistants notebooks says "find it by a tree" which may imply that it is thought to have a particular tree association. I think this transcription needs revisiting: my field notes have *snaa son* which could potentially imply a snail (*son*) connection.

Edible Fungi Found on Termite Mounds at Nikree

NAME(S)	Notes
swonkay [not transcribed]	Found Nov-Feb. I suspect that the name should be written *soǎn kɛɛ* meaning "rotten mushroom" and thus convey a similar idea to the Sapo name for *Termitomyces microcarpus* which spoils quickly

Edible Fungi Found on Trees at Nikree

NAME(S)	Notes
chechɛ̌ ***Schizophyllum commune***	Small white bracket fungi found Nov-March.
fefe OR gbɔtu bla kokɔ ***Cookeina speciosa* (Fr.) Dennis**	A reddish mushroom growing on decaying wood, Nov-March. Specimen identified by Dr. André de Kesel. The second name means "Gbotu beat Kor" which relates to the story of Kor who told Gbotu there was no meat in the sauce, Gbotu didn't believe her and beat her for lying. The case went before the elders who told Gbotu that he had been wrong because the mushroom she used really tastes like meat. This was the most frequently cited mushroom (5 women, 2 men).

fɔnĭfɔn OR jòsɛ̀fo ***Lentinus squarosulus***	A white mushroom that grows on fallen branches, Nov-March.
gbàlè chŏ	Found on rotten logs. Possibly a synonym of *fefe* as *chŏ* = red
jlee nɔŭn ***Auricularia* spp.**	"Monkey ear" an ear-like, bracket mushroom.
kawlo kɛɛ	A bracket mushroom: Harvest time unclear, said to be found Nov-March and also July. *kàwloo* = meanness, refusal.

Edible Fungi Found on Unknown Substrates at Nikree

NAME(S)	Notes
woupou [not transcribed]	Found Nov-Feb. Possibly a compound word around the verb to sprout *wŏ*

Therapeutic Uses of Fungi at Nikree

- ***bodo*** 'one foot', a mushroom that stands on its own, i.e. is not clumped together. Used as a medicine to make children walk.
- ***sùsùwòblaĕ*** was cited as a remedy for body pain by one man. Apparently it is a black bracket tree fungus. It is beaten in a mortar, boiled and the resulting water given as an enema.
- ***jlee nɔŭ***: "monkey ear" *Auricularia spp*. One woman reported this was used to treat stomach pain.

Chedepo Dialect Data from Anon (2005)

The dictionary provides three entries for unidentified mushroom species:

- **blatukɛ̆ɛ**
- **bochokɛɛ**
- **chechĕ**

The first two names are presumably contracted binomials since ***kɛɛ*** is the generic term for mushroom. Thus the first is likely to be a Termitomyces fungus since ***blatŭ*** means termite hill. The second may mean "pig mushroom" since ***bocho, boche*** means pig and it would be fascinating to know if this refers to the same species as the Kpelle edible mushroom, **ɓoi fena** "bush hog mushroom"—see later. The third name presumably refers to *Schizophyllum commune* as at Nikree, but it is interesting that it has a homonymous meaning as the verb "to dry". Preparation and preservation practises around this fungus require investigation and the dictionary offers a revealing snippet in the example of how the word is used: **chèchĕ wɛɛn maekɛɛ̆n sànu**: **chèchĕ** are good for thick palm butter.

Ritual Uses of *Lentinus tuber-regium*

George Schwab (1947) provides descriptions and an illustration of three ritual uses of mushrooms in the Northern Grebo area, which despite what appears to be an error in one and the confusing description of the fungus as a puff ball mushroom in another, all probably refer to the use of the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium*. The three localities where these occurred can be located on Map 3 as follows: Palepo #37, Tuobo clan #24 and Nitiabo #35.

> P. 211-12: "When the Palepo infant is brought out for the first time the father or mother lays it on a small, new mat and carries it to the head of the father's family. Handing it over to the aged man, the parent says, "I have brought this man [or woman, if a girl] to work for you." Holding it in his arms, the family head speaks to it thus: "You must remain on earth for long, as I have done. You must get as old as I am. Do not make trouble for others. Do not become a rascal. Do not cry too much."
>
> Next he takes some of a dry "beefsteak"mushroom (gɛ t'ro), chews it, and blows it out on the infant's face. Finally he gives it his blessing and wishes it the things these people consider most desirable and useful. On the following day, the family head has a fowl killed and makes a small feast for the mother."

Given the similarity between the alleged Palepo name and the Maawe (Mano) term—see later—gɛ toro for a "beefsteak" bracket mushroom, I suspect this an error and that the offering was the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium*.

> P. 63: "At Watike, home of the paramount chief of the Tuobo clan, and at another place near there, we came upon the more elaborate form of first fruits ceremony customary among the Half-Grebo. At the new moon just before harvest an offering of sacred mushroom (*Lentinus tuber-regium*) flour was sprinkled on the floor in a ribbon about two inches wide. This ribbon first encircled the hearth, then went around the medicine post at the base of which was the portable shrine. Then it continued out over the threshold into the small open space before the hut, where it ended in a circle 2 feet in diameter. Between the door and the outer circle were two cross ribbons 18 inches long. Inside the circle the main ribbon branched into three (fig. 37, c). This was a graphic representation, a sort of map, of all the paths between the hut and the farm - the paths over which the farmer had traveled and over which the medicines in his house must travel to be effective out there.
>
> Each morning during the harvest moon the men of the village visited this hearth and made a slight offering before they took the trail to the farm to follow the daily round of their circumscribed lives. The offering was a little of the first new rice boiled and mixed with palm oil. Some was placed within the circle around the hearth, some around the medicine post, and some in the area outside representing the farm. In addition, the customary fowl was sacrificed and some of its blood sprinkled over the medicine at the base of the post, while blood and feathers were smeared on the post itself. The villagers said that when no fowl was available, dried meat was permissible. This would be cooked, and part of it

then used as an offering, the rest eaten as is customary."

Figure 37c "Mushroom meal sacrifice to the farm, Tuobo clan, Half-Grebo"

P.370-71: "The mushroom itself is a mysterious and sacred object among the natives, especially the tiny puff balls which are comparatively rare. In a Nitiabo (Half-Grebo) town we came upon a man making an offering of chewed puffball mushroom to his medicine (fig. 37, c). Unfortunately we were too late for the preliminary ceremony. The medicine was laid out on an antelope's skin. Some cooked rice and palm oil had been put on it. A line of this chewed white mushroom encircled his medicine, then led through the center of the home, across the door sill, out into the street, where it ended in another circle. Inside this latter circle, there were two dots, and near it, two cross lines. Inside the house, between the doorsill and the circle around the medicine, there were three more cross lines; while from this circle itself to the medicine on the skin, there was another line. As the "meal" line was being formed, the man kept muttering something. Other ceremonies, if such there were, were performed after our departure. The man refused to say anything about the meaning of the various lines."

Central Grebo

Ethnologue lists five sub-dialects of Central Grebo: Borobo, Dorobo, Globo, Nyenebo, Trembo. Two snippets of ethnomycological data relate to this area:

In February 2017 on a forest trek from the town of Gbaken in Maryland County with six men from the local Neewinyenklo *dako*, we briefly discussed the use of the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium*. It was said to be used for good luck and one man said he had also eaten it, despite others saying they don't. Unfortunately I didn't record the local name.

On the basis of geography rather than anything specific in Hasselbring & Johnson (2002), I assume that the Jedaro, also written Yederabo, which are shown as dako #21 on Map 3 are in the Central Grebo group area. Kurtz (1985: 65) notes that the Tuabo sib of the Jedaro have as their taboo the ***tedie klere*** "mushroom". This could potentially be a Termitomyces fungus as Innes (1967) gives ***tide*** as termites nest.

Southern Grebo

Ethnologue lists four "quite distinct" dialects of Southern Grebo: Glebo (Seaside Grebo), Jabo, Nyabo and Wrelpo. Some scant ethnomycological data are available for two of these.

On the 30th December, 2016 in the Nyanbo (Nyabo) (*dako* number #23 in Map 3) town of Geeworloken in Maryland County, at an impromptu meeting organised by my assistant Alex Nyemah whose family reside there, the following short list of edible mushroom names was elicited, partly using some Sapo mushroom photos I had on my phone. The names have not been transcribed.

Name	Notes
gbo chankan	Name elicited from my photo of *Lentinus squarosulus*. Said to be very tough and hard to chew, which accords with accounts of this species.
kpemie	Grows on old oil palm *Elaeis guineensis* stumps and felled logs and where palm-butter water is thrown away. Not found on other trees. Not seasonal. Can be greenish. Presumably *Volvariella volvacea*
muá	Grows on old logs in the forest. Smells very sweet when close to it. Yellowish colour.
neneh kon war	"Old lady's ear" Name elicited from my photo of *Auricularia delicata*
telleh gleh	"Termite hill mushroom" Purplish colour on top
sibleh	Small white mushroom on termite mounds. Name elicited from my photos of *Termitomyces microcarpus*
son kon men	"Chicken has tongue". Named after its very sweet taste. Found in short, soft areas in the rainy season. White, small, always found in groups.

The Grebo-English Dictionary produced by Gordon Innes (1967) is based entirely on the speech of his sole informant who worked with him in London, Mr. J.Y. Dennis. Though Innes makes no mention in this publication as to where Mr. Dennis grew up and learnt his Grebo, Hasselbring & Johnson (2002:12) note it was in the Glebo dialect, which is also known as Seaside Grebo. In addition to the generic name listed in Table 1, the following three specific names are provided:

kpimi a big mushroom, sing. **kpimiyɛ**

pibi a small fungus

tidɛ̲glɛe a fungus resembling a mushroom

The first is possibly analogous with the Nyanbo name ***kpemie*** above. The last name presumably refers to a Termitomyces since **tidɛ̲** pl. **tidi** = termites' nest.

Of possible relevance to the use of the sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium*, given its similarity to other Kruan language names for it (see Table 2), it would be interesting to check whether this entry actually refers to a plant or this fungus:

blo̲ a plant which grows in rich soil; it is grated and mixed with water and applied to the face as a symbol of victory by warriors, persons acquitted in a law court, women after child birth. Formerly warriors chewed a piece and spat it in each other's eyes. This is still done in ceremonial war dances.

Bassa

According to the aforementioned 2008 census data, the Bassa make up the second largest ethnic group in Liberia after the Kpelle (LISGIS 2009). The number of Bassa speakers is however difficult to determine and geography may be an important factor: the proximity of Monrovia may favour English and bordering Kpelle and Maawe (Mano) speakers in the heavily populated central belt may encourage English over cross language family bi-bilingualism. Ethnologue lists six Bassa dialects: Central Bassa, Gba Sor, Gbor, Hwen Gba Kon, Mabahn and River Cess Bassa. I am however aware that an old unpublished dialect survey I haven't seen (Bertkau et al., 1974), which is reported in Marchese (1978), identified 15 dialects.

The only ethnomycological data I have found in addition to the generic name in Table 1, are the following three entries in Jane Hobley's dictionary (1960) which is not easily available. The dialect of these names is unknown, but as the work was published at the Gaye Peter Mission, 40 km northeast of Buchanan, I suspect the local dialect there is Níxwínín on the basis of Map XV in Marchese (1978).

dùù: Kind of mushroom (and also means "caterpillar" and "cannon")

gmùnùù: Kind of mushroom

peɖe-geɖeeɦ-dyi: Small white mushroom

Klao (Kru)

Ethnologue lists four Klao dialects: Central, Eastern, West Central and Western. It thus follows the classification of Duitsman et al. (1975) who helpfully also list the component 'clans' for each dialect group—*dako* (plural *dake*) would be the better term.

It is perhaps important to note that the limited Klao ethnomycological data available mostly hails from the coastal zone, which may have a bearing on the species referred to due to the coastal savannah habitat, but this remains to be determined with comparisons further inland in the forest zone.

In 1978, Sharon Poellot began compiling a working Kru-English dictionary and the copy I have has plenty of handwritten annotations indicating work, perhaps by others, up until 1981. The ten or eleven mushroom names it contains are all sourced from a "Catholic Dictionary" which she describes as "Date unknown. Probably early to mid 1900's. From the Catholic sisters in Grand Cess." Given the potential usefulness of knowing where and when these names were collected, I have so far learnt that the principal Catholic missionary 'station' of Grand Cess was established in 1916 with various local outstations following.[13] However, it seems that it wasn't until the ordainment of the first Catholic Bishop of Liberia, Monsignor John Collins in 1934, that women became part of their evangelisation movement.[14] In 1936 the Bishop got the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary involved who may well have been the sisters behind the Catholic Dictionary. In due course it may be possible to identify who provided these names.

At Grand Cess the dialect is Siklɛɔ which is considered a peripheral dialect of Eastern Klao (Duitsman *et al.*, 1975). Some of the names have been transcribed phonetically in hand written notes in the original and these are shown below in parenthesis. Unfortunately all names are simply followed by "mushroom, variety of". Interestingly the term provided for the generic term mushroom (wān) is a constitutive part of only one entry.

boratusonwanje (bōwlātūsɔ̄nwānjē AND blātusɔ̄nwánjɛ̄)
boto (bɔ̄tē)
bwacuco (gbācūkó)
bwacuco knenknen (gbācūkó klnāklnā)
bwisielu (gbīsīēdlū)
fobwe (fɔ̄gbē AND fɔ̄gbè)
folifo (fɔ̄līfɔ̀)
susio (sùsūí)
takon
tuebli
woko wan

13 http://defunts.smainternational.info/en/necrologe/1074-le-pere-michael-cummins
14 http://liberian-americancatholicsassociation.blogspot.co.uk/p/unique-history.html

A curious omission from the above names is to be found among a collection of Kru proverbs compiled by the anthropologist Melville Herskovits in Chicago from his informant Siɛ Tȧgbwɛ from the Bobo Tòwao clan who grew up in Sikrɛkpɔ, the indigenous name for Grand Cess (Herskovits & Ta'gbwe, 1930: 276-77):

"sa ka sa kâ tǫ nê brȁ pɔ̌ mę miɛ̨
White-fungus teach rice grow-growing. Sakasakâ teaches the rice to grow.

> Sakasakâ is a small white fungus which the Kru use for soup, and which, it is thought, showed the Kru people in the early days where their rice would grow. Today, it is found in all the best rice-fields. The proverb would be used to a woman (and sometimes a man) who talked too freely and meddled in other people's affairs. The feeling is that if a woman is too talkative she teaches the other women to become gossips."

Nifa Klao (Po River)

In late 2016 I was able to collect some ethnomycology data at Middle Town, Grand Kru County, among the Nifa, or Po River Kru. This is the mostly easterly speaking Klao area and forms a small island surrounded by Grebo speakers—see Map 2 and #51 in Map 3. My main informant was Lawrence S. Doe was but we also got some names from a woman called Snofee Doryen. The names have not been transcribed but note that the first two are similar to entries in the Poellot dictionary. Note also the contradiction with the above proverb, which suggests it may be a specific lineage taboo.

Name	**Notes**
folifo	Grows mostly on dead thorny sticks : flat, white, sticks out, small. Possibly *Schizophyllum commune.*
fooboh	White, on termite hill in rainy season, quick to spoil, gets slippery. Possibly *Termitomyces microcarpus.*
gbor-tor	Palm mushroom, white/yellow, found not only on rotten palm tree logs, but also on dead tree stumps. Can be dried. Lawrence linked this mushroom to cold places, where trees are burnt and looses heat the mushrooms come with the cold. Presumably *Volvariella volvacea.*
sakasa	"The Kru don't eat it" Plentiful where soil good on dumper.

Ritual Uses of *Lentinus tuber-regium*

Lawrence provided the following information:

- Called ***blo*** but it is not considered ***won*** (the generic name for mushrooms).
- It features in burial ceremonies, the details of which are not entirely clear. Relatives

of the bereaved are shaved and given money by mourners as a token of condolence. In return they (?) get ***blo*** placed on their hand which they apply to their forehead. The idea is to give them luck.
- Used by the country doctor around the bowl from which he evokes spirits.
- When a war dance is performed after the death of an important person ***blo*** is rubbed around the performers eyes to see other things you can't see with the naked eye. As Lawrence said ***blo*** is a "spiritual microscope".

Jede Klao

As mentioned above under Northern Grebo, Nikree had some Klao-speaking residents—see Map 2 which shows it on a linguistic border. The Jede *dako* in this area use the Central Klao dialect according to Duitsman *et al.* (1975). Only one Klao name (not transcribed) for an edible mushroom was however obtained here, but it was at least for a specimen later identified by André de Kesel. Note that the similarity of the name to one of the Grebo ones (fefe):

koufefe*: Cookeina speciosa* (Fr.) Dennis

Part 2: The Mande Languages

The eight indigenous languages of Liberia in the Mande family are categorised by Glottolog into three sub-groups, which is born out by the internal similarities for their generic names for mushroom shown in Table 3—unfortunately no ethnomycological data have been located for Manya which is in the Central Mande group.

Table 3: Generic Names for Mushrooms in the Mande Languages

Southeastern Mande Group		
tóló	Maawe	Mr Zarwolo
belo	Dan	Schwab (1947)
Southwest Mande Group		
fena Variant: fona	Kpelle	Leidenfrost & McKay (2007)
fai	Loma (Wubomai Dialect)	Leopold (1996)
fàlé(ì) (h–)	Bandi	Parsell *et al.* (1966)
fale	Mendi	Innes (1969)
Central Mande Group		
fúndé	Vai	Welmers & Kandakai (1974)

Unlike the data for the Kruan languages, a common ethnomycological theme has not emerged within the Mande language data collected here. However, it is important to note that in comparison to the Kruan-speaking southeast of the country, three non-cultural factors differ in the Mande-speaking zone of central and north-western Liberia:

- lower rainfall
- different vegetation formations—see Map 1
- higher human population density

These factors may shape both fungal diversity and exploitation, but a much more comprehensive national data set would be needed to understand their relative significance.

Maawe (Mano)

The people who speak this language generally refer to themselves as Maa (Mah) or Maa mia (the Maa people) but are typically referred to by others as the Mano in Liberia, or in Guinea, Manon. They call their language Maawe, 'Maa language' and I use this term in preference to Mano. Khachaturyan (2018) provides a useful overview of the six Maawe dialects, three of which are found in Liberia: the Northern dialect, Maalaa (*máá lāā*), spoken around Sanniquellie; the Central dialect, Maazein (*máá zèŋ́*) spoken around Ganta and the Southern dialect, Maabei (*máá bèí*). She notes that Maalaa a well as the three Guinea Maawe dialects (Zaan (*zə̰ə̀ə̰̀*), Maa (*màá*) and Kpeinson (*kpéŋ́sɔ̰̀*)) have all experienced lexical influence from Kpelle—see later—and to a lesser extent, and generally via the Kpelle, Manding.

The ethnomycological data presented here come from three sources. Two are odd notes, first from Dr. George W. Harley, a medical missionary who resided at Ganta, Nimba county from 1925 to 1960 bar several furloughs and secondly from Kjell Zetterström, a Swedish anthropologist who studied the 'Yamein Mano' in the late 1960s. My exploratory fieldwork in the far north of Nimba county overlapped with Kjell's study area and importantly was in the zone of Kpelle lexical influence which may mean some of the names presented will be unknown to speakers of the southern dialect. It would certainly be interesting to explore these potential differences further.

George Harley made some important contributions to Liberian mycology through sending hundreds of specimens to David H. Linder, the curator of the Farlow Herbarium at Harvard University from 1932 to 1946.[15] Unfortunately Harley's field notes which accompanied his specimens have not yet been located[16] as these could potentially contain useful ethnomycological information. One reason for this suspicion can be found in the memoirs of his wife Winifred (Harley, 1973: 20), who notes:

> "The two young boys who helped in our house the first year were enthusiastic in showing us anything they thought might interest us. They brought us mushrooms that were safe to eat."

Furthermore, George Harley also noted in a letter to David Linder on the 15th July, 1939:

> "There is one large mushroom which I have not yet collected, but I have previously seen one measuring 10 or 11 inches in diameter (edible)."

Though Winifred admits that neither her or her husband were as proficient as they wished in speaking Maawe (Harley, 1973: 30), it is possible that he would have noted the local

15 Linder was a member of the Harvard African Expedition in 1926 which visited Liberia and this may have been the stimulus for Harley's fungal collection efforts.

16 Thanks to assistance from staff at the herbarium who have shared scans of their correspondence, it is clear in his letter to Linder dated 15th July, 1939, that Harley had sent a large envelope of field notes which Linder acknowledges receipt of in his return letter of the 27th October of the same year.

names of his specimens as he did this for medicinal plants in his publication *Native African Medicine: with special reference to its practice in the Mano Tribe of Liberia* (Harley, 1941).

Harley also played an important role in writing up the findings of the Peabody Museum expedition, led by George Schwab to Liberia 1926 as indicated in the subtitle (Schwab, 1947). To what extent the various fungus use references in the Mano areas are part of the additional material he supplied is not always clear but these are listed here:

In relation to pottery in an unnamed Mano town, page 132:

> "The top was then smoothed off with a piece of shell-fungus of the thin, leathery type, that had been soaked in water until it was very flexible."

On a list of types of ingredients in medicine, page 359:

> "mushrooms (*Nepatica*), called *gɛ toro* in Mano, because they grow only on the decaying stumps and logs of the sacred bombax tree; puffballs (*Morchello*) and another mushroom said to be the "dung of the moon", are all used for medicine."

This list requires some decoding. I have been unable to find any reference to a Nepatica mushroom but given a later reference by Harley (see below), I suspect it refers to the beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*) which I don't think has been recorded in West Africa. The Maawe name for the bombax tree, *gɛ* (Harley, 1941: 268), nowadays called *Ceiba pentandra*, is obviously referenced in the name, with *toro* presumably a variant of the generic name for mushroom shown in Table 3. This should aid identification.

More details of the final mushroom listed above is provided in the glossary on page 496:

> **mɛnɛ gbo**: puffball mushroom ("moon droppings")

The last known morsel of ethnomycology information from George Harley can be found in his aforementioned work on local medicinal practises (Harley, 1941) which contains one fungal reference:

> P. 77 "For acute hepatitis, a piece of the large shelf fungus shaped like a liver is charred, powdered, mixed with palm oil, and rubbed over the liver."

Kjell Zetterström's contribution is twofold. Firstly this statement which would be interesting to investigate further (1976: 59):

> "Wild mushrooms constitute an important part of the diet. Mushrooms are usually eaten together with fish. In fact, the connection between fish and mushrooms is so close that they very often give mushrooms as an answer when asked about the catch when they have been fishing."

Secondly on page 78 he gives the mushroom *bono* as one of the taboos of the Kinoh 'quarter' (*gbing* in Maawe) in the town of Gbapa.

My familiarity with northern Nimba dates back to November 2007 which is when I came across my first example of fungal use in the country, the collection of *Aurucalaria* species that were described as a meat substitute—the photograph on the front page dates from this encounter. Despite conducting several studies in the area in the intervening years, and occasionally noting snippets of fungal use, it wasn't until 2017 that I decided to try and elicit some Maawe mushroom names at opportune moments. These occurred at the end of interviews with 'quarter' (lineage) chiefs that I was conducting for an unrelated study, with one to three male informants in the towns of Gbeleyee, Bonlah and Seyhi Geh.

My enquiry method was to simply get informants to list all the edible mushrooms they knew and then, if time allowed to ask what each looked like, the substrate they grew on, the time of year they were found and if the name meant anything. I aimed for this to take no more than a 5-10 minutes as I had already taken up their time with the interview. Sometimes I was also able to ask about non-edible uses of mushrooms if the informant(s) were at ease. Three such discussions were held in each town. On five occasions I showed images from the Benin guide (de Kesel *et al.* 2002) afterwards to see if it induced any tentative identifications plus twice with some images from this book plus others on my phone. This it must be stressed is not considered a reliable identification method. At Seyhi Geh I had the advantage of an old friend from the town translating at the interviews and these listing discussions afterwards, plus I also knew a couple of the informants from previous research. This might explain the slightly higher number of names elicited there.

These data have to be considered as preliminary only and undoubtedly the absence of women from these discussions will have limited the number of names and knowledge elicited. The combined data are presented below in separate tables for three basic substrate categories along with any other relevant additional information collected. The Maawe names are generally shown in two forms, standard English and phonetically using the IPA. Mr. Leelamen Zarwolo of the Mann Literacy and Translation Association transcribed the names for me on the basis of some recordings I had made and also aided in unravelling some of their meanings. Mr. Zarwolo who speaks the Central Liberian dialect, referred to mushrooms as ***tolo***, which is the form I have followed but informants actually said something more akin to ***troh***.

Photo 3: Piles of *sey-sey* (*Schizophyllum commune*) for sale at Lugbeyee market, Nimba County, 8/08/15

Edible Fungi Found on Soil without Visible Termite Mounds

Name	Description	Gbe	Bon	Sey
gbano *gbɑ̀̃no*	Described as the biggest mushroom with a cap ⌀ c. 10-15 cm, which is a little brown sometimes white on a white stem. The 'root' said to break when plucked. Find singularly or just two or three together in forest/high bush, August-September. Said to taste like fish by one informant, which is interesting given Zetterström's aforementioned observation. Five sets of informants identified it as *Termitomyces robustus* in the Benin guide but a sixth as *Russula cellulata* which can be confounded with *R. libariensis.* This mushroom is presumably the same as the ***bono*** that Zetterström mentions as the taboo of the Kinoh *gbing* in Gbapa.	X	X	X
bele-si tolo *bílí-sí tóló*	"The dead animal body mushroom". Listed by only one informant. The name refers to the fortune of finding a dead animal body, which is like finding this mushroom. Found in high forest, but couldn't recall the season. Smaller than ***suan-suan***.			X
leh tolo *lɛ́ɛ́ tóló* Probably *Termitomyces letestui*	"leaf mushroom". Three reasons given for name: sprouts like a leaf, like a leaf always found in groups and when leaves fall, they are plentiful on the ground, just like this mushroom. Two informants noted it is always found in groups, 20+ or 50-100. Found where high forest has been cut to make a farm. A range of months for it noted in both rains and into dry season (April, July and October onwards). White, though one informant said brown and confirmed my question if it had a nipple, cap ⌀ 8-10m or same size as ***bilo***. A long 'foot' or 'root' frequently mentioned and can even tie bunches with it—this feature distinguishes it from **bano**, which it resembles in colour and almost in size. Sell it in market and can dry it. On all seven occasion images from the Benin guide examined by informants, this mushroom was identified as *Termitomyces letestui.* Interestingly, Heim (1977: 187) gives a Guerzé (Guinea Kpelle) name meaning 'leaf mushroom' for *Termitomyces fuliginosus* (see later). It should be noted that this species is illustrated on the same page as *T. letestui* in the Benin guide, but was not selected by informants. That this species was not said to associated with termites is not an issue with a *T.letestui* identification: in Benin it is always found without any visible presence of termites (de Kesel etal. 2002: 222).	X	X	X
nian sele tolo *nyìɛ́-sɛ́lɛ́ tóló*	"sandy soil mushroom". Sweet. White cap and stalk, cap ⌀ 2-3 cm. Found in April only in clear areas where there is sand. Like **leh-tolo**, but with a short 'foot' (stipe).		X	X
sei kpu tolo *seì kpu tóló*	'sei tree stump mushroom'. Sei is likely to be the shrub *Microdesmis keayana*: Harley (1941: 269) lists *sei* as *M. puberula* but the species found in Liberia is *M. keayana* for which Marshall & Hawthorne (2013) give the Maawe name in northern Nimba as *seiyee-leh* so this may be a diminutive name. One informant agreed with this identification when shown the image of it in Marshall & Hawthorne. The reason for the name is said not to do with an association, but rather a similarity in growth form, but quite how is unclear. A resemblance to multiple stem bunches just like this mushroom was mentioned. The mushroom has a cap, ⌀ 2-3 cm, one informant said white, but another that only underpart white, top darker, brownish. Another noted it has a pointed cap. Grows in groups and has a long 'foot' (root). Found in both high forest and young bush.		X	X

Name	Description	Gbe	Bon	Sey
troh-kenay *[not transcribed]*	"tiny mushroom". Though I was told the name meant 'small-small' mushroom when first elicited, this meaning was only clarified later by a friend: the word for tiny is ***nɛ̀ɛ*** but it is prefixed with ***ke*** for the sound effect. Cited only twice but without details though first elicited from showing my Sapo photos of *Termitomyces microcarpa.* One informant said it was synonym of ***tuno tolo***, "the termite hill mushroom". I was told that this mushroom was the taboo of the 'stranger' household in *Yi de blay* quarter in Gbeleyee, but unfortunately I didn't get to find out any more about them and the story behind it.	X	X	
vonnor tolo *vɔ̀nɔ tóló*	"soft ground mushroom". The colour of this mushroom was said to be brownish, with one informant describing it as the colour when yeast is added to flour or when a tree trunk has rotted. Grow close together in groups, or alternatively described as coming from a 'thick root, altogether'. 4-5cm high, cap ⌀ 2-3 cm. One informant said got special area for it but revealed no more. Could this be *Pleurotus tuber-regium*?			X
wahn tolo *wɑ̃́ɑ̃́ tóló* *Probably Volvariella volvacea*	"The palm kernel mushroom". So called because found where the kernels are dumped and burnt at the palm oil 'factories' as shown below. One informant expressed his appreciation of its taste by saying it was 'very sweet, more than chicken soup.'  Said to be found any time people work at the palm factory, which tends to be in the dry season. It was noted that it was induced by watering the kernel mound—from rain and vessels of hot and warm water all mentioned. Most intriguingly, as it implies incipient domestication, one informant at Bonlah said people transplant it to different production sites. Identified as *Volvariella volvacea* in the Benin guide by 3 informants. Another however gave a description which may cast doubts on this: a red water comes out of it when squeezed.	X	X	X

Edible Fungi Found on Termite Mounds

Name	Description	Gbe	Bon	Sey
bilo *[not transcribed]*	Has a white cap ⌀ 8-10 cm and long 'root'. Said to be found only on certain termite hills, with the months of March & June both cited. One informant said this mushroom was also called ***nian sele tolo***—see above in the ground mushroom table—but perhaps unlikely.	X	X	
be tolo *bì tóló*	A very sweet mushroom. Comes up like a 'knuckle' and doesn't open for a long time. Described contradictorily—but this could relate to senescence—as both having a 'slippery' skin which is removed before consumption, and being hard on top, but soft inside. Dark outside, white inside. Some caps can be wide, but others small. Grows on or around, sometimes plentifully, special termite hills called ***guahn tunu*** (gũ̌ã̌ tũ̀nu), which are only 2 foot high. When the termites leave it, this mushroom grows—another informant described it as being found on 'dead' termite mounds. When the termite are inside, the rainbow always 'hits' these hills—Schwab (147:411) notes the Mano and Gio (Dan) believe about these rainbow-producing hills, but without this detail. One informant added that they use a 'country' axe to harvest the mound to make it come up. This is intriguing and it would be interesting to compare with the harvesting of the mushroom called **bòmo** in Liberian Kpelle, for which there is possibly a related saying—see later. No meaning know for name. Potentially *Termitomyces schimperi* on the basis of the skin peeling, termite hill specificity and also identified by one informant from images in the Benin guide.	X	X	X
kon *[not transcribed]*	Like a large ***bilo***. A special mushroom, grows in a small number (4-5) in savanna areas or on termite mounds in farms. Found in March.	X		
suan-suan *sũ̌ã̌-sũ̌ã̌*	Small, cap ⌀ c. 2cm, found on old termite mounds in thousands, with one informant noting it came in patches with arm length gaps in between. Comes between dry and rainy season. Quick to loosen, open and spoil. Said to make water brown when it is put on it. One person said name means 'little-little' but another said that though he doesn't know meaning, when I asked about the possible homonym with the name for bats, he said maybe his parents saw a resemblance to the way bats hang upside down in groups. *Termitomyces microcarpa* would seem a good candidate and indeed one person identified them as this in Benin guide.	X		X
tuno tolo *tũ̀nu tóló*	"termite hill mushroom". Find many together on old termite mounds in no particular season. Said at one discussion to be the same as ***troh-kenay***, see above. Also identified as *T. microcarpus* in Benin field-guide.		X	X

Edible Fungi Found on Trees

Name	Description	Gbe	Bon	Sey
baynay tolo *ɓéne tóló*	"The *baynay* (tree) mushroom". Name elicited from a sole informant after he had seen the image of *Pleurotus cystidiosus* in the Benin guide. I have been unable to identify the ***baynay*** tree which it grows on, but it was said to be found in the high forest and 'look white but not white'. The mushroom was said to be reddish in colour.			X
sey-sey *sèéè-sèè* *Schizophyllum commune*	This is a popular, well-known fungus that I first encountered for sale fresh in August 2015—see Photo 3 above. Mention of the name often brought out the spontaneous remark that this was their cube or Maggi—the make of a very popular bouillon cube that is ubiquitous in West African cooking. When I later enquired with my male friend how it is cooked he said it is simply boiled and added to the soup greens, but added that apparently some women say if you make a certain noise when cooking it, it makes it sweet. This intrigued me and we went on to discuss how people say things before tapping piassava wine for the first time, or when cutting certain trees. This anecdote suggests that paying attention to the details of cooking mushrooms beyond the associated ingredients may be enlightening. A few informants linked this fungus to certain trees (names mainly derived from a local plant lexicon in Marshall & Hawthorn, 2013), but whether this reflects specific hosts or common farms trees is unknown: • *siklay* (*sékelé*): *Funtumia africana* and *F. elastica*. • *gayée*: Possibly *Milicia excelsa* & *M.regia* • *framira: Terminalia ivorensis* • *geh (Cotton tree): Ceiba pentandra* • *corkwood: Musanga cecropioides*	X	X	X
tohn tolo *tóũ tóló*	"The oil palm mushroom". White on top, brown underneath, and its water can be brown. When fallen oil palms get rotten, it grows on them. Identified as *Pleurotus cystidiosus* from images in the Benin guide by one informant.	X	X	X
yeleh gbeleh *yɛ̀lɛ́ɛ̃̀-gbɛ̀lɛ̀* *Aurucalaria sp.*	The name is a contracted form of ***yehleh gbeh wa bay*** (yɛ̀lɛ́ gbɛɛ wá ɓe) which word for word translates as "means no not available" or more logically "there are no means available" which evokes the idea it is not eaten by choice. It would be interesting to know how factors such as ease of preparation and taste of this fungus relates to others. Seen for sale fresh at Sanniquellie market on my intermittent visits over the years.	X	X	X

Therapeutic Uses of Fungi

mɛnɛ gbo: "moon droppings" I asked five informants about this mushroom because of its mention in Schwab. All agreed it wasn't eaten but used as a medicine, but only two knew, or were prepared to explain how. The first said it is boiled then the water cooled and used as an enema for stomach problems in both men and women. The second said because of its connection with the moon, it is used to treat epilepsy in children and adults by mixing it with 'chalk' (clay) and other things. Only one informant gave a description: grows in high forest like a 'knock' (knuckle?), five or six together, round with a ⌀ about 15cm. Hard to split with hand. White inside. This description accords with a *Calvatia* spp. such as *cyathiformis* or *pyriformis.*

bea nyehn wehleh (*bí nyɛwɛlɛ́*) "elephant eye": A brown bracket fungus which can get big and resemble it's namesake. It is not eaten, but one informant said it was used a medicine for stomach and liver problems for both sexes, which recalls the use of an un-named shelf bracket by Harley (1941:77) mentioned above.

Names for Other Non-Edible Fungi

These were all mentioned by single informants.

gbo troh: "faeces mushroom" which grows where you defecate.

duno kolo: "fishing net old". Don't eat it. Name given after I showed a photo I had taken in south east Liberia of a veiled lady mushroom (possibly *Phallus indusiatus*) as a follow up to someone else listing the next name.

kon: Can't eat it, has a 'basket' over it. Informant didn't know what it is used for. Note the similarity in this name to one untranscribed termite associated mushroom name above. Looking at the Guinea Maawe-French dictionary by Bonimy & Yamakoshi (2012), the name could mean basket or perhaps poverty.

Dan

Dan, which is also called Gio or Yacouba, has more speakers in Côte d'Ivoire than Liberia, where a language level distinction is made between Western and Eastern forms. The Dan spoken in Liberia is of the Western form and according to Ethnologue, has three dialects: Lower Gio, River Cess Gio and Upper Gio. The available ethnomycology data gathered so far are very limited.

The glossary in Schwab (1947) lists one specific name, but the identification needs to be questioned given the analogous Maawe name—there are strong historical connections between the Maa (Mano) and Dan (Zetterström, 1976: 16):

belo gbo: puffball mushroom (*Lentinus tuber regium*) ("mushroom droppings")

Possibly relevant to the Dan spoken in Liberia are three names in a Western Dan-French dictionary (Erman & Loh, 2015) which is based on the Blo (Blowo) dialect spoken in Blossé Canton—shown as the hatched area in Map 2. These are shown with my translations of their entries, the last of which presumably refers to an *Aurucalaria* species:

bhlo: mushroom species, very white, edible
dou': mushroom
'todhe: mushroom, but also the auricle, the visible part of the ear outside the head.

Two passing general references by Christina Salonek who carried out research in Nyor-Butuo provide some interesting context worthy of follow-up:

> "In gathering, the collection of snails from April to August (and again in November) as well as of palmnuts is most important. Palmnuts can be found throughout the year, but the main gathering time is from December to March. Other important items are palmwine, palmhearts and mushrooms. Mushrooms appear more or less simultaneously with the snails." (Salonek, 1986a: 92)
>
> "Am ehesten werden heute noch Pilze gesammelt und teilweis vermarktet. Von den gesammelten Arten wird eine ausschlie lich als Gewürz gebraucht. Man findet sie etwa ab August auf den Reisfeldern am alten Holz. Die anderen Arten werden als Gemüse genossen. Man findet sie von April bis August später werden die Regenfälle für das Wachstum der Pilze zo stark." (Salonek, 1986b: 92)
>
> Google translation: "Today mushrooms are most likely to be collected and partly marketed. One of the collected species is used only as a spice. This can be found in the rice fields on old wood from around August. The other types are enjoyed as vegetables. They are found from April to August as later the rains are too strong for the mushrooms to grow."

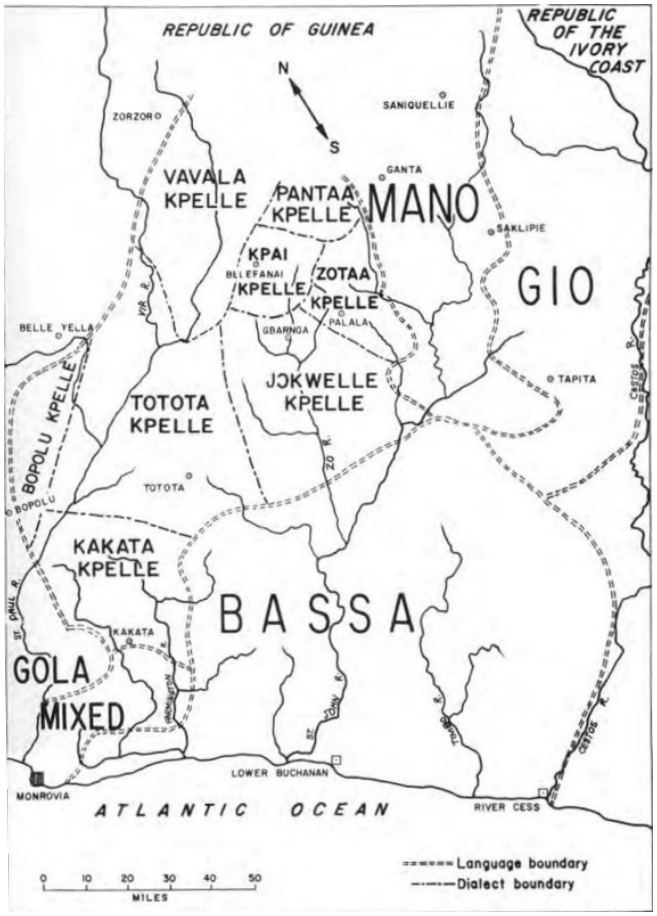
A good candidate for the spice mushroom mentioned above is presumably *Schizophyllum commune* on the basis of the description and the Maawe data above.

Kpelle

Kpelle is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Liberia. Though Ethnologue notes that it is a different language from Guinea Kpelle, typically called Guerzé, this is not inimical to lexical correspondence in the realm of fungal names. Whereas Ethnologue acknowledge only three slightly different Liberian Kpelle dialects, (Boopolu, Fuama and Nyawokole), Gay *et al.* (1969) recognised seven (Bopolu, Vavala, Kpai, Pantaa, Zotaa, Jɔkwele and Totota). The location of where these seven dialects are spoken is in Map 4 below, which comes with the caution that the boundaries are very rough in part because of "gradual shadings in boundary areas rather than abrupt shifts" (ibid. 43). They also note that apart from vowel change differences: "The second characteristic is acquisition of some vocabulary from the surrounding language groups. Bopolu Kpelle is influenced by Mandingo, De and Gola; Vavala Kpelle by Loma; Kpai, Pantaa and Zotaa Kpelle by Mano; and Jɔkwele Kpelle by Bassa and Mano. Totota Kpelle is the most central and the least influenced by other languages. It would appear, therefore, that a wise choice was made when Totota Kpelle was selected as the standard for the written language."

Map 4: Location of the Kpelle Dialects

Source: Gay *et al.* (1969:42)



The available Kpelle ethnomycology data are unfortunately only drawn from the literature. A goo starting point is Theodore Leidenfrost & Tom McKay's 2007 opus, *Kpelee-woo-Kwii-woo Su-kula Kolo / Kpelle-English Dictionary* which was compiled at the Lutheran Church's centre at Totota, though there is no indication that the vocabulary was gathered only from that dialect area. Whilst its contribution is small, it contains some useful cultural insights into fungal use which require follow-up, for example the saying about beating termite hills to make them grow and transplanting **kpurî**, presumably *Volvariella volvacea* to line palm oil pits, both of which seem analogous to earlier noted Maa (Mano) practises.

Entry	**Meaning/Notes**
fena n. Var. fona	Mushroom (Generic) with the distinction between *mii fena* = edible mushroom, and, *paa fena* = poisonous mushroom.
bòmo	**Bòmo sĩi lókwaa ɓa gùla**. 'Beating a termite hill on which this mushroom grows, makes it grow plenty'. To challenge a warrior, makes him arrogant
ɓoi fena OR dukpu	n. bushhog mushroom, edible, found near gozala trees, its color is like that of a bushhog. [Voorhoeve (1965) gives the Kpelle name *gosalah* for *Gilbertiodendron preussii*, which he calls one of the commonest trees in Liberia with a characteristic yellowish flakey bark that often makes it look shaggy.]
gbù	n. mushroom species
kpɔɔ	n. mushroom species, large variety of edible mushroom. July (**Gbaayaai**) is named after this mushroom because the rain of this month makes the ground 'wet' for it to come out. **Kpɔɔ kula ŋɔyâ fa nyii à puru**. A traveller who finds this mushroom on his way, will not sleep hungry.
kpɔɛ	1) tree species. 2) mushroom species, large, edible mushroom
kpɔwɔ	n. mushroom species. Ref n92:4 **kpɔwɔ pôlu ɓalaŋ ɓé zĩi fenai a mbaâi lai?** After failing the wild mushroom to kill me, it is the termite mushroom that is killing me? Hunger makes you to eat the thing that you do not eat.
kpurî	n. mushroom species. **kpurî kɔlɔŋ** n. fungus species, mushroom grows from there; it is used to line the palmoil pit with it before the pit is lined up with flat stones

Another insight into Kpelle ethno-mycology—and surely more widely relevant—is a short paragraph from John Gay's 1973 ethnographic novel, *Red Dust on the Green Leaves: A Kpelle Twins' Childhood*. Ignoring his mention of a red dangerous mushroom, which may or may not have a factual basis, it offers a glimpse into how individuals acquire their knowledge about mushrooms:

> "She and her grandmother often had gone into the forest to collect leaves, and she had been forced to repeat over and over again the names and qualities of every leaf that man can use. And on these trips, when the leaf collecting was over, they would stop and collect mushrooms. Noai knew the small delicious kind, which make the soup so tasty, and knew also the red, dangerous mushroom, from which deadly poisons could be

> derived. She knew also, although she was told never to reveal the secrets, which leaves and barks could be mixed to kill quickly, to kill slowly, or merely to weaken an enemy." (Gay, 1973:.45)

By taking the liberty to look over the border for any relevant Guerzé data, the advantages are clear when considering some grains from a work of the famous French mycologist, Roger Heim. In his well-known publication on the Termitomyces (1978) he has a somewhat rambling chapter called "Les Termitomyces vus par les Autochotones" in which in passing he offers the four Guerzé names below. Where he acquired these is not known but more information may lurk in his long list of publications and would be worth checking, especially given the potential different species to what the Maa (Mano) also call the leaf mushroom—see earlier.

Species	Guerzé	Original plus my translation & notes
Termitomyces testui	**borro**	Terme qui est aussi celui d'une enorme Achatine qui s'en nourrirait et qui lui communique son nom indigène. "A term which is also that of a huge Achatina (snail) which feeds on it and communicates its native name" As Leidenfrost & McKay (2007) noted that ***ɓóro*** = "snail's mucus gland" the reason for this name should be revisited.
Termitomyces fuliginosus	**la filé**	Champignon-feuille. "Leaf mushroom" Though **la** = "feuille" (leaf) in Leger's (1975) Guerzé dictionary (**láa** in Leidenfrost & McKay, 2007), the leaf mushroom is given as **la-hvèla** implying a possible error in the second part of this name—see below
Termitomyces mammiformis	**gna gbé**	Champignon de la poussière. "Mushroom of the dust" Neither Leger (1975) or Leidenfrost & McKay (2007) have any entries resembling these words which mean dust, so this would be worth checking. It is possible that this name refers to the same species as that list as *gbù* above.
Termitomyces microcarpus	**holapelé**	No further details provided.

Turning to Guerzé dictionaries for mushroom names, the publication by the White Father Jules Casthelain (1952) is relatively rich. However this work was later reviewed, corrected and augmented by Father Jean Leger (1975) in a much less available publication. As I have been fortunate enough to be provided with a copy of Leger's work, I present this below with my translations of the entries plus some notes.

Entry & Synonyms	Original plus my translation & notes
hvèla Syn. **hvola**	Champignon (terme générique) Mushroom (generic term). Whereas edible mushrooms are described with the same prefix as in Kpelle (**mi-hvèla**), inedible ones appear to be called **hvèla-nyon**, with **nyon** = sickness, or bad/nasty.
bholoo	autre espéce. "other species": no further details provided
do-goa	Espèce de champignon, avec colerette [sic] au pied; comestible. "mushroom species with a collar on the foot: edible"
dulu-dulu Syn. **hî-dulu-dulu**	Grand champignon blanc, comestible. "Big white mushroom, edible" The reduplicated name is also an ideophone that expresses the idea of thick, viscous liquids, but this may be irrelevant to the mushroom name.
gôô	Gros champignon; comestible (un des meilleurs champignons). "large mushroom; edible (one of the best mushrooms)"
héghé-héghé Syn. **yeghe-yeghe**	Champignon, comestible (excellent); pousse surtout sur le bois tombé, après que-l'on a brûlé les champs. "Mushroom, edible (excellent): grows especially on fallen wood after burning the fields" Could this be *Schizophyllum commune* which often seems to get reduplicated in local names? Other examples are found in Maawe, Grebo (Northern) and possibly Vai.
hî-dulu-dulu	Grand champignon blanc, qui pousse sur les termitières (d'où son nom): comestible. "Big white mushroom, which grows on termite mounds (hence the name), edible". The entry for **hî** gives a definition as large termite mounds which can be several metres high.
hvungô-hvungô	Espèce de petit champignon, comestible. "Small mushroom species, edible. It is interesting to note that **hvungô** = Poussière, poudre, farine "dust, powder, flour". Could this be *Termitomyces microcarpa*?
köghö-bha-kala-kala	Grand champignon qui pousse au pied des arbres, non comestible. On l'utilise parfois pour provoquer l'avortement. - Deux espèces: un blanc et un rouge. "Big inedible mushroom that grows at the foot of trees. Used sometimes to induce an abortion. Two species, a white one and a red one."
kpili-kölön-vèla	Espèce de champignon qui pousse sur les couches de feuilles mortes; comestible. "Mushroom species which grows on layers of dead leaves, edible"
kpogho	Espèce de champignon de grande taille, comestible, très apprécié. "Large species of mushroom, edible, very appreciated"
kpölö-hvèla	Nom d'une espèce de champignon, comestible. "Name of an edible mushroom species." Also described as: champignon comestible des fourrés, which reflects one of the meanings of **kpölö** implying it could be called the "thicket mushroom" and it would interesting to delve further into this etymology. Could it possibly refer to the same mushroom as the Maawe ***sei kpu tolo***, the Sei tree stump mushroom?
la-hvèla	Champignon comestible à long pied. "Edible mushroom with a long foot"

Entry & Synonyms	Original plus my translation & notes
	la = feuille "leaf" so the "leaf mushroom". Though this is similar to the name given for *Termitomyces fuliginosus* by Heim (1978: 187), *T. letestui* is another candidate given the earlier Maawe data.
löö-gèlè Syn. **gbomo**	Espèce de champignon: il est comestible, mais il faut le faire cuire d'une façon particulière, autrement il fait vomir. "Species of mushroom: it is edible, but must be cooked in a special way otherwise it will cause vomiting." It would be interesting to know more about the etymology of this name as **löö** is the word for palm wine.
nyanin-gbo **nyanin-gbo hvèla**	Espèce de gros champignon, non comestible "Species of large inedible mushroom". Interestingly **nyanin** = moon and the name appears similar to the Maawe ***mɛnɛ gbo*** for a puffball.
tölu-hvèla Syn. **tölu-kala-hvèla**	Espèce de champignon qui pousse sur les tas de palmistes pourris, comestible. "Edible mushroom species that grows on piles of rotten palm kernels". Though the entry states that **tow-hvèla** below is a synonym, noting in parenthesis (il pousse également sur les troncs qui pourrissent pas terre) "grows equally on rotten, fallen oil palm trunks", in a separate list of mushrooms at the end of the work, it makes the distinction between the two, very much like the Maawe distinction earlier. **tölu** = palm kernel. Potentially *Volvariella volvacea*.
tow-hvèla Syn. **tow-kogho-hvèla**	Champignon de palmier à huile "oil palm mushroom" **tow** = the oil palm tree
wungbé-hvèla	Espèce de champignon qui pousse sur les souches d' arbre pourries, comestible. "Edible mushroom species that grows on rotten tree stumps" That **wungbé** = genou "knee" could be an element in the name.
wuyè-hvèla	Espèce de champignon qui pousse sous les fromagers; comestible (très doux). "Edible mushroom species that grows on cotton trees (very sweet)". **wuyè** = the Cotton tree, *Ceiba pentandra*.
yèlè-kpèlè	Espèce de champignon qui pousse sur les bois morts et pourris; comestible: il croque sous les dents. "A species of mushroom that grows on dead and rotten wood; it crunches under the teeth". Presumably this is an *Aurucalaria spp.*. It would be interesting to learn the etymology of this name, especially given its similarity to the Maawe name for these species, ***yeleh gbeleh.***

Loma

Ethnologue lists five dialects for Loma (sometimes written Lorma) noting that the northern and southern dialects are different enough to make mutual intelligibility difficult: Briama (Bulima, Buluiema, Buluyiema, Bulyama), Gbunde (Bonde, Bunde), Gizima, Wubomai (Wubomei) and Ziema (Siama). It also states that Loma is distinct from Toma spoken over the border in Guinea but to what extent there is lexical correspondence is not made clear.

The available data are very limited. Robert Leopold (1996) has compiled an unpublished Loma–English Lexicon for the Wubomai Dialect, which he kindly shared with me, which has the following entries. It would be interesting to know more about the Faiwogi and their 'emblem' as Leopold calls it in his thesis (1991: 338): from the albeit limited data assembled in this work, this is the only potential case of a generic mushroom food restriction (taboo).

fáiwóógii: Mushroom Clan (**fai** = mushroom)

póvái: type of mushroom

The aforementioned worked by Roger Heim gives four Toma names (1978: 187 & 189), one of which presumably identifies the **póvái** mushroom above, which may suggest the others could also be valid in Liberia:

douri-faigui (*Termitomyces microcarpus*): no information

jiavefaigui (*Termitomyces striatus*): no information

nia faigui (*Termitomyces mammiformis):* Champignon glissant "Slippery mushroom"

po faï (gui) (*Termitomyces fuliginosus):* Champignon-héritage "Heritage mushroom"

Photo 4: Unnamed *Termitomyces* spp on a Loma farm, Konia, Zorzor District, Lofa County, 02/04/17
Source: Kindly provided by Carl Wahl

Bandi

Ethnologue lists six dialects for the Bandi langauge which is also written Bande, Gbande, Gbandi and Gbunde: Hasala, Hembeh, Lukasa, Tahamba, Wawana, Wulukoha. They add that there is a 96% lexical similarity for these six dialects and 83% with the most similar Mende dialect, which is presumably Kɔ Mende.

The only source of ethnomycological data available are a few specific names in the unpublished dictionary by Reverend Parsell *et al.* (1966). This is presumably based on the Tahamba dialect, given that Ethnologue states this one is used for literature. It is interesting to note that all these names have analogous Mende names—see over.

Entry	**Definition & Notes**
kpòkpóhówò fàlè(í)	"A mushroom that grows on ant hills"
sɛ̀jìá fàlèí OR jɛ̀jìá fàlèí	"A mushroom found in scattered clumps"
tɔ̀kpɔ́halèí	The English section gives "tɔkɔphalei" among the mushroom listed without accents but the name it is not mentioned in the Bandi section. However, since tɔ̀kpɔ́ = oil palm, I have adapted the spelling as it is presumably "Oil Palm mushroom"

Mende

As can be seen in Map 2, Mende is only spoken in two areas bordering Sierra Leone, Sokpo clan in Porkpa district, Grand Cape Mount County and Vahun District, Lofa County. However, it is spoken much more widely in Sierra Leone, where it is something of a *lingua franca* in the east of the country. According to Gordon Innes (1963:3):

> "The language shows a high degree of homogeneity with no extreme dialectal variations. Two main dialects may, however, be distinguished - Kpa Mende, spoken in the western part of the region, and Kɔ Mende or Upper Mende, spoken in the eastern part. Lexically the two dialects differ little;"

The prime source of ethnomycological data is Gordon Innes' dictionary (1969) which is based on the eastern (up-country) dialect, supplemented by other notes from the literature. I have organised the entries in Innes below to distinguish between the ones he notes as either inedible or edible.

Entry	Definition & Notes
fale	"General name for mushrooms, toadstools and bracket fungi". It may be of no relevance at all, but it is interesting to note that **fale gbua** = to have sexual intercourse for the first time.
ndɔgbɔ vale	"A large inedible mushroom"
pelɔ	"An inedible, foul-smelling mushroom"
poma vale	"An inedible mushroom with a foul smell." It is probably relevant that **poma** = corpse
njivika	"A fungus that grows on dead trees (esp. kola trees)"
njoso yeya	"Dark sterile pliable root-like fungus strands resembling boot-laces." Of possible relevance, the word **njoso** = conjuring, slight of hand; spirit; bush spirit; a brand of imported wine.
galo	"Large edible mushroom which appears commonly in the forests in October" **galoi** = the name of the month for October
gbakujɛlɛ	"Flat, white edible mushroom"
hiwi loto	"An edible mushroom" As **hiwi** = a large termite hill, this is presumably a *Termitomyces* fungus.
holi	"An edible brownish-white mushroom"
jɛjia vale, jesia vale	"A small edible mushroom, cf. **Njawa"**. Of possible relevance to the meaning, **jɛjia, jesia** = walk about.
kpokpohuwo	"A large edible mushroom, esp. a species which grows on termite heaps" Again, presumably a *Termitomyces* fungus.
kpɔwɔ	"A large edible mushroom which appears in September and October"
mba galɛ vale	"A small white edible mushroom" Possibly relevant to the name, **mba**

Entry	Definition & Notes
	= rice, and **mba galɛ** = cleaned rice. This is surely the **mba galevali** that Heim (1977: 187) notes as the Mende name for *Termitomyces microcarpus.*
ndii vale	"A small white edible mushroom." Possibly relevant to the name, **ndii** = fly; the fore sight of a gun. As Heim (1977: 187) notes the Gba, Up Mende name for *Termitomyces microcarpus* this is presumably a synonym of the above.
ngolo	"A greyish semi-pellucid edible mushroom"
ngola vale	"A species of mushroom" Possibly relevant to the name, **ngola** = forest.
njawa	"An edible mushroom." Of possible relevance, **njawa =** a tree with reddish heartwood, which after the Mende lexicon in Savill & Fox (1967) may be *Guarea cedrata*.
pɔ vale	"An edible mushroom" Of possible relevance, **pɔ** = fell and **pɔ kpalla** = a farm on which the trees have been felled but not yet burnt
sogbasogba	"A small edible mushroom" Possibly relevant to the name, **Sogba** = snatch, grab, seize.

Strangely missing from Innes dictionary is **tokpo-fale** "a mushroom that grows on the roots of oil palm" which is cited by Migeod (1913). Innes write the oil palm as **tɔkpɔ.**

Heim (1977: 188) notes that the Mende name for *Termitomyces striatus* is **nicolei**, which in Gba (Kpa) Mende is **yombo-ngolei** or **ngolo-ngolei** or **ngo-ngolei**.

In relation to the Gola forest reserve which borders Liberia, Davies & Richards (1991:44) note as food sources, **komavale** (*Schizophyllum commune*) which they describe as uncommon in the early dry season along with *ndivale,* which they identify as *Termitomyces microcarpus*, which concurs with Heim (1977: 187). They also describe an unidentified edible agaric called **kpOwO**, which may be analogous to **kpɔwɔ** above as a wet-season fungus.

Finally Bockari (1955) adds some further details about the naming of months after mushrooms:

> "GOLAI (May). The appearance of a kind of edible mushroom called *Ngolei*, from which originated the word *Goloi* generally corresponds with the month of May. Since the mushrooms (*ngoloi*) appear in this month, it was agreed to call the month *Goloi*."

> "GALOI (October) is a word that goes to signify broadshaped. It is also the name given to the wide-capped edible mushroom (*galoi*) which commonly appear in October in the forests of Sierra Leone. This mushroom is regarded as a broader form of the mushroom (also edible) called *kpowei* which appears a month earlier than *galoi*."

Vai

Ethnologue states that Vai has no known dialects. In Sierra Leone the language has experienced a tremendous decline: the 2004 census revealed only 2,501 speakers, mainly aged over 60 (Kanu, n.d.). Its similarity with Mende has aided a shift to this more privileged language (*ibid.*). The current status of the language in Liberia is unknown: the 2008 census records 140,251 people who identified ethnically as Vai (LISGIS, 2009: A4-87), but this does not mean they all speak Vai.

I have been fortunate to acquire an unpublished draft Vai-English dictionary (Welmers & Kandakai, 1974) which in addition to the generic term cited in Table 3, gives four names for edible mushrooms, which on the basis of some rapid fieldwork, all appear to be rather well known. The field data come from three sources within Grand Cape Mount County. In February, 2018, at Bamboja, Garwula District, I asked Masa Kiazolu, my hostess whilst there for other work, to list all the mushrooms she knew and provide descriptions. In July, 2019, with the help of Varney Fahnbulleh, we visited his home town of Latia, Commonwealth District and asked three older women he knew to list and describe the mushrooms they knew. Finally, a little later in the same month, I quizzed Momo Dassen about the mushrooms he knew. Momo was born in 1930 at Goe, Tewor District but has retired to Robertsport where our discussion took place. It is interesting to note that Mr. Dassen listed more names than the women at Latia and Bomboja. I suspect this might come down to a poverty of fungii on the Pleistocene white sands of the coastal plain compared to the more clayey soil formations with greater tree cover around Goe. I have incorporated the phonetically transcribed dictionary names with the field data which are presented below by substrate categories.

Edible Fungi Found on Trees

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
gbaku	Grows on old palm trees and old trees cut down on the farm. Similar to **kè'éŋké'éŋ** but bigger			x
kenken (kè'éŋké'éŋ OR kè'éŋ)	Grows on trees, and variously described as white, black or grey-brown. Interestingly said not to be easy to find at the time of the interview (July)—but see the remarks above about the Mende **komavale**. In terms of preparation pounding it in the mortar was said to be essential before frying it in oil with pepper. The Welmers & Kandakai dictionary notes it doesn't become tender from cooking. Presumably this is *Schizophyllum commune*, which like the Maawe, Grebo (Northern) and possibly Guerzé names is reduplicated. It would be useful to understand the contexts in which the simple, unduplicated form of the name shown in the dictionary is used.	x	x	x

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
semay kenay	Though two informants said it was found on dead, fallen palm trees, another said it grows on any rotten tree after farming time. Cap described as not pure white. Semay (**sɛ̀mbɛ́**) means to lean and it is called this because it leans on the tree —a bracket fungus imagery? Kenay was said to be something that is caught in the sea and lake, but this couldn't be deciphered any further.	x	x	x

Edible Fungi Found on Termite Mounds

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
kpor (kpɔ̀ɔ́)	Cap said to be brown or grey on top with a white stem. Diameters given: c.7-8cm, c.10cm and c.10-15cm. Mr. Dassen, who called it **kporwor**, noted the cap was pointed like an umbrella. A termite hill connection was noted by three informants, but also said to be found in the forest and beside old 'dumpers' (refuse sites). Said to be found at different times depending on the informant (February and the rainy season, May-Sept). One lady at Latia said this mushroom was the same as **kpoyahey** but this needs confirming. André de Kesel has suggested *Termitomyces clypeatus* as a candidate.	x	x	x
voe-voe	Found in rainy season on the ground around termite hills. Small-small, can come plenty and cover the whole ground. Sweet. The name said to give the idea of people rushing to get it. André de Kesel has suggested this might be *Termitomyces microcarpus.*			x

Edible Fungi Found on Soil without Visible Termite Mounds

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
jah sieh (jáàsíɛ̃̀)	There was agreement on the colour of the cap, brown or brownish red, with some caps ⌀ c.5cm. Apparently comes up several together. Said to be found both after burning the farm, when it grows up in the tree ashes, and in the farm or forest when cutting rice (Sept-Oct). Said to be a sweet mushroom and that the water turns pink-red when cooking it. **jaá** = to be red, but this meaning was not mentioned.		x	x
kon gben bey	White, grows on ground. Found when cutting rice (Sept-Oct). It has got branches (divides) hence name which means small			x

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
	branches on tree. **kɔ̌ŋ** = tree & **bó'òŋ** = branch. André de Kesel has suggested *Ramaria* sp. or *Clavaria* sp.			
kpoyahey	White cap ⌀ c.10cm, comes up one-one on the ground in the dry season		x	

Edible Fungi Found on Uncertain Substrates

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
horsweh	Contradictory descriptions were given about this mushroom: top of cap described as dark/black, dark brown and white and from small-small in diameter to c.10cm, with one person noting sizes can differ. Comes up in groups, with one person saying after the farm is burnt, another in the bush and yet another on the ground by termite hills. One person said, if you don't cook it well, it will make you vomit, which recalls the Guerzé (Guinea Kpelle) **löö-gèlè** or **gbomo**. Apparently foams when pounded and this may have something to do with its name as **sòí** = soap.	x	x	x
jemah fundaye (jɛ̀ɛ̀mà fúndé)	"The late afternoon mushroom". Whereas in Latia I was told by one lady that this mushroom was inedible and deadly, Mr. Dassen described it as sweet. This same lady also said it was white with a "mosquito net" around it (a veil or fringe?) which I would have thought the other two informants would have mentioned, so perhaps her contribution should be discounted. Otherwise, said to be reddish or brownish and found when the farm is burnt or growing on rotten fallen palm trees on the farm, in the rainy season until Oct-Nov. Two informants mentioned an important characteristic of this mushroom, if it comes up in the morning it is already spoiled by the evening and hence the name: **jɛ̀ɛ̀mà** = evening from 4pm to dark.	x	x	x
mangar (màŋgáá)	There was general agreement on the cap ⌀ at c. 3 cm. Said to be both white and a little yellow. Whereas one informant noted a termite hill connection, another refuted this and said just on the ground when the farm is burnt. Apparently in some places it is plentiful, but others just find it 'one-one'.	x	x	x

Inedible Mushrooms

Name	Combined descriptions	Bom	Lat	Goe
gbo-gbo-doe	Only animals can eat it. Said to be thicker than all other mushrooms, grows on ground and has a bad scent. It would be interesting to unravel the etymology and also see if this is the same species referred to in Mende as **poma vale.**			x
bon toh (kpɔ̀ŋ tò'ó)	"monkey (generic name) ear" grows on trees, can't eat it. An aversion to this fungus was also noted later by a woman in Robertsport. Presumably an *Aurucalaria* spp. given the name.		x	

Therapeutic Uses of Fungi

A quick chat about mushrooms with an acquaintance's wife in Robertsport in July 2019, who speaks both Vai and Mende, indicated a reddish mushroom called **fúndé bá** "the big mushroom" which is used to make a medicine to treat 'risings', a skin infection that rises up, boil like.

Part 3: The Western Atlantic Languages

The grouping of Atlantic languages into a Western Atlantic or Mel sub-group appears to be an ongoing debate and suffice is to say this has not been convincingly proven (Pozdniakov & Segerer, forthcoming). Of relevance here is that this group has only two indigenous representatives in Liberia, Kisi and Gola, which are not particularly closely related as perhaps indicated by their words for the generic term mushroom in Table 4.

Table 4: Generic Names for Mushrooms in Two Western Atlantic Languages

Term	Language	Source
hòlló	Kisi	Childs (2000)
ma	Gola	Fieldwork

Gola

Ethnologue identifies three Gola dialects: Deng (Todii), Kongba and Senje. Kanu (n.d.) states that Gola is no longer spoken in Sierra Leone, where former speakers have instead adopted Mende. The current status of Gola in Liberia is unclear.

The Gola ethnomycology data come from a single short interview with three informants (two women and one man) in Wealiquah, Gbarma District, Gbarpolu County, in February, 2018.

Name	Description & Notes
gbor lor-lor	Red, thick, ⌀ c. 15cm. Comes when rainy season sets in and sun can't shine any more. Don't eat it here but the Loma & Kisi do.
komaye ma	White, small, found on ground in May time
ma diaye sweaye	Grows on rotten palm heart. Khaki colour. *Volvariella volvacea?* Didn't know it from palm kernel factory.
ma dja yor ma	"snail mushroom". yor = snail, but rest of etymology unclear. Stipe white, cap green. ⌀ c. 3cm.
ma dya siah ma	"witchcraft mushroom". White, small, found on termite mounds. Named because instead of growing on ground, where it grows is associated with witchcraft.
ma guyan-guyan ma	White, on ground, plentiful. Name is onomatopoeic for sound when you walk on it.
ma kpor	"soup mushroom". Cap ⌀ c.8 cm, khaki colour. Not plentiful, sometimes find 2-3 together. Comes in August.
mandiebé ma	White, small, found at brushing time
maswee	White, grows on stick: *Schizophyllum commune?*
yor for	"rice mushroom". White, small-small. Plenty in rice farm after burning it.

Kisi

Ethnologue notes that the Kisi (also written Kissi) spoken in Liberia, which they call Southern Kisi is distinct from that spoken in Guinea, which they term Northern Kissi. The degree of lexical correspondence between the two is unknown. Ethnologue identifies three dialects in Southern Kisi: Luangkori, Tengia and Warn.

The Kisi dictionary by Childs (2000) covers all Kisi languages and provides the following specific mushroom entries:

Name	Entry
bɔ́ùlέŋ	A species of mushroom [also eggplant/aubergine]
búkúlóó	Month around May or June; named after a species of mushroom flourishing at that time of the year. [Name of this mushroom not given]
hìɔ̀lɔ́lέŋ	A mushroom species. Text example: one can put H in sauces.
hòl-ŋ̀pèŋgòó	A mushroom species, an edible fungi associated with mounds of the pùùsóó type of termite hill (Fairhead & Leach, 1996: 184)
hòl-tìɔ́ɔ́	A mushroom, lit "termite mushroom" so-called because it grows on termite mounds
kpòŋbósóólóó kpòŋbósóólúéí	A species of mushroom. Text example: the mushroom is growing under the palm tree.
sáásàŋgbànɔ̀ɔ́	Edible mushroom species
tàndá-pɛ́ɛ̀ŋdó	A mushroom that grows on logs
yúlúllú	A mushroom species with a long root, easy to uproot, tasty.

The reference in the dictionary to Fairhead & Leach's (1996) seminal book *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic* discusses how Kissi farmers in Kissidougou, Guinea, value the ***puusa*** type of termite hills for their soil fertility enhancement. In contrast, they use several methods to evict ***tɛlin*** termites (*Macrotermitinae*) which damage their crops, but welcome the subsequent appearance of the secondary colonising ***puusa*** termites, which are possibly *Ancistrotermes* spp (footnote 3, page 316). In a subsequent publication (Fairhead & Leach 2003:211), they note:

> "Among Kissia, the association of termite mounds with twins is indicated in the manner in which the mounds presage events. The fungus ***hol yio*** (literally mushroom of winged termites) which grows on (is cultivated in) particular termite mounds is almost always found in twinned pairs. When it does occur in odd numbers, bad news beckons (Tinkiano 1991: 47)."

Heim (1977: 187) notes that the Kissi call the mushroom of *Termitomyces fuliginosus*, ***kanlouo***. If the findings on the diversity of *Termitomyces* in Côte d'Ivoire (Koné *et al.* 2018) can be extrapolated, they are likely to be particularly diverse in the forest-savanna mosaic which extends into northern Liberia.

Endnote: Incidents of Mushroom Poisoning in Liberia

This collection of notes started with a quotation, probably based on the knowledge of the physician George Harley, indicating that the misidentification of toadstools for mushrooms is seldom made. How seldom is difficult to determine but collating records of mycetism (mushroom poisoning) is a useful starting point, especially in the absence of any official statistics. Three instances have so far been recorded.

Werner Junge who served as the doctor at the Bolahun hospital, now Lofa County, from about 1930 to his first furlough in 1933, notes in his memoirs (1952:33) that illnesses presenting there included mushroom poisoning.

During the terrible years of the recent civil conflicts when people had to hide in the bush and survive on wild foods, mushrooms of course entered their diet and under these circumstances, novel species were tried. Sometimes, as in the case of ***simeɛ jlea pɛlɛ wanu*** "the catfish belly mushroom" described by a Sapo informant at Tweh's Town, this was uneventful. But in others it wasn't, as in this testimony by a woman called Rose which appears in an FAO study (1996: Box 4).

> "Rose, along with many others, ran back to the bush and stayed there till March 1993. People were eating mainly cassava roots and palm cabbage with potato greens and cassava greens. The leaves of the sweet potato and cassava plants are popular foods in Liberia. Some also ate bush yam and sweet potato roots. Palm butter and oil were scarce. Men did not travel far to look for palm nuts because of the insecurity. When they did collect palm nuts they were often stolen from them. "Some people ate mushrooms found in the high forest (i.e. virgin forest), some of the mushrooms were known and people experimented with others by first giving them to animals to see what happened. Some people died eating the mushrooms,"It made them very drunk and killed them". Other foods eaten included green leaves called Barbor John (an old woman had told Rose that it had been eaten before and that it tasted nice). In 1993, there was a lot of "swelling" (oedema), it was seen first in children but gradually it extended to the adults."

Finally during my rapid fieldwork in Seyhi Geh, northern Nimba County, I was told how several members of a family had died from eating mushrooms in the 1980s. This apparently attracted the interest of a national newspaper and in due course the resulting article and perhaps others on this topic will hopefully provide more details. This information only came to light when my informant, Paramount Chief Nyan Ton Win, who I had worked with previously on other topics, was looking through the Benin guide. When he came to the image of *Boletus pseudoloosii*, he mentioned the deaths and how those involved had been confused with another edible red mushroom. Clearly identifying potentially lethal confusion species is an important task that more detailed work on Liberian ethnomycology can contribute to.

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Appendix A:

Documentation of Analogous Ritual Uses of the Sclerotia of *Lentinus tuber-regium* among Kruan Language Speakers in Côte d'Ivoire

Guéré

Schwartz (1975) provides the following information from the village of Ziombli:

> Page 72-73: «L'unique rituel auquel est soumis le nouveau-né a pour but de lui donner un nom - plus exactement de déterminer quelle personne défunte se réincarne en lui. C'est une cérémonie divinatoire qui a lieu quatre jours après la naissance si l'enfant est un garçon, trois jours si c'est une fille. L'expression qui désigne le rituel est ***bloè-téè***, « disposer le sclérote[1] ».
>
> La cérémonie, qui réunit tous les hommes adultes, ainsi que les vieilles femmes du lignage, se déroule en deux phases. Le sclérote est tout d'abord divisé en deux éléments, qui sont disposés dans un van, et qui représentent l'un les aïeux en ligne agnatique, l'autre les aïeux en ligne utérine. La mère, qui jusque-là est tenue à l'écart avec son enfant dans une case voisine, est alors appelée. Pendant quelques instants, elle berce le nouveau-né au-dessus du van, avant d'arrêter son choix sur l'un des éléments de ***bloè***. Cette première opération délimite le cadre des recherches, en indiquant si l'aïeul qui revient est un ancêtre paternel ou maternel.
>
> La femme se retire de nouveau avec l'enfant et le morceau de ***bloè*** retenu est ensuite fractionné en autant d'éléments qu'il y a de personnes présentes. Chaque assistant donne un nom d'ancêtre possible à son ***bloè*** et le replace dans le van. La mère revient avec le nouveau-né, répète l'opération précédente, en disant: « Je suis revenue pour chercher ton nom », et porte son choix sur un morceau de sclérote. Le nom tiré est celui de l'ancêtre qui se réincarne effectivement dans l'enfant, nom que celui-ci portera désormais. Le père prend ensuite le morceau de ***bloè***, en détache quelques fragments avec les dents, et les crache sur le front du nouveau-né en faisant des invocations pour qu'il vive heureux et longtemps.»
>
> Footnote 1: Forme que prennent certains champignons quand les conditions de croissance deviennent défavorables. Grâce à l'accumulation de réserves, le sclérote, qui a l'apparence d'une pelote, permet au champignon de résister, puis de se propager à nouveau. Élément fondamental de la reproduction de ce végétal, il est étroitement associé par les Guéré à l'idée de vie, et intégré dans plusieurs rituels. Le sclérote utilisé ici est celui du champignon *Lentinus tuber regium.*

In relation to first fruit offerings (*ofrande des prémices)*

> Page 148: «La consommation du maïs, puis du riz nouveaux, est obligatoirement précédée d'une cérémonie d'offrande des premiers produits. Kwi semble avoir joué autrefois un rôle capital dans l'accomplissement de ce rite. Mais il n'en était que l'agent « spirituel », et n'intervenait que par une « sortie» de danse incantatoire. L'exécution matérielle de l'opération était confiée à un homme-médecine.

> Pour le nouveau maïs, par exemple, la cérémonie débute à l'aube par une procession qui se dirige vers le soleil levant. L'officiant, entouré des enfants du village, psalmodie inlassablement: « Que Dieu[1] nous envoie le bonheur! » De retour devant sa case, il demande à!'assistance: «Avez-vous déjà mangé le maïs nouveau? - Non », répond celle-ci en chœur. Puis est organisé entre deux enfants un concours du « mangeur de maïs le plus rapide ». L'opération consiste à égrener le fruit avec les dents le plus vite possible, et à cracher les grains par terre. L'officiant en ramasse quelques-uns, gratifie le vainqueur d'une récompense et se retire dans sa maison. Les grains de maïs recueillis sont écrasés dans un mortier, mélangés à un morceau de ***bloè*** - sclérote de champignon dont nous avons déjà vu le rôle dans l'imposition du nom - et de l'eau. Le produit obtenu est en partie appliqué sur la figure du célébrant, en partie répandu sur le sol de la case.»
>
> Footnote 1. L'expression que les Guéré traduisent par Dieu est *gnon-sua*, « l'homme originel », c'est-à-dire le plus lointain ancêtre. C'est en fait au principe du Bien que s'identifie l'idée qu'ils se font de la divinité suprême, dans une vision du monde toute manichéenne, par opposition au principe du Mal, sinon, terme qui désigne tout ce qui est « mauvais », et que nos informateurs traduisent par « diable ».

Wobé

In the village of Guézo, in what is now the Département de Facobly, Région du Guémon, which after Schwartz (1968:17) would seem to be the Glao group of the Gbéon confederation, one of three in the Wè (Wobé), Hauenstein (1978: 536) notes:

> «Autrefois avant de partir en guerre, le responsable pratiquait ce même culte mais en y ajoutant une calebasse contenant de l'huile de palme que les serpents étaient invités à laper. Il leur présentait également une poudre jaune appelée kao préparée avec du bois de l'arbre iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*), ainsi qu'un grand champignon blanc appelé ***bloè*** (*Lentinus tuber regium)* croissant sous la racine de certains arbres.»

In the village of Gbeibli (elsehwhere written Gbeibly), in what is the Département de Kuibli, Région du Guémon and after Schwartz (1968:17) would seem to be the Kouao group of the Gbéon confédération, Hauenstein (1979/80: 85-86) notes at a service (culte) addressed to the fish:

> «L'officiant prend, alors une poule blanche qu'il sacrifie et dont le sang est répandu dans la rivière. Il prend ensuite une espèce de farine prépare avec le grand champignon blanc appelé «**bloué**» (*Lentinus tuber regium*) qu'il met dans la bouche; après l'avoir mastiquée il la recrache dans la rivière.»

Kroumen

In 1948 when the anthropologist Bohumil Holas was on a mission in eastern Liberian and adjoining parts of Côte d'Ivoire, he noted at a sanctuary for the god Nyẽswa at Prolo, a Bapo Kroumen village on the Ivoirian side of the Cavally river he noted (Holas, 1952: 393-394:

> «En face, sur une autre table plus grande, sont déposées en rangées régulières par 4-5 pièces, les ***gbɔlu***, offrandes préférées de Nyẽswa, faites en diverses occasions par ses fidèles suppliantes. Les ***gbɔlu*** ont l'air de galets ronds en argile de 10 à 20 centimètres de diamètre, ornes de taches blanches de kaolin. Les plus grandes pièces encerclées en croix, de bandes ou de fils de coton blanc et rouge.
>
> A notre regret nous n'avons pas réussi à recueillir des informations suffisamment précises en ce qui concerne leur nature ; cependant le chef du village de Bliéron (et ses informations nous ont été confirmes par l'agent local des Douanes françaises) a insisté sur le fait qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une matière minérale, mais d'un produit végétal qu'on trouve de temps à autre en brousse, dans la terre, au pied des grands arbres...»

In a somewhat meandering publication published just after his death called *Traditions Krou,* Holas (1980: 80-81) notes in relation to hunting practises:

> «Pour mieux voir, c'est-à-dire détecter plus facilement une proie, chaque chasseur possède une recette qu'il tient volontiers secrète: la plus répandue, d'ailleurs bien apparente, consiste à s'enduire la région oculaire d'une pâte blanchâtre obtenue du mélange d'un champignon souterrain appelé *gbolou* avec certains ingrédient d'origine animale.
> Ce *gbolou* joue d'ailleurs également un rôle de substance liturgique dans le culte de la grande divinité Niéswa dont nous parlerons plus loin.»

Appendix B:

Key to Map 3 from Kurtz 1985, Map 1, Table 1

N.B. Holas = Holas (1952)

Tribal Group Name	Map #	"Tribe" (*Dako*)	Alternative *Dako* names
Jao	1	Bolukwen	Garraway; Garawe; Jao
	2	Nihwiyekwen	Nemeah; Half Garewe
	3	Pedekwen	Patey
	4	Jenoyakwen	Genoyah
Glebo	5	Klimewe	Kudemowe; Kuniewe
	6	Nyimewe	Nyomowe; Nyamawe
Nyabo (Nyaabo: Holas)	7	Sedebo	Sidike (Pedebo included in #7)
	8	Traasiebo	Transebo; Gidibe; Traasiyebo
	9	Jidetabo	Gedetarbo; Dyere Tabo (Holas)
	10	Gbolobo (Holas)	Gborlobo
	11	Plibo	Pleebo; Plidibo
	12	Bolobo	Gbolobo
	13	Klebo	Kedebo
	14	Wiebo	Wrebo
Sewo (Seo)	15	Lower Trembo	Watiken; Wotiken
	16	Upper Trembo	Sodoken; Sorroke
Gulo		Borobo	Barrobo; Guloo
	17	Wuyya (Holas)	Whuyah
	18	Wulebo (Holas)	Wreboken
	19	Nyoke (Holas)	Nyanke
	20	Doolu	Dorrobo; Dowlu (Holas)
	21	Jedaro	Yederabo; Yirrabo; Dyirelo (Holas); Jedekoloo
	22	Nihwiyewlo	Pokpake clan
	23	Nyao	Nearrobo (?); Nyambo (?)
	24	Tuwoo	Tuobo; Twow (Holas)
	25	Dediyo	Dedebo; Deryow (Holas); Dideyabo; Deliyo
	26	Gbeyeo	Part of Dedebo Clan
	27	Kleo	Gedebo; Gelebo; Klewo (Holas)
	28	Nyenewo (Holas)	Nyembo; Nyenebo; Nyineo; Yineo
	29	Wepo	Webbo; Wepo or Webo (Holas)

Tribal Group Name	Map #	"Tribe" (*Dako*)	Alternative *Dako* names
	30	Jitukwe	Getu
	31	Diyabo	Diabo; Deabo; Diyeo
		Kaapo	
Nokwe	32	Nokwe	Kittabo; Kiteabo; Ketibo; Keluu
	33	Kayitebo	
	34	Sao	Sarbo; Sabo
	35	Nyitiabo	Nyentiabo; Nyiteao
	36	Tuobo	Tuabo; Tuwoobo
	37	Polupo	Pallipo; Palipo
Bowo (Holas)	38	Kelipo	Killepo; Kilepo; Kilebo (Holas)
Mena (Holas)	39	Chedepo	Tyelepo (Holas); Chelipo; Chedapo
Gbeypo (Bweypo: Holas)	40	Seyipo (Holas)	Sayepa; Seyeepo
	41	Sawelken	Slieake
	42	Nyenaawe (Holas)	Drugbo Clan
	43	Tienpo	Tyiempo (Holas)
	44	Jidepo	Jadopoh
	45	Fopo	Forpo
	46	Bua	Buah; Boa; Buau
Kplio (Plewo: Holas) (Plapo: Official)	47	Gbalapo	Gbalakpor; Gbalakpo
	48	Flenapo (Holas)	Flennokpo; Flenepo
		Twopo (Holas)	Topor
		Swe	Suehn
	49	Wokpe	Workpe; Wakpwe; Wa'pepo (Holas)
	50	Kwalo	Waddarbo; Wejilabo; Gwalo; Wedebo
Klao-speaking	51	Nifau	Nivao; Kpo River Kru; Nifu
We (Kran)-speaking	52	Glaro	Glarro; Gborra (Census); Glalo; Clagulo