

**Motility and Relational Mobility
of the Baka in North-Eastern Gabon**

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I, Doerte Weig, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed: Cologne,

The wisdom of a man is not determined by his experiences,
but by his understanding of the experience.

George Bernhard Shaw

To think is no longer to contemplate, but to be engaged,
merged with what we think, launched –
the dramatic event of being-in-the-world.

Emmanuel Lévinas

Abstract

This thesis offers a first scientific portrait of the Baka in North-Eastern Gabon, a group of post-foragers living along the River Ivindo, and the way they practice and conceptualise mobility. The inquiry encompasses the long-term historical and the daily or short-term current mobility of this group, elicited through life histories and participant observation. The central premise of this work is that mobility is relational. Relational refers to interaction of movement and fixity, of position and outcome, and to the understanding of mobility as socially produced. The second concept employed is that of *motility*, the *capacity* or *potential* to be mobile. As *motility* analyses what comes *before* observable movement, of potential and actualised outcome as mobility or immobility, it takes up the idea of mobility as relational.

The Baka living on the Ivindo migrated from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon over the last approximately 60 years. In contrast to established approaches to forest forager mobility, which focus mainly on resource mobility during an annual cycle, this study considers the long-term and larger geographical perspective and shows that the quality of personal relations between Baka and their neighbours is decisive in mobility considerations. Previously these relations were characterised as a structural opposition between two ethnic groups. This analysis demonstrates the heterogeneity of people and their interactions, in the past and the present, to argue, firstly, that relations are more appropriately conceptualised as multilateral, and, secondly, that an inquiry remains incomplete without considering affections and emotions.

A principal mobility factor for the Baka is the search for a good life, meaning economic improvement and freedom from violence. This search coincides with a diversification of Baka livelihoods to include subsistence practices as well as working in the gold sites of Gabon. Employing *motility* shows the aspirations and limitations of Baka personal and group mobility in gold work. *Motility* is also understood as 'mobility capital' and thereby helps document social change, and how gold work is undertaken with reference to Baka egalitarian social organisation to be successful. By including group and individual as well as different temporalities in the analysis, and detailing the impact of social values on mobilities, *motility* gives depth to the analysis of mobility.

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Writing and Abbreviations

With my predominantly English-speaking readership in mind, I have translated all quotes from Baka and French into English, be they verbatim accounts or literature references. Where required for better understanding or sharing with the reader the ethnographic feel of the data, I state the emic Baka or French term, formatted in italics, followed by the explanatory translation into English. In the text, any mention of the Congo refers to the *Republic of the Congo*, unless otherwise stated.

List of Abbreviations

ANPN	Agence Nationale Des Parcs Nationaux
b.p.	before present
CENAREST	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique
CRC	Collaborative Research Centre
E&F	Ministère des Eaux et Forêts
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDG	Parti Démocratique Gabonais
RFUK	Rainforest Foundation UK
SFB	Sonderforschungsbereich
UOB	Université Omar Bongo
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
ZSL	Zoological Society London

Dramatis Personae

Below is a list of the most prominent Baka from the River Ivindo region, and other sites in Gabon, to whom I frequently refer in my ethnographic descriptions or who are directly quoted. The overview has been anonymised on publication to comply with ethical standards to protect informants' anonymity. This approach applies also to other ethnic groups, although their details are not included below.

The list is alphabetical following the reference to the person used in the text, which is given as a single or double initial. These initials are based on the Baka name, the French name, the nickname, or a combination thereof, of the person concerned. The age given is approximated. The item 'village' refers to the 'village of the heart' (cf. 3.2.3.6).

Name (Initials)	Clan	Age	Gender	Place of Birth	Village (of the heart)
AB.	Yanji	40	male	Été, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
AG.	Mophandje	55	female	Souanké	Kabisa, Gabon
AM.	Makombo	67	male	Ntam, Congo	Ntam, Congo
AO:	Yanji	60	male	Mvadi, Gabon	Adjab, Gabon
AP.	Yanji	45	female	Alat, Cameroon	Makokou, Gabon
AT.	Ekuambe	65	female	Yen, Minkébé forest (Cameroon)	Adjab, Gabon
B.	Njembe	59	male	Alat, Cameroon	Kabisa, Gabon
BF.	Mophandje	50	male	Eba, Gabon	Ndoumabango, Gabon
C.	Yanji	22	male	Été, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
EM.	Ndoum	57	male	Alat, Cameroon	Adjab, Gabon
F.	Ndoum	40	male	Eba, Gabon	Adjab, Gabon
G.	Essilo	49	female	Dezou, Gabon	Adjab, Gabon
HA.	Ndonga	60	female	Minvoul, Gabon	Libreville, Gabon
J.	Yanji	40	male	Adjab, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
JM.	Mombito	50	female	Meka, Congo	Kabisa, Gabon
JO.	Mbongo	82	male	Cameroon	–
L.	Mbongo	38	female	Makokou, Gabon	Makokou, Gabon

M.	Njembe	65	female	Meka, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
MA.	Njembe	65	male	Alat, Cameroon	–
MJ.	Yanji	45	male	Alat, Cameroon	Adjab, Gabon
MN.	Njembe	30	female	Été, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
MO.	Mbongo	–	male	Congo-Kinshasa	–
MR.	Likemba	52	male	Assoumdele, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
N.	Makombo	53	female	Ntam, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
NA.	Ndoum	–	male	Mintom, Cameroon	–
NC.	Yanji	20	female	Été, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
NR.	Yanji	34	male	Été, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
OA.	Njembe	–	female	Colonia, Cameroon	Makokou, Gabon
PJ.	Yanji	45	male	Alat, Cameroon	Adjab, Gabon
PO.	Yanji	–	male	Alat, Cameroon	–
Y.	Ndoum	48-50	female	Nesam, Congo	Adjab, Gabon
YC.	Mombito	68	female	Cameroon	Adjab, Gabon
YM.	Makombo	75	female	Alat, Cameroon	Ndoumabango, Gabon



Some of the Baka in Adjab, Gabon, July 2011

1 Introduction

Being in a Baka village on the River Ivindo in North-Eastern Gabon is a lively affair. In the mornings, between 5 and 6 am, people begin to stir. It is still quiet, although increasing sounds from the forest tell of the arrival of day. The men begin to gather in the *mbandzo*, the roofed assembly place in the middle of the village, stir the embers, and sit by the fire. Most of them smoke tobacco leaves rolled in a local forest plant. The women rekindle the fire in their kitchens, and sit huddled until the warmth begins to spread and drives away the nighttime chill. They may heat up leftover food from the night before, or place some peeled manioc tubers near the fire, so they get toasted and taste like a type of bread. When the day has fully dawned and the sun has dried off the remaining dampness, conversations become livelier. It is the time to share the first laughs and jokes, have coffee, discuss serious matters, or continue the arguments from the day or night before. People start moving about the village, and by about 8 o'clock most have left, to go and work in their plantations, carve a dugout canoe, hunt, or work gold. The village is quiet until 4pm when people start returning. After an initial period of relaxation, the men gather for a raucous game of football. On some mornings, a woman or a man will start dancing instead of going off to work and be in the forest. Depending on what the others had planned, they will stay and join in, singing and dancing, and a party develops, which may go on all day long, and well into the night.

1.1 Scope and Structure of Thesis

The Baka live in the tropical forests of Cameroon, Gabon and Congo, and are classed as mobile hunter-gatherers or, more specifically, tropical forest foragers, whose social organisation is defined by egalitarianism and demand sharing. They are spread out over a large geographical area, but the groups share 'a linguistic and cultural identity, and as acephalous forest societies are characterised by organisational mobility and fluidity' (Joiris 1996). As the above morning scene describes, the Baka way of life on the River Ivindo in North-Eastern Gabon is centred on a village, and the mobility patterns of hunting and gathering classically associated with forest foragers are

changing. This PhD project is geared towards understanding what mobility means in Baka society today, and how the Baka practice and conceptualise mobility.

I set off to Gabon in Central Africa in October 2010 to spend a one-year fieldwork period with a Baka group. Approximately 1000 Baka live in Gabon, firstly, around the town of Minvoul in the northern Gabonese province of Woleu-Ntem, and, secondly, in the North-Eastern province of Ogooué-Ivindo, along the River Ivindo from the provincial capital Makokou to the Gabonese-Congolese border town of Mvadi.¹ The forefathers of the Baka in Minvoul migrated to Gabon less than a hundred years ago from Cameroon (Paulin 2010). The Baka on the Ivindo first came to Gabon about 70 years ago from Congo and Cameroon, and have successively moved downstream along the River Ivindo towards the provincial capital Makokou ever since. The Baka are not officially recognised as one of the ethnic groups living in Gabon, and some Gabonese authorities were even unaware of the Baka presence on the Ivindo.

After visiting both the area around Minvoul and around Makokou, I decided to focus on the Ivindo as my main research area. There is no ethnographic literature available for this region, which meant every piece of contemporary or historical information on Baka mobility was a true discovery. My analysis takes into consideration both the ethno-historical point of view, and the synchronic perspective, offering new data from a regional and ethnographic viewpoint. Moreover, much literature on the Baka in Cameroon concerns their recent (enforced) positioning by the roadside (Joiris 1998), whereas there is no road infrastructure along the Ivindo and travel takes place by dugout canoe, which again opens up novel areas of theoretical discovery. My central research method were life history interviews, which, given the lack of data to build on, proved to be very appropriate. I opted for the Ivindo, also because of the village Adjab near Mvadi. Adjab is a village in which live only Baka and no other ethnic groups, which is a special situation, as normally village spaces in this region involve two or more ethnic groups. Baka normally adapt behaviour and language to such constellations, and Adjab provided the occasion to learn about Baka practices without going deep into

¹ See page 28 for a map of Baka Presence in Gabon, page 30 for Baka locations around Minvoul, and page 36 for a map of Baka locations on the Ivindo.

the forest to live only with Baka. This PhD tells the story of the Baka I worked with along the Ivindo, with comparative excerpts from Bitouga, a Baka village in the Woleu-Ntem in northern Gabon. I document the social change in Baka practices and conceptualise Baka mobility according to today's lived reality.

1.1.1 Theoretical Approaches to Mobility

It is here of interest to consider firstly the definition and scope of mobility. We all know it as a term for physical and spatial displacement, a reference to walking or any other bodily movement, and we commonly associate mobility with modes of transport, such as cars and planes. Terms related to or synonymous with the act of physical mobility are forced displacement, migration, tourism, commuting, and the movement of goods. Social mobility as a change in the social position of an individual or group, as advancing vertically or horizontally within the (hierarchical) social system is another established idea.² These notions of spatial and social mobility are often conceived of as independent phenomena, and the topic of different disciplines.

In both the archaeological and the anthropological discussion of hunter-gatherer mobility, conceptual approaches have been set within the theoretical framework of human-environment interaction, examining mobility with regard to factors such as (food) resources, territoriality and seasonality. The analytical focus has been on the observable facts of resource-oriented mobility, which led, for example, to Binford's differentiation between *foragers* and *collectors* (Binford 1980). This typology is linked to Binford's model of *residential mobility* and *logistical mobility*, whereby *residential mobility* refers to the transfer of all members of one residential group to another location, meaning that the foragers move to the resources by changing their residence; *logistical mobility*, on the other hand, denotes that only a part of the group, a task

² The scope of the term mobility today, of course, extends to many more fields, such as communications technology; online (virtual) mobility; mental ability; materiality in the sense of mobility and durability; 'infrastructure mobilities' which refer to the infrastructure that provides us with basic supplies of food, gas, and water; and even a 'structure of feeling' (Thrift 1996); and to include not only physical movement, but bodily functions such as breathing and digestion. Social mobility can relate to a change in social position of an individual over time as intragenerational mobility, or regarding changes in inheritance from parents to children as intergenerational mobility (Kaufmann et al. 2004).

force, moves in order to return food to the camp, but the other group members (dependants) remain sedentary (Binford 1980:9-10). *Residential mobility* is associated with *foragers* - the movement is from consumer to resources, whereas *logistical mobility* is linked with *collectors* – the movement being of resources to consumers (Binford 1980:5-10). Binford's typology continues to find application in archaeology today (Perreault & Brantingham 2011).

The two types of mobility strategy constitute the end points of a continuum, and most hunter-gatherer societies exhibit various combinations of them within an annual cycle (Binford 1980), an approach later developed into analyses based on the annual residential moves of a group (Kelly 1995). With regard to the forest foragers of Central Africa, the resource-orientation in mobility studies was touched upon in the *Wild Yam Debate*, which focused on whether or not 'pygmies', to which the Baka are considered to belong, can survive purely on forest products for their nutritional needs without having recourse to the agricultural products of their neighbours (Bailey et al. 1989, Headland & Bailey 1991).

Critics of this focus on economic or socio-ecological considerations and the 'subsistence orientation' (Lee & Daly 1999) have argued that the human-environment approach with its ecological focus overlooks, amongst other things, the importance of social and ritual networks in mobility patterns (Oetelaar 2006). This is mirrored by Baka ethnographies, which document how individual family units or several families would hunt and forage independently for an extended period, to then reunite with all clan members for ritual and other purposes (LeClerc 2001: 137), which constitutes a combination of ecological and social aspects. Studies of Baka movement also highlight other 'social' factors in mobility: visiting families (Dhellemmes 1986); cases of illness, accident or death of a group member (Vallois & Marquer 1976); conflict resolution (Joiris 2003); intra-group knowledge transmission (LeClerc 2001); and maintaining links between Baka camps according to spirit guarding (Joiris 2003). Further studies of Baka mobility, thus, recommend themselves to a deeper understanding of the 'social' aspects of mobility.

One of the central analytical endeavours within hunter-gatherer studies relates to the group as the unit of analysis. This was first understood to be the patrilineal and patrilocal band or horde (Radcliffe-Brown 1931, Steward 1936), later including matrilineages and composite bands (Hiatt 1962). Following the *Man the Hunter* Conference in 1966, optimisation theories which take the individual as the unit of analysis gained importance. The principal conceptual approach, which takes the individual as its unit of analysis, is Optimal Foraging Theory - OFT for short. OFT is a notion of microeconomic optimisation, derived from ecology, which studies foraging behaviour and states that organisms (including hunter-gatherers) forage in such a way as to maximise their net energy intake (calories) per unit time (Kelly 1995). The specific mobility models developed by proponents of OFT are *patch choice*, *optimal diet breadth*, *optimal group size*, and focus on the interdependencies of foraging, time and energy output and intake.

The optimisation approach is debated (Binford 1980, Kelly 1995), in particular as 'this line of reasoning minimises the role of learning and other sociocultural processes', and overemphasises natural selection (Martin 1983: 612). As Martin has summarised:

One need not invoke natural selection to see some possible utility in the maximisation postulate once it is clearly recognised that maximisation is always relative to some set of capacities and conditions' (Martin 1983: 627).

Furthermore, OFT assumes the existence of an omniscient homo economicus, which constitutes another central point of criticism. Human behavioural science, notably Simon from an economic point of view (Simon 1955), and Kahnemann in the field of psychology (Kahneman 2003), have shown that 'rational man' must be considered a fallacy; rationality is 'bounded' by the information available and the computational faculty accessible for processing existing information; and this process is often sequential rather than based on an all-knowing decision at a single point in time. In sociology, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus indicating decision-making guided by bodily dispositions also contradicts rational choice theory (Bourdieu 1977). Moreover, optimisation models have been challenged for their 'methodological individualism',

the exclusive attention to the individual (Kelly 1995), and the question of the adequate unit of analysis remains an open one.

The bias in the study of hunter-gatherers remains on (corporate kinship) groups, roles and rules, and a more balanced approach is needed, for example, by acknowledging the 'functional importance of single individuals' in facilitating fluidity and autonomy in hunter-gatherers (Bird-David 1987), and accepting that 'the elements to be studied are individuals and nuclear families (or combinations of these) as opposed to residential groups' (Biesbrouck 1999). LeClerc showed how Baka mobility around elephant hunting must be conceptualised as a group activity, 'which implies the participation of the entirety of the community' (LeClerc 2001). With my work, I aim to consider individual mobility and the distinct life histories of individuals beyond the group as one aspect of social and economic change for the Baka on the Ivindo, without losing the orientation on Baka sociality defined by reference to the group.

Within the study of Central African forest forager communities, there is a strong analytical tradition concerning the relations of the Baka (or 'pygmies') with their neighbours, generally termed inter-ethnic relations, and I develop this concept with regard to mobility. In this, I build firstly, on the idea that how we address the world and how we form relations with others and make sense of them involves mobility, and secondly, on previous observations regarding inter-ethnic relations and mobility where Bahuchet reasoned that:

It seems likely that, in the case of the Pygmies, the history of the relationship with non-Pygmy populations, a human factor which is not taken into account by current theories on optimal foraging strategies (Winterhalder & Smith 1981), has had more influence on the use of space than the resources (Bahuchet 1992b).

However, although advocating this point, Bahuchet's writings since do not seem to pursue this line of analysis. It is more the works of Joiris (Joiris 1998, Joiris 2003) and Grinker (Grinker 1994), which have advanced the argument that ecological concerns

are only part of the (inter-ethnic) relational story, which had led to exchanges such as the *Wild Yam Debate*.

The Baka neighbours along the Ivindo are predominantly *Bakwele*, a Bantu ethnic group also living in Cameroon and Congo, who mainly engage in agriculture and fishery. The Bakwele often employ the Baka by the day to help clear forest for shifting cultivation, weed or harvest; or Baka men go to hunt for a Bakwele. Much literature on the Baka analyses the inter-ethnic relationship between them and the *Fang*, one of the large Bantu groups in Gabon and Cameroon, whereas my work builds on a growing body of literature analysing the nature of Baka-Bakwele relations (Joiris 1998, Joiris 2003, Kitanishi 2006, Rupp 2011).

My work takes up the premise that mobility is relational in that it is a positioning within a system (Thomas Widlok, personal communication), or in that 'mobility and immobility are understood as an effect or an outcome of a relation' (Adey 2010: 18). I use this concept to question, which factors in addition to resources trigger mobility; or hinder it to result in immobility, and to show that the 'social environment', which includes intragroup and extragroup social links is relevant to mobility.

A further point, which deserves more detailed consideration, is the temporal dimension of mobility, a topic within sociological analysis of urban mobility (Kaufmann 2002), as much as within hunter-gatherer studies. Biesbrouck has pointed out that the timeframe of most anthropological research, the annual cycle, focuses on seasonal mobility to, from and between hunting camps, or villages and hunting camps, leaving out moves in previous years (Biesbrouck 1999). In her study of mobility and sedentarisation she emphasises the importance of long-term observations in mobility studies in that 'as sedentarisation is concerned with relative changes in mobility, to study it means that one should analyse mobility of particular groups of people over a longer period' (Biesbrouck 1999: 198).

The aim of this study of Baka mobility is thus to address three central topics. Firstly, the PhD considers individuals, nuclear families and small groups, and larger (family)

groups as its unit of analysis. Secondly, building on previous Baka ethnographies, it analyses the importance of social factors in forager mobility, and considers how to overcome the socio-ecological or social-spatial divide. Thirdly, the timeframe examined extends beyond seasonal activities and the annual cycle. I propose two theoretical approaches to address these issues: firstly the understanding of mobility as *relational*, and secondly, the concept of *motility*, which refers to the *capacity* to be mobile. I expand on both approaches in the following.

Relational Mobility

My main argument is to advocate the understanding of mobility as a relational phenomenon. This proposition is inspired by the emic point of view, namely the Baka understanding of space, time and sociality as interrelated (LeClerc 2001). LeClerc has analysed how the management of cultivated and living spaces constitutes a replica of and support for Baka social structure, and how in Baka socio-spatial-temporal understanding social space is equivalent to mythical space owing to Baka ritual associations (LeClerc 2001). In mobility understood as relational, relational refers to interaction of movement and fixity, of position and outcome (Adey 2010: 18), and to mobilities as socially produced and of mobilities as ‘not only differentiated but interrelated’ (Cresswell 2001: 21). Connecting these notions with Baka emic view, leads me to propose the importance of mobility as *relational* in the conceptualisation of Baka mobilities on the Ivindo.

The analysis of Baka historical mobility documents the main trigger for Baka mobility as *toma*, which means to move from one location in order to *follow family or other persons* to another location. *Toma* must be distinguished from the mobility pattern of simply visiting family, which is well documented for many other hunter-gatherer groups, and which also happens amongst the Baka. The historic migration account also evidences the importance of the relations between the Baka and their inter-ethnic neighbours in mobility considerations, and the quality of these relations as the other central reason for mobility, or immobility. Building on the work of Rupp and Joiris (Rupp 2003, Joiris 2003) I argue that it is not only the existence of these relationships,

but the emotional and affective quality of these relations, which influences mobility decisions and patterns.

Connected to this point is an extension of the socio-economic understanding of Baka relations with their inter-ethnic neighbours as patron-client, characterising the Baka as the clients or 'pygmies' of the other ethnic group, and Baka mobility as related to the agricultural or ritual needs of the neighbouring farmers. The 'social environment' of the Baka today includes many different people, *players*³ as I have termed them, and I advocate the heterogeneity of Baka neighbours as an essential aspect of understanding (Baka) mobility. On the premise that mobilities are socially produced, both the diversity of the Baka and that of their neighbours today and the manifold relations they entail, suggests that mobility cannot but be conceptualised as relational.

Relational mobility, thus, refers to a number of aspects. It is proposed as a more refined analytical approach to understanding mobility. One characteristic of this is that mobility and immobility are considered together, as relational, or two sides of the same coin. The conceptual proposition is supported by and derived from the analysis of my field data. On the one hand, from Baka interrelatedness of space, time and sociality; on the other, from *toma* as the principal Baka mobility, as a social motivation in mobility considerations, and a mobility pattern; and from the importance of the quality, as the relational aspect, in the intergroup mobility of Baka and their neighbours.

Motility

Motility can be defined as 'the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the domain of mobility and puts this potential to use for his or her activities' (Kaufmann 2002). Analysing *motility* means taking one step back from observable mobility, and 'focusing on the actor, or group of actors, *before* they become mobile' (Kaufmann 2002, emphasis in the original). Drawn from urban sociology⁴, the concept

³ See footnote 129 for the definition.

⁴ Urban sociology in turn draws on *motility* as a term originally used in biology and medicine, and which refers to the ability of an organism (ie fish), body or body part (ie eye or digestive system) to move, consuming energy in the process.

of *motility* suggests itself for an application to sociological and anthropological questions as it incorporates that the capacity for movement may be perceived, constructed, engendered and 'realised differently or have different consequences across varying socio-cultural contexts' (Kaufmann et al. 2004:750). Moreover, the notion of capacity, capability or potential has gained scientific prominence in feminist, developmental, legal, and anthropological studies, (Nussbaum 2003, Sen 2005, Rapport 2010), and it is a valuable enterprise to consider its use within the field of forager studies.

With regard to the unit of analysis, *motility* offers the study of diverse actors, which can be individual persons or social groups. The emphasis of analysis is on the personal project and reflects the 'key idea [that] every actor has an own potential for mobility, which can be transformed into movement according to aspirations and circumstances', but this cannot be realised without reference to the different social relations surrounding an individual (Kaufmann 2002). The inclusion of aspirations, motivation and decision-making processes of actors are *explicitly* taken into account in understanding mobility, which extends the unit of analysis beyond the individual-but-rational-neutral 'optimal forager' to include personal life histories and resulting motivations for mobility into a study. Such personal actions can also be triggers for larger adaptations of humans to their environment.

Analysing *motility* potential rather than just observable mobility immediately introduces a temporal dimension into a study, as an examination will consider the process of how the potential was actualised. This applies to the different 'social temporalities' of daily life and the life course (Gell 1992), whereby both the seasonal activities of foragers and their life histories can be included. The interesting quality of this approach is the aim to explore any type of constraint on *motility*, such as the high cost of riverine transport on the Ivindo, and its impact as mobility or immobility for an individual or group. Moreover, it is argued that *motility* can be the link between spatial and social mobility, as '*motility* goes beyond a simplistic separation between social mobility and geographic space by integrating these on the level of actors, culture,

networks, institutions and society' (Kaufmann et al. 2004:745), which can be studied on a micro, meso and macro level (Kaufmann et al. 2004:752).

The impact of temporality has further been developed into the idea that mobility constitutes a form of Bourdieuan capital, which can be exchanged (Bourdieu 1986, Kaufmann et al. 2004:754). Conceptualising *motility* as mobility capital and analysing how mobility potential is enacted or constrained over a temporal expanse is advocated as a tool not only for gauging mobility and immobility as such, but also for making evident and conceptualising societal inequalities and social change (Kaufmann et al. 2004:754, Flamm & Kaufmann 2006).

The concept of *motility* and the idea of focusing on the potential to mobility have been applied in the field of gender studies (Young 1980: 145), in the field of sociology (Bauman 2000, Kesselring 2006), and in human geography (Weichhart 2009: 15). Apart from Vincent Kaufmann, the central *motility* advocates are also those advancing the 'new mobilities paradigm' which is aimed 'at going beyond the imagery of "terrains" as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes' (Sheller & Urry 2006: 209), especially John Urry, who has written in particular on 'motility patterns' in automobile and aeromobilities (Featherstone et al. 2005, Urry 2007).

Kaufmann and Urry diverge in their operationalisation of *motility* (Kaufmann 2011). Kaufmann breaks down *motility* into three interdependent determinants: *access*; *competence*; and *appropriation*. In short, *access* refers to the available choices in mobility; *competence* includes physical, acquired and organisational skills and abilities; and *appropriation* is the acting or non-acting on a particular choice, shaped by needs, plans, and aspirations of the agents (Kaufmann et al. 2004:750). Urry has argued to combine all three elements under the term *access*, in his understanding made up of four components, which are economic, physical, organisational, and temporal (Class et al. 2003, Urry 2007). Both theorists employ Bourdieu's notion of capital, Kaufmann to argue for 'mobility capital' as such, and Urry to suggest reconceiving *access* as *network*

capital, which itself has eight elements (Urry 2007).⁵ However, *network capital* is not an attribute of the individual (Urry 2007), which highlights the distinction between Kaufmann's focus on the individual life project, and Urry's systemic approach as a proponent of (non-agentic) complexity theory (Urry 2003).

Given the aim to improve the understanding of Baka mobility beyond group mobility influenced by large-scale environmental factors, the diversity of mobilities I encountered amongst the Baka along the Ivindo, and the impact of individual personal mobility on group dynamics as well as the constraint effected by the group on the individual, I employ Kaufmann's three determinants of *motility* in my analysis of Baka gold work along the Ivindo to find them appropriate (heuristic) analytical tools. Focusing on skill (and the capacity for it) has also been suggested as a way to overcome the socio-economic divide from within hunter-gatherer studies (Ingold 2000). I conclude my argument for *motility* in Chapter Five with the suggested differentiation between *mobility pattern* and *motility profile*. As *motility* analyses what comes *before* observable movement, of potential and actualised outcome as mobility or immobility, it takes up the idea of mobility as relational.

1.1.2 Chapter Outline

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. Included in this introductory chapter are the scope and structure of the thesis, as well as a portrayal of the country of Gabon and my three field sites, the area around Minvoul in northern Gabon; the Ivindo region in North-Eastern Gabon; and the capital Libreville. The introduction is completed by a description of my methodologies and ethical considerations in the field.

Presenting the Baka is the title of Chapter Two, in which I provide facts and figures on the Baka in Gabon, with comparative reference to Cameroon and Congo. I recount Baka origin myths; address the topic of 'pygmies' as a classificatory group to which the

⁵ The eight elements are: 1. array of appropriate documents, visas, money, qualifications; 2. others (workmates, friends and family members) at-a-distance; 3. movement capacities; 4. location free information and contact points; 5. communication devices; 6. appropriate, safe and secure meeting places; 7. access to cars, planes etc; 8. time and other resources to manage and coordinate 1-7 (Urry 2007: 197-198).

Baka are deemed to belong, and the stereotyping associated with it; I introduce the subject of inter-ethnic relations, meaning the relations between the Baka and their ethnic neighbours, as they play a central role in (the understanding of) Baka mobility. Baka livelihoods, egalitarian social organisation, and other aspects such as gender roles have been and are continuing to change, and Baka are 'leaving the forest'. I conclude Chapter Two by suggesting that this group diversity is best characterised as an intra-population generation gap and an urban-rural trajectory.

Chapter Three explores what constitutes Baka mobility, from an emic perspective and based on my observations. The first part of the chapter analyses Baka dwellings and living arrangements to show that the Baka live a predominantly sedentarised lifestyle, and that their life is characterised more by (observable) immobility than by mobility. The derived argument is that dwellings serve as (emotional) moorings for the Baka to enable related mobilities, and that Baka have not necessarily been forced to adopt sedentism, but that it is also their choice, that they prefer certain aspects of it. In the second part of the chapter, I proceed to the emic description of three types of Baka mobilities - *molongo*, *mosesanu* and *mongengele* - which refer to different lengths and ways of being in the forest. I present those Baka values which are relevant to mobility practices: individual autonomy; *bien garder*, taking care of one another (in the broadest sense); *être à l'aise*, to be relaxed and at ease; and *faire l'ambiance*, to have a party; and I explain that the *heart* and the spirit world are essential to Baka mobility. In the third section of this chapter, I exemplify the principal factors in Baka migration, mobility and immobility as firstly *toma*, following family from one location to another; secondly, the different types and qualities of the inter-ethnic relations; and thirdly, the search for a good life, for economic improvement and freedom from violence in Gabon. In summary, I draw together three topic areas: the three principal mobility factors, the mobility values listed above, and the (increasing) Baka intragroup diversity, to suggest that the result of the analysis of these three areas is the conceptualisation of Baka mobility as a *motivational complex*.

This idea serves as an introduction to Chapter Four in which I narrate the migratory history of the Baka who live along the Ivindo, and that of their forefathers from the

1960s to today. The chapter tells of how the Ivindo Baka came to Gabon from Cameroon and Congo, and the text is structured following the geographical locations along the migratory routes, meaning the different villages. I present each village with the mobility patterning most dominant in that locale, and conclude with a summary of factors for Baka migration and mobility which includes not only *toma*, inter-ethnic relations and economic considerations, but also paramilitary violence, sorcery, outbreaks of Ebola and love triangles.

In Chapter Five I apply the concept of *motility*, which refers to the potential to be mobile and studies what comes *before* actualised mobility or immobility, to analyse individual mobility patterns emerging through Baka gold work in the gold fields of Gabon. I take the example of one Baka man and his family to conclude that *motility* is better suited to conceptualising their movements and the resultant social change than existing mobility theories. *Motility* gives depth to the analysis by applying the three determinants of *access*, *skill* and *appropriation*, to show how the Baka man manages his movements, thereby including ecological, economic and social factors without explicitly distinguishing between them. As individual personal stories alone would be insufficient to conceptualise all dimensions of mobility, I propose to differentiate between the terms *mobility patterns* and *motility profiles* to allow for an easier appellation of different units of analysis, temporal scales and conceptual approaches.

Chapter Six develops the idea of mobility as relational and returns to conceptual issues around inter-ethnic relations, the everyday reality thereof along the Ivindo, and the resulting academic importance which remains, and, as I argue, will grow with increasing Baka sedentarisation. The first part of the chapter gives examples of the diversity of relations and interactions between Baka and their neighbours, to argue that the heterogeneity of both groups must find conceptual recognition. Through several case studies, I show that Baka mobility includes relations and mobilities with non-ethnic others, and I propose using the more general term *player* to allow for the relational diversity within mobility patterns or profiles. In the second part of this chapter, I build on Rupp's work emphasising the emotional and affective aspect of relations to suggest two things: firstly, that Baka and some of their mobility players are

connected through a 'care-network', and secondly, that it is often the emotional aspect which makes for actualised mobility or immobility. Finally, I develop ideas on Baka interrelatedness of time, space, sociality and mythical realm, and the connection of this to elephant hunting to show that a transfer has occurred from hunting mobility to *following* 'Gabon' as the signifier of a better life, and as a way of locating the Baka group in the world. There is thus an inspiring congruence between Baka emic understanding and the analytical conceptualisation of Baka mobility as relational.

1.2 The Field

Gabon is a country about which little is known. This first chapter, therefore, includes a description of the geography, history and current political structures of Gabon, to contextualise where the Baka that I worked with live, and which, of course, is the location where I undertook the fieldwork for this PhD. I also provide details on my three fieldwork sites: firstly, the area around Minvoul; secondly, along the Ivindo River; and thirdly, in Libreville. In the last part of the chapter, I describe the methodologies I applied before and during my field period and the writing up phase, as well as detailing my ethical considerations and the challenges I encountered in the field.

1.2.1 Gabon: A Portrait of a Central African Country

La République Gabonaise, as Gabon is officially known, is a state in West Central Africa, located on the equator between latitudes 3°N and 4°S, and longitudes 8° and 15°E. Gabon shares its borders with Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea to the north, and with the Republic of Congo to the east and south. The western territorial limit is formed by the Atlantic Ocean over a distance of 885 km. The Gabonese territory expands over 267,668 km² (equivalent to two thirds of the size of Germany), more than 80 per cent of this territory is covered in tropical forest, and only just under 2% of the land are cultivated (United Nations Statistics Division 2011). The official language of Gabon is French, and the country has an estimated population of 1,505,000 (United Nations 2010), approximately half of which live in the capital city Libreville, which is located on the Atlantic coast.⁶

Climate and Tropical Forest

The climate of Gabon is humid and tropical, defined by two wet and two dry seasons: wet from mid-September to November and February to mid-May, and dry from about mid-May to mid-September and December to January. The average temperature varies from 20 °C to 30 °C. Gabon is rich in natural resources, which include natural

⁶ Compare the population sizes of Cologne, with its 1,027,500 inhabitants (Stadt Koeln 2010), and Gabon as close in numbers, although the respective related spaces are so vastly different in size.

gas, gold, and iron ore, and the country's main exports are crude oil, timber, manganese and uranium. The oil revenues make up nearly half of Gabon's GDP and are declining, so that since 2003 there has been a move towards eco-tourism as a new source of state income (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). Moreover, this nation state has practically no home-grown economy, and nearly everything on sale in Gabon is imported.



Map 1.1 – Political and Topographical Map of Gabon in Africa (inset)⁷

No account of Gabon can be complete without a detailed reference to its environment, to the central fact that defines this country, the forest, *la forêt* or *la brousse* in French, the latter term referring to what in English is commonly called

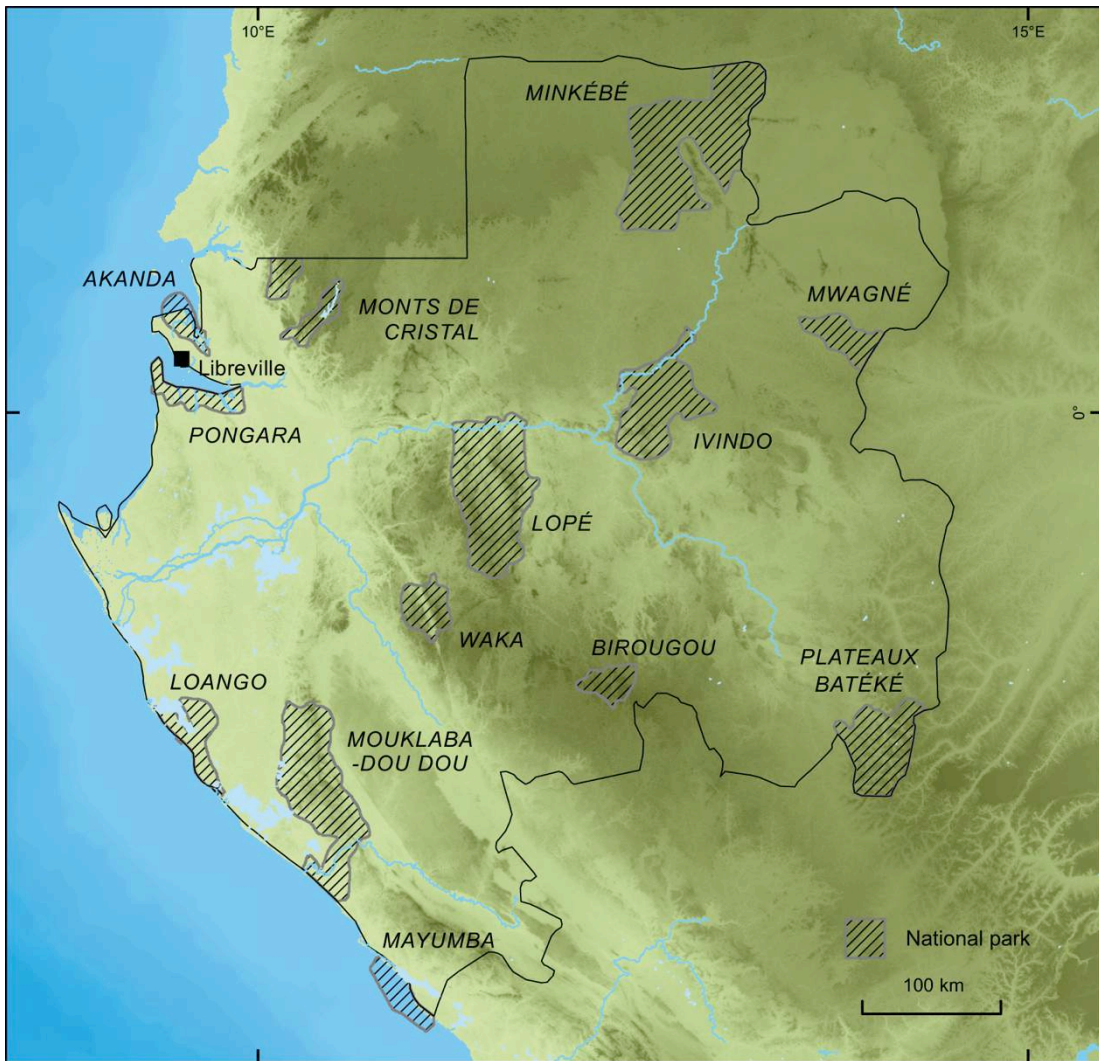
⁷ Responsibility for the excellent cartography and detailed maps designed for this PhD lies with my colleagues from the CRC 806 subproject Z2. Special thanks to Andreas Bolten and Lutz Hermsdorf-Knauth.

jungle.⁸ With 80% of its land mass covered by tropical forest, the thing you see when flying overhead in a plane is a sheer endless expanse of green, ranging from the canopies of the tallest trees to savannah grasslands and gnarly mangroves. About 700 bird species, 98 species of amphibians, between 95 and 160 species of reptiles, about 10.000 plant species, and about 198 different mammals populate the area (Pourtier 1989, LeGabon.org 2010, Appendix IX). This diversity and the constant growing and dying of plant matter lead to the particular type of rainforest in Gabon being called a mosaic forest (Hladik 1982). Underlying the rich green is a substantial water system, as this region is part of the Congo Basin, which is the second largest undisturbed area of tropical rainforest after the Amazon, and is also known as the ‘world’s second lung’. On September 4, 2002, at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, the late Gabonese president Omar Bongo Ondimba announced that about 11% of the Gabonese territory were to be turned into national parks, 13 in total (cf. map 1.2 below). The *ANPN*, the *Agence National des Parcs Nationaux*, the Gabonese National Parks Agency and several conservation NGOs such as WWF (World Wildlife Fund), WCS (Wildlife Conservations Society) and ZSL (Zoological Society of London) have since been engaged in project work to manage the parks and protect the abundant wildlife, as Gabon lists many protected species such as the Gorilla and Mandrill (see Appendix X for the overview of protected species 2007, and Appendix XI for listings in 2011). The main concerns are the ever-dwindling number of forest elephants and related illegal ivory trade, and the illegal bushmeat trade.

Population

More than 40 different ethnicities make up the Gabonese populace, the exact number mostly given as 47 or 49, who are divided into nine ethnic groups and eleven language groups (Pourtier 1989). Baka and other forest peoples are listed under the overall title of *pygmées*, pygmies. According to census data, the major ethnic groups are divided into *Omyènè-Séké*, *Eshira*, *Okandé*, *Bakèlè*, *Fang*, *Bakota*, *Mbédé*, but this is disputed and it is suggested that grouping *Myènè* (*Ngwé-Myènè*), *Fang*, *Punu-Ghisir*, *Kota*, *Téké-Obamba*, *Ndzébi*, would be a better classification (Rossatanga-Rignault 1993: 237).

⁸ This is also evidenced in the Gabonese flag, which has three equal horizontal bands, green (top), yellow (middle), and blue (bottom). Green represents the country's forests and natural resources, yellow represents the equator (which transects Gabon) as well as the sun, and blue represents the sea.



Map 1.2 – National Parks in Gabon

From my day-to-day experience of how people introduced themselves, the largest groups are the *Fang*, *Ndzébi*, *Myènè* and *Punu*. The street image of Libreville is dominated by women and men dressed in tailor-made clothes in a large variety of colours and styles. There are equally as many people dressed in jeans and T-shirt, but the diversity and elegance of the bespoke garments with ‘African’ patterns are dazzling. There is always music coming from somewhere, often very loud to a European ear, and mostly there is someone joyfully singing along with the tune, including in the supermarket. One point to note is that all ethnic groups generally speak about being in the ‘forest’, not about living in the jungle. In my opinion, this shows how the ‘jungle’, perceived as wild, dangerous and impenetrable from a (European) distance, becomes a ‘mere’ forest from close up. Having said this, journeys from Libreville on the coast are undertaken into the ‘interior’, as the Gabonese

themselves refer to the non-coastal areas of their country, so there is nevertheless a clear sense of entering a special zone. All Gabonese live in close connection to the forest and village life in or near the forest, either as village inhabitants, or by a kind of proxy through the extensive kin networks which connect Libreville and the villages in the interior, and eating bushmeat is still considered an essential part of being Gabonese (Pourtier 1989; for parallel developments in Africa see Geschiere & Gugler 1998). Pourtier has further argued that the Gabonese perceive the forest that makes up their country as a place without borders, as a fluid area which determines the Gabonese understanding of space (Pourtier 1989).

Libreville has exploded over the last ten years, following the influx of Gabonese from the interior of the country, as well as legal and illegal immigrants from other Central and Western African states, who make up about 15% of the population. Gabon, as one of the richest states in Africa, is generally known for its good income possibilities, and I was told that for the same type of work a cleaning lady will earn \$10 in West Africa, but \$100 in Gabon. The Gabonese themselves are said to be reluctant to take up menial jobs, and, for example, the variety of nationalities from Western Africa amongst the taxi drivers in the capital depicts this fact.

In comparison with many other African countries, *La République Gabonaise* has enjoyed relative peace ever since its independence from France in 1960. This may be considered particularly surprising in light of the fact that 80% of the population live below the poverty line (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) 2010). The majority of Gabonese is Christian (55-77%), with a growing number of Muslims since the late president's conversion to Islam in 1973. Bwiti, which can variously be viewed as a religion, ancestor cult, or syncretist cult (Fernandez 1982, Raponda-Walker & Sillans 1962, Gollnhofer & Sillans 1997, Mary 1999), holds an increasingly important place in Gabonese society. Whichever creed is officially followed, an essential dynamic governing and defining social interaction is the belief in and fear of sorcery, its supernatural and destructive powers, and known in vernacular language as *vampire* (Bonhomme 2005).

Historical Information

As a part of Central Africa and the Congo Basin, Gabonese history begins in the mists of time with the Baka and other 'pygmy groups', who are considered in common parlance to be the original inhabitants of the forests of this region. This belief is held by the majority of Gabonese I spoke to, but also commonly accepted and propagated, for example by Wikipedia on the history of Gabon which states: 'The earliest inhabitants of the area were Pygmy people'. I return to the validity of this 'primordial' idea in Chapter Two (cf. 2.3.1), and now focus on the period of colonial history beginning in the 15th century and the political situation of today.

The Portuguese arrived at the site of what is today Libreville in 1470 as part of their search for the sea route to India. Thick fog is said to have forced them to stop at the mouth of the Komo River by Libreville, which is roughly the shape of a cloak, and from which stems the country's name, from *Gabão*, Portuguese for cloak. During the 15th and 16th century, the Portuguese established the trade in slaves and ivory, but also beeswax, honey, and palm oil, in exchange for European goods such as cloth and old iron, and important Atlantic coastal goods like salt. These activities were not pioneering, but rather built on a 'vast pre-colonial, regional trading system', which lay between the coast and the interior of the country stretching further into the Congo Basin (Cinnamon 1999, drawing on Bucher 1977). In the 1700s, the Dutch took over the trade importing cloth, metal, alcohol and guns in return for the established trading items, dyewood, and sexual favours (mistresses with diplomatic roles in international trade). The major slave trade period for Gabon began only in the late 1700s with approximately 1000-1500 slaves exported per annum until the early 1800s, and several thousand per annum from 1815-1850 (Cinnamon 1999, quoting Patterson 1975). During this period also the trade with ebony, and from 1851 with rubber, were established. The overland trading routes must be imagined as relay systems between tiers of traders (rather than long caravans), which were based on alliances of trust and marriage, and formed part of the construction of ethnic identities (Cinnamon 1999: 192). The tiers of traders were at a 'transactional distance' from the coast, each trader taking his cut, but there were many inter-clan rivalries around this system (Cinnamon 1999: 193, referring to Chamberlin 1977).

The *Mpongwe* lived on the coast near Libreville constituting the first-tier of the relay system, and on February 9, 1839, the Mpongwe king Antchouè Kowè Rapontchombo, better known as 'King Denis', signed a contract placing himself under French sovereignty, thereby enabling the French to establish the first European settlement in Gabon (Image of King Denis in Appendix IV). This led to the establishment of other European trading houses and the arrival of European explorers who went further inland along Gabon's largest river, the *Ogooué*, in 1870/1880s. These included the expeditions of Du Chaillu in (1861), who was the first to encounter the *Babongo* 'pygmies'; that of Crampel and Fourneau (1888-1889), whereby Crampel was the first to encounter the *Baka*; and the Trilles expedition (1899-1900). With regard to migration, it is described that the *Mpongwe* destroyed the *Akoa*, an ethnic group today classed as 'pygmy', on arrival at the coast (Touchard 1861). The 19th century also saw the great *Fang* migrations from Southern Cameroon and out of the Ivindo basin south and west towards the Ogooué and the trading centres on the Equatorial African Coast (see also Appendix V – Historic Migrations in Gabon).

Cinnamon describes this as a 'period of unprecedented social opportunity, population movements, and widespread social upheaval', due to the expansion of long-distance ivory and rubber trade in return for European manufactured goods, including guns and powder which flowed into the interior 'entering into local patterns of exchange and conflict' between the different groups involved in trading, especially the *Fang* (Cinnamon 1999: 187). The *Baka* have hunted elephants since time immemorial, and it can be presumed, would have been part of this 'social upheaval'. As resources became scarce near the coast, the Europeans moved into the Ivindo basin in the late 1880s, and Northern Gabon took on greater importance. The systematic colonisation of Gabon only started in the first decade of 1900s, and in 1910, Gabon became part of French Equatorial Africa, together with areas today roughly equivalent to the Chad, Central African Republic and French Congo. I detail this period of Gabonese history later to draw attention to the serious famine in North-Eastern Gabon in 1920s, which is said to constitute the end of the 'Equatorial African tradition' (Vansina 1990).

In 1958, Gabon became an autonomous republic in the French Community, and on August 17, 1960 gained its independence from France. The 17th of August is still the most important national holiday in Gabon, marked by fireworks and parades, and people travel throughout the country in order to celebrate this time with their families. Gabon has been ruled by three presidents, who have all been from the PDG, *Parti Démocratique Gabonais*, the Gabonese Democratic Party: Léon M'ba (1961–1967), Omar Bongo Ondimba (1967-2009), and, following a contested vote after his father's death, Ali Bongo Ondimba (2009-today). A republic since its inception, it was only in the early 1990s that a multi-party system and a new democratic constitution were introduced. Although the political changes of the 1990s allowed for a more transparent electoral process and the reform of some governmental institutions, it is often criticised that the Bongo family upholds an authoritarian and corrupt rule (Gaboneco 2012)

Contemporary Gabon

The national media consist of the main national newspaper *L'Union*, and the national broadcasting service, *Radiodiffusion-Television Gabonaise* (RTVG), which has two radio and two television channels, all of which focus on local Gabonese issues, representing Democratic Party views, and little or no reference to international events. Foreign newspapers can only be bought in large international hotels and the evening TV news mostly focuses on the presidential activities of that day so that the Gabonese information policy may thus be deemed 'government-controlled' (BBC 2012).

In 2010, in the months before my arrival, Gabon together with 16 other African countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of political independence from France, the so-called *Cinquantenaire* (Official Logo in Appendix II). The focus of the festivities in Gabon was the continuing, close cooperation and friendship between La République Gabonaise and the Republic of France, which may strike as strange given the reason for the celebrations (Fricke 2011). Moreover, there was a notable 'discursive silence' on the resistance to colonial oppression, the struggle for independence, or post-colonial events, and instead the contract between the French and, King Denis' in 1839,

which had opened up Gabon to French colonial interests, constituted the central theme of remembrance (Fricke 2011).

In time for the *Cinquantenaire*, the exhibition *Gabon, ma Terre, mon Futur*, Gabon my country, my future, opened (Exhibition Poster in Appendix I). Gabon has no national museum, so that this show was particularly interesting as a window on how Gabon would like its history and its future to be seen.⁹ The exhibition was structured into 6 parts from the 'Garden of Origins' to the 'New Era', and included a space for the exhibition of 'pygmy life', which showed a round hut, a carrier basket, and some forest products such as bark. In the exhibition itself, it was fascinating to watch pupils from Libreville marvel at animals which live on their door step, but which they have never seen, such as the giant leatherback turtles which can grow to be up to 2m. Art galleries are conspicuously absent from the cityscape of Libreville, but the exhibition showed many amazing works by young artists, including fashion designers. This image of a modernising Gabon is something Ali Bongo, who presents himself as a forward looking and democratic president, actively drives with his official vision and campaign *L'Emergence*, Emerging Gabon, which consists of three parts and is explained as follows on the national website legabon.org:

Since taking office in October 2009, Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba has started to implement important political and economic reforms to transform Gabon into a newly developed country by 2025, strengthening and diversifying the economy around three pillars:

Gabon Vert (Green Gabon) to sustainably develop the country's natural resources: 22 million ha of forest, 1 million ha of arable land, 13 national parks, 800 km of coastline;

Gabon Industriel (Industry Gabon) to develop local processing of primary materials, export of high value-added products;

⁹ The information in this section was gained through interviews with the organising committee to learn about the ideas and the strategy behind the exhibition. I owe particular thanks to Vincent Bobango and Mathias Ndembet.

Gabon des Services (Services Gabon) to develop the Gabonese workforce to become a regional leader in financial services, ICT, green growth, tertiary education and health.

(LeGabon.org 2010)

L'Emergence aims for change in the political system, to break up corruption and eliminate nepotism, but mostly to attract investment into Gabon as 'one of the continent's most stable countries, an upper-middle income country with per capita income four times the sub-Saharan African average' (Oxford Business Group 2010). This portrayal of Gabon may include the fact that there are more of the exclusive *Hummer* SUVs only in California, a testament to the oil-rich elite of the Sub-Saharan African country, at the same time omitting the datum that approximately 80% of the population live in poverty. This report also excludes the considerable infrastructure problems in Libreville and elsewhere in the country, which entail, for example, that many households never have running water or only during short intervals, a fact that affects all areas and social strata.

In January 2011, during my time in Gabon, a political coup took place. Andre Mba Obame, leader of the then opposition party *Union Nationale*, repeated his claim that President Ali Bongo had won the 2009 elections by fraudulent means, and called on the Gabonese people to overthrow Ali Bongo's government. Obame declared himself to be the true president, and named a parallel cabinet of 19 ministers. Following accusations of treason, he moved to the UN compound with his supporters for protection. This coup and the riots that followed barely made the international news, possibly because Obame lacked either international backing or that of the African Union, and Ali is still firmly in power today. Transparency International is still investigating his father's assets (Transparency International 2011), but these accusations seem to have had no noticeable impact on Gabonese politics or international relations. In Gabon, I learned of individuals who had fallen from political grace after the changeover from Omar Bongo to Ali Bongo, and who have had to emigrate to France or other European countries as a result. For those who have stayed in Gabon and who press for further changes in their country, life is made difficult. As

one person who prefers to remain nameless summarised: 'We live in an enlightened dictatorship'. Political hierarchy can be said to be one of the central organising structures in Gabon, and it was interesting to note that wherever I travelled in Gabon, identical posters depicting the Gabonese political organisation with president Ali Bongo at the top above the other important ministers, were posted on the walls of official Government buildings, but also in restaurants and many other locations of daily life (Appendix III – Depiction of Gabonese Political Organisation).

Present-day Migration and Mobility in Gabon

Almost all ethnic groups of Gabon have a strong migratory history, in particular the Fang tribes (Cinnamon 1999). In a time period estimated to cover the last 10-30 years, many of those who formerly lived in the interior of the country have moved to Libreville, or other larger cities in the interior. Many villages have become depopulated or even deserted, and this general movement of rural Gabonese into larger towns is a well-discussed topic in Gabon itself.¹⁰ The rural population density is especially low in the North-Eastern part of the country and the province Ogooué-Ivindo, where I worked. The current contentious issue surrounding these migratory movements is that many villagers have received birth certificates in different villages, so more than one, which leads to inflated population figures. It is said that there are 'double lists' in most villages, meaning lists of the actual inhabitants and lists including people (previous villagers) actually living elsewhere. The easiest way to deal with this and to clarify population numbers is to encourage sedentarisation, and the Gabonese Government is attempting to address and prevent this malpractice through biometric cards. Combined with the fact that Gabon is an attractive location for economic migrants from Central and Western Africa, the country will be an interesting location for further research on mobility and migration in the coming years.

¹⁰ In particular, I discussed the situation in Southern Gabon with Father Pierre from the Alliance Chrétienne. Michael Fay described this for Northern and Eastern Gabon following his *Megatransect* of Central Africa. For the same region it was also a topic during a meeting with UNICEF (29.04.2011, evening), and whilst visiting Lambarene with the Baka woman HA..

1.2.2 Baka presence in Gabon

Gabon is divided into nine provinces, namely Estuaire, Haut-Ogooué, Moyen- Ogooué, Ngounié, Nyanga, Ogooué-Ivindo, Ogooué-Lolo, Ogooué-Maritime, and Woleu-Ntem. The nine provinces are again sub-sectioned into thirty-six prefectures. The Baka live in the northern and North-Eastern part of Gabon around the town of Minvoul in the province Woleu-Ntem, and in the province Ogooué-Ivindo stretching north along the river Ivindo from the provincial capital Makokou.¹¹ Some Baka frequent Libreville in the province Estuaire, and the Baka woman HA. has lived their for many years. In the following, I describe the three very different settings, the environment and the effort necessary to arrive there, in the attempt to provide the reader with a feel for the localities of this PhD. The diversity of the locations gave me a great opportunity to explore what it means to be Baka today.

Given my research topic of mobility, my focus was at first set on the national park Minkébé, which is the largest of Gabon's parks with a surface area of 7,565 km², and stretches out in between the two areas of Baka dwelling around Minvoul to the West and the Ivindo near its Eastern limits. The name Minkébé comes from the Fang word *Minkegbe*, which means 'valleys' or 'ditches'. This region is criss-crossed by small and large rivers, making it swampy and inaccessible in many areas. Travel is mainly by boat, on foot, or by helicopter, as there is little or no road infrastructure. Human population density is very low; much is being done to maintain the animal population at a healthy maximum by the respective conservation NGOs.¹² Historically speaking, the designation of the park of Minkébé derives from the former German and French army control point, which was set up in 1910 and dismantled from 1930 onwards (Ndong-Akono Mbiaga 1984).

¹¹ See Appendix VIII for an overview of the Coats of Arms from the Provinces Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo, and the significance of the symbolism depicted.

¹² The area of Southern Cameroon, Western Congo and Northern Gabon forms the Western part of the Congo Basin and an environmental unit, which even today governments and conservation NGOs are trying to establish and protect as a single zone known as TRIDOM. This covers 140,000 km², which equals 7.5 % of the Congo Basin's forests (de Wachter 2009). TRIDOM stands for the Tri-National project Dja-Odzala-Minkébé, and includes Minkébé in this conservation project between Cameroon, Congo and Gabon. The aim of this agreement is to jointly manage the trans-boundary protected areas in order to promote conservation, the rational use of natural resources and sustainable development for the benefit of the local communities with a view to contributing to poverty alleviation.



Map 1.3 – Baka Presence in Gabon: Minvoul, Ivindo and Libreville

1.2.2.1 Minvoul in the Woleu-Ntem

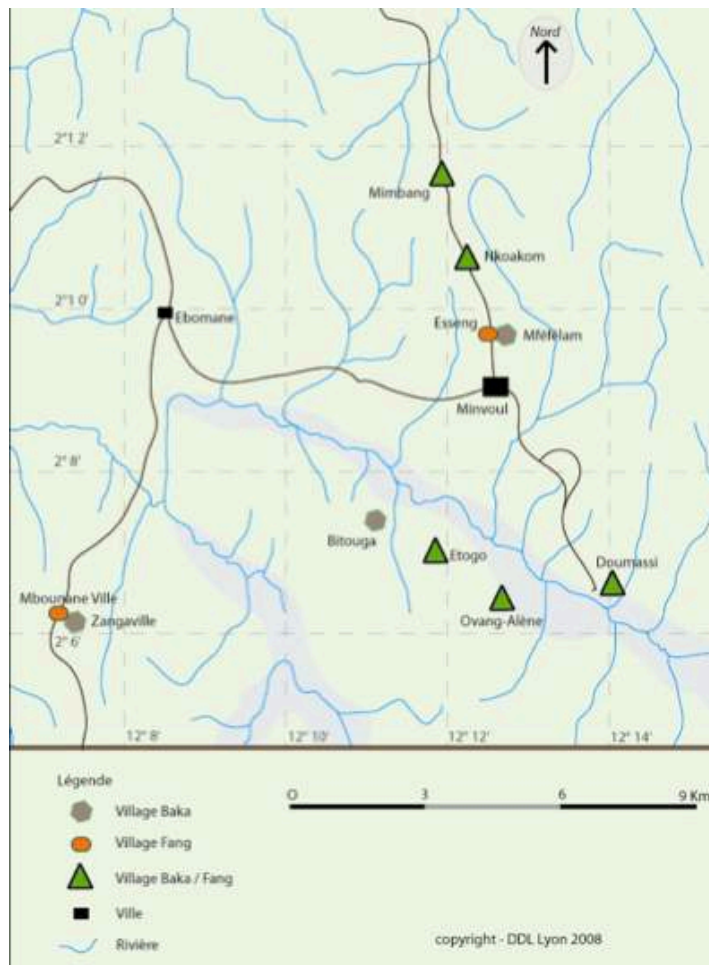
Woleu-Ntem is the most northerly province of Gabon, a traditional Fang stronghold, and the agricultural production centre of Gabon. The distance between Libreville and the provincial capital Oyem is about 500 km, and the road journey takes on average 8-10 hours. Most roads in Gabon, and even many in Libreville, are dirt roads, or if there was once a tarmac covering, this is pitted with holes, which sometimes makes driving in a normal car an adventure in and of itself. Most of the road from Libreville to Oyem is tarred so that travelling with one of the bus operators on this stretch is relatively easy. Sadly, the tarmac covering gives rise to even more accidents, as drivers hurtle along in vehicles which have long passed their last MOT check and which are hopelessly overloaded with people and goods. From the bustling trade town of Oyem

there is a dirt track of about 100km to the town of Minvoul. Taxi-buses take about 3-4 hours for this journey.

Minvoul is the capital of the Haut-Ntem prefecture with approximately 6000 inhabitants, situated only a few kilometres from the border with Cameroon. Baka have been living here for four generations,¹³ so less than one hundred years, having departed mainly from Djoum in Cameroon (Paulin 2010). There are 8 villages where the Baka live together with or close to the Fang: Doumassi, Eto'o, Bitouga, Ovang-Alène, Mimbang, Nkoakom, Mféfélam, Zangaville. As I will describe more, this cohabitation is not a peaceful one, but rather characterised by Fang discrimination and ill treatment of the Baka (cf. 2.3.2). European and Gabonese researchers interested in working with the Baka have been coming mainly to the villages around Minvoul.

My first aim on arrival in Minvoul was to visit the Baka man S. in the village of Bitouga. Bitouga has been the field site of a linguistic project by the University of Lyon in France, documenting Baka as an endangered language (Paulin 2010). S. was the key informant for the duration of this project, and the French researcher Pascale Paulin had suggested making this contact. Bitouga is a fascinating place for the budding researcher. To get there from Minvoul, it is a steep 20 minutes climb up the hill on a dirt road, then down into the forest along a small, slightly overgrown track until you reach the Ntem River. From here a small dugout canoe takes about 20 minutes to reach one of the paths leading to the village of Bitouga. The journey in its entirety can take anything from one to several hours, depending on the people involved and the level of organisation possible. Bitouga is considered a Baka village with approximately 60 individuals living there (Paulin 2010), although the village chief is a Bamiléké from Cameroon. On the village grounds are *mongulus*, the 'traditional' dome-shaped Baka dwellings, as well as substantial mud-walled or wooden houses. Bitouga is also on the tourist map, as a place where Gabonese and foreigners go for healing, so that the Baka are familiar with visitors and researchers.

¹³ Baka generational cycle is defined as a period of about 15 years.



Map 1.4 – Baka Locations around Minvoul

Another aspect to address for the area around Minvoul is that WWF and ANPN have been very active in this region in launching wildlife protection programs. This applies in particular to the forest elephant, which the Baka traditionally hunt for subsistence and ritual purposes, as well as for ivory to trade (Mve Mebia 2001, LeClerc 2001). In order to facilitate peaceful solutions to this obvious clash of interests, WWF created and funded the NGO *Edzengui* in 2004. The main idea behind this initiative is to build alternative forms of income for the Baka, such as ecotourism. There has been much confusion and strife about this project, as many Baka do not identify with it, and are not closely involved. For example, they find the name *Edzengui*, which refers to a Baka forest spirit, confusing. Thus, the NGO did not prove to be an effective vehicle for the promotion of Baka interests, and, at the time of writing, the organisation and its activities had completely disintegrated.

Minvoul, similar to many towns in Gabon and including Makokou, has a considerable Muslim population, who run the majority of stores selling food items, toiletries and all sorts of hardware.

1.2.2.2 Makokou and the Ivindo River

The Ogooué-Ivindo is the North-Eastern province of Gabon, and is the largest, least populated, and least developed in Gabon. It gets its name from two rivers, the Ogooué, which is Gabon's largest river extending over 1200 km, and the Ivindo, the main Ogooué tributary, which forms part of the border with Cameroon and Congo, and flows from the northeast of Gabon to the southwest. The provincial capital Makokou has approximately 12.000 to 16.000 inhabitants. The name Makokou refers to eddies of water and waterfalls caused by boulders and rocks on the riverbed of the Ivindo, which reflects the gentle flow of this sleepy town. Makokou is nearly 600 km from Libreville along a road, which, although it constitutes the only route into this part of Gabon and even into the Congo, mainly consists of a dirt road with potholes some of which are large enough to 'swallow' small cars. Makokou, like Oyem, has an airfield with departures to Libreville, but only at irregular intervals. When I questioned why there is no bank or ATM in Makokou, I learned that the Governor of the Province previously threw outrageous parties, supplying food and alcohol, and literally handed out bank notes.¹⁴

Migratory and Colonial History in the Ogooué-Ivindo

Under this heading I provide a detailed description of the historic and current movements around Makokou to contextualise the current situation of the Baka on the Ivindo, and to show that the Baka are not the only ethnic group with a nomadic past. Before it became the capital of Ogooué-Ivindo, Makokou was initially established as a military station in 1908. Due to its location in a valley easily accessible from Cameroon, Makokou has been a way station on the migratory routes of the 'pygmies', and the Bakwele, Bakota, and later the Fang since time immemorial, as one Makokou local

¹⁴ The priests at Makokou Catholic Church first told me about these past activities of the government ministers, and this information was later confirmed by other sources in Libreville.

explained to me. Research confirms that the Fang group descending the Ayina-Ivindo route via the German colonial post Minkébé into Gabon (one of the three taken by the Fang) were the *Makina*, also known as *Osyéba* or *Chiwa* (Jean-Paul Abeigne-Nze 1973). Due to the absence of roads, a significant regular trade to the coast was never established, and it is only recently that the timber industry and other projects have brought about an interest for this area, which is colloquially termed *La Province Oublié*, the Forgotten Province.

Historically speaking, this part of Gabon has played a significant role, and it can be said that WWI was partly fought in the rain forests of Northern Gabon. In his analysis of Fang presence in this area, Cinnamon describes how in the first decade of the 20th century, Germans and French pursued the colonial and commercial conquest of the Upper Ntem, Ivindo and Dja rivers together (the Dja flows through Cameroon and Congo). The Congress of Berlin (1884-1885) had dealt with power regulations in the Congo River basin, for example navigation and commercial rights, and resulted in the first Franco-German delimitation protocol of 1885 which:

Established a boundary between their respective territories inland from the Bight of Biafra along the Campo river to the 10th meridian, and thence from the point of intersection, the parallel of latitude 1 to the 15th meridian' (The Geographer 1971).

The exact border delimitations remained a point of contention also for the second border commission in 1905 led by Captain Cottés, especially as they were made without any reference to existing local political structures (Mangongo-Nzambi 1969). The concessionary regimes, including the French S.H.O. (Société du Haut Ogooué) who were active in North-Eastern Gabon between 1905-11 during the peak of the rubber and ivory trade, effectively destroyed what trade has been conducted through the long-distance overland trading networks detailed above (Cinnamon 1999: 189). The European traders became colonisers by way of the building of roads, the forceful relocation of locals, and the prohibition of ritual fetish. The importance of the roads is that prior to their existence, people oriented themselves according to the landscape, and especially to rivers (Fernandez 1982). During this period, various colonial posts

were established: Makokou (February, 1908), Mvadhi (1908) Minkébé (1910), Angouma (1912), Collioura (today Ovan) (1912). In 1911, France ceded the larger part of northern Gabon to Germany, confirming German commercial and administrative ascendancy during the decade prior to WWI in Northern Gabon. The new border cut through Fang territory.¹⁵ The years between 1912-1914 constituted the time of the official German occupation until the departure from northern Gabon in 1914-15 (Cinnamon 1999: 287) (see Appendix VI and VII for maps of Gabonese-Cameroonian (French-German) borders from 1911 to 1919). Initially, the Germans were seen as friendly and successful traders, especially regarding ivory and because they brought *bilam*, alcohol, but later they came to be seen only as ‘murderous oppressors’ by the local population (Cinnamon 1999: 290). I was intrigued by this possibility of working in an area, which had, even if only for a short while been under German colonial rule.

Several times, I met the descendants of people who had experienced WWI and retold of the extreme brutality of the troops such as massacring people by slitting their throats in broad daylight, what Cinnamon has called the ‘apocalyptic violence’ of WWI, which provoked widespread population movements south from Minkébé, having to pay the French one tusk for the right to immigrate into foreign territory, underlining the ‘disempowerment of the colonised and the onset of colonial domination’ (Cinnamon 1999: 309, 312). Moving into the French territory also resulted in the discovery of money (Cinnamon 1999: 310). The French were initially seen as ‘colonial saviours’, but then the ‘colonial exploitation was pushed to its logical limits’ by the ‘financially hard-pressed French administration’ and the Ivindo basin became a labour reserve for timber logging camps in the Estuaire province and the lower Ogooué (Cinnamon 1999: 313). Colonial ignorance of the necessities of swidden agriculture and the destructive practice of male labour migration from villages to support the colonial war effort and roadwork led to a great famine in 1925. It is said that the ‘famine produced and was the product of widespread social and economic dislocation, marking a turning point in the history of the region’ (Cinnamon 1999: 315), as people fled into the forest, deserting the southern region of Woleu-Ntem resulting in a forced

¹⁵ Further research would confirm the implications of this for the Baka, but it may be one of the reasons for today’s separation of the populations between Minvoul and Makokou.

relocation of villages to areas around Makokou; on the Ivindo, people moved towards Minkébé or downriver to Makokou (Cinnamon 1999: 351). I heard many stories about this migratory history of Fang and Bakwele, who had lived on the opposing sides of the River Ivindo; looking downstream, Fang lived on the right-hand side, Bakwele on the left. Most Fang have long moved to Makokou, and the Bakwele took over the old villages, and have built new ones.

Contemporary Makokou

Makokou today is a centre of the timber industry; since 1983 the location of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme in Gabon (UNESCO 2012); a location for various conservation projects by ZSL and WWF, especially for the study of gorillas; and increasingly the focus of substantial infrastructure projects by the Chinese regarding telecommunications and road construction. One of these projects was the planned exploitation of Bélinga, which is the site of the second largest unexploited iron ore deposit remaining in the world, by the Chinese state-owned company CEMEC. First discovered in 1895, Bélinga lies in a hitherto undisturbed area of rainforest. Work was due to start in 2011, but without any previous feasibility and impact studies having been undertaken (The Rainforest Foundation UK 2009). Further up the course of the Ivindo a hydroelectric power plant had been planned, which was to supply electricity for the mining of ore. Marc Ona from the NGO *Brainforest* was instrumental in stopping these plans (Ona Marc 2008).

Baka in the Ogooué-Ivindo

The population around Makokou and along the Upper Ivindo today is made up of the ethnic groups *Fang*, *Bakwele*, *Bakota*, *Bakoya* and *Baka* (detailed figures for population sizes not available). The Bakoya live on the road towards Mékambo, and both Baka and Bakoya are considered to be 'pygmies'. However, the Baka do not see themselves as being in one group with the Bakoya. It has been acknowledged that the Baka live in Makokou and along the Ivindo (Knight 2003: 92), but this is not common knowledge to the authorities in Libreville or in Makokou. The Baka presence has been documented mainly through the *Brainforest* project 'Mapping for Rights', supported by the

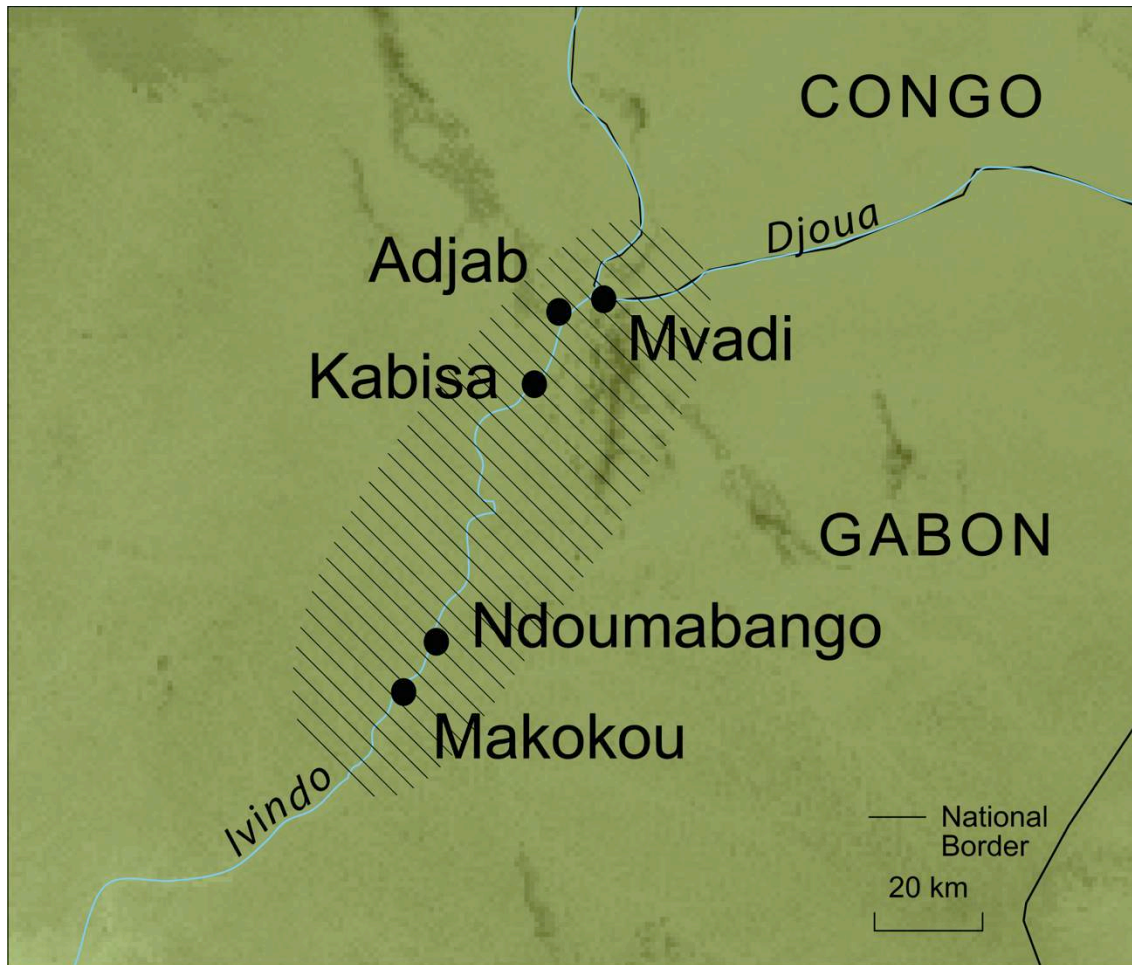
Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK).¹⁶ The pilot project was undertaken with Baka in Cameroon in 2000, and has since been extended to other Central African countries including Gabon and the national park Minkébé in 2009.¹⁷ The participatory mapping projects have helped to put Baka on the map of the WWF and the National Parks Agency, but other Gabonese government institutions still know little about them.

In the Ogooué-Ivindo, the Baka live in the provincial capital Makokou, and, moving north along the River Ivindo towards the Congolese border, in the villages Ndoumabango, Kabisa, and Adjab. Makokou and the region along the Ivindo River became my main fieldwork site due to one inspiring fact: the village Adjab. Adjab differs from other villages in that only Baka live there; they do not (have to) share their village space with any other ethnic groups, as is normally the case. Having learned of and seen the disrespectful treatment of Baka around Minvoul by the Fang and others, I was interested to observe and document a Baka-only village, something there is little previous research on, and which I felt would be better suited to making a contribution to knowledge.¹⁸ The Ivindo region as a field site is also special because of its environmental situation meaning the sizeable river itself, which is used for riverine transport. Many studies on Baka or 'forest peoples' deal with their (new) situation by the roadside (for example Knight 2003). However, there is no road infrastructure from Maibut north towards Mvadi, so that my study encompasses the analysis of this particular situation of riverine locality, one aspect, which led to my conceptualisation of the rural-urban trajectory amongst the Ivindo Baka (cf. 2.4.3).

¹⁶ Participatory Mapping is 'A set of approaches and techniques that combines the tools of modern cartography with participatory methods to represent the spatial knowledge of local communities... [which] ... aims to promote recognition of communities' rights to access, control, and use forests in legislative, political and strategic processes of Congo Basin countries' (The Rainforest Foundation UK 2000).

¹⁷ Since its inception, Minkébé has caused upheaval among the Baka populations, as their rights to exploit the forest and hunt elephants were heavily curtailed, if not entirely denied, the restrictions sometimes being implemented by force.

¹⁸ Incidentally, Adjab, the Fang name for the Moabi tree, is central to an origin myth, which involves Baka and Fang (cf. 2.2).



Map 1.5 – Baka Locations in Makokou and along the Ivindo

To reach Adjab from Makokou, the first part of the trip is along a dirt road, which takes you through over 100km of spectacular tropical forest to the village Maibut I (spoken Maibut ‘Un’, Maibut One) on the River Ivindo. This journey from Makokou to Maibut can take anything from three to seven hours depending on the condition of the vehicle and the road. If you are the first car to leave in the morning, travel will be delayed several times as it becomes necessary to clear the road of trees which have fallen overnight. Even if you have a big axe and several strong men with you, the carnage after a storm might be such that turning back is the only option. From Maibut, the only way to travel further north is by dugout canoe along the Ivindo. These *pirogues*, the local French term for dugouts, vary tremendously in size, from small ones of about 2.5m which are rowed by hand, to vessels which are best described as boats with a length of ten metres which are powered by outboard motors of up to 40HP. Most canoes are four to five metres long and rowed by hand; only traders, Government officials and NGOs own the large motorised boats, as only they have the money to buy

petrol for the engines. To reach Adjab, it takes about two hours going upstream by motorised pirogue; on the way lay several villages including Maibut II (spoken Maibut Deux, Maibut Two) and opposite Kabisa. Kabisa is the location of the second Baka community on the Upper Ivindo, where I also spent many weeks of my field period. Kabisa is the access point to one of the many artisanal gold camps, Mabilia, in this part of Gabon, which lies deep in the forest. Baka are participating in the growing gold industry in Gabon, as I detail in Chapter Five. The third village with a noteworthy Baka population is Ndoumabango, which lies about one hour by motorised pirogue north of Makokou. Ndoumabango is a village shared by Bakwele and Baka. The Bakwele repeatedly expressed to me that they consider themselves superior to the Baka, and the then sub-prefect, Jean-Jacques Dibekinde, told of having to manage many conflicts between the two groups. Nevertheless, this gave me an opportunity to observe discrimination of the Baka, mainly associated with the Fang, by the Bakwele.

The three villages - Adjab, Kabisa, and Ndoumbango - exemplify the different types of village set-ups, which I also detail further in Chapters Three and Four. The point I would like to address here is that in none of the villages on the Ivindo do the Baka live in *mongulus*. All Baka live in mud-walled houses or tent-type structures, unlike in Bitouga.

1.2.2.3 Libreville

Libreville has long been home to HA., a Baka woman born in 1968 and originally from Minvoul. HA. was educated in a convent in Lambaréné¹⁹ and later in a church school in Libreville. She has since lived in many areas of Libreville, but also in Minvoul. At the time of writing, she was renting one room in a run-down house in the Nkembo market area, where running water came from a large communal tap several metres away; living like this is not uncommon in Libreville.²⁰

Working with HA. was interesting in many ways. Firstly, she has grown up and lived in a world at the interstice of Baka and non-Baka groups, and it was thought-provoking to hear her take on Baka practices and sociality. Secondly, HA. was Head of *Edzengui* for several years, and provided me with information on the interaction of Baka with state authorities and NGOs. Thirdly, by working with her at Nkembo, her residence at the time of writing, I experienced the (shocking) deference to a white person who comes to a poor part of town, and how this raises the standing of the marginalised (Baka) person they are with. Finally, she helped me with transcribing the Baka interviews, and being from Minvoul she would point out the linguistic and practice differences to the Ivindo Baka.

In this way, my three field areas, Minvoul, the Ivindo region and Libreville formed a perfect array of field sites, allowing me to see many different sides of Baka existence.

¹⁹ Lambaréné is also the location of Albert Schweitzer's famous African hospital.

²⁰ The face of Libreville has and is continuing to undergo major change. Public infrastructure in the Gabonese capital is not what it could be following years of a lack of investment in roads, water supply and waste management. People joke that the only well-tarred road is the *Boulevard de Mer*, which stretches over several kilometres from the president's private home to the official state palace. Running water at home is not a given, no matter whether you live in a posh or a poor neighbourhood. The amount of slum-type areas has increased over the last few years, and one aim of *L'Emergence* is modernising some of these areas. This normally means clearing the sites to make way for high-rise buildings. One example of this was *Boul-bess*, a built-over area of street vendors selling various types of grilled fish interspersed with bars, which can easily be termed one of the 'cultural institutions' in Libreville. *Boul-bess* was bulldozed, but during my time in Libreville none of the consecutive activities, which had been announced regarding the new apartment project, were started.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Preparation and Arrival in Gabon

The aim of my research has been to learn about the mobility patterns and the decision-making and motivation behind the mobility of the Baka in Gabon, as detailed above (cf. 1.1). The topic of forest foragers and the Baka in particular, as well as mobility were new to me, so that my first objective was to familiarise myself with the relevant literature. Coming from a performance-related understanding of human movement, I set out to discover the world of hunter-gatherers, human-environment interaction, and the related critical issues to build a well-founded research design. In addition to the traditional literature research (in English, German and French source texts), I conducted online research. This was particularly useful regarding current information on the Baka in Gabon, as, at the time, there were no monographs available.²¹

My second concern was to prepare for the practicalities of my one-year fieldwork period in Gabon. Given the constraints of the CRC project, I was not able to conduct a pre-study, so that I was well and truly organising to go off into the unknown. As the University of Cologne has no established connections to Gabon, I spent a large part of 2010 making contacts via email and telephone. I addressed myself to the university in Libreville, the Université Omar Bongo (UOB); to CENAREST, the Gabonese national research association; and various institutions and NGOs who have (conservation) projects or offices in Gabon, such as the WWF, WCS, ZSL, and Rainforest, as well as the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. I successfully built up a network of contacts; learned about Gabon and what kind of issues might await me; became knowledgeable about the practicalities of living in the forest; and organised the necessary paperwork. As it turned out, several people in Gabon complimented me on how well I was prepared for the different scenarios of life in the jungle. I also started eating meat again after many years of being a vegetarian, knowing that my diet living with hunter-gatherers would contain less salad and more meat.

²¹ Paulin's account (Paulin 2010) was only published after my return from the field.

The other essential aspect of preparing for my year in the field was to start learning the language of the Baka. Baka is a tonal language, where one word can have several different meanings according to the way it is pronounced. As I was unable to obtain audio material from the region I planned to work in, and was therefore without any knowledge of what Baka sounds like, I found learning the language difficult. This was worsened by the fact that I found it hard to relate to the vocabulary, which concerned hunting practices and forest food types, topics on which I had no previous personal experience. Working through Boursier's example conversations (Boursier 1982) sometimes felt like a joke. Only in the field, once I had seen the daily reality of a (post-) forager lifestyle and developed a personal and emotional understanding of their practices, did the examples given by Boursier or in the Baka-French dictionary published by him and Brisson (Brisson & Boursier 1979) make sense, and was I able to comprehend the meaning.

On arrival in Gabon in October 2010, I introduced myself to the people and authorities I had made contact with. My first port of call were the UOB, where Raymond Mayer gave me a warm welcome and immediately engaged me in discussion on the Baka; and CENAREST, who had accorded me a one-year research permit for Gabon.²² CENAREST is divided into several departments, and I was affiliated to the *Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines* (IRSH), the Institute for Research in Human Sciences. Wenceslas Mamboundou, Assistant Director of IRSH, greatly contributed to my understanding of Gabon and the relations between 'pygmies' and Gabonese from a local point of view. I also signed in with the so-called 'Auslandsliste - Elektronische Erfassung Auslandsdeutscher', an online registration scheme for Germans abroad set up by the German Consulate in Gabon. During those first steps in a new place, I found confirmed what I had been told, namely that hierarchy can be said to be one of the central organising structures in Gabon, and that it is very important to pay heed to this fact. To

²² Part of the support by CENAREST is the accordance of a so-called 'homologue', a research partner. From other foreign students in Gabon I had heard that these partnerships can be very fruitful and supportive. Sadly, in my case, things turned out very differently. The gentleman in question travelled with me on a first field trip, which we had split into two parts. He failed to turn up for the second part, knowing that I had been stranded without enough money to return to Libreville, and I never heard from him again. It turned out that he too had this notion of me as 'la blanche', the rich white woman from Europe, something which I found particularly hard to accept within the research context, from someone who should have known better and who was officially charged with supporting me.

enter official government buildings, it is necessary to be in the *tenue correcte*, the correct attire, which means prim and proper clothes and closed shoes, and not the grubby outdoor gear many white researchers are despised for. So, I invested in a tailor-made skirt and blouse of local 'African' design to be able to satisfy the official regulations, and noted the respect this generally earned me.

Having learned French in Central Europe, I at first found it difficult to understand the intonation of Central African French, but after a while my usual fluency returned, and communication was possible. More importantly, I discovered a new French verb: *gaspiller*. It is a term heavily used in Central Africa, and may best be translated as broken, useless, lost, squandered. The meaning of the word is closely related to the tropical climate, as it refers to the inevitable destruction of material objects through the intense humidity. Something you only pick up after a while is that it also refers to a cognitive state, the local mentality of not caring too much when things do not work out as planned (if there ever was a plan), or as might seem logical to a European outsider. I knew I had embodied *gaspiller*, when later on my video camera did not work, and my response was to calmly place it back in its case, simply accepting that humidity had taken its toll. With *gaspiller* in mind and a reminder to give only copies and never the original passport or research documents to officials to prevent confiscation, I set off to meet the Baka.

1.3.2 First steps in the Field

During my first field trip I went to the area of Minvoul, in particular the villages of Mféfélam and Bitouga; and to Makokou and the Ivindo region, with the villages Ndoumabango, Adjab, and Kabisa. In Bitouga, I met S. who had been the key informant during the years of the Lyon language project. The French researcher Pascale Paulin had suggested that he could be my introductory guide to the world of the Baka. Indeed this idea worked out well, as S. has travelled to France for the project, and by referencing things he had experienced as strange in Europe, we were able to discuss similarities and differences of both worlds. Generally speaking, I saw, heard, smelt, and 'spoke' Baka for the first time around Minvoul and on the Ivindo. This involved not

only communication problems, but, thankfully, also got me many Baka laughs, as I learnt to say simple things like I am going to eat or wash. Many of the women speak only little French, and, wanting to communicate with me, they were very encouraging in my attempts to learn and enable mutual understanding. I still struggled terribly as for example *nuale* means both father and mother depending on the way it is pronounced. At first, I just did not hear the difference, let alone could I say it right. I also came to understand that the Baka spoken in Cameroon is not identical to that spoken in Gabon, as many of the words I was taking from Brisson's (very good) dictionary were not comprehended. For example, asking for the clan name using the prefix *Ye* only got sensible results once I also employed the local term *mbi*. This meant, moreover, that my idea of starting the data collection by taking genealogical facts involved hurdles I had not imagined. I also realised that I needed to decide which language to take my field notes in: French, as the local language or the language of translation from Baka, English the language I was to write my PhD in, or German which has for many years been my note-taking language whilst travelling. In the end, I decided for English.

With regard to the Gabonese organisational hierarchy, I discovered that I was truly expected to introduce myself at every level from the Governor, to the Prefect, down to the last village chief, and also to the *Gendarmerie*, the police, and there to explain myself and my reason for being in the locality. In return, I got an official stamp on the special research permit I had to acquire for every *mission*, as a field period is known in French, and the promise of help and protection in case of emergency. Luckily, I never once had even a fever during the entire time in Gabon, and I was able to use my medical kit to help the Baka.

1.3.3 Methods in the Field and After

Before setting off for Gabon, I had broken down my central research topic of how the Baka practice and conceptualise mobility and immobility, into the following research questions:

Research Questions:

1. Why do Baka move or travel, from a synchronic or diachronic perspective, what stops any movement?
2. How does Baka mobility vary at different stages of the lifecycle?
3. How and where have the Baka moved over the last decades, what is the impact of outside influences, historical and/or environmental?
4. What is the Baka conception of space and territory, what is the signification of the forest paths?
5. How does the local unit connect to other units/ larger clan structure, which type of movement is relevant to these connections?
6. How, when, and where do Baka interact with non-Baka?

Anthropology, in my understanding, is a discipline at the interstice of the social sciences and the humanities, and therefore, I wanted to work with qualitative and quantitative methods in the field, and wherever possible learn the emic and the etic perspective. My central research methods in the field were participant observation, an extensive survey covering kinship and mobility patterns, and life history interviews. The unit of analysis was pre-defined as (mobile) Baka, and I gathered expert information on their locations from the respective NGOs before setting off on my first field trip. Following the finding that the Baka are more sedentary than anticipated, I decided to take a purposive sampling approach, and focus on Adjab and the Ivindo Region for two reasons: firstly, Adjab has 'novelty' value in that it is a Baka-only village, and secondly, there is no previous account of the Baka along the Ivindo. As I was hoping to research mobility deriving from kin and other social links, I had intended to do a comparative study and work with a Baka group or village from around Minvoul, and one from along the Ivindo thinking they were linked across the Minkébé national park. During the first field experience, two facts emerged concerning this idea. Firstly, that the Baka communities in Minvoul and those along the Ivindo have no regular interchange, and thus it was not a valid research design. It further became clear that such a systematic comparative study between Minvoul and Makokou (see for an example in Cameroon Joiris 1998) would simply, and sadly, not be possible for logistical reasons. Nevertheless, my two field periods in Bitouga were very valuable as

they brought up clear differences to the Baka on the Ivindo, which I refer to in the text whenever relevant to an argument.

The study of mobility necessitates careful reflection on methods, and it has been argued, is best undertaken by a mobile researcher so that mobility becomes a *method* and mirrors the phenomenon under study (Adey 2010; also Said documented how migrant people forced the researcher to become like a traveller, quoted in Adey 2010: 26). In my case, this had several components: firstly, learning to walk through the forest as fast as the Baka without hurting myself on low-hanging branches, being able to walk rapidly along the forest paths, which are often not even 30cm wide, was a feat which only came *doucement*, very slowly. Secondly, the phenomenological experience of movement meaning to travel in small dugout canoes along the River Ivindo, which were sometimes only 5cm out of the water, in order to understand geographical mobility along the waterways and the physical sensations thereof (it was mostly the only way to travel). In both cases, my aim was to do a rhythm analysis of daily mobilities (working in the plantations, collecting firewood, fetching water, shopping by canoe), as well as understanding the physicality and the rhythm of the historical migrations of previous generations. In this I was inspired by Lee and Ingold who have argued that by walking with (or in my case also canoeing with), 'we can see and feel what is really a learning process of being together, in adjusting one's body and one's speech to the rhythms of others, and of sharing (or at least coming to see) a point of view' (Lee & Ingold 2006). I later realised that I was indeed able to comprehend aspects of prospective Baka mobility with regard to their political and physical dimension, having pursued this analytical approach. Researching Baka mobility meant that I travelled extensively between the different previous and current Baka locations along the Ivindo, which inspired me to the idea of the rural-urban diversity (cf. 2.4.3).

Participant observation remains the central research strategy for anthropologists and is best understood as a bundle of methods (Thomas Widlok, personal communication). During my entire time with the Baka, I documented whatever was going on in the village or forest at that moment, observing and participating to the best of my abilities. We undertook various participatory methods, such as forest walks, where I would

learn about plant and animal species, and which of them are edible or used for medicinal purposes according to the Baka. I became used to walking through the forest and picking food from the ground or trees, such as the delicious *mengoum*, a type of nut; or *mobo*, which looks a bit like a shrivelled papaya, but tastes like a carrot; and the spring water is easily the most delicious I have ever drunk.

With regard to gathering genealogical and biographical data, I conducted informal and in-depth interviews with Baka and non-Baka on the historic and transnational migrations, as well as the more general and short-term Baka mobility. Firstly, collecting data for the survey took the form of individual conversations or group discussions with the Baka. The second research component was to gather life histories by conducting semi-structured interviews with the aim of a qualitative life course analysis. These interviews would partly follow the survey questions about the place of birth, and other census data, if not already known. Then, I would ask my interlocutor to tell me about all the different moves he or she had made until the present day, focusing on critical events and *life trajectory* (Settersten & Mayer 1997), so that there was a good balance between a standardised and an open part. These interactions took place with the help of an interpreter where necessary.

The interviewees and myself were mostly surrounded by a group of other women, men and children, so that questions and responses were easily translated back and forth. The information was also verified in the process, as and when different answers would be given, debated, until a majority agreed on one description. One aspect of this is that the Baka have several nicknames for each other, and these change regularly. Often the 'real' name is unknown, so that identifying which forefather or living person the information given referred to often gave us reason to laugh. In several cases I was given conflicting (chronological) or simply unclear information, which I tried to clarify further through formal and informal interviews with other Baka or non-Baka interlocutors, and other external sources.

Discussing life histories with my Baka interviewees was a challenge, because of our different understandings of time. This has been generally conceptualised as a

difference between a Western three-dimensional and an African two-dimensional conception of time (Mbiti 1969). Mbiti's argument is that the Western concept of time involves a clear and continuous understanding of past, present and future, whereas the African conception of time is characterised by past and present, the virtual absence of any idea of the future, and is rather composed of a series of events. Although the depiction of the African (lack of) notion of future has been criticised (Wiredu 1996), I found that generally speaking, Baka certainly did not share my linear understanding of time. Owing to increasing interaction with Gabonese authorities, the Baka are beginning to use the Gregorian calendar, but any date given now and in retrospect is to be taken with caution. Baka conception of time is divided into statements concerning (forest) activities to be carried out in the short term. Such plans can change substantially or be modified at very short notice, meaning within a timeframe of five minutes.²³ Time keeping is (still) done in relation to the environment, the forest, and I often heard the term *15 heures*, 3pm, which signifies the time period when it is still possible to go to the forest and return in daylight around 5pm. During the discussions on life histories and migratory movements, the second aspect of Baka time conception became clear: giving someone's age or the timing of an event was specified with reference to older or younger Baka persons, or sometimes also to non-Baka. For example, if one of the Baka elders described when they were leaving a certain locale, they would describe their age as being the same as one of the children living now. For the women in particular, changes of place were given with reference to whether or not they had already grown breasts, been married, or which of their children had been born at the time in question.

My focus during these biographical interviews was as much on learning about specific places and people, as on hearing the reasons and motivations for the movements and the connections the interlocutors themselves made between space, time and sociality. It goes without saying that the more survey and life history data I had collected, the clearer and more directed both aspects of my work became. I also enjoyed employing the strategy that 'a good interview is as much about good questions, as about good

²³ Such changes are also an aspect of an egalitarian society where people organise themselves with regard to one another (Lewis 2002).

listening' (Julia Pauli, personal communication). To get at the migratory minutiae took time, as my interlocutors used, for example, the term 'going down the River Ivindo' to describe their route from Cameroon to Gabon, suggesting that they had migrated by boat. However, the detailed interviews showed that they had travelled mainly through the forest.

From the original genealogical data and my first recordings of diachronic mobility, I developed the idea to collect personal, kinship and mobility data as part of one enlarged survey. As far as I understand, this approach of taking life history data together with the genealogy, and asking *why* people moved, married, or had children in a particular place or elsewhere has not been undertaken with a Baka group. This goal was helped by the fact that the Baka (on the Ivindo) give mainly relational information as indicators of location or reason for movement when describing their mobility. The relational quality concerns two aspects: firstly, it refers to Baka relatives (living) at a certain place at a certain time; secondly, it became clear that social relations are the predominantly named, if not the governing motive for Baka movement. For example, moving to go and live with the spouse's parents, or the wife's brother were often given as a reason for geographical mobility. The 'mobility survey' became the central part of my data collection on Baka synchronic and diachronic mobility, and the basis of my argument on *toma* (for conceptualisation cf. 3.3.1), the *motivational complex* (cf. 3.4) and relational mobility (cf. 6). The narrative interviews are summarised and recorded as the migratory history of the Baka in Chapter Four. My conceptual thoughts on diverging mobility patterns are presented in Chapter Five.

Given my (limited) Baka language skills, I had decided to hold the interviews with myself speaking French and working with a Baka translator. The first weeks in Gabon and with the Baka had alerted me to the high level of alcohol abuse in the country, and especially in rural communities, whereby the levels of intoxication were matched by levels of unreliability. With regard to my fieldwork, this meant that I went through several attempts to find responsible gatekeepers, key informants, let alone a dependable assistant and/or translator. I was determined to avoid the habit of many 'pygmy' researchers to work with non-Pygmy interpreters and research assistants,

which precludes obtaining valid emic data due to inter-ethnic tensions (Lewis & Köhler 2002), but mostly the fluency in French of the Baka on the Ivindo was insufficient for research work. So, I was glad to find a Baka man from Cameroon who could read and write. However, during one incident, he was so inebriated, that the interviewee, a female Baka elder, was telling him off, which made for some situational comedy. The problem here, and in other cases, had been that there had been no verbatim translation of what was being said. Instead the translator was making things up, for example naming gathering honey as a work activity when the interviewee had not said this, or inventing times and places which had never been stated. I resisted the offers from members of neighbouring ethnic groups to make up for this perceived Baka inability to work with a professional researcher. In the end, I worked with a select handful of people from Adjab, who can neither read nor write, but whose French and my Baka made for good communication, and this proved to be an inspiration and a great pleasure. It was also the only way to overcome the short attention spans of my interviewees. This issue has also been documented for the Aka, who quickly became fed up with interview sessions (Bahuchet 1985); using questionnaires was not possible for this reason, and a successful interview was said to last no longer than 45 minutes. I experienced people who never wanted to stop talking, and those for whom a five minute chat was too long.

All research activities were triggered or accompanied by free listing, mapping manually and by means of GPS, taking endless photos, drawing with children and adults, and informal interviewing. I was not doing the latter secretly, but always had a notebook in the lower pocket of my trousers, and was constantly and obviously writing things down. After a while, the Baka knew that if something was important, I would jot it down, and if they wanted me to know something, they would not leave off, until I had written it down in my little book. There was an extra benefit to this, as many of the sit-down interviews were interrupted by the need to replenish alcohol levels. The methods to avoid me knowing this were at times quite outrageous and simply exhausting, so that chatting on the fly was much easier, and – as I would argue contrary to Bernard's depiction (Bernard 2006) - more effective. On the other hand, it was much harder work for me; because I had to keep all the mobility stories alive in

my head at the same time, as any Baka would at any moment arrive with new information, and expect me to know exactly what he or she was talking about. This was in itself an interesting magnifier on the skills of an oral tradition, and my (initial) inability to memorise immediately. My notes from informal interviewing were part of a group of documents, which included an electronic diary, and a personal journal. For coding, I started off using the relevant coding categories from the HRAF, to later develop my own coding system, which again became fine-tuned as I progressed.

At various intervals throughout the year, I mapped and drew the villages, dwellings or other significant places I was working in with the help of both a standard measuring tape and a GPS. The aim of this mapping activity was to, on a physical level, document the geographical reality of houses, huts and plantations, and on a social level, document things such as family structures, eating taboos, sleeping regulations, and any social change I could observe during the year. As my knowledge on Baka mobility along the Ivindo grew, we also visited the 'historical' sights of now abandoned villages and cemeteries, which in turn elucidated further information on smaller villages (see for example the village of Dezou cf. 4.2.4, and the village of Été cf. 4.2.8.) At some point, this culminated in a group of Baka men drawing a map which stretched from Makokou to Mintom in Cameroon, to Souanké in Congo, so roughly 33800 km² on the village ground in Adjab (without doubt, one of the best research moments, as things started coming together). In my original research design, part of the idea had been to give GPS to select Baka to document their movements along the network of forest paths, as described in the literature on 'pygmies' (Bahuchet 1985). As I discovered during the first field trip, travel in the Ivindo region today is mostly in canoes, and so there were no 'ancient' paths to be digitally tracked and analysed through *hodology*, path-network analysis. As I document later, Baka do not have the same understanding of the waterways ('river-paths') than they do of the forest paths, precisely because they are not in the forest (cf. 3.2.2, cf. 4.3.3).

Throughout my entire time in Gabon with the Baka, I was always concerned to hear and understand the different points of view of the people I encountered. This general concern was underlined by the fact that the interaction between the Baka and their

neighbours is characterised as one of discrimination and servitude (cf. 2.3), and I wanted to get my own understanding on this topic, to get the 'other' point of view, if you like. To both these aims, I met and conducted interviews with many non-Baka. A second avenue of supplementary information, namely scrutinizing historical archives was sadly impossible, as the Gabonese national archives in Libreville have been closed for many years. The search for meaningful church records also proved a loss, but I found some interesting theses in the library of the UOB, and I was able to use the archives of the CCF, *Centre Culturel Française Saint-Exupéry*, the French cultural centre in Libreville, where a small room upstairs held some treasures. Later on back in Germany, I decided against visiting the *Bundesarchiv*, the German national archives in Berlin, as online research had established that the archival recollection focuses on the village chiefs and their interaction with the colonial authorities, and does not contain any substantial data on the Baka.

Given that Baka society functions around very strict gender role models, another aspect of the 'emic-etic' was trying to gain an insight on the viewpoints of both men and women on specific topics. The men were very open and we had no difficulty bracing sensitive topics. Working with the women was slower at first, but then they seemed to rejoice in the professional interest in them. This was no doubt possible or easier due to my situation as a female researcher; it also made evident that the 'other' is not a 'given', but that the self of the researcher is split and the 'other' is to be understood as a 'partial self' (Abu-Lughod 1991).

When it came to transcribing the Baka interviews, I enlisted the aid of HA. in Libreville. As we were working, she would exclaim surprise on hearing how or what the Baka were doing on the Ivindo, be astonished by the words they used.²⁴ This again gave me a chance to verify many facts and small details, and at the same time trace differences between the Baka of Minvoul and the Baka along the Ivindo. I was later able to discuss and confirm my observations with Pascale Paulin, who has worked with the Baka of Bitouga for many years, when she came to visit the Baka on the Ivindo. Particularly

²⁴ In one interview, the speaker mentioned *mon* and *mbambo* when speaking about money. HA. was fascinated by this word, saying that *mbambo* is 'real Baka' and how the Baka of Minvoul would not know it.

interesting were her observations on the social changes in Bitouga, as she had not been in the village in four years. Generally speaking, we noted, for example, that the Baka in Minvoul use and pronounce 'z', which on the Ivindo equals 'dj' (see also Paulin 2010), which also mirrors Helene's comments and her difficulty with parts of the transcription, as a woman from Minvoul translating audio data from the Ivindo. This was another topic, where the experience of being in Bitouga heightened my observational sense to the differences between Minvoul and the Ivindo, and documents that the data in this PhD is underlined by a comparative approach.

During the year in Gabon, I continually had recourse to online information even given the technical difficulties of being connected to the Internet in Gabon. This was also essential to maintaining my blog (Weig 2010), which I had initiated to enable colleagues, friends and family to participate in my project.

When commencing the data analysis, my first step was to establish the connection between and the relevance of the kin network in the travel routes, to match the genealogical data with the mobility references in the interviews and the supplementary information from the survey. In the analysis of all the accounts given to me, I was aware that the majority of the people recounting the events were children at the time, and have heard the stories, and the gossip, from their parents. Adding to the parental colouring, my interlocutors and I were looking at the events in hindsight, they possibly creating post-fact rationalisations, and as we all know 'human memory is fragile' (Bernard 2006). In writing up, I used *Citavi*, an electronic reference manager, and *MAXQDA*, a tool for qualitative data analysis, to assist me.

The reflexivity of the research process was most evident in what became Chapter Four, where the more I learned about where the Baka on the Ivindo had come from, the more I came to see the mobility motivations and patterns behind the movement. I was able to develop the comparative approach more clearly, as the literature on the Baka is dominated by information taken in Cameroon, and in Gabon from Minvoul, with nearly no information from the Ivindo. The 'rhythm analysis', meaning the attention to the physicality of space and the descriptions thereof (Lefebvre 2004), continued on a

different level, as I explored the 'tone' of the 'pygmy' literature, which I often found heavy-footed. In order to challenge the given theoretical framework, my endeavour was to look for *lacunae*, for those special situations, which document the diversity I encountered. I experienced writing as an enjoyable process of moulding and shaping, cutting and pasting pieces of information together in the way famously described by Claude Lévi-Strauss. My data is taken in the ethnographic present. In the conceptualisation I was guided by the following thoughts:

Theories are not neutral. They are chosen for a purpose, to draw our own attention, and that of our readers, to aspects of social life and to propose causal connections between events. While our desire may simply be to give as complete an account as we can of social life, we write with a purpose that, to a greater or lesser extent, stems from the problems of our own time and place, our own lived experience. We must never forget that what we write may guide or justify others' actions in future. Theory is inextricably bound up with politics. The better we understand the role of theory in anthropology, the better we appreciate both its dangers and its usefulness (Layton 1998).

1.3.4 Collaborative Research

During my time with the Baka, it was always my concern to work *with* them, not just about them, to engage them in the research activities, and respect their input. In my view, prior informed consent should be a matter of course, so that at the start of every interview (no matter with whom), I would explain my project, how the data was to be used for publication, and ask for consent. Given such chapters in anthropology as the *Yanomamö Controversy* (Borofsky & Albert 2005), and the observation 'that we are using other people for our own purposes all the time... using the knowledge they give us for goals they would never imagine themselves' (Abu-Lughod 1991, quoting Riesman 1982), I drew up a 'research contract' when I first visited Adjab. This was a piece of paper stating my aim to work with the population, an idea inspired by seeing how the Baka valued the written documents they possessed ('contract' in Appendix XIV). I also made a video documentation, where I explain my project and collaborative

approach to a group of people from Adjab and Kabisa, including the population headmen, and ask for their consent and cooperation (Weig 2011). In both cases the idea was to demonstrate my sincerity and respect, and in this I follow the AAA task force's suggestion that "anthropological research with indigenous peoples should deepen the informed consent model in the direction of fully 'collaborative' models of research" (Borofsky & Albert 2005). With all these steps, I hoped to overcome the Deleuzian criticism of 'missing people methodologically' (Biehl & Locke 2010: 335), and to use the research practice to build fruitful 'energetic exchanges' (Latour 1999).

Integrating myself into the communities I worked with involved becoming part of the egalitarian demand-sharing. This meant that instead of paying, I would give or exchange small or otherwise appropriate items, such as milk powder, cigarettes or onions for help, information or small favours. On arrival, I would always bring gifts for the community as a way of thanking them for their general efforts: rice; sugar and salt; oil; tobacco leaves for the old women and cigarettes for the men; and Pastis (French aniseed liquor). The Gabonese informants in Libreville had described bringing gifts to a community as standard practice and the way to do things. More importantly, it went without saying that alcohol was part of the parcel; it is inevitably used straight away to have a dance and a party.²⁵

Conscious of the moral, practical and representational obligations to my host community (Borofsky & Albert 2005), I wanted to give something in return, and each time I arrived my boxes would contain some items I knew the Baka needed and could only acquire with great difficulty or not at all, such as bed linen, nails, clothes, or fishing tackle, and which were also a way of thanking the community for their support.²⁶ Amongst other things, I also offered English lessons, initiated a Kindergarten-School project for Adjab together with UNICEF, and left DVDs for the

²⁵ In contrast, it is the policy of the DDL, the *Laboratoire Dynamique Du Langage*, in Lyon, who have worked closely with populations in Gabon for many years, that bringing alcohol or tobacco to the community is simply forbidden. However, when a foreign researcher visited Adjab without bringing any alcoholic gifts, the men called the researcher to a meeting following which a policy exception was made, but only tobacco was bought.

²⁶ This even brought on jealousy from village chief DF., because of what he called 'my success with the Baka', something he felt he was being denied. He even went as far as expressing his concern in political terms saying that 'if there were an election today, they would not vote for me, they would vote for you'.

Baka with all the images I had taken over the course of the year, hoping that the tropical forest would not *gaspiller*, meaning destroy, them immediately. The Baka also picked up some new habits from me: cleaning teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste, and lifting a hand as a way of greeting. Last but not least, I had started each day making black tea with milk in the typical English way, thereby keeping up the good traditions also maintained by Mary Kingsley during her travels (Kingsley 2002). However, presumably differing from her, I always made a large cooking pot full of tea, somewhere between 1-2 litres, which I shared with my host family and various other people. When I left for Europe, I was asked to return soon, because who else would make tea for them in the morning.

1.3.5 Challenges

Anthropology in a setting like Minvoul or the Ivindo region in Gabon is *per se* about challenges, and overcoming them. There was the physicality of the tropical heat, and the totally different experience of living with a hunter-gatherer tribe, which included great discoveries, but also involved frustrating moments and bouts of loneliness – the common anthropologist’s problem (Delamont 2007). What was particularly hard was the fact that I couldn’t get away from the impact of alcohol. To see Baka lying about in contorted positions in the dirt at 11am was emotionally painful, and obviously made communication impossible.

I would also like to draw attention to three things I had not anticipated about research in Gabon: firstly, how the topic of hierarchy would affect my research attitude; secondly, being *la blanche*, the white woman; and thirdly, the Baka thinking of me as some kind of special emissary or saviour. As one Gabonese man explained, ‘in the African hierarchical system, respect is often identical with fear’. To my dismay, I watched how the Baka would respond well to being treated badly or to abusive talk, and do whatever needed to be done. On the contrary, they would gaze at me vacantly when I appealed to their self-determination and organisational skills regarding any number of topics. In my experience, the Baka could not deal with being treated like equals by me, which struck me as a paradox in an egalitarian society. On the other

hand, in the context of an egalitarian social organisation 'it is rude to ask questions (not easy for a researcher), rude to tell someone else what to do (men cannot order their wives, parents cannot order their children)' (Lewis 2012). I found that I could communicate well with those Baka, who had experienced life outside the forest, who were not scared of the white woman, and where our ideas of what is rude, and what is polite seemed to meet at a mutual level.

Furthermore, I have travelled widely, but I was completely unprepared for the onslaught against white women in Gabon, calling me 'la blanche' or, as they later intoned 'la white' every five minutes as you walk down the street. This went as far as a marriage proposal in a taxi where, thankfully, the local women in Makokou intervened and gave the taxi driver grief for not leaving me in peace. Over the course of my year in Gabon, I learnt to deal with this expression of interest, deciphering which of the calls of 'la blanche' were based on a friendly interest to meet the white stranger; which on male excitement about the white woman they had seen in so many pornographic films; and which the wish or simple need to find money, to tap into the white financial reservoir perceived as endless and self-replenishing.

The perception of white people as rich is something the Baka also share. This is strongly fuelled by stories about or direct experience of the *Projet Baka* in Cameroon whereby the 'goal of the project is emancipation of the Baka Pygmies in their traditional environment' (Janeselli 1990). As I was repeatedly told, the *Projet Baka* paid for normal houses with tin roofs, and I was expected to do the same. This attitude and its implications have also been documented in other parts of Cameroon where:

Expatriates have had a clearly negative impact by communicating to the Baka that they are poor and deserve to receive money and various goods free of charge... As a result some Baka now expect all foreigners to give them what they ask and in return they will say what the foreigners want to hear (Leonhard 1997, see also Chagnon 1983).

On several occasions, the Baka literally demanded of me to ‘save’ them. The idea that riches might fall from the heavens personified by a white person also came about following the goodbye tour of the former US Ambassador to Gabon in 2010, who had promised schools and hospitals for the Ivindo region, after watching the Baka dance in Kabisa. I arrived not long after this trip had taken place, was welcomed as the US Embassy envoy - and expected to have money and building materials with me.²⁷ Even local Gabonese researchers expressed surprise at the intensity of demands that were made on them and myself in the Ivindo region. One man laughed when I asked him about this, and replied saying ‘yes, they are insatiable here. Normally, a visitor is treated to food and drink on arrival. But here, no! Before you have had time to put down your bag, they ask you what you have brought with you, what type of gifts you have brought for the community’. We laughed about it, which is the best, if not the only way, to deal with these situations.

When people ask me about Gabon, I have always felt hard-pushed to sum up the diversity that marked my time there. I can tell stories about the social extremes between rich and poor, and how this manifests as social practice; how people do ‘not know time’ the way we do in Europe, which makes life much more (and sometimes too) relaxed; about the way the country is at once so sleepy and gentle, and yet hurling itself into hyper-modernity at great speed. It is one of the safest places in Africa, and I was always grateful for this, but much more for becoming the *petite soeur*, the little sister in an African kin network which included the Baka and other Gabonese ethnic groups. The other fact that stuck in my mind, is that whenever I spoke to family and friends in Europe over the phone, they would comment on the beautiful birdsong they heard in the background. It became my favourite tune from Gabon, and the experience of living in these inspiring natural surroundings underlies the description and analysis of my time with the Baka.

²⁷ This behaviour is further resonant of a long-term Gabonese practice, only recently abandoned under the leadership of the new president Ali Bongo. Under the late president Omar Bongo, it was good and regular custom for the Government ministers to fly to their respective provinces at the weekend, and throw a huge party. This meant they would pay for food and drink, and literally hand out or throw around money bills. Needless to say, people enjoyed these parties, getting very drunk on the free alcohol, and picking up money for the next period. The cost of living is fairly low in rural Gabon, supported by subsistence activities, and an exchange economy, and so, one is tempted to say, the provincial citizens didn’t ask for much more.

2 Presenting The Baka

The Baka are a group of people that share a linguistic and cultural identity; as acephalous forest societies are characterised by organisational mobility and fluidity; and have a patrilineal clan organisation (Joiris 1996).²⁸ In Gabon, the Baka are referred to as *population autochtone*, the indigenous population; *pygmée*, pygmy; *chasseurs-cueilleurs*, hunter-gatherers; or, more specifically, as *Baka*. In Minvoul, I also encountered the terminology *Bayaka*. The Baka language is known to belong to the Ubangian-based language group, but has recently been more precisely allocated to one branch of the Ubangian language family, namely the group *sere-Ngbaka-mba*, which includes 12 languages (Paulin 2010). From my observations, most Baka are at least bi-lingual, if not tri-lingual or more. Around Minvoul they are fluent in Baka and Fang as a minimum, whereas on the Ivindo the predominant fluency is with Baka and Bakwele, in addition to which there is knowledge of Fang, French, and Kota in varying degrees. This multi-linguism may be due to their exceptional oral and audio skills (Lewis & Köhler 2002).²⁹ The Baka on the Ivindo and HA. in Libreville stated that speaking the Baka language and being born into a Baka family is what makes a person Baka.

In common parlance, the Baka are considered to be the descendants of the first inhabitants of Africa, also termed 'pygmies'.³⁰ The 'pygmies' and Baka living today are attributed with deep knowledge of forest plants and remedies made from leaves or pieces of bark, and are admired for their healing powers, which are even said to bring a dead person back to life (Bahuchet 1996). Throughout my time in Gabon, the locals would burst out with statements to this effect, when they heard about my research project. These discursive stereotypes are also manifested on a popular global level, for example in the Wikipedia entry for Gabon which states that 'The earliest inhabitants of

²⁸ It has recently been questioned whether ancient Baka society was not a bi-lineal one, as lexical studies indicate matrilineal elements, suggesting a 'matrilinearity undergoing mutation' (Paulin 2010: 188, my translation).

²⁹ I was privy to this skill during an English course I offered in Adjab, in that the Baka participants would perfectly imitate my English accent. It was like hearing myself speak.

³⁰ I set this term in parenthesis to document that it is a 'social construction of Euroamerican researchers, and does not necessarily reflect ethnic or social identities as expressed or experienced by the people [] themselves' (Rupp 2003: 54).

the area were Pygmy peoples' (Wikipedia 2012b), the entry for neighbouring Cameroon even specifically referring to the Baka in that the 'Early inhabitants of the territory [of Cameroon] included ... the Baka hunter-gatherers in the southeastern rainforest' (Wikipedia 2012a).

The Baka way of life is classed as hunting-and-gathering or foraging, which can be defined as 'subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog', and the search for and exploitation of resources is coupled with mobility (Lee & Daly 1999). An alternative 'working definition' has been given which 'identifies hunting and gathering as subsistence activities entailing negligible control over the gene pool of food resources' (Panter-Brick et al. 2001:3). This is proposed as an extension of Lee's 'minimal' definition and emphasises the '*absence of direct human control* over the reproduction of exploited species' (Panter-Brick et al. 2001:2, emphasis in the original). As I document throughout this PhD, the livelihoods of the Baka groups I worked with have diversified beyond tropical forest foraging. They include subsistence practices such as hunting, foraging, and honey collecting. In addition, Baka practice subsistence agriculture (cf. 3.1.2.), and earn money through various activities, such as *bricolage* (waged labour) for their neighbours; carving canoes and paddles; healing through medicinal plant knowledge, or mythical knowledge and visions; working as salaried trackers for wildlife conservation projects (cf. 6.2.1.2); or working at gold sites (cf. 5.3). The latter manifests the shift from a foraging economy to a mixed economy in which gold mining plays a prominent role. With the money they earn, Baka participate in the cash economy and acquire personal material possessions. Therefore, they fall outside of either of the definitions above, and may be better classed as 'post-foragers' (Frankland 2001, Blench 1999). However, the term 'post-forager' is not without its drawbacks, as 'with any other use of the post prefix, there is the assumption of a prior condition' (Frankland 2001:248), which in the case of the Baka refers to all the stereotypes around 'pygmies' (cf. 2.3.1).

The ancestors of the Baka have stood in exchange relationships with the ethnic groups in the areas where they lived for approximately 5.000 years (Verdu et al. 2009). These

relationships take many forms, from giving ritual blessing to newborn children to working as menial labourers, and they are variously conceptualised. Mostly, Baka and their neighbours are seen to be in structural opposition owing to their different subsistence modes as foragers and farmers, which is commonly termed a patron-client or patron-slave relationship, and has been one of the main subjects of discussion in the literature on 'pygmies' (Turnbull 1965). The Baka continue to live faced with this duality of perception: on the one hand as the living incarnation of mythical powers from the past; on the other hand, as despicable and discriminated remnants of a way of living humanity has long surpassed. This double identity towards them is well summarised as an 'all-or-nothing' attitude (Knight 2003: 83).

In this chapter, I elaborate on the topics introduced above: the external and Baka perceptions of the Baka way of life, and the interaction with their (social) environment. I provide facts and figures on the Baka generally and for the Baka in Gabon, as well as the origin myths surrounding the Baka. Then, I address the term 'pygmy', as Baka and 'pygmy' are synonymous in many ways. I present perspectives on the relations between the Baka and their direct neighbours and other groups, the so-called inter-ethnic relationship, which is a significant topic, and which I develop further in Chapter Six. My aim with this topic structure is to introduce the Baka as I encountered them during my year in Gabon, in the ethnographic present, and I conclude with observations on the changes to Baka sociality and subsistence practices that I witnessed, to show how the Baka are in some ways 'leaving the forest', and that the resulting intra-group diversity can best be imagined as a rural-urban trajectory.

2.1 Facts and Figures on the Baka

The Baka live in the countries of Gabon, Cameroon, and Congo, specifically in the vast expanse of tropical forest, which stretches across the joint borders of the three countries in the northeast of Gabon, the South-East of Cameroon, and the northwest of Congo.³¹ The largest Baka population lives in Cameroon, which also makes up for the largest part of the academic texts (cf. Dodd, LeClerc 2001, Joiris 1998, but there are no exact figures available).



Map 2.1 – Baka Presence in the three countries of Gabon, Cameroon, and Congo

³¹ Paulin and others hypothesise that there may also be isolated groups of Baka living in the Central African Republic (Paulin 2010).

Given the continuous nomadic movements of the Baka, the lack of birth certificates, and the fact that they often change their names over time or have identical names (known as *homonymy* cf. 6.3), it remains hard to come by correct census data. Dhellemmes, for example, described the considerable problems with accurate numbers for the 1978 census in Cameroon, because Baka were constantly dispersing and re-joining the community (LeClerc 2001, quoting Dhellemmes 1980). The population figure for Cameroon is estimated to lie between 30000 and 50000 individuals. As Paulin has detailed, the first estimate of 30000 was given in 1979 (Brisson & Boursier 1979), and confirmed in 2002 (Kilian-Hatz 2002); in 2006, the political scientist Patrice Bigombe Logo, puts the figure at 40000 for Cameroon; and in 2010, Brisson speaks about 50000 individuals in Cameroon, and 20000 to 25000 in Congo (Paulin 2010).

The figures for Gabon are even less clear, and both Joiris in 1997, and Knight in 2003 emphasise that the Baka in Gabon are more or less unknown, and have received little academic attention (Joiris 1998, Knight 2003). In a 2009 genetic study, a map of the Baka population in Cameroon, Congo and Gabon refers only to the population around Minvoul, not indicating the Baka in Makokou (Verdu et al. 2009). This fact presents us, once again, with an interesting dichotomy, as:

The Pygmy groups in Gabon are particularly unknown, with hardly any literature about their locations. This is in spite of the fact that they were the very first pygmies to be discovered by the Europeans in the nineteenth century (Bahuchet 1993a: 76).

In 2010, Paulin in reiterating that there are no in-depth studies on the Baka in Gabon, suggests that their total number does not exceed 1000 individuals (Paulin 2010), which differs considerably from the 3.200 quoted by Joiris in reference to figures from the Christian and Missionary Alliance from 1990 (Joiris 1998). In-depth studies on the Baka in Gabon have focused on the area around Minvoul, and, to my knowledge, none have been conducted around Makokou. From my fieldwork in both locations, what can be safely stated is that, at the time of writing, significant groups of Baka live in two

locations in Gabon, namely around Minvoul and along the Ivindo. As Paulin describes, the presence of the Baka in Minvoul can be dated back to around four generations³² and less than a hundred years with an estimated total of 500 individuals (Paulin 2010). However, in the 1980s, Mayer had undertaken a linguistic survey of the 'pygmies' in Gabon, and noted that Makokou was the only *town*, 'situation urbaine' as he termed it, where there were Baka present; the Baka of Minvoul were only to be found in the forest, up to 10 km from the town (Mayer 1987: 2). The figures for Makokou, in turn, document Baka lived mobility through dispersal and aggregation: In 2003, there were approximately 70 individuals (Knight 2003); in August 2006 Baka were said to be almost non-existent in Makokou (Paulin 2010); and in 2011, I documented 60 individuals, who were there more or less permanently. My extensive survey of the Baka on the Ivindo shows a total of 314 individuals. Taking together the figures for Makokou and Minvoul from 2010 and 2011, the estimate of around 1000 Baka individuals living in Gabon seems appropriate. It is difficult to make a prediction, but given the arguments of dwellings as moorings (cf. 3.1.5), and an increasing participation in the financially rewarding gold work (cf. 5.3), the numbers may rise in the future.

I now turn to the Baka origin myths, and how the 'sweet things' in life occasion mobility.

³² Baka generational cycle is defined as a period of about 15 years.

2.2 Baka Origin Myths

YM., undoubtedly the oldest Baka lady I had the pleasure of interviewing, told me about her late husband MO., who had been born somewhere in what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo. He left that area with his parents to travel through Congo-Brazzaville, and then into the Sanga Area in Eastern Cameroon. This story is consistent with general hypothesis of the Baka originating from the Congo Basin and their movement westwards over time. Bahuchet has presented lexical evidence for the emergence of the two groups known today as *Aka* and *Baka* from a joint proto-language, neither Bantu nor Ubangian, which he has termed *baakaa (Bahuchet 1989). The two populations separated with the Baka moving West into Congo and Cameroon, and subsequently Gabon (Bahuchet 1992a). This idea of an *Eastern* (Aka) and a *Western* (Baka) pygmy group has also been corroborated by genetic evidence (Verdu et al. 2009) (cf. 2.3.2).³³

After about 1000 AD, the ancestors of the Baka adopted the Ubangian language, which they speak today, when they encountered and guided the Ubangian sub-group *Gbanzili* who were migrating southwards (being pushed south by the *Nilotes*) from the savannah of what is today the Central African Republic into the forest (Bouquiaux & Thomas 1980: 809–810, Bahuchet 1987, LeClerc 2001). During the 17th century the Ubangian sub-groups *Monzombo* and *Ngbaka* remained sedentary until Bantu pressure from the south in the 18th or 19th century forced them to travel north again, whilst the Baka hunter-gatherers that had been associated with them separated into two groups, moving either side of the River Sanga into Cameroon giving rise to the hypothesis of ‘double populating’; one group travelling to Moloundou, the other to Yokadouma, and a smaller part of that group into the Central African Republic (Vansina 1984: 141, Bouquiaux & Thomas 1980: 817, LeClerc 2001). The Baka are said to have arrived in Cameroon between 1850-1880, slightly before the advent of the Germans, the abolition of colonialism and slavery, and the introduction of fixed villages (Bahuchet 1993a, for historical information cf. 1.2.1). After the intense Fang slave

³³ Paulin refers to personal information from Hombert in 2010, whereby the Baka and Aka already separated more than 20 000 years ago Paulin (2010).

trade, the people that remained had fled to the most Eastern part of Cameroon, and the Baka arrived as the guides of these threatened groups (Alexandre 1965).

Another story about the Baka comes from the Mbendjele, another 'pygmy' group in Central Africa. This legend suggests that approximately 250-300 years ago, the Mbendjele and Baka were actually one group, until the Baka learned how to transform or 'shape-shift' into elephants, *mokila* in Baka, and started killing men i.e. they became cannibals, which led to the bifurcation of the two groups (Jerome Lewis, personal communication). As Lewis has analysed, this story corresponds to accounts of *mokila* as related to slave raiding practices of the Atlantic Trade era, and to the alliances of Bakwele warriors with Baka elephant hunters in secret societies in order to learn the shape-shifting (Joiris 1998, Köhler 2000, Lewis 2002). The Baka on the Ivindo had not heard of this story, but the non-Baka inhabitants of Minvoul told me how many years ago, in the depths of time, a group they called the *Bayaka*, which is officially one of the names for the Baka, arrived in Minvoul and settled in a particular area. People were scared of them and avoided that part of town, as the *Bayaka* were said to be cannibals.

Along the Ivindo, I had questioned both the 'indigenous' Baka and those visiting from Cameroon about their origins. The Cameroonians recounted that there was a book telling that they were the first inhabitants, and that they had lost everything because they 'followed honey'. The Gabonese Baka confirmed this story of having 'followed honey', one man adding that it must be true, as the 'white person says that' (J., 10.5.2011). The perpetuation of the Baka as the pre-historic first inhabitants myth through 'white', meaning French edited, schoolbooks also occurs in Mvadi. As the local Bakwele chief explained to me, he had learned of the pygmies and the Baka as the first inhabitants in school, ergo it was the truth, which is why he had also passed it on to his children. In a way similar to the local stereotypes on 'pygmies' also advanced on a national and international scale via, for example, Wikipedia, the discursive categories are used selectively, and the narratives concerning Baka origins take local myths to a global level from which they are re-propagated into the local context.

Following Honey

The Baka on the Ivindo describe their presence in the forest with the notion of having 'followed honey'. This is related to another well-established legend about the Baka enabling the Fang, coming from the savannah, to enter and traverse the tropical forest. In order for this to happen, a primordial 'pygmy' dug through a large tree with an adz to open up a tall forest hardwood tree, a Moabi. This myth is common knowledge, and was told me by the Baka and other inhabitants both around Minvoul and along the Ivindo, and is established in literature (Cinnamon 1999). Questioned about this legend, HA. in Libreville, referring to the debated Egyptian origin of the Fang (Cinnamon 1999), stated:

Sure, but the Fang were behind, the Baka were walking in front. The Baka had the axe. Everyone was behind us. Walking, walking, walking. When we arrived, there was a big tree, *Adzap* in Fang, what the Baka call *Mabé* and the French call *Moabi*. The tree was so big that people couldn't pass. So the Baka made a big hole in the tree, and waited whilst everybody, everybody who had been behind, passed through. After they got through, they arrived at a river, and it was, the Whites, who stayed there. In the place where it was good, that's where the Whites were. A generation passed, but the Baka didn't stop. (HA. 11.2.2011).

AO., the village headman in Adjab, also emphasised the larger picture in that:

It was the passage of all, including whites, blacks, and animals, the *dja mbo ka*, the opening of the world, which the Baka did for the others by cutting a door in the Moabi tree, making a safe passage through the deep ravines on either side (AO. 21.11.2010).

AO. concluded that 'we consider any problems associated with this as a thing of the past'. Both AO. and HA. include white people in their versions of the story of traverse, which suggests a continuing adaptation of the origin myth (Hobsbawm & Ranger

2012). HA., then explained what it means to 'follow honey', *poki* in Baka:

Everyone stopped behind, but the Baka continued to walk to the point where we heard the bees. We followed the echo of bees. Following the echo, we went into the forest and saw the honey. Then we just contented ourselves with the honey. The others [Fang, Whites, ...] remained in the village and we left for the forest. This is why we say that the Baka are in the forest. This is because from the beginning, it is the echo of the bee that makes the Baka be in the forest. We did not see what was in the village. When we continued into the forest and we saw the tree where there was honey, that's where we said, "that which we followed here, this is it." We began to gather honey. This is why the Baka stayed in the forest, because of the honey (HA. 11.02.2011; A full version of HA.'s account of continued Baka movement can be found in Appendix XII).

This story of 'following honey' was given as the reason why the Baka on the Ivindo have such a low social status, are not appointed village chiefs and hold no positions in administration or army. From the viewpoint of mobility, it documents that continued movement is construed as the *sine qua non* of Baka identity. The Fang origin myth draws attention to another important fact of Baka reality and scientific conceptualisation of their lives: their interaction and cooperation with their neighbours, which constitutes one of the driving factors of their migratory history and movements today, as I will show in the following chapters.

2.3 Inter-Ethnic Relations

As the Baka-Fang origin myths made evident, there is a strong interrelation between the Baka or 'pygmies' and their neighbours. These relations and interactions are variously lived and constructed and can be of a socio-economic, socio-political, mythical, or ritual nature, and often exclude matrimonial alliances. There are several factors, which (are perceived to) differentiate the Baka (and other 'pygmies') from their Bantu neighbours, and which attention and research has focused on. The main ones are firstly, a difference in stature, short vs. tall, secondly, opposed subsistence practices, namely hunting-and-gathering vs. agriculture, thirdly, a difference in skin colour, brown vs. black, and fourthly language, meaning that Baka is Ubangian-based, whereas the Bantu speak their respective Bantu languages. All this results in the denomination of Baka (or 'pygmy') as a derogatory term for imbecile, dirty, or uncivilised forest creature, whereas the neighbours are the gallant and grand 'farmers' or 'villagers'. However, as Joiris stated in 2003:

We know very little about the inter-ethnic relations, beyond the fact that Pygmies have village "owners" and that they practice material as well as ritual exchanges (funeral, circumcision, etc). ... This gap is probably the result of a scientific tradition focusing on the study of Pygmy and villager communities separately as if they are not part of the same reality (Joiris 2003: 2).

Recalling that Baka and 'pygmy' are often considered to be synonymous, in this subchapter, I first present the etymology and history of 'pygmy', and document the current level of information on 'pygmies' in Gabon. Then, I detail approaches to inter-ethnic relations, and related conceptual issues, and explain the situation of the Baka and their neighbours on the Ivindo.

2.3.1 'Pygmy' – Etymology and Current Use

'Pygmy' signifies small in common parlance, and in biology refers to animal populations physically reduced in size in comparison to other populations of the same

species. For example, the African forest elephant is referred to as pygmy elephant, as the shoulder height is much lower than that of the African bush elephant. 'Pygmy' is also used with reference to humans, and it is interesting to note the official dictionary definition of our time, which draws attention to all the cliché aspects, of a small, short being; which can be either a human or an animal; living as a hunter-gatherer; and living nomadically:

Pygmy: 1. a member of certain peoples of very short stature in equatorial Africa and parts of SE Asia. Pygmies (e.g. the Mbuti and Twa peoples) are typically nomadic hunter-gatherers with an average male height not above 150 cm (4 ft 11 in.). 2. chiefly derogatory a very small person, animal, or thing (Oxford Dictionaries 2012).

Bahuchet in his seminal 1993 article *L'invention des Pygmées* summarises the ancient texts on the topic of 'pygmies' and shows how they are always associated with cranes. He chronicles how Herodotus (485 – 425 BC), did not use the term 'pygmy', but spoke only of 'little black men' who had been seen by the young *Nasamons* when they travelled further south than Libya. Herodotus believed them to be fable creatures, as did the geographer Strabon (lived around the year 0), and only used 'pygmy' to describe a statue of Hephaestus. It was Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) who turned fable into fact, confirming the existence of the 'pygmies' by specifically using the term, and situating them at the source of the Nile in Libya. Bahuchet explains that Aristotle thereby draws together Homer's analysis (who lived somewhere between the 12th and 8th century BC) of crane migration and the 'pygmies' as their prey and Herodotus' locating the crane migration on the Nile in Libya. Aristotle boldly claimed that 'their existence is not a story', although today Homer is quoted as having coined the term 'pygmy' (Bahuchet 1993b: 153–155).

The fascination for these supposed primordial inhabitants has always remained and for many centuries explorers continued to search for 'pygmies'. During the Middle Ages the essential question pursued by theologians such as St. Augustin, was whether certain 'monstrous races' including 'pygmies' were to be seen as animals or humans.

Following the rediscovery of Aristotelian thought in Arab writings, their existence was not questioned, rather it was said of the 'pygmies' and certain others that 'the women conceive at the age of five, and do not live beyond the age of eight' (Bahuchet quoting Saint Augustin, Book XVI-8; Bahuchet 1993b: 156). With the discovery of great apes in Tropical Africa and Malaysia, the Aristotelian 'pygmies' became (re)classified as animals, and related to questions around the origins of man and of what makes man human, such as bi-pedalism or language (Bahuchet 1993b: 161).

Explorers to Africa documented the existence of small people or 'dwarves' in Angola, Gambia, and Gabon as early as the seventeenth century (Knight 2003: 86), but nobody had spoken of 'pygmies' (Bahuchet 1993b: 162). It was only in 1871, when the German explorer and botanist Georg Schweinfurth travelled to Central Africa and encountered the *Aka*, who are considered to be one of the 'pygmy' groups, and pronounced that he had found the *Pygmäenrassen*, the 'pygmy race', that the two became connected (Schweinfurth 1874). He is therefore accredited with being the person to confirm their general existence, and since then the terminology and its (derogatory) reference to short-statured people has remained. The ethnic groups generally classed as 'pygmy' today include the *Aka*, the *Mbuti*, the *Twa*, the *Efe*, the *Asua*, the *Koya*, the *Bongo*, and the *Kola* (Bahuchet 1993a).

The 'Pygmies' of Gabon

In Gabon, the French-American explorer Du Chaillu was the first to confirm the existence of people of small stature groups to a European audience. On June 30, 1865, during his expeditions into the tropical forest he encountered the *Babongo* who live in Southern and Central Gabon, and documented this in his book *The Country of the Dwarfs* published in 1872 (Bahuchet 2007b). Du Chaillu's discovery predated Schweinfurth (who mentions Du Chaillu in his writings), but neither Du Chaillu nor Gabon are remembered or known for this circumstance.³⁴ With regard to migration stories in Gabon, Deschamps has documented that not only the Fang relate their

³⁴ In his book, Du Chaillu also reconciled the Babongo with the (San) Bushmen and the hunter-gatherers of East Africa (Bahuchet 2007b).

presence in Central Africa to the Baka, but that the oral traditions of other Bantu groups like the *Punu* and the *Nzebi* also tell of being guided by 'pygmies'. From these findings, Deschamps deduces three types of migratory history: firstly, where migration occurs together with the 'pygmies'; secondly, meeting the 'pygmies' on arrival after migration; and thirdly, no mention of 'pygmies' (Deschamps 1962). These different stories draw attention to the varying types of interaction between the group classed as 'pygmies' and their neighbours already in the past.

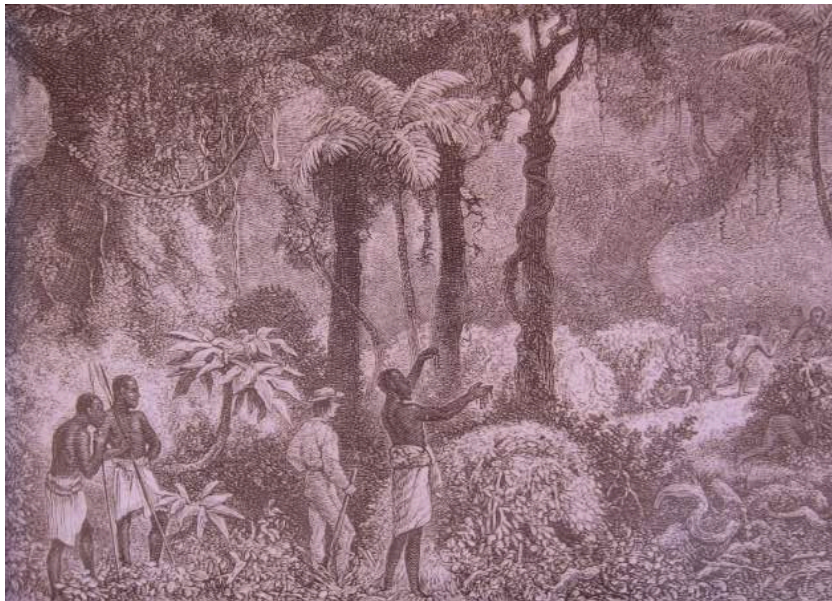


Plate 2.1 – Du Chaillu meets the Babongo

(source: Hombert & Perrois 2007)

A linguistic study in 1987 documented seven pygmy groups in Gabon: these were the *Babongo*, *Baka*, *Barimba*, *Baghame*, *Bakola* (*Bakoya*, *Bakoé*), and *Akoa* (Mayer 1987). This study adds to earlier work of officials, missionaries and traders writing on the Babango (Marche 1877), on the Babinga of Mékambo (Fleuriot 1880), on the Akoa (Le Roy 1897 and Trilles 1932), and on the Babongo-Rimba (Anderson 1983 and Fairley 1940 (about)). The explorer Paul Crampel had been engaged by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, another explorer and later governor-general in Central Africa working for the French, to explore Northern Gabon, and became the first to encounter the Baka, whom he referred to as *Bayagas*, in 1888 on the River Ntem west of Minvoul (Crampel 1890).

In 2003, Judy Knight published an updated account of the situation of the 'pygmies' in Gabon (Knight 2003: 92), or as she specifies to call them the *Forest Peoples* (see also Hewlett 1996, who advocates the term 'forest forager'). Based on her field trips and personal knowledge, she provides an overview of the distribution of *Forest Peoples* in Gabon for the years 1998-2002 (Table with information concerning the two provinces Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo replicated in Appendix XIII). The total number of individuals listed for the two provinces of Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo varies from 1358 to 3000, which shows the divergence of population numbers, also for the reasons specified below.

By 2007, the number of pygmy groups listed for Gabon has changed from seven to four, the Babongo, Baka, Koya, and Rimba, according to Bahuchet (Bahuchet 2007a), whereas Knight still includes the Akoa. The latter group was never mentioned to me, when I asked about 'pygmy' groups in Gabon today. Generally speaking, people referred only to the Babongo, Baka, and Bakoya. This change is due to various factors, which are on-going, and possibly intensifying with the increasing presence of Baka in urban areas (cf. 6.1.3). The main reason may be processes of voluntary or forced assimilation of the 'pygmies', which means they purposefully deny or have to deny their identity as 'pygmy' or *Baka* to avoid discrimination (Jean-Jacques Dibekinde, personal communication; Paulin 2010 states the same for the Baka in Minvoul).

Children born to mixed couples of Baka-Fang, Baka-Bakwele, or Baka-Bakota automatically receive a birth certificate, if the birth takes place in a Gabonese hospital. In these cases, the children are registered as the ethnic group of the father and the reference to Baka is lost. Some children are registered without the name of the father, in which case the ethnic group, *coutume* in the official Gabonese denomination is given as 'pygmy', or possibly *Bayaka*; mostly no specification of Baka or another 'pygmy' group is made. Baka children, from a Fang or other father and a Baka mother, jokingly call themselves 'café au lait', which can be interpreted as an example at the interstice of people wanting to lose the (prejudicial) category and yet wanting to form an identity. Some Baka women in Makokou have taken a practical, if not opportunistic approach to all this. Several women told me they like having children with non-Baka

men, as these men take care of the paper work and ensure their child is registered for healthcare. The women criticised the Baka men for not concerning themselves with these matters, if the men were even knowledgeable and capable.

The *Bakoya*, also known as the *Bakola*, are the second 'pygmy' group in the province of Ogooué-Ivindo, and they live on the road towards Mékambo in the direction of the Congo-Gabon border, and have a Bantu-based language, unlike the Baka. Often, people would group these two ethnic groups together, and indeed refer to them simply as 'pygmies'. The 'pygmies' from Mékambo have become quite well-known through Léonard Odambo, a Bakoya who has turned himself into a successful international journalist, working, for example, for UNICEF. Odambo himself is proud to be *pygmée*, and during my interview with him spoke and emphasised his 'pygmitude', employing the discursive category to his advantage. With international help, Odambo founded *MINAPYGA*, acronym for *Mouvement des Minorités Autochtones et Pygmées du Gabon*, the Movement of Indigenous Minorities and Pygmies in Gabon. The title of his organisation suggests that he represents the pygmy groups in Gabon, and he considers himself a general spokesman, but the Baka do not agree with this, which is the reason for detailing this here.

Discussing the implications of the word 'pygmy' with the various Baka groups along the Ivindo was something that occurred at various intervals throughout my fieldwork period. It became very clear that the Baka on the Ivindo do not see themselves as being in one group with the Bakoya to the summary point of questioning whether 'the Bakoya are real pygmies?'. One endeavour, which has contributed to these antimonies, was a UNICEF project, which started in 2006 and aimed to provide all 'pygmies' with birth certificates which then enables them to get national identity cards, thereby ensuring them an acceptable legal status and citizenship within the Gabonese system and access to healthcare. Odambo and his son had been charged with taking a census of all 'pygmies' in the relevant provinces. The project has had a mixed success, as I heard during the impact evaluation meeting in Makokou in 2011.³⁵

³⁵ The birth certificates, *jugement*, should be free to the Baka, but most local authorities abuse their power in providing them, and demand money for them. One Baka man, for example, had to pay CFA 2000 for his. Moreover, 72

During this reunion, various Baka voices expressed dismay at the outcome. One point that was repeatedly addressed and criticised was that they did not consider Odambo to be their spokesman. Instead they emphasised that the ‘Baka need a different representation’, which would really help the Baka tackle the issues they are having to deal with on a daily basis. From the follow-up meeting it appears that the ethnic differences amongst the ‘pygmies’, which seems to have played little importance in the planning of the UNICEF project, sadly, contributed to undermining the good intentions. For the Baka of Minvoul, *MINAPYGA* is also seen as critical regarding the representation of Baka concerns, partly because it was instrumental in bringing about the name of the NGO *Edzengui*, which was never truly accepted as I detailed earlier (cf. 1.2.2.1).

Given that the groups living along the Ivindo and those in Minvoul are all classed as ‘Baka’ I assumed that there would be a high level of Baka interaction across Minkébé national park, and I was surprised to learn that the Baka on the Ivindo knew next to nothing about the Baka of Minvoul, and vice versa. There are direct kin links and personal experience of Minvoul amongst the Ivindo elders, but no active contact or knowledge amongst the younger generations. It seems that the region, which is now approximately the area of Minkébé, has always been impenetrable or even dangerous and serves as a natural barrier between the two population groups, rather than acting as a joining element. Lives and kin ties on the Ivindo have been focused on the area along the Ivindo, and the more easily traversable forests into Congo and Cameroon. Only some of the Baka in Makokou have been in contact with Minvoul via road travel.³⁶

Moreover, I found a strong, intra-group differentiation between the Baka of Gabon and those originating from Cameroon or Congo. The Cameroonian Baka visiting the

even if the papers are issued, this is often done in a location far away from the residence location of the Baka concerned. All Baka are deemed to live and be on the Upper Ivindo, and, therefore, the government office in Mvadi gives out their papers. This, of course, is not helpful to Baka in Makokou, who may never have been to Mvadi and cannot afford to travel there. They have to pay CFA 2000 for a second set of papers to be issued in Makokou. A sample *jugement* can be found in Appendix XV.

³⁶ However, the recent visit of S. from Bitouga to Adjab, accompanying the foreign researcher Pascale Paulin, was a great surprise and success. Realising joint family ties between himself and the Baka in Adjab means contact has been established, and in the age of mobile phones, one can be nearly certain that the connection will grow and strengthen, once the rudimentary infrastructure is no longer an impediment to communication.

villages on the Ivindo look down on their Gabonese kin, because they consider them to be backward and make fun of them because of their illiteracy (most of the Cameroonian Baka are said to be partly literate, following teaching by missionaries and NGOs). One particular point of rivalry is that the Cameroonian Baka speak of having maintained plantations for many years, whereas they do not think of the Ivindo Baka as having done so. These statements amount to a clear social distinction and stratification between the Cameroonian Baka and the Ivindo Baka.

This leads me to postulate that, firstly, it is essential to acknowledge that the different 'pygmy' groups of Gabon distinguish amongst themselves and have relations of varying intensity and quality; and secondly, that Baka intra-group relations are falsely considered to be homogenous, that here too, a heterogeneous perspective on relations is necessary to account for the findings on the Ivindo. Moreover, the ethnic identity as Baka or 'pygmy' is not neutral, but subject to strategizing. Baka will employ 'pygmitude' and the related local or global discursive categories, to, for example, secure international funding, but downplay or even 'forget' their ethnic identity, if it means their children get basic healthcare.

2.3.2 Baka Neighbours

The Baka' neighbouring ethnic groups can be other 'pygmy' groups and the Bantu tribes. However, the term inter-ethnic does not refer to 'inter-pygmy', but is limited to relations with non-Pygmy groups, who are predominantly Bantu, locally known as *les grands noirs*, the tall blacks, in French. The Bantu peoples migrated through sub-Saharan Africa from the region of what is today Nigeria, and this movement was long believed to have been one single continuous expansion, but linguistic evidence has shown that a more appropriate model works with numerous successive Bantu dispersals rather than a single expansion (Vansina 1995: 190). The Bantu tribes living in Gabon, Congo and Cameroon in the same areas as the Baka I worked with on the Ivindo are the *Fang*, the *Bakwele*, and the *Kota*. In Minvoul, there is a dominant Fang population. The Fang, *Kaka* in Baka, are the largest ethnic group officially known in Gabon, many of whom hold important positions in politics and commerce, and their

history and culture have been well studied (for example, Cinnamon 1999). Less is known about the Bakwele, who migrated from Cote d'Ivoire through Cameroon to Congo and Gabon, and today number about 12.000. Some Gabonese Bakwele return to Congo, in particular to the area around Souanké, to find eligible wives, and there are still close relations and a strong exchange with the families there; current research focuses on their language (Marion Cheucle, personal communication).³⁷ The Kota number around 75.000 and are best known for their funerary masks (Dulon & Perrois 2011). As one senior official in Makokou explained to me, there is a clear hierarchy amongst the Bantu tribes in Gabon, and in this case the ranking is – Fang – Kota – Kwele. The Baka were not considered to be part of this line.

The interactions between 'pygmies' and their neighbours are predominantly classified according to two categories: the economic and ecological one of hunter-gatherer and villager; and the socio-political understanding of domination and servitude (Rupp 2003). The economic relationship meant that the 'pygmies' would work, for example, on their neighbours' plantations and receive salt, iron or other goods in return. This form of exchange relationship was characterised by and dependent on seasonal factors: help with planting and harvesting in the villages was undertaken mainly during the dry seasons, whereas during the rainy season, the Baka would live in camps deep in the forest (Joiris 2003, LeClerc 2001). The mobility pattern associated with this is seasonal dispersal and aggregation. The Baka and other 'pygmies' also hunt for their neighbours, which means the Bantu will provide the gun, and they either share the kill, or the 'pygmy' is given something else in return. In one case, for example, a village chief provided a gun and four cartridges, two for meat to be hunted for him, and two for the 'pygmy' hunter to use for himself. This kind of economic exchange relationship is attributed to all 'pygmies' (Bahuchet 1979), and in the case of the Baka generally termed *ami*, friend (cf. 6.1.1).

Within these exchange relationships there has undoubtedly been considerable infliction of abuse and violence on the group classed as 'pygmies', when they were

³⁷ As Marion Cheucle exclaimed when we first met: 'The Bakwele are rather similar to the Baka!'

considered to be serfs or slaves rather than 'friends'.³⁸ The servitude and ill treatment is well documented by all researchers who have worked with the Baka or other Central African forager groups (Turnbull 1961, Turnbull 1965, Lewis & Knight 1995, Kenrick 2000, Lewis 2000, Paulin 2009, Paulin 2010). I observed many examples of abusive treatment of Baka, and must confirm that the subjugation and domination of the Baka by their Bantu neighbours continues today. It is common to hear Fang or Bakwele openly referring to the Baka in an extremely derogatory way, calling them 'animals',³⁹ and cheating them out of what is due to them.

On one occasion, I witnessed a big argument between a Bakwele and a Baka, the Baka demanding CFA 1000, and the Bakwele laughingly only paying CFA 500 stating 'we are brothers'. Another example was a hunting convoy of Bakwele and Baka for antelope, wild boar and elephant from Makokou. The Baka killed 7 wild boars, but only got CFA 2000 each after the Bakwele took off the expenses. When the Baka complained about the sum as 'CFA 2000 pays for nothing', the Bakwele laughingly replied: 'who do you think you are? A Pygmy like you has no way to lodge a complaint anywhere'. There are also many cases, where Baka have accrued debts with neighbours or neighbouring traders, often through alcohol tabs (cf. 6.1.4), and by not (fully) paying the Baka for another service is a way for the traders to get their money back. However, it has also been shown that an apparent submissiveness of the Baka is a conscious interaction strategy on their part, and how they use the classification and victimisation as 'pygmies' to their advantage and to get what they want (Lewis & Köhler 2002).

³⁸ With regard to the question of serfs and slaves, I understand the difference to be one of status and economic relationship. In the case of the serfs, the relationship is of an economic nature and such that the serf works and produces only for his master, on a specified piece of land. The serf retains a part of his work proceeds for his own subsistence. A slave is wholly tied to his master and also works only for him. Contrary to the serf, the slave is considered the property of his master, with no choice in his movements, and is dependant on his master for survival. The predominance of relationships between the Baka and their neighbours would, therefore, be classed as serfdom, but there are also instances of slavery, especially in Gabon. In both the French and English literature, the term chiefly used is slavery (Pugh 1997).

³⁹ More than once the Bakwele men from Mvadhí asked me how I could bear living and working with 'the animals from Adjab', and some particularly curious individuals inquired whether I had had sexual intercourse with these animals.

'Pygmies' are often considered to be part of a Bantu family.⁴⁰ Joiris describes the 'virtual joint clan' between Baka and Bakwele, where there is sense of ownership of villagers over pygmies, but this is not unique to Baka and Bakwele relations, but also occurs between the Bakwele villagers themselves (Joiris 1996: 265). This brings in a distinction between the 'ideology of solidarity', whereby the relations are sustained by links of pseudo-kinship, which contrasts with the 'ideology of domination', the political-economic dominance over the 'Pygmy peoples' by the 'villagers' (Joiris 2003). In cases where the 'pygmy' families are related to Bantu families, this can also take the form of servitude, and in *Punu*, an ethnic group from Southern Gabon, the word for 'pygmy' and slave are identical (Wenceslas Mamboundou, personal communication). On the death of the 'master' the question of inheritance of the 'pygmy-slave' will be raised (Paulin 2010). However, the characterisation of the relationship as slavery is said to be specific to Gabon (Joiris 2003: 67, writing on Cameroon), although in an historical context it has been shown that this assumption cannot be generalised. Some of the Fang tribes, with whom the Baka lived, are described as non-slave holding, whereas the *Igalwa* of Lambarene in Central Gabon were slave-holding (Kingsley 2002). Interestingly, Mary Kingsley also addressed differences between Fang and Bakwele around 1895 and pointed out that:

To the south-east the Fans are in touch with the Bakele, a tribe that has much in common with the Fan, but who differ from them in getting on in a very friendly way with the little dwarf people [] : people the Fans cannot abide' (Kingsley 2002: 206).

In a study of the Baka in the areas of Messaména, Lomié, and Yokadouma-Moloundou in Cameroon, Vallois documented that they had relationships 'with 17 other tribes' (Vallois & Marquer 1976). A comparison between the Cameroonian Baka living in the village Koumela on the road between Yokadouma-Moloundou and the Babongo living in Central and Southern Gabon and their respective interaction with neighbouring farmers and towns, however, shows that the Baka had only very little engagement

⁴⁰ This has been documented in particular for the Ituri by (Grinker 1989).

with their neighbours, whereas the Babongo interaction is very high and they are deemed to actively participate in the Gabonese social system (Matsuura 2009).

This variance in interaction results in six different modes of cohabitation or living on the same territory between the Baka and their neighbours, which could be found at the time of writing (see table 2.1 on following page).

	Baka living	With Ethnic Group(s)	Location
1	inside a Fang house in a Fang village or part of town	Fang	Minvoul, Makokou-Centre, Makokou-Elarmintang
2	in a Fang or Bakwele village or town, but in independent Baka houses or huts	Fang Bakwele	Minvoul, Makokou-Mboula, Ndoumabango
3	in their own village adjacent to a Fang village. In many cases, the Fang village will be by the roadside and the Baka village slightly behind and closer to the forest.	Fang	Mféfélam
4a	in their own village with only a Fang village chief present	Fang	Bitouga ⁴¹
4b	in their own village with a Fang man, who is not the official village chief, but exerts a certain influence and is partly treated as chief by the Baka (hybrid category)	Fang	Kabisa
5	in their own village with the official village chief located in another village	Bakwele	Adjab (chief in Mvadi)
6	deep in the forest far away from their neighbours and with limited contact to them	Bakwele Fang Other groups	Deep Forest (Minkébé)

Table 2.1 – Cohabitation modes of Baka and their neighbours based on my fieldwork observations in Gabon in 2010/ 2011

⁴¹ This categorisation is different to Paulin, who classifies Bitouga as a Baka-only village, as they are ‘far from the Fang’ (Paulin 2010:133). To my mind, the presence of a Fang village chief living in the village precludes such a classification.

In adding number six, I take up a distinction made by Deschamps between ‘pygmies’ living their daily life close to others, and those living far away in the forest (Deschamps 1962). To my mind, as the two groups would know of each other and possibly share the same territory, it seems important to add this as a category. In Chapter Three, I explain the relevance of this chart to Baka mobility considerations, and the impact of geographical proximity and social interaction between Baka and their neighbours in more detail (cf. 3.3.2).

The relations of the Baka or other ‘pygmy’ groups with their (agricultural) neighbours were and remain complex and ambiguous. In addition to the economic exchange, the ‘pygmies’ are seen as powerful diviner-healers, and on the Ivindo some Bakwele women take their children to Baka female elders to ask for a blessing, and Bakwele and other ethnic groups consult a Baka *nganga*, a healer and visionary, who can be male or female, for advice on physical ailments and life questions. As has been shown ‘pygmies’ are involved in many origin myths, and their famed singing and dancing, their musical contribution, is deemed to make rituals a success (in Gabon this refers in particular to Bwiti (Bahuchet 2007a). The interaction can also take a pro-‘pygmy’ stance in that they are given help with administrative matters (Bollig 1992). With regard to the synonymy of ‘pygmy’ and slave in some Gabonese languages, I suggest that as a term of reference within a language it is always clear that it only refers to one particular group. Only with hesitation should general assumptions about social relations and ‘pygmies’ be made. The amount of and quality of interaction between the two groups rather than just the use of resources is further a concern in the conceptualisation of mobility, as Bahuchet has pointed out (Bahuchet 1992b), and as I document in the following chapters, inter-ethnic relations indeed play a large part in Baka mobility practices, in addition to resources. For now, we turn to a (pre-) historical perspective on inter-ethnic relations.

The Pre-Historical and Genetic Perspective

To begin with, it must be said that the pre-historical and genetic perspective on inter-ethnic relations still leaves many questions unanswered. Different hypotheses abound, which even a find of skeletal remains may not reconcile. The Congo River Basin, the

second largest river basin and undisturbed area of tropical forest in the world after the Amazon, has been the location of human movement and different migrations since time immemorial. Archaeological data shows that hunter-gatherers were living in the area at least 100,000 years ago, with forager groups roaming in the tropical forests of, for example, Gabon since 40000 b.p. (Clist 1999). Continual inhabitation of the forest by hunter-gatherers can be documented since 8000 b.p., and by foragers and villagers from about 5000 b.p. onwards (Clist 1999). One of the central questions of archaeology in capturing the pre-history of human migration in Central Africa is whether the group of peoples commonly headed 'pygmies' can be considered as the original inhabitants of this region, or whether they too migrated into the area, and how to understand the interrelation and morphological differentiation between 'pygmies' and non-pygmies.

These issues have been intensely debated (Vansina 1990; Blench 1999), and, given the temporal expanse, it may be difficult to establish final evidence on this. A recent study on the origins and genetic diversity of pygmy hunter-gatherers from Western Central Africa, suggests that ancient pygmy and non-pygmy populations separated approximately 54000 b.p. (Verdu et al. 2009: 317). Depending on whether or not the ancient Bongo population groups (who are today in Southern Gabon) are included in the analysis, the separation occurred already 90000 b.p. (Verdu et al. 2009: 317). The findings identify a common origin of all Western Central African pygmy populations (cf. 2.2 on Bahuchet's Western pygmy group) about 2800 years ago (Verdu et al. 2009: 312). The point to draw from this study is its support for the historical scenario that the 'expansion of non-pygmy agriculturalist populations during the Neolithic revolution (2000-5000 b.p) fundamentally affected the existing relationships within the ancestral pygmy population', introducing new social constraints, namely, on 'pygmy mobility and intermarriages' (Verdu et al. 2009: 315).⁴²

Vansina, on the other hand, speaking about the same time period argues that:

To foragers a Bantu village was a large and exciting place. It easily became a

⁴² The term *Neolithic* can refer to different epochs depending on the geographical region (see for example Childe 1925); I quote the term as it is used by the article's authors.

stable point of reference for a large region all around it, a point often visited by foragers. Eventually many autochthons became bilingual as a result. Some among them may also have settled in the villages, perhaps as spouses, perhaps as hangers-on in the households of village leaders (Vansina 1995: 192).

He further argues that in the fission and fusion processes of Bantu-speaking settlements, some Bantu would emigrate 'accompanied by groups of the autochthons who had attached themselves to Bantu houses', a group he terms 'Bantuised autochthons', so that in time the majority of 'migrants were physical descendants of former autochthons' which in turn means that 'major population replacements of autochthons by immigrant Bantu speakers may never have occurred' (Vansina 1995: 193). This description paints a picture of fusion between the indigenous 'pygmies' and the immigrating Bantu tribes, whereas Verdu and his colleagues speak of constraints. Recalling Deschamps' migration trilogy above (cf. 2.3.1), I hypothesise that both types of interaction resulting in diverse inter-ethnic relationships will have occurred in pre-history, as they do today.

2.3.3 The Future of 'Pygmies'

The term 'pygmy' has an historic tradition outside Africa. For example, the documentation on 16th and 17th century conquests by the Spanish in the Argentinian Pampa refers to their indigenous opponents as weak because they were only *pigmeos*, which is Spanish for 'pygmies' (Soprano 1896). The citation from the Oxford dictionary above specifies a wider geographical area for the presence of 'pygmies', including Africa and Southeast Asia, which underlines the relevance of the term 'pygmy' for future discourse.

It is critical to note that the term 'pygmy', as we use it today, is not a category *sui generis*, but a Euro-American and partly an African myth, which has long manifested as reality. One argument to underline the diversity of 'pygmies' comes from the geneticists. The study emphasised the increasing isolation of the different 'pygmy' groups leading to the substantial genetic heterogeneity found today from which the

authors constitute that the 'pygmies' are 'a culturally and linguistically diverse group of peoples gathered under the term "pygmy"' (Verdu et al. 2009: 315). An argument in favour of grouping certain groups under the term 'pygmies' is posited with regard to the aesthetic specifics of song and dance, especially the polyphonic singing (Lewis 2012). Anthropologists can and should be at the forefront of dismantling elementary and negative clichés, which bring about unnecessary and unjustified suffering to individuals or ethnic groups. As part of the recent emergence of indigenous rights awareness and representation, a step in this direction is to speak of *Forest Peoples* rather than 'pygmies'. However, especially in the Gabonese context, where all ethnic groups can be said to originate from the forest, the term 'forest peoples' is not without its hiccups.

'Ah, t'es un pygmée!', hey, you're a pygmy!, is one way the Baka on the Ivindo make fun of each other, or how mothers chide their children when they have done something really silly. This shows that the Baka have appropriated the derogatory term in their daily use, thereby, one might say, counteracting and undermining the discriminatory power structures and local discursive stereotypes. So, if they are aiming to transform the terminology, where does all this leave the debate on 'pygmies'? Frankland has argued that it is an academic 'desire for purity':

The consequence of this desire for purity is that the deep forest, the centre, has been privileged over the periphery of the roadside and forest edge. This structural dichotomy spatially incarcerates the concept of what it is to be Pygmy within the confines of the canopy. ... Cultural variation among the Pygmies, when it is acknowledged (eg. Hewlett 1996), is done so only within the context of the rainforest. Along with cultural change and human agency, variety vanishes into the depths of the forest, and, as anthropologists, we are left without an adequate theoretical language to explain the existence of the majority of Africa's Pygmies (Frankland 2001: 241).

As I have detailed, I am in agreement with Bahuchet, who constituted that "'pygmy" is a European mythical category without any foundation in reality' (Bahuchet 2007b). To

my mind, the interesting question is what this myth means to us, and why it retains such power in local and global, popular and academic imagination? From a theoretical point of view, it seems essential to distinguish more carefully between discursive categories from local to international levels, understanding of identity and belonging by the ethnic groups or individuals themselves, and academic aims at classification often entrenched in questions of subsistence modes (Rupp 2011). As I argue in the following chapters, the last twenty years seem to have brought change to the Upper Ivindo, and other parts of Gabon, which must find recognition in theoretical conceptualisations.

2.4 From the Deep Forest to Urbanity

In presenting the Baka, I now address social change and group diversity amongst the Baka on the Ivindo. In this context, it is important to draw attention to the term 'leaving the forest', *ma ledji a bele*, as a common expression in Baka to describe the physicality of coming out of the forest. *Sortir de la forêt* in French is also a (Gabonese) idiom for social change and for the move from dwelling deep in the forest to living in villages along roads or rivers; or from rural villages to more urban locations, something which is happening not only in Baka society, but in Gabon in general (cf. 1.2.1). Living in and off the forest, as well as the social and physical development of leaving the forest were topics which I discussed many times with the Baka on the Ivindo, or which, motivated by their own wish to talk, they would come to address with me. Taking together their own descriptions on change with my observations along the Ivindo, I suggest that this is best viewed as diversity along a rural-urban trajectory, which manifests most strongly through the generation gap.

2.4.1 Egalitarianism and Social Change

The changes firstly have an impact on Baka social organisation, which is classified as egalitarian.⁴³ As Woodburn famously described, the essence of egalitarianism is that equality of wealth, power and status is not a given, but continuously acted out and maintained through levelling mechanisms (Woodburn 1982: 21). Woodburn's notion of egalitarianism is further connected to the concept of an *immediate-return society*, in contrast to a *delayed-return society*. Immediate-return can be summarised as the immediate consumption of what is hunted and gathered with low-labour, high-skill tools with no elaborate food processing or storage. Delayed-return, on the other hand, involves food storage and processing following a concept of rights over or stemming from labour yields generated with labour-intensive tools. The proprietary considerations of delayed-return contrast with the lack of authority and the emphasis

⁴³ The egalitarianism I discuss relates to economic and organisational equality, meaning the interplay of socio-economic and socio-political factors, rather than merely the political equality at the centre of much of today's debate on the topic.

placed on individual autonomy within an immediate-return society, and Woodburn has reasoned that 'only the hunting and gathering way of life permits so great an emphasis on equality' (Woodburn 1982: 432). The institutional procedures of the immediate-return model to promote equality and resist the development of inequality are based on the interaction of the following key mechanisms: the lack of leadership authority and hierarchy, and individual and group mobility including freedom of association as preconditions to equal access to means of coercion; equal access to food and other resources; sharing; and sanctions on the accumulation of personal possessions (Woodburn 1982).

Regarding the question of whether to classify the Baka as an immediate or delayed return society, I emphasise that my observations on this must be considered a snapshot of the ethnographic present. As I continue to detail at various points in the text, there is a general movement of 'leaving the forest', a change in livelihoods, dwellings and practices, and an increased desire for material possessions. Regarding the latter, I witnessed secrecy, hoarding and claims to personal ownership related to delayed return, but also time and again the levelling mechanisms associated with an immediate return society bearing down on individuals trying to live differently. For example, one young man wanted to earn himself some extra cash by making and selling, *beignets*, fritters, in the morning. With great frustration and sadness he described to me, how he had been forced to stop after just one month. This was due to three facts: on the one hand, constant demands for the money he had made from other group members, which he could not refuse handing over to other Baka owing to demand sharing rules; secondly, the social pressure exerted on him to stop and not to differentiate himself from the group in this way; thirdly, he feared social exclusion, which he would have risked, had he continued. Alcohol also has a severe impact on Baka sociality and abusive consumption limits physical capacities. Recently, alcohol has become a commodity sold by the Baka to the Baka (cf. 6.1.4).

On the other hand, the (physical) individual and group mobility which brings about freedom of association and is deemed essential to a functioning immediate return society, is severely curtailed or simply no longer practiced, owing to the fact that the

Baka predominantly dwell in villages and no longer roam from camp to camp in the forest as will be described in Chapter Three. They are more correctly classified as part sedentarised and no longer as a purely nomadic people. They engage in agricultural work planting and harvesting manioc and plantains for their own use, which makes for a structured working day between 8am and 4pm during the planting season, something rather more associated with farming societies than with hunter-gatherers. Finally, sedentarisation is introducing questions of leadership and hierarchy advanced by the Gabonese authorities contrary to the highest values in Baka society of freedom of movement and association and their levelling mechanisms.

Therefore, I would argue that I witnessed the impact of conflicting forces on Baka social organisation, and possibly the beginning of a challenge to immediate-return. Taken together, these arguments detailing how the Baka are 'leaving the forest' confirm that the Baka are better considered as 'post-foragers'.

2.4.2 Generation Gap

Amongst the older women and men, there is a clear commitment that the Baka still live off the forest, and cannot survive without this connection. For example, time keeping is (still) done in relation to the forest and I often heard the term *15 heures*, 3pm, which signifies the time period when it is still possible to go to the forest and return in daylight around 5pm.⁴⁴ B., a Baka elder, pointed out that the difference to today is that 'before people lived *in* the forest' (my emphasis). As he went to elaborate, some other elders hushed him, telling him that 'No, you cannot explain; only our grandparents would really have known', indicating the change in the way of life as perceived by the Baka themselves and evidenced by the different approaches of different generations. During a film documentary with WWF France, M. confirmed how young Baka no longer look for food in the forest (WWF France 2012). Whether or not a hunter will pray before setting off into the forest depends on the age category of the hunter (cf. 3.1.3).

⁴⁴ In Baka terminology, *bako a wule* means the sun is no longer in the middle of the day, it has moved from there towards *dakala*, meaning evening which starts as 5pm.

The biggest change that comes with leaving the forest was given as the loss of the knowledge of healing with plants, and how now pills are taken when available and when there is money to pay for them.⁴⁵ I repeatedly questioned these statements, but both men and women were very open and clear about no longer having in-depth knowledge of or making much use of plant medicines, which of course contradicts the ‘pygmy’ characterisation of accomplished forest healer. What remains of the knowledge is vested in the elders; the youngsters prefer the pills.

Especially in Adjab, Baka bemoaned the loss of ritual knowledge. My questions concerning purpose and details of dances were at first met only by silence or a superficial flurry of verbal activity. As the year progressed the voices which admitted that much ritual knowledge has been lost became louder,⁴⁶ highlighting that here again, the knowledge has ‘died away’ with the elder generation that first came to Gabon about 50 years ago, as shown in Chapter Four. The last Baka ritual house was in Dezou (cf. 4.2.4), and young men today are no longer systematically initiated into the male ritual society of *Edzengui*. Baka women told me that in Congo female circumcision had been practiced, but that this stopped with the move to Gabon and the Ivindo region. It can thus be argued that social change amongst the Baka manifests most noticeably through the conflicting generational attitudes and changing positions with regard to a forest-based way of life, the generation gap.

2.4.3 Rural-Urban Diversity

During the many discussions, it became evident that of those Baka staying in the villages, there is a group, who are determined to be accepted into Gabonese society, and who often despair owing to the conflict between the mobile aspect of their lifestyle and the authorities’ need for physical presence. Some Baka in Adjab expressed a very clear wish that their ‘brothers and sisters should come out of the forest’, stating

⁴⁵ The contents of my medical kit were in high demand, and it was interesting to observe Baka belief in the absolute power of pills. I made a great effort to explain that too much Western medicine, i.e. taking too many painkillers at once, can amount to poison, rather than healing.

⁴⁶ This process led to me having to make a promise to return to Adjab, because the Baka men want to take me to Congo, where ‘we will meet Baka *ngangas* and we will show you [Doerte] the real Baka rituals, because in Congo our kinfolk still know the old ways’.

that there are still some Baka who live in the forest, or who just go off on *molongo*, which means long periods of about six months of walking in the forest (cf. 3.2.1). The Baka wish to enjoy the benefits of ‘modern’ life, technological inventions, and the sociality of towns, which act as a pull factor and in a way ‘allow’ the Baka to leave the forest. They often referred to how life is easier in the village or city, stating that in contrast ‘life in the forest is very tough’. At the same time, there is the push factor of politically supported sedentarisation within the territory administered by a person politically recognised within the Gabonese hierarchy, who aims for their votes (cf. 4.2.10). One of the Baka men pinpointed social change in that ‘the Chinese have built roads, so the Baka now take the car or bus if possible’, emphasising that Baka no longer always *walk* in the forest. Most Baka women like to use body lotion and anti-wrinkle eye-cream, if they can afford to buy the products, or are given them as gifts by their urban kin.

Considering this matrix of push and pull, of some Baka wanting to enjoy urban comforts, and others wanting to continue living in close connection to the forest, it became evident that this might best be conceptualised as a rural-urban trajectory. Along this rural-urban diversity on the Ivindo, the Baka population is experiencing considerable change of values and practices – in many ways, what is fashionable in the town, is frowned upon in the village. A classic example concerns women’s attire, whereby in the town Makokou women wear jeans or skirts as they please, whereas in the village Adjab, wearing trousers is frowned upon and women (including myself) got told off for doing so. Another interesting instance was one woman who left the ‘Adjab-Kabisa mentality’ for Makokou due to *desordre*, family strife, saying that life was too complicated in Adjab and that it was better to live in a large town than in a small village, because life in the city is more relaxed and free of family politics (cf. 4.3.5). A further important topic in this realm concerns changing gender roles, for example that it is no longer the women but the men who build houses (cf. 3.1.1). The change in roles, subsistence practices and livelihoods also concerns the maintenance of proprietary plantations rather than foraging for yams and additional forest fruits. When asked about their daily activities, men responded with ‘small hunt and plantation work’ (cf. 3.1.2, see also introduction to this chapter cf. 2).

The idea of a trajectory is of course also inspired by spatial considerations and how some Baka have moved all the way to Makokou from the forests in Congo (cf. 4.3.5), and how a select few have and continue to travel in between all locations along the Ivindo (cf. 6.2.1.3), transporting goods and knowledge between the different Baka groups and locations. Derived from this, I came to think of my unit of analysis and this social trajectory as the 'Ivindo Baka', extending from the village Été in Congo (cf. 4.2.8) to Makokou.

Acknowledging the divergence of opinion and practice, within the population and especially between old and young, to its true extent, is essential to showing the Baka as they are in the ethnographic present. Taken together with the shift away from forest subsistence practices, the image of Baka trajectory along the River Ivindo extends from life in camps in the deep forest with nutritional needs focused on forest products; to rural village life in Adjab or Kabisa with plantation management and regular trips to the local shop; to urban Baka city dwellers in Makokou caught between poverty and the joys of city life. I emphasise that this idea of a trajectory is not to be deemed absolute, but this trope is employed to impress on the reader Baka intragroup diversity along the Ivindo, which rather quite wonderfully mirrors the 'fuzziness of culture' (Gatewood 2001).

Another aspect of 'diversity' concerns the fact that Baka discriminate against each other on grounds of nationality: Baka from Cameroon perceive themselves as vastly superior to their Gabonese kin, and do not hesitate to express this opinion (cf. 4.1.1). Reasons for the superiority were given to me as the longer engagement with agriculture by the Cameroon Baka; their schooling and resulting knowledge of reading, writing, and practical skills such as carpentry; having better clothes than Gabonese Baka; and advanced knowledge and skills for 'modern' and urban life. The reason I have brought this diversity of livelihoods and opinions to the reader's attention at this point in the discussion, is the importance of keeping this in mind when considering (general) conceptualisations of mobility in Baka society today.

3 Mobility and Living Arrangements

In 1890, Crampel in visiting the Baka groups around Northern Gabon had described how the Baka did not have fixed dwellings, and how they change location every four to five days (Crampel 1890: 549). Seasonal considerations and resource-orientation were seen as key to Baka mobility. Later, Baka mobility was depicted as movements between *bala*, collective forest camps, and *gbagala*, large semi-permanent settlements near farmer villages, with movement patterns attuned to the dry and rainy tropical seasons, and to the farmers' needs for help with their plantations (Bahuchet 1992b). Social motivations for mobility, such as visiting family, have also been demonstrated by Baka ethnographies (Vallois & Marquer 1976, Dhellemmes 1986, LeClerc 2001, Joiris 2003), so that it has long been clear that Baka mobility revolves around more than merely resources. The question to be addressed in this chapter is what constitutes Baka mobility today, especially given that Baka livelihoods and social organisation are changing, as indicated in Chapter Two, and how this impacts on the understanding and conceptualisation of Baka mobility.

The initial point to consider is the (increasing) Baka sedentarisation and this chapter firstly examines Baka living arrangements, villages, and dwellings, as I encountered them in the different locations, to evidence the change in the Baka way of life from forest nomadism to predominant village sedentism. Subsequently, I question what constitutes mobility for the Baka of today, describing their main types of mobility, namely *molongo*, *mosesanu* and *mongengele*. I then introduce those values, which are particularly relevant to Baka mobility considerations and decision-making: individual autonomy; *bien garder*, taking care of one another (in the broadest sense); *être à l'aise*, to feel at ease; and *faire l'ambiance*, to have a party. In addition, I show that *heart* and *spirit* are essential to Baka mobility. I present the three primary factors in Baka mobility and immobility - *toma* (following kin); the quality of relations with Baka neighbours; and the search for a good life - to conclude with the idea that Baka mobility is best conceptualised as a *motivational complex* from a temporal, spatial and relational perspective.

3.1 Living Arrangements

This subchapter describes Baka village structures, dwellings, and plantations along the River Ivindo in the North-East of Gabon, in particular in the villages of Adjab, Kabisa, and Makokou; comparative reference is made to the village of Bitouga near Minvoul in the North of Gabon (see maps cf. 1.2.2.2). As I will illustrate, Baka dwellings range from the ‘traditional’ *mongulu*, a dome-shaped hut; to mud-walled houses; to what I term ‘tent-type structures’ made from poles and different covering materials (which gives the image of a tent). I specifically use the term ‘living arrangements’ as the heading of this chapter to evoke movement in the way that people are connected through the spatial structures in their environment and through the people who frequent them. In addition, the term references the impermanence still inherent in Baka society, even though they are predominantly sedentary. In so doing, I am inspired by two notions: Firstly, the correlation between social and spatial organisation, which continues to generate much attention, and the idea of permeability mapping which aims to not only document structures but their social relevance (Widlok 1999). The latter looks at space ‘not only as a mirror of cultural ideas but also as a means of producing such ideas in the disposition and behaviour of social actors’ (Widlok 1999: 392), and emphasises the analysis of the way in which spatial features are connected and their (social) permeability.

Interrelation of space, time, and sociality in Baka terminology

Secondly, I draw on the conclusion put forward by LeClerc that all Baka terminology, which reports Baka relation between space, time and activities, refers to ‘people’s relations amongst each other during an activity, which, in turn, are made with reference to the residential group unit’ (LeClerc 2001:112, my translation). Through his analysis of gathering terminology, LeClerc showed Baka lexical interrelation not only of space and time, but also sociality. He also analysed in detail how the management of cultivated and living spaces constitutes a replica of and support for Baka social structure. The Baka word *paki*, for example, signifies both the social unit of the Baka

'band'⁴⁷ and the local group territory. In this vein, the village stands for the clan (identity), the cultivation areas for the local group, and the forest for the constitutive parts of the local groups, including the focus on family affiliations along maternal kin through uncles and nephews. The merger of Baka social and spatial understanding is extended to conclude that social space is equivalent to mythical space owing to Baka ritual associations (LeClerc 2001). Moreover, space is not conceived in relation to units of time, and there is no differentiation between space and time, but distance and duration are merged (LeClerc 2001). The duration of absence from camp is the marker of distance travelled in order to realise an activity, and the terminology of activities refers to relations between people, and between people and place (LeClerc 2001). The following tables gives examples of the interrelation between space, time and sociality in Baka terminology:

Baka term (spatial and temporal)	Meaning
tie	place or time
ndanda	place/location or moment
Belebele (doubling of bele, meaning forest)	always or everywhere

Table 3.1 - Examples of Baka terminology with both a spatial and temporal meaning

Baka term (social and temporal)	Meaning
moyapa	family quits the group for two or three hours
noo	family quits group for whole day
mombato	family quits group for more than a day
limbanga	only the couple quits the group for more than a day

Table 3.2 - Examples of Baka terminology with both a social and temporal meaning

3.1.1 Villages and Dwellings

All villages on the Ivindo - Adjab, Kabisa, and Ndoumabango - have in common that the Baka have built and live in rectangular mud-walled houses starting about 30 years ago. Mud-walling means that small branches roughly 5cm in diameter are used to build the walls of the house. These branches are placed at a distance of about 20-25cm to each

⁴⁷ I use LeClerc's term; for theoretical contextualisation cf. 1.1.1

other in two parallel lines, which are about 10cm apart. To construct the wall, thinner branches are used to horizontally interweave the vertical branches. The space in between the branches is then filled with mud. The houses are on average 6m long and 5m wide, and covered by *pailles*, thatched straw. As these straw roofs only last for about 1-2 years, before they need to be completely replaced, people aspire to the alternative of corrugated iron roofs, or at least a mix of *pailles* and plastic sheets as a combination which better withstands damage through the strong rains. Many houses have a wooden door, which is bolted at night. Where there is no actual door, a sheet of corrugated iron or wood bark serve as a door at night or during the absence of the inhabitants.



Plate 3.1 – Variation of Baka Dwellings on the Ivindo

The houses are mostly divided into three parts, two rooms and an open area, which one is tempted to call a living room, as this is where people will sit during the day or at night when inside the house. Interestingly, anyone can be in this area, but generally only the 'owners' and resident family members of the house will dwell there. In most spaces designated to sleeping, simple bed-like structures have been constructed from

poles and planks, with the platform sleeping area about 40cm off the ground. This is covered by a foam mattress and varying qualities of sheets and blankets. The poles extend to about 1.5m from the ground and hold a mosquito net over the bed. Mostly, parents have mosquito nets, but if the children sleep separately they do not. Both on the Ivindo and around Minvoul 'nowadays, owning a bed consisting of a mattress and decorated with sheets is symbolically seen as a sign of wealth and success (knowing that even some Fang cannot acquire this type of property)' (Paulin 2010: 259). One example of this attitude can be seen in that, following their flight from the village Été (cf. 4.2.9), the Baka returned under the threat of more violence to pick up their belongings, including the mattresses. In another case, the population of Adjab moved down the river to Kabisa for over ten weeks to attend the mortuary rituals of an old woman who had died.⁴⁸ The Adjab Baka were forced to sleep in cramped conditions on the floors of the fewer houses in Kabisa. Some of the Adjab Baka complained of missing their comfortable beds back in their village, and the privacy of their homes. These statements document the importance of these structures with regard to physical wellbeing and the intensity of social interaction. They may inhibit movement to a certain degree, but do not prevent mobility as such, and some Baka emphasised that they could always just pack up and leave, that having a house did not dampen the 'Baka spirit' of being mobile.

I have here described the most prevalent model, but there are many types of 'house'. Some are much smaller and contain only one room, the largest, on the other hand, have four rooms. Many have the double woven-pole-structures in place which would serve to hold the mud, but have never been filled in, or have only had one side filled in. Frequently, thick plastic sheets are used as alternative walling. Often several sheets with plenty of holes in them have been stuck together, and provide only limited protection from the elements. Plastic sheets are also used to cover tent-type structures, which serve as temporary or permanent dwellings. By 'tent-type', I refer to two styles of construction, where the plastic sheet is either stretched over one central wooden bar at the top in a triangular fashion, or stretched over several wooden bars in the shape of a house. The plastic sheets, *baches* in French, are prized possessions, one

⁴⁸ The map of Kabisa indicates the tomb of the deceased (cf. 4.3.3).



Plate 3.2 – Sample Interiors in Baka Houses on the Ivindo



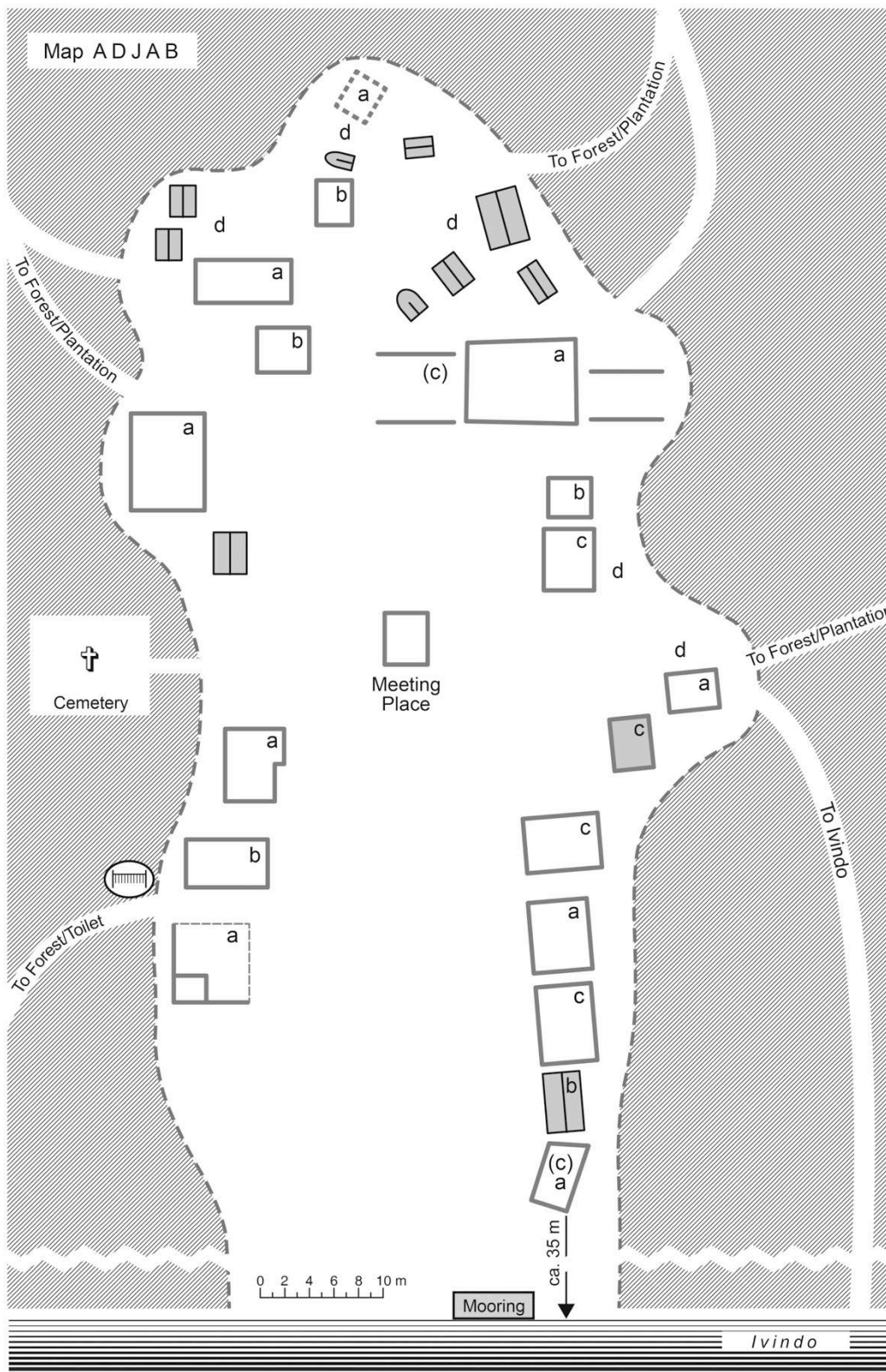
Plate 3.3 – ‘Tent-Type’ Structures on the Ivindo

square meter costing around CFA 3.000, and are taken from one living space to the next. This was the case, for example, when the Baka fled Été (cf. 4.2.9), or when they returned from the gold site Mikouka to Adjab (cf. 5.3.3), where they carried their plastic sheets with them, and built new tent structures from them. I came to think of these 'tent-types' as 'shifting homes'. There also exist bark houses, where the sides are made from flattened bark. Finally, there is the 'luxury' house built from wooden planks, roofed with either wooden planks or with corrugated iron; the men who can afford to build these, work as 'pygmy' healers for other Gabonese, or as poachers.

MJ., a Baka male elder from Adjab, described to me that 'one house is for one family of a husband, wife and children'. A house is associated with the man who built it and his family will live in it. The estimated average number of adults and children to one house lies between 5 and 6. However, there are always other family members or visiting kin also living in the house. This situation was described as bad by some of the Ivindo residents, the aim being to be 'good citizens' where each family has its own home.

On the Ivindo, the preparation of food and cooking take place in a space separate from the sleeping areas. This can be inside the house, but in the 'living room', or simply outside the house, but in most cases, there is a distinct area designated to cooking. Most of these spaces are mud-walled houses where only two or three sides have been filled in with mud; some are only covered by a straw thatched roof. As the women told me, having one side of the kitchen open enables them to observe or witness what goes on in the village whilst they are in the kitchen preparing the food. It also gives them the chance to obscure activities from the direct view of others. Interestingly, in true Bourdieuan style, the entire house is seen as the space of the male, whereas the kitchen is seen as female.

The map below shows the predominance of mud-walled houses in the village of Adjab. From my first visit in November 2010 to my final departure in September 2011, only one house (marked as 'house under construction' in the upper middle of the map) was torn down, as it had become to derelict to live in. All other houses and the second



	House		Mongulu		Bark House		a House
	House under construction		Forest		Constructed after June 2011		b Kitchen
	Tent		Derelict House		Edzengui Ritual Space		c House with Kitchen
							d Cooking Space

Map 3.1 – Map of the Village Adjab on the Upper Ivindo in Gabon

house under construction (on the right side of the village) remained more or less the same. A noticeable change came only in July 2011, when those Baka who had been working in the gold fields returned or came to dwell in Adjab (cf. 5.3.3). This group set up tent-style structures to live in, some built *mongulus*, and one couple put up the rafters for a house (location of these structures marked by the darker colour).

Even if the Baka no longer live an entirely nomadic lifestyle, they still spend considerable stretches of time in the forest. When in the forest, for whichever length of time, different modalities of shelter are used. Those in the forest for a longer period will carry plastic sheets and construct tent-type or round structures over which the sheets are placed as shelter. Or they travel only with a mosquito net and mat, which, with the help of simple poles cut on location as necessary, are then turned into an 'open-air' bed. And, in no time whatsoever, the Baka women will erect what is known as their 'traditional' domed dwelling, the *mongulu*. Witnessing the speed and ease with which the women construct *mongulus* was always a pleasure. Branches or saplings of about 1.5cm diameter are taken and placed in the ground in a crescent shape. More branches are then woven through these at about 15-25cm distance from each other. Bending this intertwined construction forward and using the ends of the original crescent branches to secure the edifice in the ground, brings about the dome-shaped dwelling, which the Baka have long been famous for.

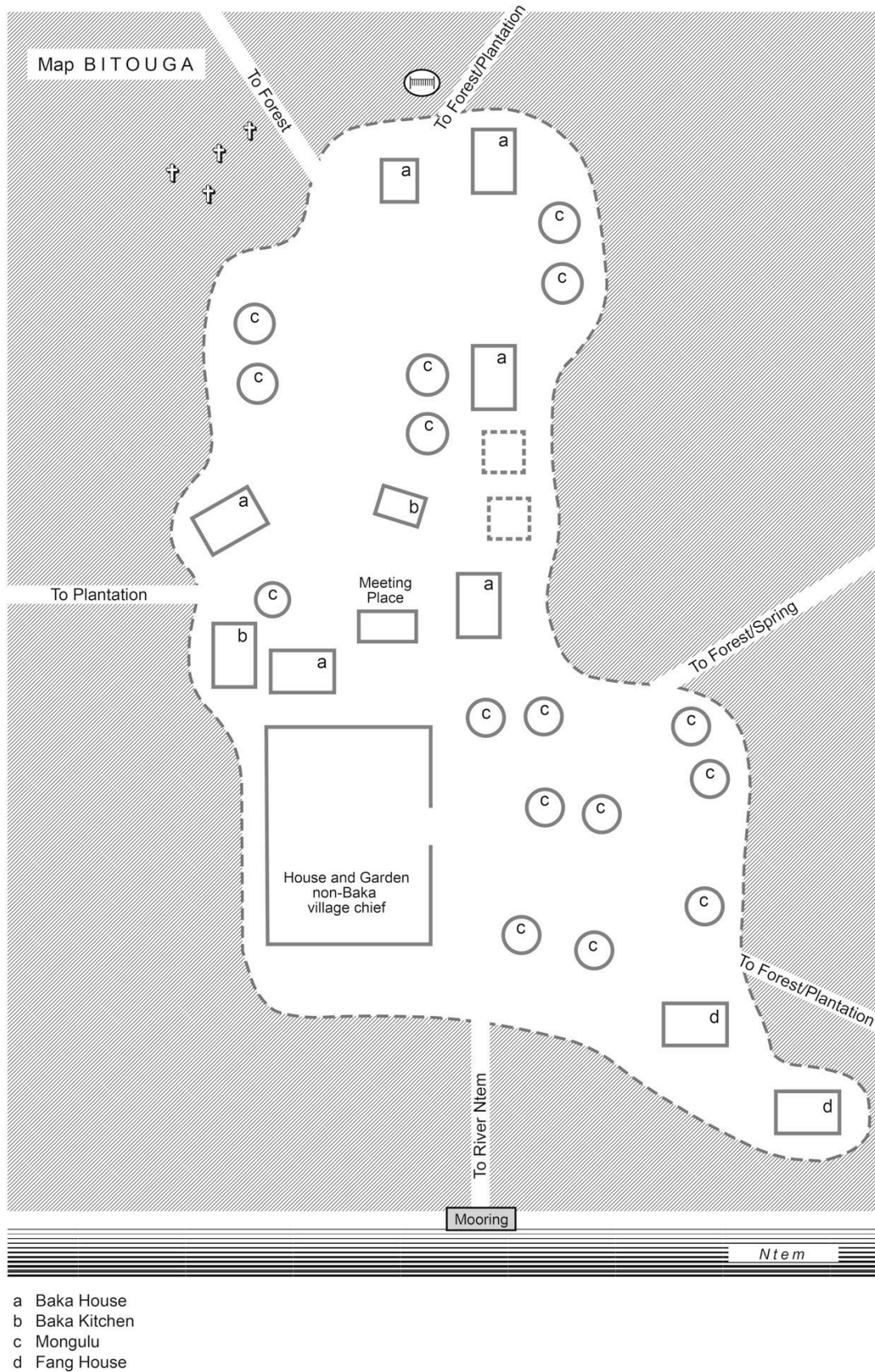
Along the Ivindo, I only saw *mongulus* in the forest, but never in the villages. However, the knowledge to build *mongulus* has not been lost, and during the life history interviews I was told how burning down a mud-walled house cannot scare a 'true Baka', as they will simply quickly build a *mongulu* to have a roof over their head again (cf. 4.2.6). Finally, these living arrangements show an essential change in Baka society. Setting up a *mongulu* was a woman's chore, but now building a mud-walled house has become part of the role of a man. When I asked the women about this, they confirmed this change, but told me it was still them who would instruct the men how to proceed in the building of a house.



Plate 3.4 – Building *mongulus* on the Upper Ivindo

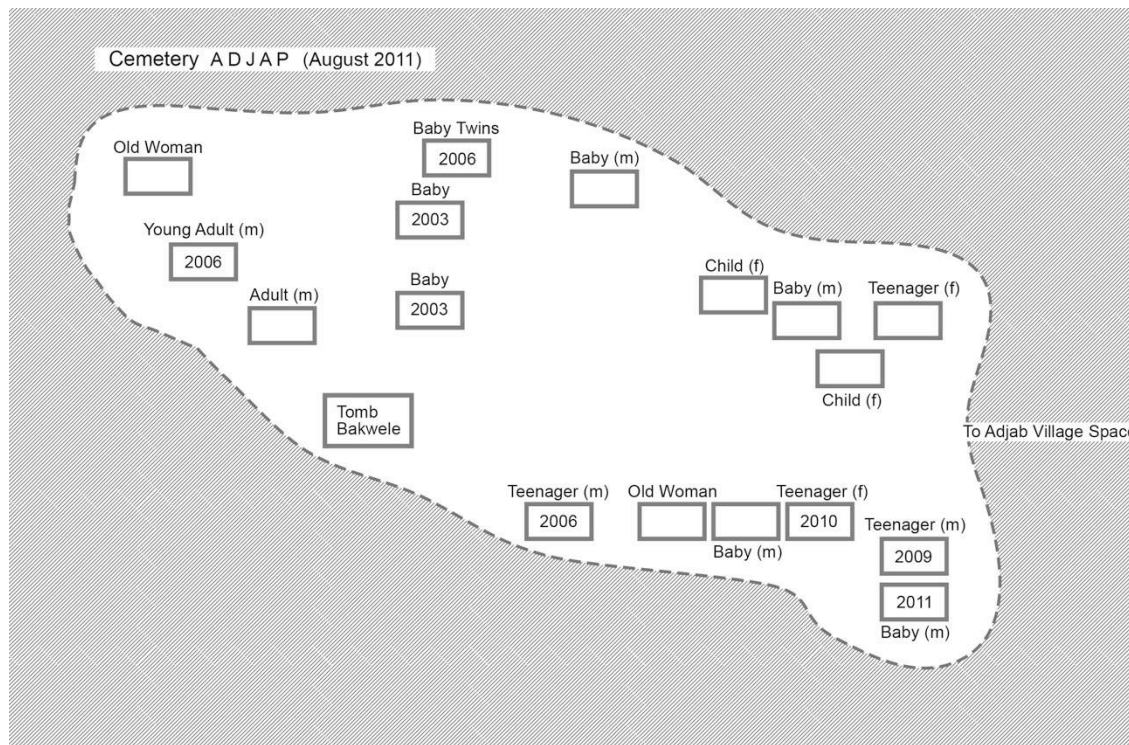
In Bitouga in northern Gabon, half the village population lives in wooden-plank houses, and the other half live in *mongulus*.⁴⁹ These areas are in the most part spatially distinct from each other, and reflect village social dynamics, as those living in the *mongulus* complain of disparaging behaviour towards them by those living in the wooden-plank houses; whereas they consider the wooden-house dwellers to have lost touch with Baka traditions. The wooden houses are also storage place for different items such as guns, various tools, large amounts of clothes, electronic music playing equipment, and (in one case) a television; objects, which evidence a divide between the two groups along material lines. The change in dwellings is something, which has occurred only during the last years, and was described as ‘dramatic’ in its impact, deeply changing the face of the village (Pascale Paulin, personal communication). Bitouga is further different from Adjab in that a Bamiléké man from Cameroon lives in the village as the official village chief appointed and recognised by the Gabonese State, whereas it is only Baka who live in Adjab.

⁴⁹ S. and his family live in a wooden house in Bitouga, but S. also has a *mongulu* outside his house. He explained how he likes to be inside it sometimes, and that he wants it there to maintain a connection to forest practices, and as a place for visitors.



Map 3.2 – Map of the Village Bitouga near Minvoul in Gabon

During a visit to one of the former, now abandoned Baka villages, I learned that there is another notion of ‘house’. The group that I travelled with described how in a *tolo a bo*, a cemetery, each person has a house and the coffin is considered to be a bed.



Map 3.4 – Map of the cemetery in Adjab (August 2011)

Interestingly, both Adjab and Bitouga have designated and established areas for burials. However, in the past, Baka family members were buried directly behind the houses of their relatives, as can be seen in the map of Dezou (cf. 4.2.4), and in the three different maps drawn of the village Été (cf. Annex XVI). In Kabisa, the issue of where to bury a Baka woman was hotly debated between the Baka and the official Bakwele village chief (map with tomb cf. 4.3.3).

During the life history interviews, ‘big houses’ were always mentioned in place descriptions to indicate the size and importance of a location, but maybe this is also something Baka have learnt from their neighbours as an important value. On the other hand, one of the most ‘Westernised’ Baka men, who has worked for different NGOs for many years, made a particular point of stressing how a house means nothing to a Baka, how it remains the ‘secret of the Baka’ to just be able to pack up and go.

However, I ask the reader to recall the example above of those Baka who longed to return to Adjab, because they did not like the ‘living arrangements’ in Kabisa during the mortuary rituals. Taken together, this evidences that the Baka have taken on and orient themselves towards the general regional value and ideology around ‘big houses’, but also that they appreciate the lack of hardship of not sleeping on the ground and the benefits of a ‘house’. Within the Baka populations of Adjab and Kabisa I heard many different comments on the exact value of a house, which leads me to argue that there is a broad intra-population spectrum of opinions on the topic. What they all share, is an undercurrent that, indeed, a Baka can just pack up and go, far more easily than their neighbours.

In the provincial capital Makokou, approximately 60 Baka live in 6 different locations around the town. The dwellings are simple houses or shacks of a quality, which could be considered equivalent to slums, as the abodes are made up of corrugated iron, plastic sheets, and anything else useful for protection. In other cases, Baka are living in mud-walled or stone houses, or the remains thereof, belonging to Fang or Bakwele.



Plate 3.5 – Baka Dwellings in Makokou

3.1.2 Plantations and Forest Foods

The process of cutting down large trees, clearing away bushes and weeding out smaller plants and saplings from a terrain is called *debrousser*, and takes place every year. *Debrousser* is followed by planting (crops), either at the end of the long dry season in August, or at the end of the short one in March. The main plant of cultivation is manioc, of which the tubers and leaves are eaten.⁵⁰ They have become the most visible, and, in quantitative terms, possibly the most important part of Baka diet. Other root vegetables, bananas, plantains, sweet corn, aubergines, sugar cane, tarot, pineapple, potato, *piment* (a spice bush) are also planted and harvested. According to the Gabonese authorities, there is no detailed land register for this area and everybody can build houses and make plantations wherever they like, as long as they respect the delineation of national park borders.⁵¹ In many Gabonese villages, plantations must be defended against elephant herds eating and destroying the harvest, but I did not witness this in either Adjab or Kabisa. Theft of tubers occurs amongst the Baka, and in between Baka and Bakwele, but no activities are undertaken to protect the crops. The Baka in Adjab and Kabisa do not see or speak of their plantations as inhibiting movement, as can be seen by the individual mobility patterns (cf. 6.2.1.).

Debrousser is an activity, which men and women carry out together. The tools used for this are simple machetes, and the aim is to clear more than one new plantation for the family per season. The women undertake planting the crops. If a man has no woman, then he will clear his land with a family member, and it is then the mother who plants and harvests from his plantation. Having planted in August, one can start harvesting in January or February, so after about 6 months, but only if there is no other plantation to harvest from, as it is better to leave the crops for about 8-9 months. It is always necessary to weed in between, which is done in January, if there is no other work, otherwise by March at the latest, even if there is other work. The men in Adjab emphasised that it took a lot of strength to clear a terrain, and they would complain of

⁵⁰ Manioc originates from Latin America, and is known as yuka, or cassava in the many parts of the world where it is now eaten.

⁵¹ I observed this as lived practice, but this information of course contradicts the process whereby mining and timber companies are being given specific tracts of lands for their activities, which precludes access or use by other groups.

aches in arms and legs when returning back to the village in the evening after plantation work. Nevertheless, they would always try and make 2 plantations during the long dry season, as it was then possible to harvest for 9-12 months for one family.



Plate 3.6 – Planting and Harvesting Manioc

When I asked them to define who counted as ‘family’ for this purpose, they found it hard to state for two reasons. Firstly, as there will be more than one plantation per family, it includes all family members, for example brothers and sisters, and visiting kin. Also, if the people who have made and planted the crops are away, their direct kin, for example a brother and his family will harvest from that plantation. Secondly, it is common practice to *demand* tubers or prepared manioc rolls of each other as part of the demand sharing of an immediate return system (cf. 2.4.1). I also heard of several stories where people were taking from plantations where they had no right to, and this was clearly labelled as theft by those Baka whose plantations were concerned, which contradicts ideas of demand sharing. The observation that a plantation in Adjab has

sufficient 'support capacity'⁵² for an (extended) family, is very different to the observations around Messea (South-Eastern Cameroon, Lomié district), where it was observed that the 'support capacity' of Baka plantations was clearly insufficient as 'almost all of the cultivated products which compose the Baka diet come from Nzimo villagers' plantations, next to whom [the Baka] are settled' (LeClerc 1998).

The Baka on the Ivindo did not describe and classify the forest in terms of hunting or animals, but in the tripartite terms of *wulu*, *essanga*, and *mongindi*, differentiating between the spaces good for planting and building.

Wulu: Soil which is good for planting and building villages⁵³

Essanga: Flood regions from rivers, which extend and turn into forest and cannot be used for planting or building

Mongindi: In between the *wulu* spaces, but not *essanga*

In this context, it is also important to address what came to be known as the *Wild Yam Debate*.⁵⁴ It was questioned whether or not the (prehistoric) forest foragers of Central Africa could have survived purely on forest products, and especially wild yams, for their nutritional needs, without any additional agricultural produce from their neighbours (Bailey et al. 1989, Headland & Bailey 1991, Hart & Hart 1986). When I addressed this question to the Baka of Adjab, they simply laughed and said that of course they could survive in the forest, their forefathers had obviously done so (see also Yasuoka 2006). They explained that the main source of food would be meat and *poki*, honey, and *mengoum*, a type of nut, as well as the (infamous) *ndondo*, the wild yams.⁵⁵ However, they acknowledged that eating too much meat and honey was

⁵² I adapt this term from LeClerc, who uses it to refer to the ability of a cultivated area to provide nourishment to a group of people (LeClerc 1998).

⁵³ Paulin gives the translation of *wulu* as herb, but makes no reference to the terms *essanga* or *mongindi* (Paulin 2010). See the map of Été for an example of the three terms as described by the Baka in Adjab (cf. 4.2.8).

⁵⁴ The *Wild Yam Debate* can be understood as the tropical forest version of the so-called *Kalahari Debate*. The latter concerned the political identity of the San people in the Kalahari Desert (Solway & Lee 1990, Wilmsen & Denbow 1990).

⁵⁵ I was fascinated how, when walking through the forest, there was always something to nibble on and many fruits to suck on, and often, I would come out of the forest feeling pleasantly filled. Warm *mengoum* have a taste similar to warm chestnuts, which made for a funny sensation in the tropical heat.

boring after a while, even if it tasted very good, and that it was then necessary to have a change of diet.

Studies of the Baka in Cameroon (Sato 2001) and the Mbuti (Ichikawa 1983) underline these Baka statements, also refuting the claim that 'pygmy' peoples were unable to survive in the forest owing to calorie deficiencies before the arrival of their agriculturalist neighbours. Bahuchet and his colleagues remarked on an important point which had been missed by the tropical forest *revisionists* in that successful subsistence on wild yams and other forest produce depends on the type of forest a community is living in (Bahuchet et al. 1991). It is difficult to find wild yams in the *Gilbertodendron* monospecific forest (mainly in the Ituri region where the Harts undertook their study), but far easier in the *mosaic* forests of the Congo Basin, where as the name 'mosaic' implies, the forest provides diverse food sources (Lewis & Köhler 2002). Moreover, it has been documented that for Fang farmers practising swidden agriculture, forest products would close the food gap resulting from food shortages in their own production (Cinnamon 1999). This suggests that the *Wild Yam* question could also be: how did the agriculturalist farmers survive without forest products, which they searched for themselves, or which were provided by their Baka neighbours?

The forest was always deemed to be the elementary place for food provisioning for the Baka, and for some of them it still is. The small difference for the Baka in Adjab is that they rarely forage for small yams; rather their daily trips into the forest often revolve around getting manioc tubers and leaves, and around plantation management - just like their neighbours. The seasonality of activities is now geared towards manioc as well as gathering forest products, and producing for example *chocolat*. *Chocolat* is French for chocolate and refers to the brown colour of this ingredient for meat sauce.⁵⁶ The fruits from which *chocolat* is made can be gathered at the start of the dry seasons, and occasion trips of about one week into the forest by a group of between 4-15 Baka.

⁵⁶ *Chocolat* is an ingredient for (meat) sauces. It is made from dried and pounded fruit kernels, then re-solidified into a block from which is grated the necessary quantity for making a sauce by adding water to the gratings. The name *chocolat* comes from the brown colour of this sauce ingredient.

3.1.3 Hunting, Fishing and Honey

The Baka also regularly hunt in the tropical forests, as part of daily subsistence activities. The Baka divide hunting into the 'small hunt' for animals such as porcupine, duiker and monkeys, and the 'great hunt', which refers to elephant hunting. A hunt is no longer done with spears, but mainly with rifles (Dhellemmes 1986), and porcupines are caught with traps. Individual men, or groups of two or three men will go hunting together, which is known as *sendo*. Individual forays are mostly undertaken during the day; the small groups will more often go out at night, and stay away for two or three days. Husband and wife will likewise go into the forest together to carry out a hunt, whereby the man will kill the animal, and the wife assists him by preparing the animal and cooking, and helping to carry the kill back to the camp. This cooperation is well documented, whereby it is emphasised that the hunter is nothing without the support of his wife, as the wife is his 'indispensable companion' (Dhellemmes 1986). These trips can be between one and several days, and often the couples will also look for honey and other forest products, to sell or use themselves.

The animal hunted will either be divided up and shared entirely amongst Baka villagers, or only part of it will be eaten in the Baka village, and the remainder will be sold in the nearby non-Baka village, as I observed continuously throughout my fieldwork period. For example the head, ribs and legs of a wild boar will often be turned into money. The price obtained for the sale of the meat will vary along the Ivindo with better prices achieved in the larger towns. At the time of research, a leg of wild boar was sold for CFA 1.500 in Mvadi, and for CFA 2.500 in Maibut. Baka hunt for themselves, and for their neighbours as part of an exchange relationship, whereby the guns belong to the neighbours (cf. 6.1.1). Having earned money, for example in NGO projects, some of the Baka have acquired guns with their own money, but this is still unusual. Baka women practice dam fishing and both men and women, and especially younger boys will fish on the Ivindo from a small dugout. Fish was the dominant staple in one kitchen in Adjab where there were only women, whereas for all other kitchens it was complimentary. Baka will also collect honey for own use or for sale, as the

delicious forest honey is known for its filling and health-inducing qualities, so that both the Baka and their neighbours desire it.

Baka hunting success is linked to the spirit world and prayer (LeClerc 2001), and one of the male Baka elders described to me in great detail, how he prays before every hunt. However, when I questioned the young men about their practices, they just laughed at this idea of praying before going off to hunt in the forest. Especially with regard to the night-hunt, they spoke about the 'power' of torches to stun and scare an animal. Whether or not a hunter prays depends on his age category, which documents the change in established practices and the generation gap (cf. 2.4.2).⁵⁷

3.1.4 Food provisioning

The intensification of planting again suggests that the Baka are better considered as post-foragers, especially as planting activities have taken place for around fifty years in Cameroon (LeClerc 2001; see also AM.'s account of Cameroonian Baka practices cf. 4.1.1). To underline this argument, I now give examples of food provisioning I witnessed on the Ivindo.

An old Baka woman had died in Kabisa. I was staying in Adjab at the time, and apart from the three oldest women, all Baka from Adjab and myself travelled downstream to Kabisa to attend the funeral proceedings. We ended up staying for nine weeks, during which regular 'manioc runs' were made back to Adjab. Even before we left Adjab, I was told that food was always a problem in Kabisa, a village located on the other side of the river from the large Bakwele town Maibut II (pronounced Maibut Deux), where there are several stores with big generators to power cold storage facilities selling provisions such as frozen chicken feet. So indeed, once we got to Kabisa, many times, following laments of *on a rien*, we have nothing to eat, I was asked to pay for chicken feet, which are considered a delicacy. The noteworthy thing here is that when there was no food, people did not go into the forest to search for wild yams. I first placed this in the category of the convenience of having a 'wealthy' researcher at hand, and it

⁵⁷ It always amazed me to see the physiological change in the bodies of the Baka hunters in the forest. Observing the tension and alacrity suggested a link both tangible and invisible between the Baka and their environment.

was only after a while that I came to understand this as a common response. When I questioned some Baka about this, they clarified that they no longer directly think of going into the forest when there is nothing to eat, which was on the one hand described as 'leaving the forest' (cf. 2.4), but also put down to a decline in small and large game to hunt. Moreover, the population of Kabisa had quadrupled with our arrival, and once we had used up a store of manioc, one of the daughters of the family I was staying with, and another relative, would travel to Adjab by pirogue, harvest manioc tubers, and return with several bags. This repeated itself several times during our stay in Kabisa. The harvest proceeds would be split and used within the families of those who had undertaken the trip to Adjab. This practice documents food processing and organisation beyond immediate consumption in Ivindo Baka. However, food storage does not go beyond 2-3 days, which is the same as for forest products.

The second example I want to draw attention to concerns Baka in the provincial capital Makokou. There is a general state of poverty there, as the Baka are quick to emphasise, and edibles are normally consumed immediately. However, I also witnessed cases of food storage. One example is a Baka woman born in Makokou who became the second wife of one of the brothers in Adjab, and so she had her own plantation and a plantation for her eldest daughter in the forest near Adjab. The couple became estranged, and she has returned to live in Makokou, but still regularly comes to Adjab, and other places along the Ivindo. Whenever she was in Adjab, she would carry as many manioc tubers back to Makokou as possible. In some instances she would organise for somebody else to take food back to the provincial capital to give to her children, father and other Baka living in *Maison Essouma* (see also cf. 6.2.1.3).

Baka statements and my observations amount to the fact that Baka are eating less forest foods, mostly manioc from their own plantations, meat if it has not been sold, often tinned sardines from a nearby shop, and, if possible, cherished delicacies such as chicken feet, or as one Baka elder emphasised: 'We no longer eat wild yams'. This is combined with elements of organisation regarding food provisioning but no

noteworthy food 'storage', other than washed manioc.⁵⁸ The classification of the forest into places for planting and building underlines the shifts to an enlarged or changing diet and in subsistence mobility. Keeping a watchful eye on who harvests which tubers advocates the advent of transformations to egalitarian demand sharing (cf. 2.4.1). In these factors, the Baka are similar to many of the former forest foragers around the equator in Central Africa, tropical Asia, and in the Amazonian basin also experiencing changes to their socio-economic organisation (for example Dallos 2011).

3.1.5 Dwellings as Moorings

From an outsider's point of view, the Baka I met in Northern and North-Eastern Gabon live a way of village life, very similar to that of their neighbours; in particular, the Baka of Adjab and the Bakwele of Mvadi. This PhD explores what constitutes mobility for the Baka, but at this point in the discussion, I draw attention to their rootedness in one place. This is not a new topic, but has already been documented for other Baka communities. Dhellemmes, for example, describes the 'pygmies' as 'relatively stable and no longer nomadic', as the families live in the same place for decades, only moving during the great hunt and always returning after some months to their base camp (Dhellemmes 1986). Some Baka lived in the village of Été in Congo for about 20 years, which one man recounted as 'I spent my life there'. A female Baka elder described how when moving from Congo to Gabon, they 'travelled through many villages to arrive in Gabon, as the Baka had many villages in that region'. From this it can be contended that villages, and houses, have long played an important role as reference points in Baka mobility.⁵⁹

This idea makes for interesting comparisons with mobility conceptualisations which advocate that to be mobile there must always be a point of fixed reference, a

⁵⁸ Once the manioc tubers have been peeled, they are put in plastic fibre sacks (for example, an (empty) 25kg sack of rice), and placed in a river or water pool to be washed. To keep them from floating away or sinking, they are tied to a branch. Washing the tubers takes away the stench emanating from fresh manioc.

⁵⁹ This possibly applies to other forest group as well, as, for example, in the case of the Bagyeli 'pygmies' who conceptualise *kwaato* as a base camp or 'the place where one lives in the formal sense of the word' with rectangular houses Biesbrouck (1999).

‘mooring’ (Urry 2003:125). In addition to the need for physical fixity to recognise and observe mobility, fixity or a ‘mooring’ through mobility infrastructure is understood as necessary to enable mobility, such as an airport is needed for aeromobility (Urry 2003). Fixity can also refer to ‘emotional anchorage’ which:

Enables a mooring of meaning and subjective feeling towards “wherever [people] happen to be”. In fact, it is the process of travelling with others that enables feelings of place while on the move (Adey 2010: 73, referring to Tuan 1974 and Hetherington 2000).

Baka mobility practices consisted of the dispersal into individual families or small groups, to then reunite into larger groups according to the seasons (LeClerc 2001). These movements were and are underlined by *bien garder*, which means in its simplest form taking care of kin relations, and which corresponds well to the notion of ‘emotional anchorage’. Given that today, Baka are no longer practising long-term individual or group mobility in the forest, I suggest that, at least in part, the ‘emotional anchorage’ has been transferred to village spatial structures (cf. 3.2.3.6), and in Chapter Six I relate this to the Baka mythical realm (cf. 6.4). However, this may have already been the case in prehistoric and historic times, as Vansina has suggested.⁶⁰ As I have described, the Baka along the Ivindo live in houses, no longer in dome-shaped huts (and this has possibly been the case for longer than appreciated); they appreciate the comfort of sleeping in a bed in their own house; and engage heavily in swidden agriculture. The idea of anchorage is, thus, also support for the second point, whereby I advocate that Baka sedentism and building houses along the Ivindo is (at least partly) self-generated, a process which I term ‘auto-sedentism’, and that Baka value the infrastructure of dwellings for various reasons.

The Baka have been subject to forced sedentarisation programs, *regroupement* in French, in Cameroon (Joiris 1998) and Gabon (Knight 2003, cf. 4.2.6), and regroupment is often assumed to be the reason for the change in dwellings and mobility practices. In Mvadi, one local chief insisted that the Baka have houses in Adjab today, only because

⁶⁰ See Vansina’s quote on page 81-82.

the authorities obliged them to build them. However, *regroupement* was applied to all ethnic groups along the Ivindo, so that this argument would not be Baka-specific, and suggests that *regroupement* cannot account for the multitude of mud-walled or wooden houses in Adjab, Bitouga or any of the other villages. In my argument for 'auto-sedentism', I do, however, not negate that sedentarisation enforced by the authorities has and continues to have an impact on the Baka and has affected their way of life. Though I would maintain that, in comparison, the Baka on the Ivindo have been less affected than other Baka groups.

Support for my argument of 'auto-sedentism' can possibly be drawn from the following examples: in the former villages of Été and Dezou, once the existing mud-walled houses started falling down entirely, people told me they would simply clear another space of trees and shrubs and build new houses. For the village of Été, the men spoke of having built at least two new houses each during a period of several years (Annex XVI shows three different villages maps which indicate 'first' and 'second' houses and suggest the changing external appearance of Été). When the owner of a house was away, another person or family would live in that house. In Adjab, one man built a new and larger house, leaving his old, smaller one to another family member. These cases are all examples of Baka building houses as permanent dwellings - of their own accord, and to ensure comfortable physical living.

A house can also be wilfully destroyed, and replaced. One man described losing his first child around the year 2000, which caused him to tear down his four-bedroom house, and build a new one. In the past, the Baka are known to have buried their dead and then moved on. This is no longer compatible with a predominantly sedentarised lifestyle, and the above description constitutes a different response to death, and highlights the impact of this change on (im)mobility practices (cf. 3.3.4). The value of a house to the Baka may also be documented by one other situation. One man started demolishing his house, because he was so fed up with his sons drinking, and wasting all their money, countering his emotional pain with the destruction of something valued; only to start building a new house. Hearing these stories of looking to counter the pain of losing a child or watching a living child harm itself reminded me of the Ilongot

headhunter's rage in the Philippines. An Ilongot needs a 'place where he can carry his anger', where he can turn the emotional heaviness of loss into something light, and the act of decapitating another human being brings about this catharsis (Rosaldo 1989). For the Baka, it seemed to me that destroying and rebuilding a permanent dwelling also constituted such an act of cleansing. To achieve catharsis, the object involved must be valued, which supports my idea that houses and fixed dwellings are important to the Baka *per se*. However, valuing houses is not to be equated with valuing sedentism.

During the entire time of my one-year fieldwork period, the majority of village inhabitants from Adjab and Kabisa remained in or close by the village where they have some kind of (more) permanent living structure and their plantation(s). This was most prominent during the planting seasons during the dry season months of August and March. Village life in Adjab would be yoked by regularity, contrary to the movement associated with nomadism and the individual autonomy so highly valued in egalitarian societies. Men and women would set off in the morning around 8am and spend the day clearing the bush and planting. This is hard physical work, and they would return about 4pm, tired. They would wash and then relax, listening to music and chatting, in a fashion, which could best be described as 'chilling out'. These plantation activities mirror accounts of semi-sedentarised Baka in Cameroon (Tsuru 1998). In Bitouga, a young woman took me to see her plantation area, with an expression I would find hard to describe as anything other than pride. In Adjab, the plantation areas are being extended ever deeper into the forest, and, I got the impression, becoming more systematic. Studies of the situation in Cameroon showed that contrary to the expectations of several NGOs and of the Cameroonian administrations, there was no causal link between agriculture and sedentarisation for the Baka, and the adoption of agriculture had not led the Baka group to settle permanently (LeClerc 1998, LeClerc 2001).⁶¹ Applying this reasoning to the Ivindo, would, thus, also not explain the sedentism encountered; Baka permanence in villages is not caused by the increase in agricultural activities.

⁶¹ The same argument has been made for Bagyeli 'pygmies' in Cameroon in that 'agriculture does not lead to sedentarization' Biesbrouck (1999).

The importance of having plantations may be seen in a different light, as one woman from Kabisa explained. She described how she works in her neighbour's plantations to have some money, but she also has her own plantations, which are to have food for the children. She was adamant about not being bound to the Bakwele to have food for her children. This statement must be understood in light of the fact that Kabisa has grown into a village out of being an area for plantations by the Bakwele on the other side of the river from Mvadi. The Baka claim that most of the plantations surrounding Kabisa now are theirs, but the Bakwele dispute this, claiming all the plantations are theirs, with none belonging to the Baka.⁶² This statement can be interpreted as an argument towards how the Baka themselves are trying to change their social status, living conditions, influence the domination ideology and achieve economic parity with their (ethnic) neighbours. Discussions of forager social organisation often concern territorial boundaries, and for the 'pygmies' of the Congo Basin it has been shown that 'territorial organisation is accompanied by important social mechanisms which result in a *minimisation* of territoriality' (Bahuchet 1992b). It has also been argued that there is no fixed hunting territory, only a habit to go to the same area, which was termed a 'determined territory' (Vallois & Marquer 1976). Arguments about stealing tubers from each others' plantations evidence that the fixity of Baka village life has brought about distinct notions of territoriality concerning the products of their agricultural activities.

The combined analysis of spatial structures and sociality revealed elementary topics of Baka transformation. Firstly, there is the distinct value attributed to a house, as a more comfortable and more private way of living, as a 'mooring', as well as an outward sign of social integration in Gabon through 'big houses'. This goes hand in hand with the role reversal that, formerly, constructing the *mongulu* was the women's role, but today building a house is the task of the man.⁶³ When I interviewed the women about this, they insisted that it is they who give the men the ideas for when and how to construct. I was able to witness this influence, but, in general, the changeover in

⁶² The exact delineation between Baka and Bakwélé plantations never quite resolved itself during my fieldwork.

⁶³ As the houses are made of natural materials from the forest, the argument advanced elsewhere, stating that such a change is linked to the men earning money, would not seem applicable to the Baka.

gender roles seems to have strengthened the patriarchal behaviour of Baka men. Secondly, the two different village set-ups of Adjab and Bitouga (Adjab as a village consisting mainly of mud-walled houses centred around the meeting hut; and Bitouga as divided into two parts, with *mongulus* in one half, and wooden houses in the other) document the variety of Baka living and dwelling arrangements. They also serve to underline the situation of Baka as *post-foragers* who no longer shift residential camps according to seasonal resource availability. Finally, it is an outward sign of a beginning stratification within Baka egalitarian sociality. I have insufficient data to make this argument for Bitouga, but certainly on the Ivindo, Baka society is dividing between those who want to become an accepted part of established, sedentary society, who want to 'leave the forest' and become listed on electoral registers as portrayed in Chapters Two and Six, and those who continue to want to live *in* the forest.⁶⁴ With regard to the argument of 'auto-sedentism', in Adjab, the quality of the houses, the mud walling, and the cleanliness in and around the house, seemed directly linked to the intensity of the will of the Baka concerned to integrate into Gabonese society; the houses of those most keen were the largest and the best constructed. However, as I would like to emphasise, nobody was forcing them to do so; it came of their own volition.

Whether the Baka live in *mongulus*, houses or tent-type structures, seems chiefly related to economic matters, the level of desire for comfort, and the intra-group diversity described in Chapter Two. To my mind, the counterpart of 'auto-sedentism' and the related loss of individual autonomy (cf. 3.2.3.1) is ideational with regard to mobility and fixity, and it is not related to dwellings or the environment, but relates to Baka mythical realm, as I will argue further in Chapter Six (cf. 6.4). Having documented Baka dwellings and living arrangements, and advocated the point of houses as moorings and sedentism as preferred by some Baka on the Ivindo, I now turn to the question of what constitutes mobility for the Ivindo Baka.

⁶⁴ Schebesta had already made a similar distinction for the Mbuti of the Ituri Forest, differentiating between *Basua wa pori* (forest Mbuti) and *Basua wa mungine* (village Mbuti) Schebesta (1933).

3.2 The Emic Perspective on Mobility

Baka mobility has many dimensions. Firstly, there are the daily or otherwise regular subsistence mobilities of gathering firewood; fetching water from the river; foraging for nuts, honey and other forest products; hunting (small) animals; tending the plantation; shopping in the neighbouring village; or selling the kill there. All of these are undertaken from the village as a base. In all four locations on the Ivindo, Baka go shopping for basic supplies such as rice, salt, sugar and oil in stores in the same or the next village. Baka from Adjab will travel to Mvadi by dugout canoe near daily in order to do so. From Kabisa, people will cross the river and shop in Maibut II on average every day, every three days or once a week. One man from Ndoumabango travels to Makokou for petrol, soap and salt roughly every two weeks. In couples, it is mainly the men who go shopping, whereas single women shop for themselves. In all cases, entrusting other Baka with money to buy items for another person is a big issue, as the money intended for food and other supplies is often used for alternative purposes, such as drinking alcohol.

This contrasts with 'historic' accounts of the Baka and other African hunter-gatherers and their seasonally related mobility involving the distinction between basecamps and hunting camps (Bahuchet 1992b, Grinker 1994, Hewlett 1996, Biesbrouck 1999). Baka ethnographies have always documented that forager mobility is not just resource-oriented, but how autonomously moving individual Baka family units living in camps in the forest, would seasonally unite in larger hunting groups or gather for ritual purposes (Vallois & Marquer 1976). Mobility is related to many social factors, which include: visiting families (Dhellemmes 1986); cases of illness, accident or death of a group member (Vallois & Marquer 1976); conflict resolution (Joiris 2003); intra-group knowledge transmission (LeClerc 2001); and maintaining links between Baka camps according to spirit guarding (Joiris 2003). The man from Makokou mentioned above, is a good example of this combination of resource and socially oriented activity, as he also makes use of his time in Makokou to visit his friends there.

Therefore, a differentiation between mobility on a daily, short-term level, and on a more long-term level remains observable, but changes in dwellings and values impact Baka mobility towards prolonged immobility, as was depicted above. So how do the Baka on the Ivindo describe what mobility means to them?

3.2.1 Molongo

According to the Baka along the Ivindo, the essential dynamic of Baka movement is contained in the word *molongo*. *Molongo* can be translated as ‘walking’, ‘going into the forest’, or ‘a longer stay in the forest’. As one woman described: ‘When you need to eat, you take a basket, cooking pots, plates, salt and spices, and some smoked manioc, and go into the forest’. *Molongo* is specifically the activity of *walking* in the forest, as ‘taking the dugout to go fishing is not *molongo*’. *Molongo* entails a ‘camp in the forest for several months to hunt’. The important thing being that this is ‘with many people’, many denoting about ‘three men and their families’. *Molongo* is likewise when ‘you leave where you are, to go and see someone’, which is equivalent to travelling.

From the accounts given to me, *molongo* has always meant going in to the forest to find food, and hunt elephants. However, it was not given as a synonym for elephant hunting, and previous ethnographies also specify that it means a ‘hunting migration’, but not the elephant hunt as such (Joiris 1998). Living in the forest means the spoils of hunting are an essential part of the diet, but Baka also purposefully go into the forest to kill animals to sell and have money to buy other things. The animals killed and sold may be ‘legal’, or classed as protected, so that the activity of hunting becomes poaching under Gabonese law. As one Baka man, F., explained:

‘The forest is our provider. We live thanks to the forest. We go to the forest *pour chercher les moyens*, to look for the means of living via hunting or trading with the money earned from it’ (F. 7.5.2011).

This statement documents the continued importance of the forest as provider for the Baka. However, this must be read in conjunction with alterations in subsistence mobility with regard to forest and local shops, and remarks on changing attitudes towards the forest (cf. 2.4.2), evidencing again how both positions towards the forest way of life exist at the same time.

The length of *molongo* can vary from a few days to two years, but seems to have been diminishing over the last 50 years. J., a Baka man of about 40, described how Baka today don't go into the forest for a long time anymore. He remembers this as something he did with his parents or grandparents, telling me about one time when he was about 15, when he had spent one year in the forest with his parents and siblings. They had left to find *moyens*, which in this case translated to an order for tusks by a Bakwele. He described how his father only got two elephants in that year, as the gun was often blocked by the *vampire*, black magic, which they attributed to sorcery originating from the jealousy of other Baka. His father would shoot the elephant, but the elephant would flee, and someone else would get the tusks once the animal was too weak to continue running. It seems that for a while six months has been the average time spent in the forest without returning to the village. Various stories from approximately the last 20 years were recounted to me of *molongo* for the duration of about six months or sometimes up to one year, involving four or five couples and sometimes children. Elephant hunting was always mentioned as incidental to being in forest. The young men told me that today *molongo* normally means going into the forest for about two months. After that period they are really looking forward to the distractions of village life, and eager to leave the forest.⁶⁵

This decrease in duration seems to be mirrored by a diminishing number of people going on *molongo*. In the stories from years ago, Baka always travelled in family groups, as one old lady, AT., described: 'PO. used to come *en balade* [walking] to Alat with one of his wives. As we the Baka always walk in groups, PO. used to come with his mother-in-law. She is still alive'. Often, when people told me about travelling today,

⁶⁵ Given that my fieldwork period was predefined as one year, I have limited data on today's frequency of *molongo*, but suggest *molongo* of the young men occurs once to twice a year, on average maybe every eight months.

they would speak of being *seul*, alone. On questioning this would turn out to mean they had been in a group of maximum four people, which they would laugh away as being so few as to constitute being alone, or it would turn out that they had been travelling with someone from a different ethnic group.

As the participatory mapping work of the NGO *Brainforest* has shown (Brainforest 2011), and as was confirmed during my interviews, the forest the Ivindo Baka move around in and exploit, is the same area of forest used by their forefathers. However, the creation of the national park of Minkébé in 2002 means that the area for *molongo* and legal hunting has been considerably limited. During one interview, the severe and continuously growing infringement on movement and subsistence practices this brings about were criticised as: 'One of our main resources today is around the River Nouna, but now, even that belongs to WWF'.⁶⁶ Another change the old lady addressed is how Baka used to live in the forest, but are now based along roads.

Molongo shows that a central aspect of Baka movement still is walking in the forest (also occasioned by the forest being omnipresent in Gabon) and thus constitutes a basic category of Baka movement; but *molongo* is more than just physical. The forest is the place where the ancestors live, and being in the forest is a way of connecting to Baka spirits (Tsuru 1998). *Molongo* cannot simply be classified as social or economic mobility, but is better understood as a way of being, of relating. Again, predominantly the older Baka in talking about their travels would speak of how they would travel *through* the forest, to then *come out* of the forest. When Baka speak of forest, there is always this sense that they immerse themselves in something, that they enter something, and very clear language on coming out.⁶⁷ As one man laughingly confirmed: 'When you're in the forest, you're in the forest. And then, *ma ledji a bele*, you come out'. Or as another man summed:

⁶⁶ I became witness to many situations of frustration and misunderstanding around the legal and political implications of the national park for the Baka (cf. 6.1.5.1).

⁶⁷ I questioned whether I was analysing this with too much urban idealism, but it is clear verbal expression on the part of Baka, and also other groups in Gabon.

A Baka person is a specialist. He leaves one place, he arrives in another, he is always ok. Before we Baka never stayed in one place. You just walk like that, and if you see that where you are is no longer a good place for you, you risk leaving (AO. 18.7.2011).

3.2.2 Mongengele and Mosesanu

The Baka described two further types of movement named *mongengele* and *mosesanu*.⁶⁸ *Mongengele* means to walk far in Baka, but not for long periods of time as with *molongo*. *Mongengele* must be understood in comparison with *mosesanu*, which was explained to me as the place, paths and activities where people *circule*, meaning to move around day and night over small distances, and by which people connect villages. This can include crossing a river by boat. As LeClerc has summarised, *mosesanu* signifies the neighbourhood relationship, the communication between two camps, and the paths that connect it (LeClerc 2001: 114, referring to Brisson 1979: 272). As one Baka man declared, the French word *circuler*, to circulate, sums poetically how before Baka never stayed in one place, and that there was constant movement between the village and the forest, and, of course, within the forest. The table below compares the three Baka mobility terms.

Baka Mobility Term	Meaning of Mobility Term
<i>molongo</i>	walking in the forest, or a longer stay in the forest to find food or visit people; with a group of at least three or more people; for a duration ranging from a few days to two years
<i>mongengele</i>	walk far, but not for long periods of time as with <i>molongo</i>
<i>mosesanu</i>	walk small distances at day or night; signifies neighbourhood relationship, the communication between two camps, and the paths that connect places

Table 3.3 – Baka Emic Mobility Terms

⁶⁸ LeClerc in his analysis quotes the term not as *mosesanu*, but as *mosenamou* (LeClerc 2001), whereas Bahuchet refers to it as *mosasanu* (Bahuchet 1992b: 243). The Baka on the Ivindo spoke of *mosesanu*, and so I have used the term throughout.

An aspect specific to the Ivindo, but all the more interesting is how the circulatory movement between the two villages is not termed *mosesanu*, although there are paths connecting Adjab and Kabisa, but these are not used. Instead, travel is by dugout canoe, and the word used is *circulation*. This can also be read as one aspect of 'leaving the forest' in that the mode of transport, the type of movement as well as the appellation thereof have changed.

3.2.3 Social Values relevant to Mobility

Whether a Baka leaves or stays, as stated above, is influenced by certain values, which I introduce to the reader also with regard to better understanding the details of Baka migratory history and contemporary mobility and immobility in the following chapters.⁶⁹ I focus on the observable notion of individual autonomy and three emic values, which were continuously expressed to me as governing daily social interaction and mobility practices: *bien garder*, taking care of one another (in the broadest sense); *être à l'aise*, to be relaxed and at ease; and *faire l'ambiance*, to have a party. In addition, I show that *heart* and *spirit* are essential to Baka mobility.

3.2.3.1 Individual autonomy

Mobile hunter-gatherer populations with an egalitarian social system place existential value on individual autonomy (Woodburn 1982). This is understood as the freedom to come and go, to do as you please, and to associate with whom you like, without anyone interfering and without any chief or headman directing activities and relationships. For the Baka, individual autonomy associated with high levels of mobility has even been described as their 'mentality' (Vallois & Marquer 1976). In the majority of situations I witnessed, people still decide whether and how to act through 'invisible' reference to people around them, and organised themselves as a group (Lewis 2002), but did not allow this to impact on their personal autonomy.

⁶⁹ As my research was topic-focused on Baka mobility, I did not collect data to satisfy a full monograph of Baka social values. For readers interested in details of Baka rituals I refer to Joiris and Tsuru (Joiris 1998, Tsuru 1998) and for a detailed description of the Baka kinship system I refer to Paulin (Paulin 2010).

Baka and other forager groups accept leaders situationally as long as these persons remain modest in demeanour and do not abuse their position to accumulate wealth or power (Woodburn 1982: 445). Within Baka society, these positions relate to the *nganga*, the male or female healers; *tuma*, the master elephant hunter (Paulin 2010); and sometimes an elder, who is referred to in delicate interpersonal matters. However, Baka village headmen in Adjab or Kabisa, proclaimed as such by the Gabonese authorities, always failed to convince or coerce their fellow Baka villagers into action or inaction, and it seems that Baka communities are facing up to these attempted inroads on individual autonomy through pressures exerted on them by the Gabonese state. Nevertheless, changes in Baka sociality are gnawing away pieces of the (group-related) autonomy, and some individuals are starting to act more overtly with reference to their own person or to their nuclear family, a topic, which I pick up in Chapter Five. Given Baka' own remarks and my observations, I postulate that individual autonomy still is of central importance in Baka sociality, and that it remains an active part of their 'mentality'.

3.2.3.2 *Bien Garder*

Individual autonomy is counter-balanced by the notion of *na dja bo djoko* or *na bana djoko*, which can best be translated as to take care of, to guard well, or to welcome. It works in both directions, i.e. it refers to looking after somebody, and to being looked after by someone. For example, a women may say that her husband is looking after her well, and the husband may express that he is taking great care to ensure the well-being of his wife's parents. The French term is *bien garder*, which is also commonly used by the Baka to express that *na bana djoko* refers to various levels of relationality.

Initially, there is the relation between the Baka and the forest. The forest is seen as the parent, who provides nourishment and protection; the Baka are the children of the forest, who live of its fruits; the forest is also home to the ancestors' spirits, *me*, whereby the social organisation of the living, divided into clans and lineages is mirrored (Tsuru 1998). It is argued that the Baka word *mbi*, which is said to signify clan and the term *ye*, said to signify predominantly lineage, can be used interchangeably,

which also corresponds to my field experience (Paulin 2010). Belonging to the same clan is expressed as *a toda*, being in the same house and of one blood, so that *na bana djoko* in this context ensures hospitality. If you arrive somewhere it means your clan folk will take care of you; if you meet them in the forest, you will travel together. As one Baka man put it: ‘Amongst us Baka no one will suffer. When you arrive, you need not search for a place where you can stay.’ Another aspect of the clan system is that knowledge transmission is affected along matrilineal kin lines from maternal uncle to nephew (LeClerc 2001). The *me* spirits are said to take care of the living through dreams, *keta*, which is how they send messages to proceed in difficult situations (cf. 3.3.4).

Bien garder also describes the quality of the close kin relationships, of husband and wife, of parents and adult children, of spouse and parents-in-law, and certain types of inter-ethnic relationships, such as that between the village chief and the population he is responsible for (cf. 6.1.5.2). In addition, it is the obligation of an adult child to take care of his or her elderly parents; the parent has the right to demand financial and other support. The figures quoted to me suggest that sharing an income between child and parent can mean sharing 50-50, or one third for the parent – two-thirds for the child (for an application in Baka gold work cf. 5.3.2). The regular reference and appellation of the Baka value as *bien garder* in French highlights the importance of the inter-ethnic relations to this concept as I detail in Chapter Six (cf. 6.3).

3.2.3.3 Etre à l’aise

The Ivindo Baka described to me that their aim is *être à l’aise*, to be relaxed and feel at ease to lead a good life. The counterpart is *kabu*, the Baka term for anger and rage. Interestingly and contrary to many European languages where ‘being angry’ is a *state* of being, in Baka the term is *ma go te kabu (a buma bo)*, I go with anger, so it is a movement and a process, until the anger reaches the *buma*, the Baka heart. The central processes quoted to bring about ill being are death of family members and violence (cf. 4.1.3, cf. 4.2.4), and feeling ill at ease is also a common reason for moving to another village (cf. 4.3.5). Another aspect of feeling uncomfortable, of not feeling at

ease, is shame. The Baka on the Ivindo repeatedly expressed how they were ashamed of their low social status, their lack of knowledge about the ways of the (administrative) world, and the poverty of their outward appearance.

Summarising the various exchanges on the topic of the 'good life', it means not having too many problems and having a free head and mind. This state was always related to money, which allows you to eat, drink, and smoke, as a result of which you sleep well and do not have problems. The connection to money was further stressed in that a 'good life' depends on the amount of money available. This shows the concept to be both ego-related and with regard to other relationships, as it brings in other family or kin members. A female Baka elder, JM., described, how she and her husband B. pool resources:

'We are not like *fonctionnaires* [state employees] who are paid every fortnight and at the end of the month. For me, I count the money per week. We can get either CFA 3000 or CFA 10000 per week. CFA 10000 is a lot.... This money enables a good life' (JM. 22.5.2011).⁷⁰

Baka activities are related to the unit of the group as I described at the start of the Chapter, but *être à l'aise* lies at the interstice of satisfying individual wishes and the egalitarian knowledge that other group members are needed for provisioning, sharing and enjoyment. However, as I have already mentioned, it seems that no longer everything a Baka person does is related to the group. These changes may rather relate to what literature and current parlance know as the individual focus in concepts of *wellbeing* (new economics foundation 2012); and the analysis of how hopes, desires and satisfactions shape our relations with others (Moore 2011).

It is further important to address one more aspect of feeling at ease: alcohol. Here one Baka describes the cyclical connection between alcohol and work, which gets you money for more alcohol:

⁷⁰ The couple obtains money through *bricolage* and hunting.

Drinking maybe three *doses* (shots) will allow me to work, but if I drink more, I will fall asleep, maybe even in the forest or plantation. One day when I was really drunk, I went fishing, and I fished well even though I was drunk; nobody could have told I was drunk. If I drink too much, I cannot do anything, but if I only drink to a certain level, I can go and work in the plantations, I can prepare food for my husband so he can eat. Whether I drink or not, if I have plans for the day I cannot carry them out, if I am (still) drunk (Interview in May 2011, cited anonymously).

There is a general awareness about the paradoxical connection between drinking to feel at ease, and how this quickly spills over into a drunken stupor, from which arise terrible fights, which, in turn, destroy any kind of relaxed village atmosphere. Several Baka men on the Ivindo described that physical violence is a Baka method of conflict resolution, and how they had had many fights as adolescent boys. There is a clear link between the amount of alcohol available to a population, and the amount of violence, something which the Baka themselves are aware of, as can be seen by the letter written by a Baka man about the situation in Kabisa (Annex XVII). The crux is that alcohol is seen as quintessential to the third notion: *faire l'ambiance*.

3.2.3.4 *Faire l'ambiance*

Faire l'ambiance, having a good time, refers to women, booze, and smoking, but not to food, according to a Baka male elder and healer, who also stated that he regretted having spent all his money on partying in Makokou. Asked about the Baka expression for this activity, several men told me there was no actual term, but gave the word *epesa* (pronounced *éfésá*) as the closest Baka equivalent.

3.2.3.5 Decision-Making from the Heart

Buma-le is the expression for 'my heart' in Baka, and it is of central importance in decision-making and other realms. Often thoughts are expressed in relation to the heart, which has a strong voice in and of itself, as in: 'We took the road. We walked for

a long time and we were thirsty. My heart told me, if I had a bottle to put water, I would have brought water'. To undertake the elephant hunt, 'your heart needs to be in it', and a mask for dancing will only be good if you have 'put your heart into it'. It is essential to be very gentle with a person when you tell them of the death of a loved one, so as 'not to hurt the heart additionally and unnecessary'; the personality of the heart is near omniscient and it 'sees shame'. In memorising and transferring songs from one location to another, it is the combination of heart and mind, which will keep the songs in your head, until you can share them with others on return to your own village. During interviews, people touched their hearts when they spoke of movement.

The heart is also the main trigger in many mobility or immobility decisions, as the following statement documents:

If you find me in the village during the day, it must be said that I am resting my head a little, because when I go somewhere, if my heart beats [signals], I want to leave and I will be gone. Sometimes you [Doerte] will wake up in the morning, and you will not find me. I'm already in Maibut. When I'm in Maibut, if I have a little money, I'm already in Makokou (AB. 30.7.2011).

The combination of heart and mind, and the heart as mobility trigger was described to me countless times, and I realised it was a topic, which needed further investigation. Towards the end of one of the life history interviews, an extensive discussion on decision making developed from which are drawn the following quotes:

Researcher: So, it is the heart that makes you make decisions?

Interviewees: Yes. It is the heart and mind.⁷¹ If we take the example of going to do something, it may be that your spirits were not prepared to do this thing. Then, you will no longer do so, but rather do something else.

⁷¹ It was said that the heart is equated with the nervous system, *bongo-le* in Baka. This made me ask, whether it is also 'the belly which makes decisions', as in Europe, decisions can be taken in Germany, *aus dem Bauch heraus*, from the stomach, or as one might say the same in English, 'with a gut instinct', but this is not the case for the Baka.

Researcher: Who and where are these spirits? How do they appear?

Interviewees: The spirit is in the heart and mind. This is what keeps the person going, because when the heart stops beating how can you still be alive? If the brain turns, you become crazy. The spirit is the breath because when you breathe again, this means your spirit is still with you. If breathing stops, you no longer live because your spirit is not on you; it is already released. When we say spirits in the plural, it is because we [Baka] are many. For example, our [Baka clan] spirits concurred and granted for us to come and live here with our family. Had they refused, we would never have been able to come.

Having established that not only the heart, but also the 'spirits' and the head/brain⁷² are the essential to the equation of decision-making, I tried to understand the interplay of the three components, and to find out what makes people change decision, what makes them act or not act, become mobile or remain immobile:

Interviewees: When the head and heart are not in agreement, you cannot do anything. You cannot achieve what you want to do. When you have a knife, for example, the heart tells you to go and kill, but the head thinks and tells you not to do that. Now, you hesitate, and you'll have to drop the decision that you had. But if the heart and the head tell you the same thing, even if it is a crime, you will commit it, because both have taken the same decision and you can only obey. It is the spirit that guides decisions, or changes the plan and it is between the head and heart.

⁷² The correct translation of anything to do with head, brain, and mind is something, which has been given much attention in texts concerning meditation practices or mind-altering substances. During this interview, the term generally employed was *tête*, head, but also *cerveau*, brain. I questioned, how the Baka know of the brain, to which came the reply that the ancestors of Baka did not cut people's heads to see what's inside, but they know all this because of the gorilla, which is a beast similar to humans. When they split his head, they found the brain, and this is what made them say that man also has a brain. I use the translation *mind*, as the interviewees were obviously referring to more than just the physical head or the brain; an approach, which relates to Bateson, who insisted that the mind is not limited by the skin (Ingold 2000).

Having moved his hand from chest level to the top of his head to indicate where the spirit is situated, one interviewee then described that having an idea is *ma simsa eke ma me*, making a plan is *ma wele tou we*, and changing the plan is *ma sela ee*.

Taken together with the description of the four Baka values (individual autonomy; *bien garder*; *être à l'aise*; and *faire l'ambiance*) the prominence of the heart and spirit document that Baka decision-making, and related mobility are governed by affective and emotional considerations, which extend into a spiritual domain. It is my contention that the heart is also relevant to the questions of locality.

3.2.3.6 Village of the heart

One aspect of Baka mobility is the regular movement between established villages for short periods of time, which they themselves term *mosesanu* in Baka or *circulation* in French as depicted above. On the Ivindo, this mode of movement occurs in particular between the villages of Adjab and Kabisa, and between Makokou and the village Ndoumabango, as well as in between the distinct locations in and around Makokou (cf. 4.3.5). These moves constitute regular Baka mobility limited to a certain area similar to the practices of their forefathers (Bahuchet 1992b). There are only a handful of individuals on the Ivindo who also travel the larger distances between the locations near Makokou and those near Mvadi (examples in cf. 6.2.1).

With regard to the population figures in the villages, this means that there is a constant flux in numbers. The number of people can vary, and, for example, in Adjab ranged from 25-30 as a minimum to 100 and more, a significant divergence that has also been documented for Cameroon (Joiris 1998). On the other hand, there is a certain permanence in Baka residence, and given the cues of the importance of the heart for the Baka described above, I discovered this could be best ascertained by asking which is the 'village of the heart'. In this approach, I was initially inspired by the concept of 'translocality' which sees the 'home' located in several places (Appadurai 1995), and which at first seemed to correspond to apparent Baka nomadism. Given their rootedness in one place, and the idea of dwellings as moorings (cf. 3.1.5), I then

tried to find out whether there is a point of fixity in Baka mobility (Adey 2010). The question that led to a definite answer was asking after ‘the village of the heart’, which in many cases is also where a person has built or lives in a more permanent dwelling. The table below shows the overview of Baka villages on the Ivindo and their inhabitants to be as follows, when taking this idea into account. Considering the population figures for Adjab shows that the presence of people in the village at the time of a census collection does not necessarily correspond to the place they consider ‘home’. The table also documents that the village communities are larger in size than the average Baka residence group in the forest, which has been stated as about 20 people including children (LeClerc 2001, Bahuchet 1992b).

Village Name	Number of Inhabitants	
	‘Village of the heart’	Census Data ⁷³
Adjab	124	69
Kabisa	19	35
Ndoumabango	29	57
Makokou	58	58
Total	230	219

Table 3.4 - Baka villages on the Ivindo with a reference to the ‘village of the heart’

To conclude, Baka values of individual autonomy, *bien garder*, *être à l’aise*, and *faire l’ambiance*, as well as *heart* and *spirit*, are interrelated and have an impact not only on Baka mobility, but also result in Baka immobility. The following chapters on historic and current Baka mobility give examples to support this contention. To facilitate the reader’s comprehension of Baka migratory history from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon in Chapter Four, and also of the contemporary Baka mobilities presented in Chapters Five and Six, I already present the principal factors of Baka migration, mobility, and immobility in the following. I conclude with the conceptualisation of Baka mobility as a *motivational complex*, which must be read in connection with the summary of Baka mobility factors at the end of Chapter Four (cf. 4.4).

⁷³ This data comes from an official organisation in Gabon, but I was asked not to disclose the source.

3.3 Principal Factors for Baka Migration, Mobility and Immobility

The examples in this and the previous chapter have shown the dimensions of Baka mobilities to include daily subsistence mobility to the forest, but also to the local village shop and to their (ethnic) neighbours. In comparison to their forefathers, Baka experience considerable immobility, as there is no longer any regular movement between forest and basecamp, and most of the year is spent in villages or the forest proximate to the villages. In the following chapter, I document Ivindo Baka historical migration over the last fifty years, to reveal the reasons for migration, mobility and immobility considered from a long-term perspective, which extends beyond the annual seasonal cycle. However, it is at this point that I would already like to draw the reader's attention to the multi-causality and interdependence of Baka mobilities, which amount to a spatial and temporal *motivational complex*, which transcends social or ecological considerations.

Both the ethno-historical account in Chapter Four and the portrayal of individual Baka mobility in Chapter Five identify several reasons for Baka relocation or immobility (cf. 4.4, cf. 5.4). Within this multi-causality there are three principal factors, which influence or govern mobility considerations and define mobility patterns: firstly, *toma* in Baka or *suivre* in French, which means following family, or being brought from one place to another to join other family members. The second factor is the type and quality of the (inter-ethnic) relationship the Baka have with their neighbours. Third is the search for a 'good life', which is to be understood as constituted mainly by economic improvement, but also refers to a state of peace (freedom from violence). The table below summarises these aspects.

Principal Factors for Mobility, Migration and Immobility	Explanation of Term
<i>toma</i> (<i>suivre</i> in French)	following family, or being gathered to join other family members
(inter-ethnic) relationship of Baka and neighbours	type and quality of the relationship the Baka have with their (ethnic) neighbours
search for a good life	constituted by economic improvement and a state of peace (freedom from violence)

Table 3.5 – Principal Factors for Baka Mobility, Migration and Immobility

3.3.1 Toma – Following

Toma signifies following a relative, either direct family or important clan members, to another location; or being picked up by someone from the direct family or clan to join or return to family members in another location; or being the clan person or group who travels to bring someone else back to a certain place. As part of my interviews I inquired specifically about why people moved or followed, how they would take the decision to move. One female Baka elder described how she had ‘followed my uncle, because he was the brother of my mother’, emphasising the importance of kin relations in the dynamic of *toma*. Another Baka man described how his father, PO., had encouraged him to follow his older brother to the village of Dezou. Movement becomes meaningful, becomes mobility or *toma*, because it is related to persons cared about. The list below is drawn partly from the historical account in the subsequent chapter and describes several cases and patterns recounted to me as *toma*, and how:

- People travelled to live under the guidance of one of the great Baka leaders in the village of Dezou (cf. 4.2.4);
- A woman and her second husband went from one village to another to fetch her son;
- A man and his wife were picked up by her parents to return to live in the parent’s village;
- A man had gone to pick up a woman and her remaining family from a small village to bring her to a larger Baka village;
- Families moved from a small village to a larger Baka village following the family already living there;
- One man travelled to the town of Garabizam from Dezou to find a wife, following family still living there. He left Garabizam with his new wife, to follow his big sister, who was married in the village of Été;
- The family of PO. followed two people to Été; firstly his daughter where the relation is of course that of direct kin; and secondly, the father’s Bakwele friend, an *ami*, which is a socio-economic relationship (cf. 4.2.7).

In any of these instances, children would simply go with their parents, as they did not know or understand the reasons for moving around, staying or leaving. My interlocutors of the older generation stated that they would not even have thought or dared to ask. This observation is relevant, because the notion of individual autonomy includes children (cf. 3.2.3.1), and the elders complained that today the youngsters no longer obey without questioning, another example of the generation gap (cf. 2.4.2).

There is a difference between *visiting* and *following* in that visiting means leaving to return:

Me for example, I know that I have my big brother in Cameroon, and I am here in Gabon now. I sleep, and then I tell myself it is a good time to go and see my big brother. So I can leave. But I'm going for a while, maybe five or six months. Then I come back (M. 23.7.2011).

The interviewee also refers to Baka decision-making guided by the heart and spirit (cf. 3.2.3.5), of waking up and leaving to go and see someone following an internal 'spirit call'. In contrast to the difference Baka make between visiting and following, a study of Aka individual mobility over a lifetime, gives the main reason for mobility as only *visiting* family, followed by hunting and gathering, and thirdly, participating in dances (Hewlett et al. 1982).

It is interesting to consider the unit of reference in *toma*. In Baka, my interlocutors would refer to themselves or the group that was travelling from one location to the next, and in French use either *je*, *I*, or *on*, an impersonal we, to describe who was following. Although it is mostly a particular individual, which is followed, the aim was nevertheless described as being to join or re-join with other family members, with the group. I, therefore, suggest that *toma* can be considered a LeClercian example of the Baka group as the reference unit for mobility activities (cf. 3.1). *Toma* can be seen as creating and signifying both a push and pull dynamic in a person's or a group social network. There has been much said about the push and pull qualities of environmental factors in mobility, but little on the social dynamic of push and pull of following kinfolk from one place to another. Recalling that Baka decision-making is governed by heart,

mind and spirit, it becomes obvious that the decision to move and be mobile on a non-daily level can be influenced by ecological motivations, but is more comprehensively described by including the impulse to follow another human. Environment can then be understood as comprising an ecological and a social dimension. *Toma* evidences mobility as *relational* in that it documents social motivation in mobility considerations, but also given the referential unit of analysis, which comprises group and individual.

Interestingly, *toma* is used to express following animals and humans in Baka. For the Mbendjele, Lewis has shown how the terminology of hunting and the metaphors of predation extend to outsiders, albeit with regard to hunting 'natural resources' or 'commodities' (Lewis & Köhler 2002). In the case of the Baka, *toma* refers also to following a friend, as we will see in the case of PO. following his Bakwele friend TM. to Été; a fact, which leads me to turn to the inter-ethnic relations.

3.3.2 Inter-Ethnic Relations with Baka Neighbours

Chapter Two introduced Baka seasonal mobility as one aspect of the socio-economic and socio-political relations with their ethnic neighbours (cf. 2.3.2). The mobility pattern so far associated with this is dispersal and aggregation throughout the annual cycle according to the seasons. Baka sedentism, diverging livelihoods and changing practices naturally affect these relations and the related mobilities, and Chapter Six is devoted to exploring this in detail. At this stage, I draw attention to the result of the ethno-historical study in Chapter Four. True to Biesbrouck's observations that scientific analysis has been too limited to the annual cycle (Biesbrouck 1999), the long-term historical study provides a more diverse image of neighbourly relations. It evidences, for example, Baka suffering discrimination and paramilitary violence by their ethnic neighbours, which lead them to flee an area and become mobile.

More importantly, the migratory history shows that Baka remain in a village or within an area, depending on the *quality* of the relation with their neighbours; *bien garder* and a good *ambiance* are essential to this aspect of Baka mobility, or rather immobility. The historic account evidenced how, in Baka understanding of time,

anything between one or two years is ‘not very long’, anything above two years is a noteworthy duration of time. If the relations are good and Baka *feel at ease*, they will stay for 20 years. If Baka deem the situation unsatisfactory, the break-off point comes after two years at the latest (cf. 4.2.1). It seems that the relational quality of a location is assessed during or after about two years, *ntumbu* in Baka. *Ntumbu* seems to refer to a level of emotional attachment, meaning that after two years, something changes in the intensity of relation with the environmental and personal surroundings.⁷⁴ Therefore, *ntumbu* seems to fall in the LeClercian concept of Baka interrelatedness of actor, space, and time, adding in the quality of relationship. Building on these observations on the importance of the type and quality of relations with neighbours, Chapter Six suggests that the emotional and affective dimension of these relations must be explicitly considered in mobility theories. It also shows that Baka neighbours, just like the Baka themselves, are more diverse than academic conceptualisation has allowed for, and I suggest the term ‘mobility player’ rather than ‘ethnic neighbour’ to make this evident (cf. 6).

The ethno-historical study also adds information to the table of cohabitation modes between Baka and their neighbours from Chapter Two (cf. 2.3.2). Including the villages portrayed in the historical account results in an overview in which most villages are listed under category three, which signifies that Baka live in their own village adjacent to a Fang or Bakwele village. In many cases, the Fang or Bakwele village will be by the roadside and the Baka village slightly behind and closer to the forest. This documents the well-known practice of separate living areas of Baka and other ethnic groups in one village, and the term used to speak of this by the Ivindo Baka is ‘sides’, i.e. ‘The Bakwele have their side and the Baka have their side’. This type of spatial organisation between ‘pygmies’ and villagers is common in all three countries in which the Baka live (LeClerc 2001). At first glance, the listings under category three simply confirm the previous seasonal and resource-oriented mobility and dwelling model set between

⁷⁴ There is an interesting temporal parallel here in that Paulin described a Baka person being considered an adult once he has reached the age of two and can walk in the forest on his own (Pascale Paulin, personal communication). From this it may be said that Baka have a notion of basic maturity occurring after two years. Mbiti also describes ‘African time’ as having no conception of future beyond two years, although he is, of course, writing about Bantu perceptions (Mbiti 1969).

	Baka living	With Ethnic Group(s)	Location
1	inside a Fang house in a Fang village or part of town	Fang	Minvoul, Makokou-Centre, Makokou-Elarmintang Mintom ⁷⁵
2	in a Fang or Bakwele village or town, but in independent Baka houses or huts	Fang Bakwele	Minvoul, Makokou-Mboula, Mintom Alat Alati Souanké Ndoumabango
3	in their own village adjacent to a Fang or Bakwele village. In many cases, the Fang or Bakwele village will be by the roadside and the Baka village slightly behind and closer to the forest.	Fang Bakwele, Fang, Njem Bakwele	Mféfélam Mintom Alat Akebale Alati Ntam Souanké Meka Garabizam Lio II Ebandak Koto Gata Eba Kuumbai Été
4a	in their own village with only a Fang village chief present	Fang	Bitouga
4b	in their own village with a Fang man, who is not the official village chief, but exerts a certain influence and is partly treated as chief by the Baka (hybrid category)	Fang	Kabisa
5	in their own village with the official village chief located in another village	Bakwele	Adjab (chief in Mvadi) Abam (chief in Maibut II) Dezou (chief in Maibut II)
6	deep in the forest far away from their neighbours and with limited contact to them	Fang Bakwele	Deep Forest (Minkébé)

Table 3.6 – Cohabitation modes of Baka and their neighbours including the villages named in the historical account

forest and (village) basecamp. Given that the data used stems from a period covering more than fifty years, this overview also tells of the quality of relations between Baka and their neighbours, as being ‘side-by-side’. This living arrangement consisting of

⁷⁵ I have no detailed information on the living arrangements in Mintom, but it can be assumed that the Baka were also living in Fang houses in Mintom.

separate villages can mean that the relations were either good and side-by-side was close (cf. 4.2.8), or distant and side-by-side was problem-ridden (cf. 4.2.5). My field notes suggest that in most villages listed in category three the quality of relations was acceptable to close, but further research would be necessary to verify this claim. The overview moreover suggests that the spatial independence of the Baka from their neighbours increased the further south they travelled. This may be related to the idea of following 'Gabon', explicated below.

3.3.3 Searching for a better life in Gabon

Many of the stories in the ethno-historical account, the dynamic of 'leaving the forest', and Baka enthusiasm for gold work (cf. 5.3), tell of how Baka are searching for, in their own words, a better life. The migratory account in Chapter Four documents that this search has brought some Baka to the Ivindo region in Gabon, and Chapter Five shows that the search for a good life it is not only a long-term mobility consideration, but also affects daily mobilities. Both analyses further highlight that 'Gabon'⁷⁶ for the Ivindo Baka, refers less to a national territory, than constitutes a signifier of wellbeing and a better life, a promise of freedom from military or extreme inter-ethnic violence, and the possibility to earn good money. 'Gabon' thus constitutes both an economic motivation for mobility, and a socio-political one.

Getting to Gabon did not mean that the Baka went by boat straight from Cameroon to Gabon along the river Ivindo, but that they took many years of walking in the forest to reach the national territory and this state known and referred to as 'Gabon'. Baka regional mobility became a migration to Gabon, when considered in the long-term. In my opinion, this is best understood as an iterative procedure of incremental movements back and forth, of *modulated movement*, whereby the spatial movement occasions and follows ideational change. The imagined or aspired movement is (an active) part of the spatial and temporal *motivational complex*.

⁷⁶ I use parenthesis to emphasise that the country name here refers to an idea, rather than a territory.

Kent draws attention to the cognitive aspect of forager mobility, and the difference between planning and reality, and introduces the notion of 'anticipated mobility' when referring to mobility patterns to designate the length of time occupants planned to stay at a camp and the length of time they actually did stay at a camp (Kent 1992: 636). My interlocutors rarely suggested the notion of planning, and even if they did, the discrepancy between statement and fact would be considerable. The point with regard to Baka regional mobility, which has, with hindsight, become a migration to Gabon, is exactly that; the idea of what was 'anticipated' diverged considerably from what actually happened. Moreover, one could argue that the signification of 'Gabon' is linked to the idea of Baka decision-making having a strong spiritual component, of being guided, and this guidance taking over from 'rational' planning. *Toma* may relate not only to animals, fellow Baka, and Baka neighbours, but also to ideas. This, in turn, would refer back to the Baka origin myth of 'following honey' (cf. 2.2), and indicate that the honey has been replaced by 'Gabon'; in both cases, the 'sweet' things in life. In Chapter Six I expand this idea to show that there is even a correlation between 'Gabon' and Baka mythical realm.

3.3.4 Death as a Cause for Mobility and Immobility

In a hierarchy of mobility considerations, the question of what brings about mobility must include the attention to those factors, which occasion *immobility*, as one aspect of the notion that mobility is relational (cf. 1.1.1). The fact that good relations with neighbours cause Baka to remain in one place for a long time, rather than just considerations around resource availability, has already been addressed above. On a daily level, Baka immobility can be due to illness, or, increasingly, to the effect of too much alcohol. With regard to more long-term mobility decisions, *keta*, visions and dreams, are of particular importance as one aspect of *bien garder*. One Baka man described how when he is considering certain mobility activities his father comes to him in his dreams, and gives him advice on how to proceed, which can be going ahead with something or remaining in the current locality. In another case, a man travelled from Été to Makokou with his sick wife to get her treated. They ended up staying in Makokou, as a *nganga*, a healer, had had the vision that one of them would die, if they

were to return to Été. In a different example, a man from Adjab was supposed to return to Central Gabon to continue working for an NGO. His wife had the vision of him returning from Central Gabon in a coffin, and so the husband never went to that area of Gabon again. In both cases, the vision of death resulted in the persons concerned remaining immobile in the location they were in.

Previously, the Baka response to death was often to leave the locality where the death had occurred (Bahuchet 1989), as I document, for example, for a father in mourning and his move from Été to Boureshi (cf. 4.3.2). Another man who had come to Gabon with his wife (as part of the first 'wave', cf. 4) returned home to die in the village Meka in Congo, after his wife had died in Gabon. Mobility as a response to death was also the case where children or other family members died amongst accusations of *vampire*, sorcery, or even the *vrai vampire*, which refers to the Ebola virus (cf. 4.1.3, cf. 4.2.4). With the increase in sedentarised living, this mobility response can no longer be put into practice as easily. One woman in Adjab aged about 30 had lost her younger brother, whom she loved very much, in Adjab several years back, when he was roughly 18 years old. She then moved to Kabisa, where she lost one child of about 2 years in 2011. When speaking to her on this sad occasion, she explained that she wanted to flee both villages as the constant memory of her loved ones was unbearable. She described how she felt stuck, knowing that she could not simply move away. However, she was not interested in the 'solution' of moving to Makokou, as she did not want to live in a large town. The second reason for her immobility was that she wanted to be near the remaining family members in Adjab and Kabisa, who wanted to remain in their respective villages and would not be moving anywhere with her - there was nowhere and no one to follow.

In summary, there are several reasons for daily or long-term immobility (for an overview cf. 4.4.1), but the point I want to draw attention to here is that patterns of mobility and immobility can shift over time. For example, the Baka response to the death of a loved one has changed from flight and mobility, to staying and immobility. This variation also represents another example of the larger social transformation amongst the Baka.

3.4 The motivational complex of Baka mobility

The principal factors of Baka migration, mobility and immobility have been introduced as *toma*, (inter-ethnic) relations with neighbours, and searching for a better life, as well as the death of loved ones as an example of how a response as mobility or immobility can change, and I now return to the conceptual idea of a *motivational complex*. The term 'complex' can be defined as something consisting of many different and connected parts, supported by the notion that 'mobility is never singular but always plural' (Adey 2010). In the case of Baka mobility, it, firstly, refers to all the different dimensions of their daily to medium and long-term mobilities, from daily subsistence activities to *mosesanu*, *mongengele*, and *molongo* to migratory movements. This includes the physical difference of walking in the forest or taking a dugout canoe along the river. Complex refers, secondly, to the multi-causality of Baka mobilities ranging from paramilitary violence, to *toma* of family and economic friends, to love triangles, and outbreaks of Ebola (overview of all factors cf. 4.4.1). On an individual level, the summarised personal accounts of movement towards and from Makokou, in particular, evidence this multi-causality (cf. 4.3.5). These reasons can of course be subdivided into social or spatial/ecological considerations, but the notion of complex advocates that in the end they cannot be considered independently of one another.

Within the multi-causality there are the three principal factors, which influence or govern mobility considerations and define mobility patterns: *toma*, following family; the type and quality of the (inter-ethnic) relationships with Baka neighbours; the search for a good life, which is to be understood as constituted by economic improvement and freedom from violence. Amongst these three *toma* is perhaps the dominant motive and pattern, as it is possible to follow kin and economic friends, and, as I suggested above, the search for a better life equals *following* this idea of 'Gabon'. As I detail in Chapter Six with regard to the (inter-ethnic) relations with neighbours, emotional and affective considerations seem to play a large part in which factor within the motivational complex is triggered, and whether this brings about mobility or immobility.

Complex also refers to a spatial and temporal dimension. The different types of Baka mobility, *mosesanu*, *mongengele*, and *molongo*, occur around specific locations and places, but also within a certain region around the villages, and across different regions (which may or may not involve national borders). The temporal dimension has already been touched upon in that Baka mobility entails daily and seasonal movements as well as those which go beyond the annual cycle. This refers to the seasonality of resources, such as *chocolat*, and the Baka division of the hunt into small daily and large long-term hunt. The spatio-temporal dimension to me also refers to the urban-rural diversity (cf. 2.4.3, 3.1), to the different Baka dwellings and villages along the Ivindo, and the geographical movement between these locations, short-term or over time as evidenced by the historical account.

In my understanding, what really ties these different parts and dimensions together, and makes it a *motivational complex* are Baka mobility values. For example, *toma*, is directly influenced by and related to the Baka mobility values of *ambiance*, *être à l'aise*, and *bien garder*. On an intra-group level, movement becomes meaningful, becomes mobility, because it is related to persons cared about. The quality of the relationship, the level of *bien garder* is decisive in whether the Baka like a place, and whether they stay or go, evidencing that personal relations are key to physical displacement. This relates to both the dynamic amongst the Baka themselves, and to that with their neighbours. Baka mobility values constitute both the trigger for mobility or immobility, and the links in the mobility pattern of *toma*, but also to Baka sedentism related to dwellings as (emotional) moorings (cf. 3.1.5). In this way, the multi-causality of Baka mobility, involving factors of an ecological, social, political, or other nature underlying Baka mobility decisions, becomes a *motivational complex* through the impact of Baka mobility values. This notion of a *motivational complex* along spatial, temporal and causal lines also corresponds with Baka interrelatedness of time, space and sociality (cf. 3.1); the analytical conceptualisation is derived from and inspired by emic terminology.

Finally, complex can be read as a synonym for relational, addressing how the different parts connect or relate to each other. I recall here the notion that mobility is relational

and socially produced (cf. 1.1.1) to suggest that Baka mobility as conceptualised in the idea of the *motivational complex* is thus an example of mobility understood as relational.

4 Baka Migration and Mobility from the 1960s to Today

This chapter provides an historical account of the most important sites and factors in Baka mobility and immobility from the 1960s until today. The analysis refers to the Baka living along the Ivindo River, and that of their clan members and ancestors. The history of migration and mobility I relate here concerns the region of the tropical forest at the interstice of the borders of Congo,⁷⁷ Cameroon and Gabon, and in the countries themselves. The dominant direction of these movements has been from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon, where many Baka have now 'built houses', as they themselves refer to their state of being. The main areas of departure for the migrations were Mintom in Cameroon, and the villages slightly north of there 'on the other side of the River Dja' including Alat; the villages stretching southeast along the road from Alati in Cameroon to Ntam on the border of Cameroon and Congo (please note that Alat and Alati are two different places); and the villages around Souanké in Congo. The details of migration and mobility are drawn from the life history interviews with Ivindo Baka (cf. 1.3.3, and list of *dramatis personae*). The first answer to my questioning would often be that 'we came down the Ivindo'. Through unravelling the migratory history, it became clear that the movements actually took place predominantly in the forest and not along the river. This can be termed a *modulated movement* of back and forth, and is also the cause for detailing the minutiae of individual or group movements. The Baka who tell their migratory stories in this chapter are mainly the '*dramatis personae*' (the list with their identificatory initials is located just before Chapter One).

The previous chapters introduced how Baka mobility is bound up with that of their neighbours, in particular the Fang and the Bakwele, which entails that the unit of analysis here is not limited to the Baka, but also concerns inter-ethnic relationships. This chapter documents what were Baka reasons for staying or leaving in the past, and begins to question what are sufficient motivators for movement today. The data analysis exemplified that each location offers incidents of all or some of the

⁷⁷ The Congo referred to is the *Republic of the Congo*, unless otherwise stated.

motivational aspects. By detailing the most outstanding reason for mobility in a particular village, I have tried to frame these as digestible case studies for the reader. My interlocutors spoke of travelling with, visiting, leaving or meeting their extended family, which I have translated as kinfolk. There were predominantly people from five clans involved in the migratory waves: Ye Yanji, Ye Likemba, Ye Ndoum, Ye Njembe, and Ye Mombito. The signification of the clan names is as follows:

Clan Name	Meaning of Clan Name
Ye Yanji	Fire with lots of smoke, ie 'to smoke out bees, that's when it becomes 'yanji''
Ye Likemba ⁷⁸	Certain type of wood or tree which only grows to about 15-20 cm in diameter, and has split thorns on the outside
Ye Ndoum	Drum
Ye Njembe	Announces the rain
Ye Mombito	Refers to a particular type of forest vine

Table 4.1 – Baka Clans involved in the migration from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon

As already indicated, the multitude of factors for the movements from Congo and Cameroon into Gabon, which cause or prevent mobility, combine to form a *motivational complex* along spatial and temporal lines (cf. 3.4), with three principal factors, which are: *toma*, following family or friends; the type and quality of the inter-ethnic relations; and the search for a better life defined by economic parity and freedom from violence (cf. 3.3). Other factors, which I detail in the following are for example, paramilitary violence or Ebola (overview of all factors cf. 4.4). The focus of this chapter is on reasons for Baka group and clan mobility as opposed to individual and personal mobility. Below is an overview of the locations involved in the migratory routes. In the text, cuttings from this map are given to assist the reader to locate the activities described in that subchapter.

⁷⁸ Note diverging definition given by Baka from Minvoul for Likemba as an 'unidentified mushroom' (Paulin 2010).



Map 4.1 – Locations of Baka Migration from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon from 1960s to today

4.1 Military Violence in 1960s Cameroon and Congo

4.1.1 Alati and Ntam



Map 4.2 – Alati in Cameroon and Ntam in Congo

In all accounts of migration from the interlocutor generation aged 45 or older, reference was made to what they termed ‘civil war’ between Cameroon and Congo as a major cause of involuntary movement, suffering and family separation. History books make no reference to this war, but all my Baka interviewees had described this as their reason for leaving. AT., a female Baka elder over 60, spoke of the fight between the ‘Ebando and Maquisards’, and YM., also a female Baka elder aged about 80, spoke of *bo wamo*, Cameroon people, whereby *wamo* refers to Cameroon. My questioning amongst non-Baka elicited the response that ‘they [the Baka] don’t know what they’re talking about’, presenting a good example of the prejudice held against the ability of the Baka to understand political developments. AM., a Baka elder, later explained the apparent discrepancy, in a way, which is in accordance with recorded facts:

It was not a war as such. It was Cameroonian rebels known as *maquisards*⁷⁹, who had gone to Congo to be trained in the art of warfare. Their aim was to topple Cameroonian President Ahidjo. Returning from Congo into Cameroon, the guerrillas ransacked everything in their path (AM. 16.5.2011).

⁷⁹ Maquis or macchia is a type of high ground in Corsica covered in dense vegetation, where privateers used to hide. The name has been adopted by a variety of guerrilla movements in Francophone countries.

The war the Baka tell of refers to the struggle and resulting armed conflict of the UPC, *Union of the Peoples of Cameroun*.⁸⁰ The guerrilla members of the UPC, known as *maquisards*, were living deep in the jungles of Southern Cameroon, which is also where the Baka were and are living. The guerrilla forces demonstrated their continued militancy and dedication to complete independence from France by regularly attacking village communities also living in the forest, and then presenting the heads of these villagers on sticks by the side of the road (DeLancey & DeLancey 2000).⁸¹

B., a male Baka elder of about 61, told how he remembers the war between Cameroon and Congo starting in Alati and then moving to Lélé:

The Congolese militias passed through Alati in one day to get to Lélé, where they encountered Cameroonians and started war. Some soldiers returned to Alati with dead bodies, and chopped off heads of Fang. People became scared. The military buried some of the bodies, but some were also destined to be sent to the president in Yaoundé. We Baka thought this was *amansi*, the end of the world. The army returned after some weeks, which is when Baka and Fang left together, and fled towards Congo (B. 13.5.2011).

Another Baka male elder, EM., aged around 57, recalled the extremely hurried nature of this departure. Pinching his shirt and stroking his trouser leg he added: 'There was no time to take any belongings, just the clothes on your body' (EM. 28.7.2011).

Baka and Fang had lived together in Alati, and EM. and others described this co-habitation as a 'good village atmosphere' and 'peaceful', which lasted for a long time, or as is commonly expressed in Baka-French 'c'a duré', it lasted. Alati is also a military base with the harbour Ajina, and from Alati, the Baka worked on Fang cocoa plantations mostly clearing the land, and as porters for Hausa traders on the route

⁸⁰ Founded in 1948, the UPC were fighting, firstly, for the economic and political independence of Cameroon from France, and secondly, for political unity of Northern and Southern Cameroon. The fight against the French colonial regime started in 1955, and, following independence in 1960, turned against the Cameroonian post-independence president Ahmadou Ahidjo. This civil war continued for about another ten years.

⁸¹ Reference was also made to the conflict between Ahmadou Ahidjo and his successor Paul Biya, which started in 1982, but the impact of this conflict would be a topic for further research.

from Souanké to Alati. The statements exemplify the impact of Baka mobility values (cf. 3.2.3), and the importance of the good quality of inter-ethnic relations in Baka mobility, and periods of immobility and sedentism (cf. 3.3.2). An indicator of size and importance of Alati was that there were *vrai maisons*, real houses, meaning mostly mud-walled, but also wooden or even stone houses. This importance of houses was stated with reference to all locations, which, at first, seems contradictory to the idea of the 'foraging nomad' and mobility practices, especially if we consider that the period in question is around the 1960s. However, the discursive variety from 'wanting real houses' to saying that 'a Baka man is free to go as he likes' can be interpreted to suggest that at least part of the Baka considered their dwellings as moorings even then, and that the forest-rural-urban trajectory amongst Baka on the Ivindo today may have also already existed at the time.

B. was about five years old at the time, but he recalls well how *dadi bo*, many Baka families, from around Alati went deep into the forest where they spent between one and three years as their reaction to the military violence. The noteworthy aspect of these movements is that the Baka continued on to various places in Congo and Gabon, whereas the Fang returned to their villages and took up their old lives.

At the time of the war, AM., now an influential male Baka elder of about 67, was also a young boy, and lived in Ntam. Ntam lies about 35km west from Alati, just south of the border between Cameroon and Congo, and was and is a big village with many Fang, Ndjem, Bakwele and Baka inhabitants. It was also described as a place with 'good ambiance'. AM., his family and their Ndjem neighbours were warned about the war by Ndjem friends from another village. Following this alert, Baka and Ndjem all fled into the forest together. As AM. recounts: 'Baka and Ndjem, we were together, because no one could resist. Who can bear to stay when there is war? Everyone fled' (AM. 16.5.2011).

AM. then addressed how following the general flight into the forest, the Baka of this region, who lived in approximately 10 villages between Ntam and Alati, became separated, because some Baka began a flight south, whereas the others decided to

stay. Those that left were three families, including B.'s and EM.'s parents, originally from the village Meka, eight men with their women and children. The term used to describe this movement was the French word *descendre*, descend, which indicates both the direction of movement south, and in many cases refers to riverine travel towards the mouth of a river. AM. described returning to Ntam, and how they first realised that the separation had occurred:

The Cameroonian military surprised a villager who had left our hiding place to fetch plantains from the village. They explained to him that they were looking only for military like themselves and not for villagers. The military made him understand that we could return to the village, and so we did. When we came back, we saw that some family members had disappeared. We thought these others had changed locations. We returned to tidy the village (AM. 16.5.2011).

AM. and his family later learned what had happened to those men who ended up 'going far along down the Ivindo'. As AM. recalled:

This observation [of the others leaving] was made by those [Baka] who had visited the neighbours to find out any news. These people had realised that there are clans that have disappeared since the war, and that the houses are overgrown with grass. Only after a year did we learn that those who fled settled in a village called Garabizam.⁸² This news had been announced by those who travelled along the Ivindo. So then, they [the Baka of Ntam and those others] started visiting each other until that generation died, and there remains only the current generation (AM. 16.5.2011).

It was only a small group, a minority that left, whereas the majority stayed, including AM.'s father.

⁸² AM. here refers to Garabizam as Galzance, which was first translated to me as Galabiseng. The Ivindo Baka generally refer to Garabizam as Gaza.

During the interview, throughout which AM. switched back and forth between four different languages,⁸³ he clearly critiqued those that left, their decision 'that they could not support the war', and how they, including his father's younger brother, fled without paying attention to the rest of the family. AM. contrasted this with how his parents had fled the immediate military violence, but did not abandon their village, repeatedly emphasising this form of immobility as *resistance*, and how their temporary abandonment did not become permanent. His account suggested a notion of rivalry between those who 'resisted', who suffered the horrors of war and held out, and the others who fled because they could not '*tenir sur place*', stay in one place, as AM. termed it:

To live with constant gunfire and see the dead all the time, they [who left] told themselves "We may also die here. It is better to go far away to escape the war." We resisted. We said: "Despite the war, we can not go further than that because it's our village. We were born here and we grew up here" (AM. 16.5.2011).

This elaboration on '*tenir sur place*' again suggests the value of a (more) permanent location, contrary to nomadic movement, and, moreover, emphasises the value of return to such a location to which there are strong emotional ties; it may also be seen as support for the notion of 'auto-generated' sedentarisation (cf. 3.1.5). Irrespective of a certain rivalry, it became very clear how much the separation of the Baka families caused by the war was a topic of distress to AM.. Several times we had to pause, because he was unable to speak or his eyes had glazed over, as he seemed to have images of the past in front of his eyes.

Looking at the response patterns to the violence, at first, all Baka groups and their neighbours reacted in an established, common sense way: they fled into the forest to escape the brutalities and hide, something which has been practiced by all inhabitants of this region since colonial times (Ndong-Akono Mbiaga 1984). However, once the immediate threat was over, the difference in mind-set and living conditions resulted in

⁸³ AM. spoke Baka, Bakwele, Fang and French.

a different reaction, the more sedentarised returning to their villages, whereas the more mobile moved on. The noteworthy aspect of these movements is that the response pattern does not follow a simple dividing line between Baka and non-Baka. In Alati, the Fang returned to their villages and took up their old lives, whereas the Baka of Alati continued on to various places in Congo and Gabon. In Ntam, both the Baka and the other ethnic groups returned to their villages. The differentiation between those who fled and those who stayed is not a distinction between Baka and their neighbours, but amongst the Baka themselves. This supports the idea of a multilateral conceptualisation of Baka-neighbour interactions (cf. 6.2.2).

In view of these facts, it is also possible to support the growing debate against the reductionist classification of forest dwelling groups into hunter-gatherers and farmers, or pygmy and villager (Rupp 2011, cf. 2.3.3, 6.1). Moreover, the rivalry evident in AM.'s account suggests an intra-group differentiation amongst the Baka themselves already at the time (cf. 2.4.3). AM. always spoke of his family plantations, and emphasised the importance of tending the plantations and harvesting, something which is generally associated with a more sedentary, farmer lifestyle. AM. also emphasised that Baka in Cameroon are still today more sedentarised than their Gabonese kinfolk: 'There are now still more Baka (villages) in Cameroon than in Gabon, because the majority stayed'.⁸⁴

AM. differentiates between *tenir sur place*, staying and holding out in a place, as opposed to simply *rester*, staying. The former is a clear reference to locality and a will to the face the obstacles of sedentarised life. During this interview and others on the same topic, the emphasis on the movement of those that fled into the forest, was set on the dynamic of *traverser*. This is the normal French term used to describe travelling from one point to another in the forest and the motion involved, but there is also a distinct contrast between *tenir sur place* and *traverser*, which symbolises movement and action as opposed to mobility limited through the link to a certain location. This is to be contrasted with those Baka who left, and who seemed to be less bound to

⁸⁴ This development must also be seen in light of aid projects for Baka emancipation, such as 'Projet Baka' (<http://baka.sitewala.net>), which help develop agriculturalist knowledge and skills, as well as schooling.

locality, more mobile, whose 'emotional anchorage' was predominantly with their small group (cf. 3.1.5), and Baka' own notion of being in the forest, and being free there. The fact that forager mobility is best understood as a continuum (Kent 1992: 636) further underlines this idea. The notion of 'staying' can be interpreted as remaining in one particular place, or within a region. AM. seems to be referring to the idea as *ici*, meaning to stay in one place or at least in a very small area (cf. 4.2.6).

As the (eight) men involved in the flight have passed away, I was especially intrigued to hear AM.'s point of view on why he thought they had left. He replied that he does not know how the decision was made, but what was clear to him is that the decision was collective because all were from the same village (AM. 16.5.2011). What was also interesting to see was that, not only AM., but also other interviewees, associated the men who left for Gabon with mythical powers on grounds of their endurance and the actual fact of the flight.

4.1.2 Alat and Mintom



Map 4.3 – Alat and Mintom in Cameroon

The impact of the military violence could also be felt further north, in the area around Mintom in Cameroon, which lies roughly 70 kilometres north of Alati, and specifically the villages of Alat and Akebale, which is the main living area of Ye Yanji.⁸⁵ PO. was from Alat, and the children by his fourth wife now live in Adjab. PO. is adored and revered by all his sons, AO. describing him as 'quite short and sturdy, not particularly

⁸⁵ The dominant clan in Adjab, where I spent the majority of my fieldwork period, is also Ye Yanji.

slender'. Also, it was noted that the Baka from Alat experienced a certain amount of schooling.

PO. and his family also fled due to the civil war, and again there was a Baka intra-group separation. Whilst some remained in the forest to later return to Mintom, PO. and his fourth wife, YC., left. As YC. remembered they travelled in a surprisingly small group, consisting of her and PO., and their five children, the youngest a little baby girl in her arms:

After fighting broke out, we had fled into the forest; the others went to their village. We separated. The others took their route, we took our route; but the others went back to their village. We didn't know whether the war would continue or not, so we decided to cut through the forest to come to Gabon. [The Baka god] *Komba* gave us the force to continue (YC. 23.4.2011).

YM., undoubtedly the oldest Baka I had the pleasure of interviewing, and wife of the late and great Baka leader MO. from Congo-Kinshasa, told me of how they left Alat because 'the family was finished'. When I tried to find out more, I was confronted with one of these moments where the suffering and horror of armed conflicts that have long passed becomes tangible in the present day. The question about her and MO.'s families brought tears to her eyes and a painful tension to her thin body. She was hardly audible as she repeated how 'they all fell to the Congo - Cameroon war'.

When analysing the events, I noticed how a direct reasoning emerged between the war in Cameroon and coming to Gabon, an example of which can be seen in YC.'s statement above, and which was often summarised in the phrase 'we descended the Ivindo'.⁸⁶ As I detail in the following subchapters, going to Gabon in most cases does not mean that the Baka actually took a boat, and went straight from Cameroon to Gabon via the Ivindo, but entailed *molongo* as the 'mode of transport'.⁸⁷ Moreover,

⁸⁶ This expression has also led some writers to assume that the migratory dynamic for the Baka from Minvoul and that of the Baka around Mvadi and Makokou is similar (Paulin 2010).

⁸⁷ I came to understand that my questioning triggered a reflective process amongst those (children) who have been part of these migratory movements, something, which was again openly addressed and confirmed by the Baka

the way to Gabon was not a clear, linear development at all, but a direction of movement that emerged step by step, and always there were individuals or families who turned back, a pattern I consider best termed *modulated movement*.

4.1.3 South from Mintom

Before the war, there had been a separate movement into Gabon for economic reasons. This mobility refers to artisanal gold work undertaken in small sites dotted around the Congo Basin and North-Eastern Gabon (map of Ivindo locations cf. 5.1), a development, which took its first steps to noteworthiness during the last century (Lahm 2002). The original movement for the purpose, as the Baka themselves stated, to escape poverty (cf. 3.3.3), was by a group of Baka from the Njembe clan from Meka in Congo. They travelled to Gabon and worked at the gold camp in Ngutu. Following the relational time giving, but impossible to date exactly, this may have been as early as the late 1950s, but undoubtedly before 1970. M., a female Baka elder of about 67 from the Njembe clan, succinctly summarised their motivation as: 'My kinfolk left poverty to come to Gabon, because here there is richness' (M. 21.4.2011). Another Baka couple also emphasised the will to escape *souffrance*, condescending treatment:

This is why all said, there in Gabon, there is wealth. And you know, at the time, people were starting getting dressed, but many still topless, topless. You see people who work just got the thing that is torn already in return. No. This is why you saw how everyone has come to follow to Gabon (MJ. and G. 9.8.2011).⁸⁸

In her account, YC. made particular mention of the fact that PO. didn't have any family other than his wife and kids, that he only trusted his own children, that PO.'s other

themselves. It was also an example of where some interviewees had been looking for information to satisfy the researcher in a mix of response effects such as deference and third-party presence (Bernard 2006), and the general discussion brought out the actual story.

⁸⁸ Interestingly, HA., the Baka woman in Libreville who helped me translate and transcribe the Baka interviews, confirmed this. She remembers from the time she was a kid that the Gabon Baka were known to have clothes, and if they returned to Cameroon they were considered rich because of this. Nowadays things are different because Cameroonian Baka have been schooled, which they flout as their advantage, but they still come to Gabon for work.

family were already dead. This introduces another main reason for Baka mobility or immobility, the *vampire*, which means sorcery and black magic. The Baka explained to me that the *vampire* is 'African magic', something all people who live in Africa know, and that it is mostly a nocturnal power, where bad spells are launched and effected against the victim during the night. Bonhomme who studied sorcery in Gabon highlights that:

The notion of the 'invisible', which is at the heart of representations of sorcery in Gabon, does not refer to a metaphysical backstage world, but to the asymmetrical relationship which unites sorcerers and their victims. It is a relationship of predation (predator versus prey) and of perception (seeing without being seen versus being seen without seeing) (Bonhomme 2005).

The Ivindo Baka see the *vampire* as the main source for the deaths of particularly children. One Baka man explained that it can also have a mental impact and influence your decision-making in that 'it stops you from acting, or carrying out projects, even if you have the money'. On a regional or national level it has been shown to materialise as a 'mystical political agency' influencing national Gabonese politics (Cinnamon 2012: 205). In one case, a Baka man was accused of having killed his brother's children through the *vampire*. After the father's death, this uncle then raised the remaining children. Then, when one of the boys was old enough and started having his own children, they too started dying, and again the uncle was accused of *vampire*. It was then that that man left the village to flee his uncle. Interestingly, another Baka elder told of a similar story. His family killed one of his father's brothers at Meka, because that brother had used the *vampire*, as is phrased in common parlance 'he had eaten somebody else', to get at the material belongings of others. This was the parent's reason to leave Meka and move to Alati.

The people who fled the war and did not return to their village, were, in part, also from Meka, but it is impossible to know whether the shared experience of *vampire* was a factor which brought them together. It is impossible to reconstruct with certainty whether or not they already knew about 'Gabon' and the lure of the gold, and all first-

hand and second-hand account interviews state that they simply fled into the forest. This situation refers back to an important aspect relating to patterns of conflict resolution associated with nomadism, which concerns the ability to physically leave the area of conflict, and move on. It has been pointed out that environmental reasons are given, but in actual fact these can be considered as false pretences, because physical mobility is employed to avoid a social conflict (Widlok et al. 2012: 4). *Vampire* is also a way of addressing social conflict, which can, and often does, result in mobility as the two cases mentioned above document. As I witnessed all along the Ivindo, accusations of *vampire* travel with people, meaning that they are not bound by or to a physical place, and it is impossible to escape them by leaving a location. This type of sorcery is openly spoken about and the sites of the fetishes are known. This candid approach to *vampire* suggests that it would be ill placed in the same category as the 'false pretences' noted by Woodburn.

Triggered by the brutality of civil war, the desire for economic improvement, sorcery, or the wish to follow the family, different Baka groups from different villages have followed and moved on south in the direction of Gabon at different times. This was described and differentiated as a 'first movement' and 'two waves' of Baka who descended into Gabon; and 'two waves' where the people concerned returned to their villages further north along the Congolese border, or to Cameroon.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The term 'wave' was used by several Baka to describe the migratory movements from the area around Garabizam to the various sights in Gabon. I realised in hindsight that it cannot be excluded that I had used the term 'wave' myself at some point, and the Baka picked it up from me. As they were very clear in speaking about these waves, it seems appropriate to use this 'emic' expression to refer to the incremental movements along the Ivindo.

Waves	Direction of Movement	Reason for Movement	Dominant clans involved
Move 1	From Meka (Congo) to gold camp Ngutu (Gabon)	Economic Improvement	Njembe
Wave 1	From Alati (Congo), into forest, to Garabizam (Congo), into forest, to Koto (Congo)	Fleeing War <i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	Njembe Mombito
Wave 2	From Mintom (Cameroon), into forest, to Garabizam (Congo), into forest, to Été (Congo)	Fleeing War <i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	Yanji
Wave 3	From Congo to Gabon; return to Congo ⁹⁰	<i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	-
Wave 4	From Congo to Gabon; return to Congo	<i>Toma</i> Economic Improvement	-

Table 4.2 – Migratory Waves as recounted by the Ivindo Baka in 2011

All these movements form intricate patterns, and in the following, I attempt to paint a comprehensible picture for the reader. The interconnection and overlap of reasons for mobility increasingly becomes such that it is impossible to entangle the mobility motivation, another reason, which led me to argue for the *motivational complex*. Moreover, it becomes clear that the will to improve and maintain the quality of life was - and remains – foremost, and unstoppable.

⁹⁰ These Baka returning from Gabon may have been encountered by Dhellemmes (Dhellemmes 1986).

4.2 Following the Family in Congo and to Gabon

4.2.1 Garabizam



Map 4.4 – Garabizam (Gaza) in Congo

Following the flight from the war-torn areas as described above, the Baka that left, fled into the forest. From all accounts of the following period, it became clear that they spent approximately, or at least, one year in the forest before they arrived in the Congolese town of Garabizam, which lies on the River Katagua, one could say about half way between Ntam and the Gabonese-Congolese border. Garabizam, which the Baka often refer to as Gaza, is known for its port and resulting trade activities. EM. recounted how the group of Alati Baka travelled to Gaza following the old routes:

The decision to do so was taken, because Gaza was the closest village. After many months in the forest [which EM. thinks amounted to about one year], we were hungry for village life. Still the older men went to Gaza first to see what the atmosphere was like, and only then collected women and children from the forest.⁹¹ On arrival in Gaza it was necessary to ask the Bakwele village chief, Chief EZ., whether we were allowed to stay. After this permission was granted, we cleared an area of trees and shrubs, and built *mongulus* (EM. 28.7.2011).

⁹¹ Other Baka and Bakwele referred to this too, which suggests it is standard practice.

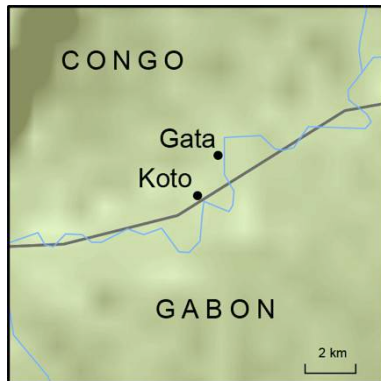
MJ. explained that, at the time, there were many Bakwele and Baka villages in the region between Garabizam and Ntam, although much has changed today. The Baka had travelled through these villages to arrive in Garabizam, specifically in the village of Lio just north of Gaza, where Chief EZ. held his tight reign. B. described how this decision to leave the forest and go to live with the Bakwele in Gaza was taken by his parents as ‘we must stay, be patient here’, adding that ‘that’s what Baka do. We just stay.’ (B.). The Bakwele lived in Lio and the Baka cleared and built a new living area, which was called Lio II. This documents the well-known practice of separate living areas of the Baka and others in a village (cf. 3.3.2).

All interviewees addressed the fact that in the region of Garabizam the relations between Baka and Bakwele were fraught with difficulty. The Baka mainly worked as hunters for the Bakwele, but in return for ivory, the Bakwele would give the Baka a pitiful basket of manioc. It seems that these were indeed different times from today, as it was still customary that a Baka wife would sing at night to call the elephant, thereby contributing the female part to ensuring her husband’s hunting success (Joiris 1998; LeClerc 2001), something which appears to be rarely practiced today. The Baka were not only cheated financially, but also suffered *brimade*, which translates as bullying, but Baka usage of the term suggests that sometimes things went beyond mere taunts and threats. Chief EZ. was described as a *bo siti*, a bad guy, and Y., a female Baka of about 50, was very clear on the fact that ‘we quit Gara because of *brimade*’. M. too described how they didn’t stay long in Gara, because ‘*Bkbel* [Bakwele] *wo we na bo Bakao*’, meaning that the Bakwele were beating the Baka too much.

From these and further statements emerged the concept of *ntumbu*, the time of approximately two years at which point the Baka decide to leave, or stay (cf. 3.3.2). Moreover, it seems that the following temporal steps are between 3-10 years, then from 10 years onwards. I suggest this understanding of mobility time is also related to Baka notions of the person and the lexical equation of space and time (cf. 3.1). *Ntumbu* seems to fall in that same category, connecting actor, space, time, and - in addition – the quality of relationship, an argument I develop in Chapter Six. The second

line of argument refers to the inter-ethnic dynamic in villages which from a Baka perspective is governed by the concepts of 'good ambiance' and 'bien garder', as described in Chapter Three (cf. 3.2.3). As I have argued and will now document this is one of the central concepts in Baka mobility decisions.

4.2.2 Koto and Gata



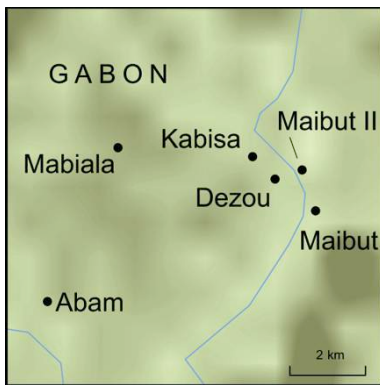
Map 4.5 – Koto and Gata in Congo⁹²

EM. estimates that he and his family spent about one year in Lio II, until they, as a 'second wave', left the area around Garabizam, and travelled through the forest to Koto. Koto is a small village, which lies on the north side of the River Djoua (not to be confused with the river Dja in Cameroon), which constitutes the border between Congo and Gabon, so officially Koto lies in the Congo. The group that travelled were predominantly of the Mombito and Njembe clans, and as EM. recounted the reason for leaving 'MO. again decided to move to Gabon, because he had heard that Baka were living a good life in Gabon' (EM. 28.7.2011). Koto was a Baka-Bakwele village, but the Bakwele from the village of Mvadi, several kilometres downstream, came to insult and beat them there. Following the attack, the Baka fled Koto at night, and travelled far down the Ivindo into Gabon with friendly Bakwele to the villages of Maibut I and Maibut II. There the group disbanded, and the Baka too separated. Some went to live in a village called Abam, and some continued on to Makokou.

⁹² The location of these villages is based on hand-drawn maps
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It was related to me that following this particular incident, the late Gabonese president Omar Bongo made a statement criticising the violence against the Baka Pygmies, inviting them to live in Gabon. One Baka woman summarised his criticism of the attacks against the Baka in her own words as: ‘Leave the pygmies alone, there are none in Gabon, they are allowed to enter Gabon’.⁹³ Sadly, the historical archives in Libreville have been closed for years, so that it was not possible to verify this statement, or president Omar Bongo’s later speech on this in Mvadi around 1996.⁹⁴

4.2.3 Abam



Map 4.6 – Abam and Dezou in Gabon

The village of Abam lies in Gabon in the forest at the regional height of Maibut near the Ivindo tributary Sing. The name Abam signifies plenitude of bamboo. The decisive point for the Baka who arrived there from Koto was that it was on the opposite side of the River from the Bakwele villages Maibut I and Maibut II, which to the Baka meant safety. MJ. estimated that Abam had existed for about 5 years when he arrived there

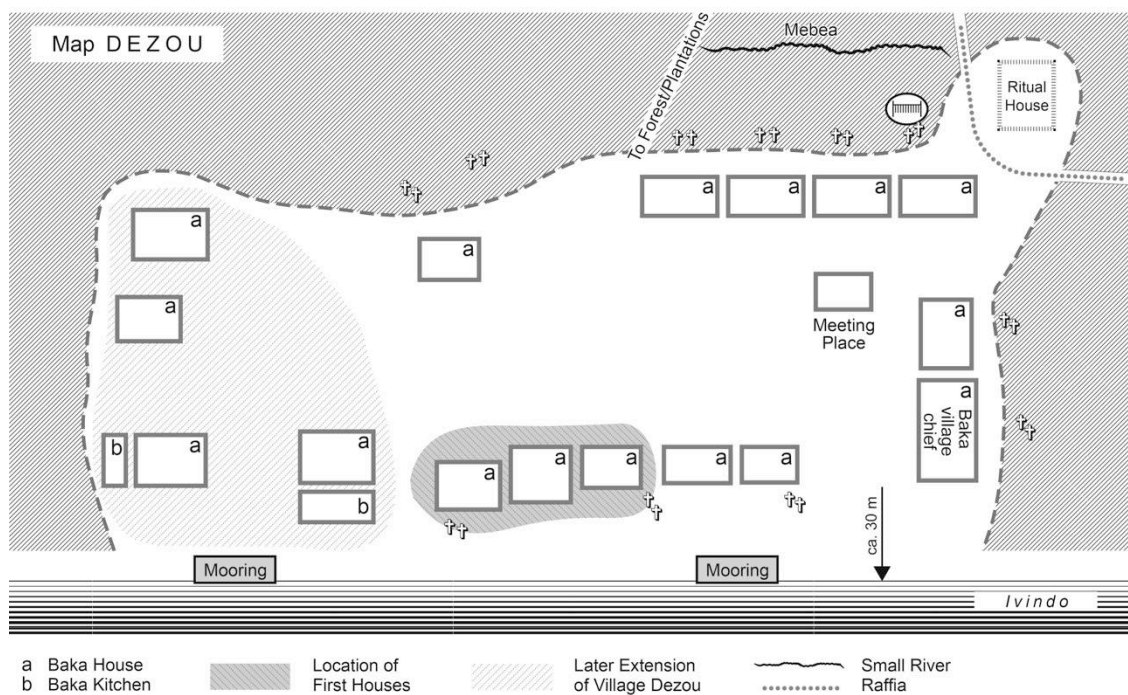
⁹³ The Baka from Minvoul reported that they had moved to Gabon in Leon Mba’s reign to escape the abuse they experienced from the Fang in Cameroon. While relations here were much better, they were still difficult. Some Baka reported that they flee the Fang because the latter consider them not human but animal and that’s why they don’t want to go to school. Others said that Fang men marry Baka women but treat them like slaves, and often reject them (Knight 2003).

⁹⁴ President Bongo is from the ethnic group *Bateke*, also known as *Mitsogo*, and it is often said that the *Bateke* and the Babongo ‘pygmies’ ‘are the same because of their longstanding exchange relationships, kinship links, and in particular their traditional forest-hunting way of life’ (Knight 2003). The higher status and levels of integration achieved by the Babongo of Haut Ogooué, as opposed to the Baka, are ‘doubtless due to having a president in power, who as a *Bateke* has had a history of long-standing relationships with Forest Peoples’, which, generally speaking, has also had ‘a positive affect on how Forest Peoples have been viewed in recent years throughout Gabon’ (Knight 2003).

at age 18, which sets the time of arrival of the others in Abam around 1978. The Baka chiefs in Abam were MA. (Njembe) and ND. (Mombito).

There were three factors influencing the departure from Abam. Firstly, there were many deaths in Abam. Secondly, the Bakwele village chief BM. from Maibut encouraged them to move, saying they should leave the forest and live on the riverbank, as he wanted them to be closer to Maibut II. The incident, which finally caused the abandonment of Abam and the move to what had by now been established as the Baka village of Dezou, was a fight over a woman. One of the men had wanted to leave even before, as there were already people in Dezou, and the fight proved to be the final straw for his decision to leave. Mobility from Abam to Dezou was caused, therefore, not by external violence as documented above, but owing to a Baka intra-group fight, and a love triangle. The latter can be understood as a minor point in the migratory history, but having a more considerable impact on short-term or day-to-day mobility, as I witnessed on many occasions in Adjab and Kabisa.

4.2.4 Dezou



Map 4.7 – Village Map Dezou (drawing of former village based on research visit and Baka recollection)

It was recounted that T., who now lives in Makokou, was the first to build in Dezou, a Baka-only village known by the Bakwele as Maibut III (pronounced Maibut three). Chief BM. had given the Baka his younger sister's terrain on the Ivindo riverbank opposite Maibut II to set up their new village. As always, this movement entailed the process of deforestation, then starting to build simple *mongulus*, and later mud-walled houses. The men from Abam helped to build the first mud-walled houses in Dezou, including a ritual house (in the right hand corner of the map), which was indicated to me as being the only one built along the Ivindo. The fact that none have been set up since is another factor indicating the quite dramatic social change the Ivindo Baka are experiencing.

The fact that singles out Dezou is that it is predominantly associated with death. In all accounts of this village, which no longer exists and where, what was once the central village space, is now overgrown by tropical forest, people would simply tell of all the loved ones, especially children, they had lost there. Most stories about Dezou included a description of a child dying after 2-3 days, following a serious case of diarrhoea, which would weaken the child so much that 'it would tire' and die. One Baka couple, for example, lost about 5 children in Dezou this way. From the accounts given, it became clear that apart from the obvious sadness and pain on losing a child, it was the repeated suddenness of death, which constituted the shock factor in Dezou. These deaths were put down to sorcery, the *vampire*, one man relating how he had lost his second child, and his brother had lost his fifth child due to the jealousy of his nephew, who had 'thrown the bad spells against the helpless children'.

The other reason was the '*vrai vampire*', which is how my interlocutors referred to an outbreak of Ebola in the Maibut area in 1996 (Georges et al. 1999). Some Baka knew this type of epidemic, as there had been a previous Ebola outbreak in Mikouka (Lahm et al. 2007: 65), where 2-3 people were dying per day, and the hospital in Makokou was struggling to deal with such a serious situation. Several Baka recalled how in the 1996 outbreak you couldn't eat any meat or fish, and how, for about three months, you would find dead animals everywhere in the forest, describing this as 10-20 animals on a stretch the breadth of Adjab (about 50m). AO. remembered going on

tour with a French doctor who came to survey the impact of Ebola in the area (AO. 18.7.2011). M.'s sister had lost three children in 1996 and put this down to the *vampire*, which gives an example of where local (Baka) belief systems and a scientific explanation of the facts as an epidemic combine in that 'Ebola is transmitted by the real *vampire*'.

The other important detail about Dezou was MA., who became Baka chief in Dezou, because the Baka population had decided for him 'given his excellent behaviour'. I draw attention to him here, as many stories of movement to Dezou are based on the motivation of wanting to live with or near MA.. For example his own brother came to 'follow his little biological brother, the "great"', as MA. was known. MA. died around 1990 aged about 65, so that his leadership skills were not available for the management of the Ebola-*vampire* crisis situation. Finally, I draw attention to the fact that Dezou and Été, a village I speak of later, existed at the same time, and that there was regular travel between the two places. The majority of Dezou inhabitants moved to Été following the second major Ebola outbreak in 1996 (Lahm 2002).

4.2.5 North and South from Lio II



Map 4.8 – Lio II in Congo

Returning to the small villages northeast of Garabizam, there had been further movements, firstly from Lio II to Ebandak, and then on to a village (also) named

Adjab(-Congo).⁹⁵ The families of PO., NA. and other Ye Ndoum lived together in Lio II. It was recounted how MY. (NA.'s mother) and her second husband had travelled to Colonia, a village near Alat, to pick up NA. (the son from her first marriage).⁹⁶ The travels undertaken to pick up own children, or to take children of other family members from one place to another constitute a regular Baka mobility reason.

NA. and PO. were 'great friends' and hunted together, as their respective sons explained about their late fathers. This emotional connection highlights an aspect, which has not only been neglected in the analysis of inter-ethnic relations, but also on Baka group level. In many cases of *molongo*, the people who set off together share a special proximity irrespective of and overriding clan membership. Spending time with people you like generally constitutes a reason for Baka mobility or immobility, and plays into the developing field of the study of mobility, body, and sensorial experience (Adey 2010, also Ingold 2000).

In Lio II, the particularly noteworthy (ideational) dynamic was that those who had fled the civil war violence were still thinking of returning to Alati, Mintom, or other places; and some did. For example, NA.'s younger brother returned to live in Assambé (Congo) with the parents of his wife, when they came to get them. However, the *brimade* described earlier by Y., caused the remaining Ye Ndoum to quit Lio after about two years (*ntumbu*) to go to Gabon in search of a better life, undertaking a *molongo* to find food, and hunt elephants, until they left the forest at the village of Gata. As MJ. and G. described:

Well, as people who took the decision [of fleeing the war] like that, they first thought only of going into the forest, but then they changed plans. They worked in

⁹⁵ I specify the location of Adjab by adding the suffix '-Congo', as the village is not to be confused with Adjab in Gabon, where the Baka live today.

⁹⁶ From all accounts, it is a common Baka practice to leave children with other family, whilst the parents go off for a number of reasons such as *molongo* or gold work. This also happens in cases of separation or divorce. Following the patrilineal rules, the children become part and responsibility of the father's clan once he has completed the bride service or paid the bride price (Paulin 2010), but I was told of many cases, where the children are 'left' with the mother. In some instances, the father never returns to pick up his children.

Garabizam for some time, before, one day, they crossed the river and left for the forest, this time to move to Gabon (MJ. and G. 9.8.2011).

Again, I found the talk of *direct* movement to Gabon astonishing, questioning the linearity, and whether this was construed in hindsight and the ‘fragility of the human memory’. One way of reading and understanding these statements on Gabon is to view ‘Gabon’ as a synonym for gold, and the related income as a wish and way to achieve a certain wealth and independence. Read this way, ‘moving to Gabon’ equals moving on in search of a better life (cf. 3.3.3). MJ. and G. also described a third wave into Gabon; and even a fourth wave of people from Congo, but ‘they never stayed, they always returned’. Certainly a topic, which would need further research, I can here only hypothesise about the increasing implications of sedentism on Baka economic migration. Possibly, once the proximate aim of having earned some money to alleviate poverty is fulfilled, the need to ‘return home’ takes over, if sufficient attachment to a place is given, due to emotional relations or the impact of sedentism. This would mean that some Baka should be classed as ‘classic’ economic migrants.

In Lio II, we again see a separation occurring probably during the start of the 1970s, following which family PO. moved one village further north to Ebandak, whereas family NA., as the sons described the units of movement, ‘continued’ and moved south to the villages Gata, Eba and Kuumbai along the Rivers Djoua and Ivindo.

4.2.6 Gata, Eba and Kuumbai



Map 4.9 – Gata, Eba and Kuumbai in Congo

Close to the site of Koto, but slightly further east along the Djoua, or Yesse as the Baka call this river, was the large Bakwele village of Gata, known as Gara in Baka. Gara was about the size of the village Adjab today, and headed by Bakwele chief JE.. Although connected by river to the next larger village Mvadi, it was so far that there was a risk of having to sleep in the forest when travelling on foot between the two places. Y., who later became the first wife of MR., remembers living in Gara from when she was a small child to getting married to MR. and having her first child, so for about 10 years. MR. told of how he and another Baka man were doing gold work from Gata (having been also in Koto).

At the same time as dwelling in Gata, the extended Ndoum family around NA. was also living and working in the Bakwele village of Eba, where the Bakwele TM. lived with his father. The Baka helped them clear land for plantations, build houses and hunt. When I visited this now deserted site with the Baka from Adjab, F. who was born in Eba, described how this village had had a good 'ambiance' and how they would dance the Baka dance *bouma* together with the Bakwele. The Baka woman AG. told how her family (including EM.) moved to Eba, where F. and her son, named NA. as a *homonym* after his uncle (cf. 6.3), were born in the same year. They all started schooling in Mvadi, and she remembers living there for a long time, until one day around 1980 the then sub-prefect MT. came during the day to burn Eba as part of his *Regroupement* activities.

The policy of *Regroupement*, regroupment in English, was designed to force those people living in the forest or in remote forest villages to leave these places and move to the larger villages, to *regroup* and settle there. This strategy was implemented in large regions of Central Africa, already during colonial times, and forest foragers such as the Baka were particularly hunted. An eyewitness account coming from a Kota man of North-Eastern Gabon told of the first villages being burnt during the 1950s (Samir Nziengui Kassa, personal communication). In the case described here, the aim was to force everyone to leave the small villages in the region, like Eba, making them move and *regroup* in Mvadi.

BF., a Baka man of about 50 who now lives in Ndoumabango near Makokou, described how, when he returned from the plantation with his parents in Eba that day, they saw the smoke of the burning houses. In this case, as in many others, I heard how burning down a (mud-walled) house cannot scare a 'true Baka', and they quickly built *mongulus* to have a roof over their head. After 3 days, BF. and his parents left Eba and travelled to Dezou, where they again first built *mongulus* to provide for an interim period, and later built 'proper houses'. After Eba had been burned, AG. and her part of the family left for Makokou and lived there for one year. Then they moved to Dezou, where the *vampire* killed her father's wife, after which they again returned to live in the village of Andok near Makokou.

From Eba, the Bakwele TM. and his family, and some of the other Baka, had moved further up the Ivindo away from Mvadi and proceeded to build the village of Été, the story of which I tell in the next subchapter. This voyage was described as *mongengele*, meaning to walk far in Baka. When the Baka told me this story, they were laughing a lot, saying how proud they were to have beaten the sub-prefect 'nasty MT.'. *Mongengele* must be understood in comparison with *mosesanu*, which was explained to me as the place, paths and activities where people 'circule' meaning to move around day and night over small distances, and by which people connect villages. This can include crossing a river by boat. As one Baka man declared, the French word *circuler*, to circulate, sums poetically how before Baka never stayed in one place, and that there was constant movement between the village and the forest, and, of course, within the forest. This must be distinguished from *molongo* (cf. 3.2.1), which refers to being in the forest for a longer period of time.

Y. described how the Baka in Gata too had had to flee, after sub-prefect MT. arrived and threatened them:

'The person who came to make us move, he was first [Prefect]. He said, all you come to the village. He said he didn't want us to stay in the small village. He said, if you stay, I will burn the village' (Y. 26.4.2011).

Y. later added what she thought was the reasoning for all this:

‘Because here [Gara] is far, we have to row to get to the entrance of the Yesse, and we sleep en route, because it is far. The authorities didn’t want the Baka to stay in the forest, because we were far. The prefect didn’t want us to stay in Congo. That’s why he told us to move’ (Y. 26.4.2011).

With this she refers not only to the contentious border issues between Congo and Gabon at the time⁹⁷, but also to the outbreak of Ebola and ‘lots of people dying’, the deaths again being attributed to *vampire*. MR. and another Baka man had mentioned the deaths as their reason for leaving, and why the authorities came to get them. The timing given for these events was conflicting, it being said to have happened either thirty or forty years ago. Considered in relation to the other dates, it seems that it is most likely to have taken place in the years around or after 1980. Y. left Gara for Été with ‘tout le monde’, everybody, which specifically meant her mother, her aunt and uncle (younger brother of father), her little sister, and MR. They didn’t sleep en route to Été, and only took one day to get there. Another Baka man who had been in Gata from about age 12-18, enjoyed the move from Gata to Été, where he found his wife.

Also during this period, MY. had moved to Kuumbai, the village after Gata and further west along the Djoua than the falls. Kuumbai which again signifies a particular tree in Bakwele, what Baka call *Mbayi*, was also home to F., MR. and Beka, who went to school in Mvadi from there. When MY’s second husband, who was one of the ‘great eight’ men died, AO. came to get MY. and her family and brought them to Été. F. thinks he was about 10 at the time, which places this event around the year 1982.

The activities around the three small villages show how persecution, *vampire* and Ebola were the driving forces to make Baka move, or, on the contrary, how a good village atmosphere and the lack of violence resulted in ‘immobility’. I set the term in quotation marks to emphasise that, as the stories show, there was constant *mosesanu*, circulation, between the villages of Eba, Gata, Kuumbai and other places. During all

⁹⁷ Michael Fay also experienced these national border issues during his Megatransect of Central Africa.

interviews, my interlocutors would often speak of *ici*, here in French. It took me the time to learn the names of the relevant individual villages, until I could break down the regional *ici* into specific locations and events. It was interesting to note that Baka give little emphasis to individual places, but everything within an approximate radius of 15km is *here*, and everything further away is *la-bas*, over there and further away.⁹⁸ This spatial referencing mirrors the activity of *mosesanu* as an expression of the interrelated complex of space, time and sociality.

4.2.7 From Ebandak to Été



Map 4.10 – Ebandak in Congo

The family of PO. had, in the meantime, moved first from Lio II to Ebandak, another Bakwele-Baka village slightly further north. Interestingly, Michael Fay lists Ebandak as one of the villages he passed through during his *Megatransect* of Central Africa. In his report, he states how in 1991 there were about 150 people living there, but when he passed through again in 2000 things had changed dramatically: ‘Like all the villages along this footpath this one was dying. People are leaving for the cities’⁹⁹. From a Baka perspective, one young Baka woman, who is about 20 today, was the last to be born in Lio, which suggests that the Baka movements should also be considered in the context of the general depopulation of the tropical forests of this region, as I described earlier (cf. 1.2.1, 2.4).

⁹⁸ LeClerc documents that the distance from the road into the forest for gathering and trapping is also about 10 to 15 km.

⁹⁹ Fay quoted on www.nationalgeographic.com/congotrek/report_41_djoua.html

MJ., who was a boy at the time of Lio II, remembers being in Ebandak as a time of carefree liveliness, of 'comme ca marcher en brousse', just walking in the forest, and his father working as a porter to Souanké. It was at Ebandak that they had heard about the experiences of the others in Koto from people travelling back along the roads. From Ebandak, PO. and his family moved several kilometres further north to Adjab(-Congo), also a Bakwele-Baka village. J. was born in Adjab(-Congo), which places these events around the year 1970. At some point, PO. wanted to join his daughter from his first wife in Été. As his son J. described: 'My father wanted to follow her and her children to Été'. The daughter was living in Été with her husband EM., who later took her little sister as second wife. J. told of how they had travelled from Adjab to the Bakwele fishing camp Djiégouyi, which lies not far from Garabizam on the other side of the River Katagua. He recalls this so exactly, as there was an earthquake, when the PO. family was there, and also it was the location where he started crawling. He summed how they had continued on to Été 'following PO.'s daughter' (J. 19.5.2011). On the other hand, PJ., PO.'s oldest son by YC., provided a different mobility motivation. He told of how his father had wanted to come to Gabon for economic reasons, following his Bakwele friend TM., whom he had met in Cameroon. One could understand these statements by PO.'s two sons as contradictory interpretations of mobility facts, but I argue they must be read in conjunction in that both the social and the economic factors create movement in a *motivational complex* (cf. 3.4).

The point I would like to draw attention to with this case is the dynamic of following, *toma* in Baka, *suivre* in French, which I indicated in Chapter Three to be one of the principal aspects of Baka mobility dynamics. *Toma* can mean following a relative to another location, or being picked up by kinfolk to go to or return somewhere, or being the clan person or group who travels to bring someone else back to a certain place. As Y. described:

The decision for Été was because of *suivre*, to follow my family, follow YC. and PO., AO. and the other kids, my daughter and my son-in-law, to *go ngangga nga do bito*, to go be with them (Y. 26.4.2011) .

In this subchapter, I have described several cases of *suivre*: How people travelled to live under MA.'s guidance in Dezou; how MY. and her second husband went from Lio to Colonia to fetch her son; how NA.'s brother and his wife were picked up by her parents to live in their village; how the families of BF. and AG. went to live with other family in Dezou following the village burnings; how AO. had gone to pick up MY. from Kuambai and take her to Été; how Y. and her family moved from Gara to Été following the family already living there; and last, but not least, how the PO. family followed PO.'s daughter and his friend TM. to Été. A further instance is the family of NG. and OA. who had taken the usual route from Gara to Été, but left Été by pirogue to Dezou to join family:

Two men had gone to Maibut I to hunt. They returned to Été to get their women and children, move to Dezou, and build houses there, because the 'great Baka' MA. was there. After this, only the family PO. stayed in Été (OA 14.8.2011)

This chapter also again demonstrates the connection between Baka mobility and a good relationship with their neighbours. The continued experience of *brimade* in Garabizam caused some Baka to leave. On the other hand, in Gata and Eba, only the impact of external violence led to the dissolution of joint living arrangements between Baka and Bakwele. In the case of Eba, this was then transferred to a different place, continued in Été. Rupp has emphasised the importance of emotional ties in inter-ethnic relationships (Rupp 2003), and I suggest that this has not only been the case recently, but for much longer. Moreover, I argue for the importance of emotional ties also being applicable to the Baka themselves, an essential aspect of the interrelations between the autonomous, individual family units in addition to clan structure rules. This idea is supported by the observation that Baka knowledge transmission follows matrilinear transmission from uncle to nephew, and that this takes precedence over agricultural cultivation activities (LeClerc, 2001). From a bird's eye perspective, this section demonstrated the intricacies of the *motivational complex*, the mix of external and internal reasons, between inter-ethnic relations, Ebola, regroupment, and following in Baka mobility.

4.2.8 Été and Mvadi



Map 4.11 – Été in Congo and Mvadi in Gabon

The village of Été, like Gata and the other small villages, is officially on the national territory of Congo, but lies very close to the Gabonese-Congolese border. Été, as are many other village names in this region, is the name of a certain type of tree in Bakwele, *Ewawa* in Baka. The two Gabonese Bakwele TM. and his father from Eba founded Été. The Baka accounts tell of how they stayed in Été for a long time, approximately 20 years. During this time, they hunted and tended plantations of manioc, plantains, potatoes, peanuts, and cocoa, for themselves, the Bakwele, and the Fang who lived just north in the village of Eler. Été was ‘a big village with everything and big proper houses’, with about 100 people living there, and the Baka already had mud-walled houses, as had been the case in Gaza too. The Baka living area was known as Quartier PO., and Été is even spoken of as the ‘village of PO.’, as the family of PO. stayed in Été the longest. Emic and etic descriptions document how life in Été was lived in relation to Mvadi.

Mvadi is a Bakwele town, originally founded in 1908 as a German colonial post. It has approximately 1000 inhabitants today, and lies at the mouth of the River Djoua where it flows into the Ivindo. Situated at a slight altitude, from Mvadi one can overlook the endless green forest canopy, and watching the play of light at sunrise or sunset over these hills is impressive. Mvadi literally sits on the border of Congo and Gabon, which extends east from Mvadi roughly following the river Djoua. Following the Ivindo north

from Mvadi towards Alati, where the Ivindo becomes the Ayina in name, is the Western border between Congo and Gabon, and later Gabon and Cameroon.¹⁰⁰

Mvadi lies in the Gabonese province Ogooué-Ivindo, the capital of which is Makokou. The Ivindo flows from Mvadi to Makokou, and along the left riverbank were the Fang villages, whereas on the right were and are Bakwele villages. Mvadi itself is the district capital of the *Canton Eyesé*,¹⁰¹ which stretches from Mvadi to Maibut II (pronounced Maibut Deux). The second district is the *Canton Ivindo*, which extends from Maibut I (pronounced Maibut Un) south to Makokou. The district heads are called *chef de canton*, and both cantons make up the *sous-préfecture*, the head of which is the *sous-préfet*, sub-prefect. At the time of writing the sub-prefect was Jean-Jacques Dibekinde. Mvadi is divided into three administrative parts, all of which are administered by a separate village chief. The village Adjab, where many Baka moved to from Été, also belongs to the area Mvadi III. Djambess Florent, a Bakwele, is village chief in Mvadi III, and, therefore, also in Adjab (he will be referred to by the initials DF. in the following). AO. and DF. have known each other since school times, and continue to share an intricate relationship of *ami* (cf. 6.1.1), so that the connection between the family of PO. and DF. is long-standing, and also part of the close connection between Été and Mvadi.

There was constant 'circulation' between Été and Mvadi, which lie about 8 or 9 kilometres apart, for provisioning, and schooling (short spells), and, most importantly, *bricoler*, doing small jobs, in Mvadi. As DF. remembers:

They led their lives in relation to Mvadi, where they came to stock up. They had their hunting and their plantations in Été, and did some *bricolage* for the Bakwele here. Someone would call a pygmy to work with him on a plantation

¹⁰⁰ The Bakwele migrated from Cote d'Ivoire through Cameroon to Congo and Gabon where they began to disperse at Mékambo and Makokou. The Bakwele of Mvadi state they have been in the region for 'thousands of years'. The Gabonese Bakwele return to Congo, in particular to the area around Souanké, to find eligible wives. There are still close relations and a strong exchange with the families there (Marion Cheucle, personal communication).

¹⁰¹ Eyesé is also written Ousyé.

or to hunt a gazelle for him. Their activities had been here all their lives. All they needed was here (DF. 26.4.2011).

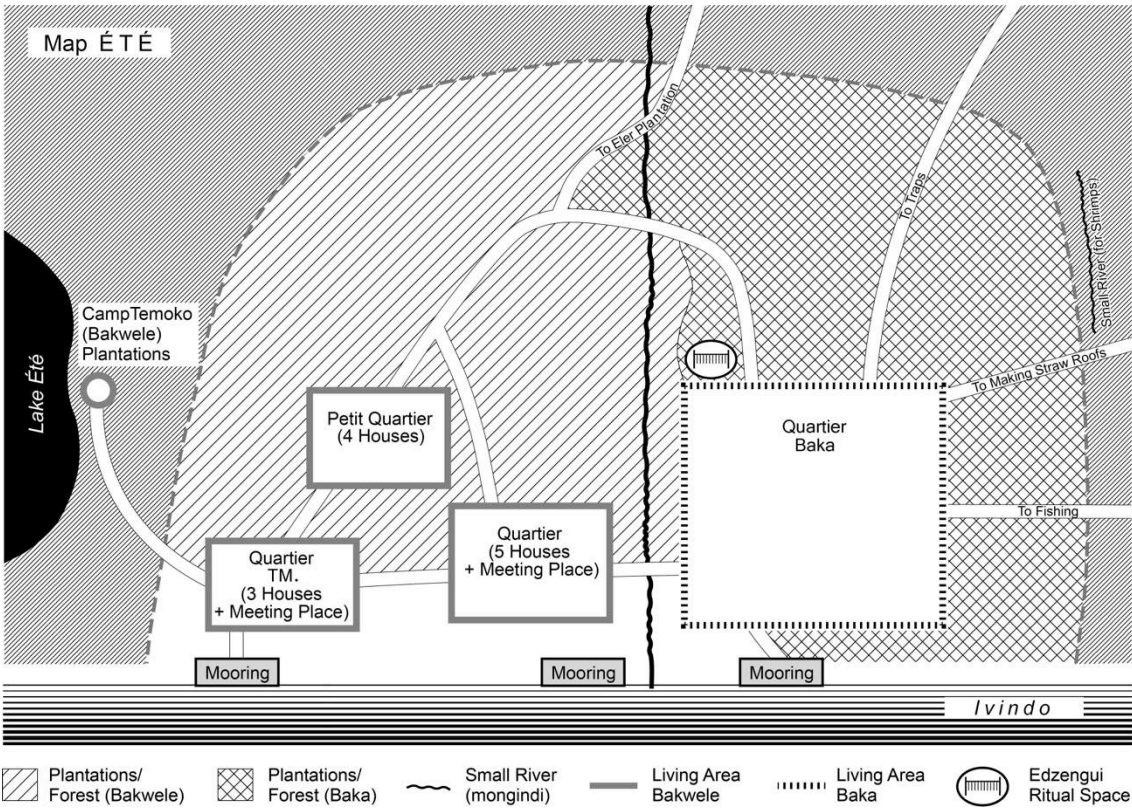
The close connection between Été and Mvadi during the years approximately between 1980-2000, which led the then *chef de brigade* and sous-prefet, Nzambatadi, a Kota, who had been posted to Mvadi for three years around the year 2000 to encourage the Baka to leave Été, as DF. recalled:

As Été was a little far, there was no oil, soap etc. there. So this is where they came to get it all. That's how the *chef de brigade* Nzambatadi came to see their lives as difficult, and decided they should 'descend' to live permanently in Gabon. The *chef de brigade* found out that when they [the Baka] were up in Été, they were always threatened by the Congolese brothers who came to visit them. As he knew them well, he did not want them to continue experiencing this same suffering with the Congolese and Cameroonians, so he asked them to descend and live in Gabon, where they would be 'covered' [protected]. In Gabon the Baka were everywhere; in Makokou there were plenty. Nzambatadi said that they should not be in the forest anymore or annoyed by the Congolese. He said the Baka must be safe (DF. 26.4.2011).

It seems that it was easier for the Baka to listen to and deliberate these thoughts, as Nzambatadi was a Kota and not a Bakwele (an ethnic group with which they have known many problems).

As already mentioned, the mobility in Été was defined by daily procurement mobility, and visiting. The latter could be going to visit, or receiving visits from Baka in Dezou, Maibut, or any of the villages in Congo or Cameroon. Once PO. and YC. had arrived in Été, one Baka woman, whose mother is YC.'s twin sister, came to visit. Visiting must be distinguished from following, as the former clearly implies the return to a different location, even if this is only after a period of two years; whereas following entails departing and relocating to another place, without the intention of return.

As the stories tell, and DF. emphasised, there were also always Baka en route ‘de passage’, travelling between Été and Makokou. Still today, there is the Fang village north of Été called Eler. During the existence of Été and today, Baka also worked for the Fang. At a late stage of Été’s existence, the Baka were living in Été, but had plantations and bark houses in Boureshi on the other riverside. During interviews or story time, the Baka from Adjab and Kabisa would often speak of Mvadi, when they meant Été. In general, the atmosphere with the Bakwele seems to have been good, although some stories referenced discrimination, but overall the accounts of Été tell of many happy years. J. spent what he himself termed ‘my entire life’ in Été, from the age of about 6 to age 30. In 1996, following the outbreak of Ebola in Dezou, the majority of Dezou Baka relocated to Été (cf. 4.2.4).



Map 4.12 – Reconstructed village map of Été (based on research visit to Été with the Baka, and their later drawings of village details)¹⁰²

¹⁰² See also Appendix XVI which shows three different plans (or memories) of where the (family) houses were located in the Quartier PO..

It was a very moving time, when we, several Baka from Adjab and myself, visited Été from Adjab, and arrived at this overgrown space, which had once been the famed village. The research party could easily identify certain locations, and had difficulty with others. The most moving moments were when we began identifying gravesites, of children, and of their father PO., who died on 20.02.1996. Going to these sites brought up memories of the past, and we sat for a long time telling stories, sad, funny or outrageous, until this exceptionally cold day in the tropical forest forced us to return to the warmth of a living village, to Adjab. The story of why the family PO. finally left Été is, once again, one of military violence which caused involuntary migration and uprooting, as opposed to preferred staying-in-place.

4.2.9 Leaving Été

The reason for leaving Été was once again violence. The Baka told of how the military had repeatedly threatened them with guns in Été, and had, for example, made them fish and prepare the catch for the army. DF. explained this threatening behaviour of the Congolese and the Cameroonian military in a different way:

The Baka were hunting for Cameroonians and for the Congolese. There were small *bons* between them and the pygmies. ... *Bon* means, for example, when the pygmies come, I give someone CFA 2000 to help me to work in the fields tomorrow. In the morning, when I go into the bush, the pygmy does not show up, so when we cross paths, I make problems for him. So it was with the Congolese and Cameroonians threats. This threatening behaviour did not go on for a long time, it was just for short a while, and it occurred when the Baka owed them the *small* bons (DF. 26.4.2011).

There was one particular incident in 2001, which finally caused the Baka to leave Été. I heard many sad accounts of this episode, but one woman, who was in her late fifties at the time, gave the most detailed account, which I summarise below:

We also left Été because of violence. One Baka woman, N. had a small baby,

and was being pursued by Bakwele military with a belt. It was before lunchtime, and the village was empty. For N., in order to defend herself, there was nobody to hand the child to, and no chance to put the child down. So, the Bakwele military continued hitting her whilst she was trying to protect her child. Her husband, MR., had been given cartridges and shoes, but he didn't bring back either cartridges or meat for the Bakwele who had provided them, and he didn't give back the shoes.¹⁰³ When the Bakwele arrived to find MR. was not there, they hit his wife N. instead. There was no time for us for meeting and talking about what to do. We just left one-by-one, quietly "like chimpanzees" to the forest, and without haste so as not to show the military we were leaving. Everybody was saving his or her own body. Everybody left Été at the same moment, the whole family. Nobody stayed behind.

In the evening of the day of the incident we secretly returned to Été from the forest to get our belongings, as on leaving we had just abandoned everything, but the military was still there. We took our things and ran, fled back into forest; every individual was grabbing one item. Half the stuff stayed behind, especially of those who were not fast enough. The military captured one guy. They also grabbed my uncle and tore his clothes off, left him naked. From my father, they took his machete, oil, and two radios, which he had bought in Mikouka (M. 21.04.2011).

The interviewee also detailed how this was the continuation of a long history of abuse, the impact of the incident on Baka reasoning, and why the Baka finally gave up Été:

The Bakwele followed the Baka from Garabizam to Été to find them there, and beat them. They would travel by boat using an outboard motor. So it was the same situation in Gaza and in Été.

The reason for us leaving was *kabu*, which means anger or being fed up, because we had been made to suffer too much [The French term for *kabu* is

¹⁰³ Apparently, MR.'s son-in-law had betrayed him, and he then later got the shoes.

cholère and the Baka use these two terms interchangeably]. We considered the act of hitting a woman with child as incomprehensible. We were also fed up with the situation that Baka men would be out at work, or gone into the forest for some time, maybe a week, and the women would be left behind. In what seemed to be perfectly coordinated timing, the military would arrive, and just take what they needed from the houses, able to help themselves, because the Baka men were away. We didn't want to risk that situation anymore.

There was also one situation where the man was in the forest, and the woman had given birth on her own. We were worried about what the military would do to the child, if they ever found it alone in the house, for example if the mother was out for toilet. And it wasn't just military, but also Fang trying to get at us. They were taking small routes instead of roads to hunt out the Baka. After all this, we were just fed up, *kabu!* (M. 21.04.2011)

It is important to distinguish between the Bakwele who lived in Été and with whom the Baka got on fine, 'had no problems and shared their meat with', and the military and other Bakwele who systematically sought out Baka to inflict violence and *brimade*. These people even tried to convince the Bakwele from Été to do as they did, but they were not successful. In the end, Baka and Été-Bakwele were again forced to flee Été together. In this case, the Bakwele went to Mvadi, and the Baka, after some stops in between, have settled in the village Adjab.

I tried to find out what was going through peoples minds as all this was happening. During an interview round with some of the men, they explained that they had had no fixed idea to do this or that, no particular plan, it was just the idea of leaving:

You will think of what? Because you see that in the place where you were living quietly, others are now coming to annoy you, so you cannot stay. You're forced to leave. You realise, no, I have to do this now and find a new place. If I stay here, I do not know what will happen to me (J. 19.05.2011).

J.'s statement can be read as another clear indication of the strongly sedentarised Baka lifestyle already in previous decades. They found it hard to leave Été for practical reasons, and often commented on the theft and loss of material goods by the military. More importantly Été was a place where they were happy and at ease, and they described having to uproot as a tragic case of involuntary mobility, which again also supports the idea of dwellings as emotional moorings (cf. 3.1.5). At the same time, it shows how emotional well-being is a central aspect of Baka mobility reasoning, and the counter-part of *kabu* is, of course, *bien garder*. My female interviewee ended this sad story on a proud and defiant note:

Today, the Baka are not scared of answering back when somebody addresses them. People cannot treat Baka the way they used to (M. 21.04.2011).

4.2.10 From Congolese Été to Gabonese Adjab



Map 4.13 – Été in Congo and (old) Adjab in Gabon

After they fled from the village, the Été-Baka first spent some time in the forest, then went to the gold camps Kuamecar and Mitoungashi, where they met up, and then spent more time in the forest on *molongo*. J. explained how at the start they spoke of their family in Makokou, especially their older sister AP., and that at first they were all thinking of going to Makokou (J. 19.5.2011). In my discussion with DF., he described the situation from the official point of view:

They came one by one and told us about their tough living conditions in the forest. One day, AO., their chief came to see me and said “Chief, we are ready, and we have no means of transportation for our belongings”. It was AO. who has done everything, so that all his brothers could be in Adjab. I immediately sent the big canoe, and the next morning they are already in (old) Adjab¹⁰⁴, clearing the land. That’s how they moved. That's how they came down the river (DF. 26.4.2011).

Both J. and AO.’s first wife M. also told of how the Commandant de Brigade from Mvadi came to fetch them from the forest to move them onto Gabonese territory, as he had previously advocated, but the impulse had come from the Baka:

Then we went to see the officials of Mvadi who told us to build the village where we are today. We returned once again to Été to get our remaining stuff, but it rained on that day and mattresses and mats got soaked (M. 21.04.2011).

The Baka used DF.’ large canoe to travel to an old camp, ‘old Adjab’ further south on the Ivindo, a location, which they themselves decided on. This place was an old Fang and later Bakwele village on the River Nouna. From my interlocutors’ statements, there was an interesting parallel between Abam (cf. 4.2.3) and this Adjab in that both were ‘on the other side of the river’, the main advantage associated with this being increased safety. DF. explained that although the Baka had begun to build houses there, they had had to leave old Adjab again, because they were too close to the official WWF site at the mouth of the river, and how there was great risk of conflict between WWF wildlife protection policies and Baka (traditional) hunting practices:

To me, I found they could not live in this village because they had to isolate them from noise. These are people who love the gun fired. They only eat meat. But the WWF... We had to put a distance between the two (DF. 26.4.2011).

¹⁰⁴ This is the third Adjab, an old Fang and Bakwele village on the River Nouna, where the Baka went before they came to live in the village Adjab close to Mvadi, where they are today.

During one of our talks, DF. also disclosed further reasons of getting the families of AO. and MR., and moving them to live in the location of today's Adjab. His main arguments were the increased proximity to Mvadi, and the (better) schooling the Baka children would thereby be able to have. He also admitted to an ulterior motive, in that the power of a local chief within Gabonese bureaucracy is linked to the number of inhabitants and voters, i.e. more people mean more power:

We want to attract people to boost our workforce, because it is the only way for us village leaders, looking to have a lot of people. And when you have a lot of people, it is on this basis that they call you a good manager. If you drive people away, they decide to scatter, they'll find you a bad person and the village will be empty. Who will you rule in that case? (DF. 17.7.2011)¹⁰⁵

Once he and Nzambatadi had taken the decision to move the Été Baka from 'old Adjab' to Adjab near Mvadi, they gathered the Baka and spoke the following message in a way fitting of the local traditions:

We called them to a meeting and told them that they had departed the Congolese side [of the river] for Gabon in order to no longer remain in the forest, and that they should no longer be scared to the point of running away. Take your children we said. You are now safe. You'll stay together, like us. This is the message we have delivered (DF. 26.4.2011).

And so it came that Nzambatadi, a Bakota who was sub-prefect and Le Commandeur de Brigade in Mvadi at the time, and DF. gave the Baka Adjab as a safe place. DF. also gave me the reasons for the exact location of Adjab (see also Baka soil categories cf. 3.1.2):

From Adjab to here [Mvadi], there is really no place where they can build on that side of the river. All that is flooded, it is under water when the water rises.

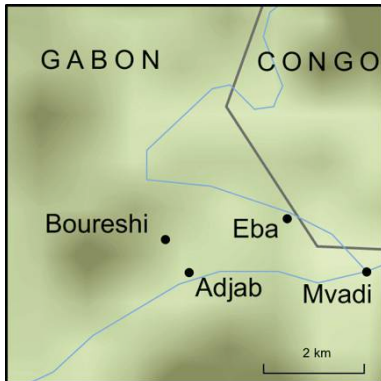
¹⁰⁵ DF. also admitted having lost some Baka to Maibut because he did not live up to the ideals of the 'care-network' (cf. 6.5).

Now, myself I lived in the small village you see below [part of Mvadi], but these people [Baka] often do not want to live with us. They always want to live secluded, to live in peace. To cross this side, it was difficult, so they had to live on the other side. The place they preferred was where they are now. That was to facilitate their journey between Adjab and here (DF. 26.4.2011).

The majority of Été-Baka moved from Été to Adjab via the different forest locations, but several others travelled from Été to Makokou. Y., MR.'s first wife, recalled how they went walking into the forest rather than taking the pirogue when leaving Été, whereas one Baka man recounted how he was happy to take the pirogue to Makokou. Some others were not present at the time of the Été incident as they were away for a one-year *molongo*. They did not 'see Été', but ended up going straight to Kuamecar to meet the others, who had carried their belongings to the gold camp for them. Other family members again were away from the Ivindo entirely, working as trackers for wildlife conservation projects in Central Gabon. In summary, once again, external violence had caused a separation of the group, which resulted in different mobility responses related to kinfolk in other locations, one aspect of mobility understood as relational.

4.3 Settling in Gabon

4.3.1 Adjab



Map 4.14 – Adjab in Gabon

Once again, the Baka had packed up and set off, this time for the village of Adjab, where they have now been for nearly ten years. Adjab is an old Fang village, but the Bakwele have had plantations in the forest surrounding the location for many years. AO. referred to the fact that Été and Adjab are old Fang villages, where the Fang had come to plant cocoa, which AO. quoted as being about 100 years ago (AO. 21.11.2010). He thereby refers to a decisive part of history on this part of the Ivindo, and the fact that villages on the East side of the river are Bakwele and on the West side, they are, or were Fang. The Fang have long gone and settled in Makokou, and today it is the Bakwele living in these villages or having plantations there. It is said that the Fang in this region of Gabon are of Cameroonian origin, and the Bakwele originate from both Congo and Cameroon (Wenceslas Mamboundou, personal communication). Apparently Adjab was also burned during the times of MT., but this was never confirmed.¹⁰⁶ DF., a Bakwele, is village chief in Mvadi III, and, therefore, also in Adjab. He explained that in the official view, Adjab is a village just like Maibut, but it does not have an official status, which means there is no Gabonese flag flying in the village, and no independent Baka chief who would receive a special medal to document his status as chief.

¹⁰⁶ Personally, I found it amusing that Adjab is the Fang word for the Moabi tree in the Baka origin myth, and that I was working in the 'primordially' named village (cf. 2.2). When I asked some of the women and men about this, they smiled, but said it had no particular meaning for them.

On arrival in Adjab in 2001, the Baka just set up some makeshift tents covered with large plastic sheets they had bought in Kuamecar following their flight from Été,¹⁰⁷ and then began the process of clearing the land. Some people also built bark houses. Clearing the village area took about one year, after which they began building the houses, some of which you can still see today. They started replacing the plastic with *pailles*, thatched straw roofs, moving the plastic covering along the roofs bit by bit, until all of it was covered by *pailles*. At some point, the first house was covered with corrugated iron, which had been provided by an ivory trader in return for a large amount of elephant tusks. In his talks with me, chief DF. welcomed this development, saying that he wants people to build proper houses as ‘how can they live as proper Gabonese without having a fixed address?’ (DF. 26.4.2011) whereby this discourse reiterates his prior quote on the relation between political power and the number of inhabitants. This change in dwellings can also be seen as the wish of the Baka to improve their living conditions and their well-being, and to end the ill treatment they have known for so long, mirroring M.’s statement documented earlier (cf. 4.2.9), that one cannot mess with the Baka as before.

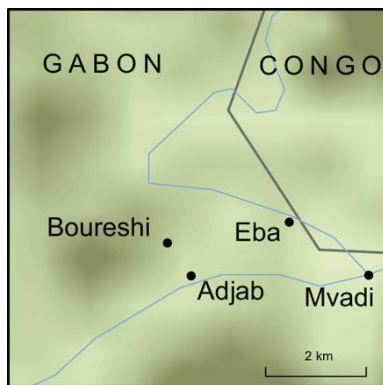
From a mobility point of view, it is interesting to consider how the previous circulation link between Mvadi and Été, has now become Mvadi to Adjab following the relocation of the majority of the Été inhabitants to Adjab, whereby the distance between Mvadi and Adjab is about 3.5 km, so shorter than the 8-9 km between Mvadi and Été. Looking at this on a map reminded me of the argument that ‘pygmies’ live their forest mobility with reference to a single village, or close group of villages (Bahuchet 1985). At first glance, one might be tempted to say that this pattern has not changed, as the reference point of the Baka in Adjab is still Mvadi. Their life is with reference to Mvadi, their (daily) interactions are with the same people, and they seem to talk about Mvadi the same way as before. However, it is worth remembering that the movement from Congo to Gabon is a cross-border one. The significance of the national boundaries is that it was possible to escape violence, moving from violence to security. Also, the original choice of location after Été and Kuamecar had been for old-Adjab, the village

¹⁰⁷ In the same way many of those Baka returning from the gold site Mikouka to Adjab in June 2011, carried their plastic sheets, with one square meter costing around CFA 3.000, with them, and built new tent structures with them. I came to think of these as ‘shifting homes’ (cf. 3.1.1).

on the Nouna. Therefore, the continuing daily relationship and related mobility to Mvadi was not intended and cannot be interpreted as a linear development, it is rather an example of *modulated movement*, of the iterative steps that make up mobility patterns.

From a Baka perspective, the most important characteristic about Adjab is that it is a Baka-only village, that they live in their own village without direct interference from others, and because of that they can say 'djoko ... on est bien là à Adjab', Adjab is a good place.

4.3.2 Boureshi



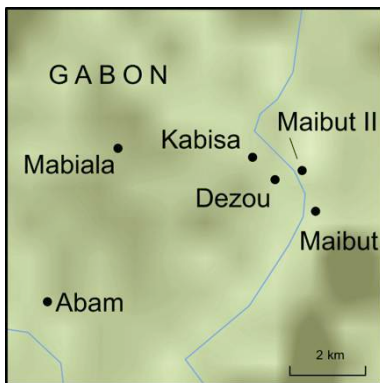
Map 4.15 – Boureshi in Gabon

Another village, which had been burned by MT. and subsequently abandoned (cf. 4.2.6), is Boureshi. It lies about 1km north-northwest of Adjab. AO. moved there from Été after his father had died in Été in 1996. As AO. remembered:

I told my brothers, that for me things were no longer good in Été, and so I went first to the old village with the avocado trees [Boureshi]. I lost another son there, whom I had named after Dad. That's when my brothers said I should not stay alone anymore, and said I should just live here in Adjab. I came to Adjab in 2004 leaving the old village Boureshi where I was with my family (AO. 18.7.2011)

Death is a long established factor for Baka mobility (Vallois & Marquer 1976) (cf. 3.3.4), a cause for intense emotional pain. The above statement tells of the death of a loved one, of AO.'s son and father, as a reason for mobility and following, specifically the dynamic of 'push following', meaning that the others didn't want to leave AO. alone in Boureshi, and asked him to follow and join them.

4.3.3 Kabisa and Mabilia



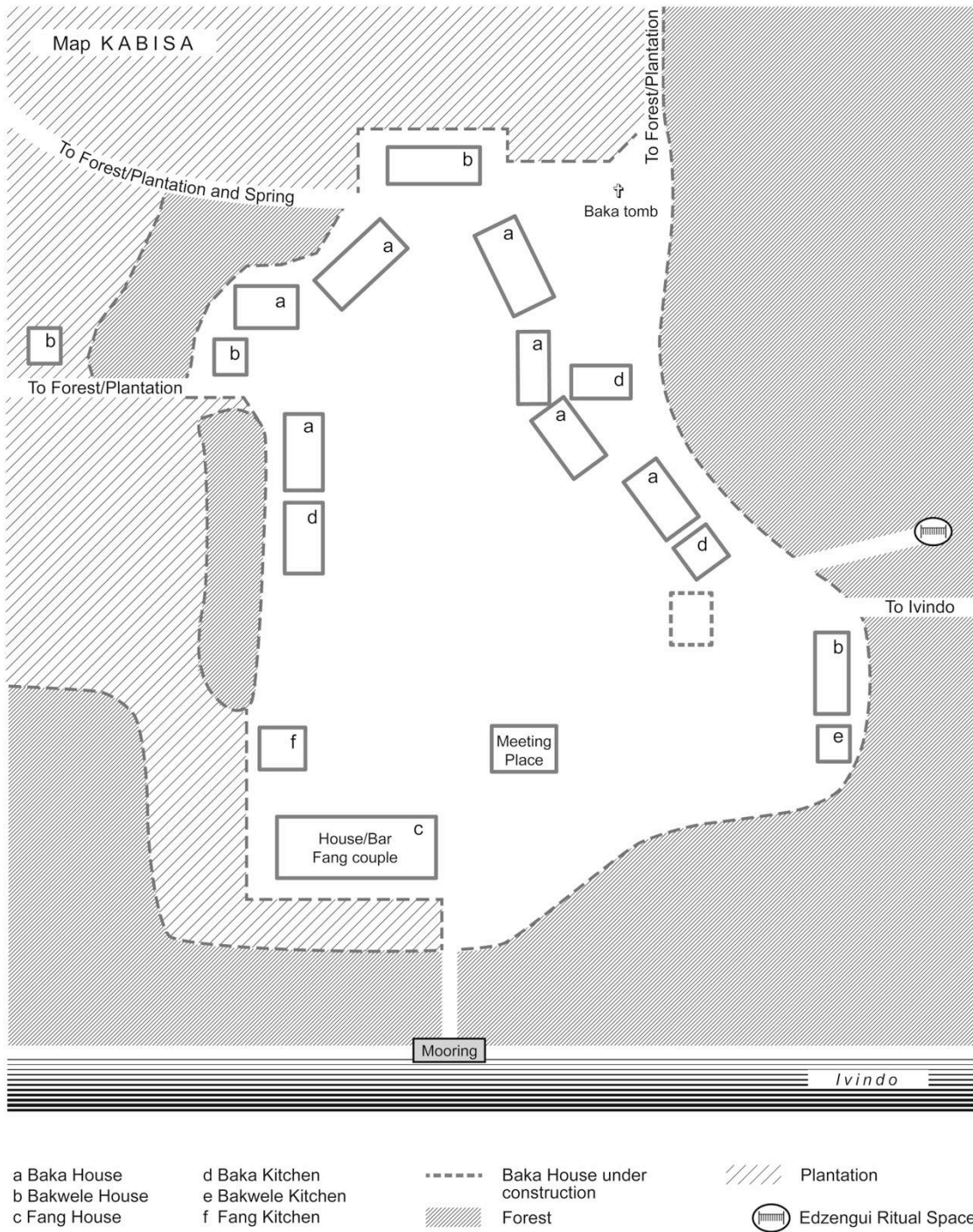
Map 4.16 – Kabisa and Mabilia in Gabon

Kabisa was the reference name for an area of plantations across the Ivindo from Maibut II, and means 'village of hunger'. B. and his wife JM. came to live there around 2005, and now Kabisa has become a small village, where their sons and other family members have also built houses. As they recalled:

The Bakwele Monsieur EC. came to get us, saying he needed us because elephants were destroying his plantations. He said "Come to the plantation and stay there, so that elephants will not come anymore". Another man then came to pick us up [in Adjab], and we were asked to stay permanently, to stop coming and going, to build a house, a village even, in Kabisa (JM. 22.5.2011).

I was curious to know why it had been her and B. whom the Bakwele asked, and JM. explained that B. already worked as a hunter for Monsieur EC., and so he and B. were already in a relation of *ami* (cf. 6.1.1) from before:

The Bakwele came to ask who would go with him. The others [Baka] refused. They didn't want to go. The monsieur took B., because he already had relations with him. B. was the first to work with him. They were already friends. B. already worked for him in Dezou (JM. 22.5.2011).



Map 4.17 – Village Map Kabisa

Kabisa is also the access point to the gold camp Mabilia, which lies 6.24 km into the forest. Baka and other ethnic groups work at Mabilia to make money with the gold they find (cf. 5.3.2). As there are only forest paths leading to Mabilia, all goods must be transported and carried there on foot. The Baka who live in Kabisa, and any visiting family member, work as porters along this route.

The essential thing to take away here is that there is constant movement, *circulation*, between the villages of Adjab and Kabisa. The two main reasons being earning money through gold work or as a porter; and socialising with other Baka, spending time with family and clan members, and drinking in the bar (cf. 6.1.4)¹⁰⁸; again, the economic and social motivational factors form an inseparable complex. The movement between the two villages is not termed *mosesanu*, as there are no well-used paths connecting Adjab and Kabisa, but travel is by dugout canoe. Moreover, there is strong rivalry between Adjab and Kabisa, and many moves from one place to the other are undertaken to escape: family feuds; physical harm through (alcohol-related) violence; accusations of *vampire*; illness stemming from *vampire*; intra-group bullying; and jealousy. Reasons for mobility also include flight after adultery and bolting from the pain of death of a loved one by moving to a different location. There is also mobility to the communities of Adjab and Kabisa by Baka wanting a change from urban life in Makokou for a while; and for the young men from Makokou, who come to search for a good Baka wife; or by a woman who has become estranged from her husband (cf. 6.2.1.3).

¹⁰⁸ During my analysis, I have been tempted to give drinking as a separate reason independent from socialising, but decided to withdraw this thought in the end.

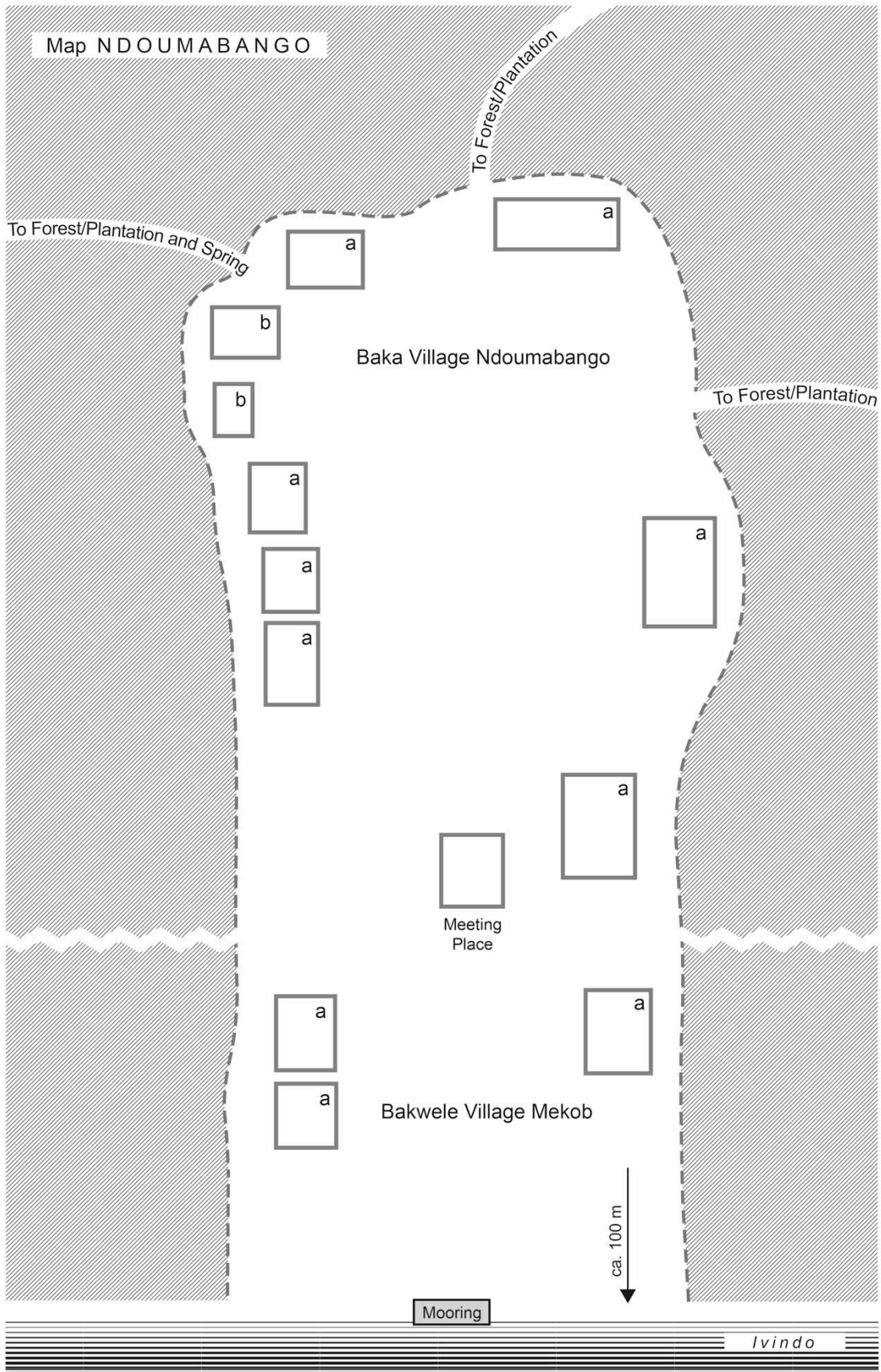
4.3.4 Ndoumabango



Map 4.18 – Ndoumabango in Gabon

Travelling downstream from the village of Adjab, Kabisa, or previously Dezou to the village Ndoumabango (a distance of about 60km as the crow flies, but much further along the endlessly winding Ivindo) can take anything from half a day by high-power motorised canoe to several days rowing. Ndoumabango is about a one hour, 17km trip away from Makokou by high-powered motorised boat along the Ivindo. The Baka often spoke of Makokou, when they meant either Ndoumabango or any of the specific locations within Makokou. This is the same phenomenon of 'ici', the approximately 15km reference radius to a location, described earlier for all the small villages around Mvadi and Garabizam (cf. 4.2.1, 4.2.8).

One man who spent many years in Ndoumabango is MO.. He had been born somewhere in what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'originally from Congo-Kinshasa', as it was termed by his wife YM.. He left that area with his family to travel to Congo, then to the Sanga Area of Eastern Cameroon, later to Ntam and Alat in Congo, where he met and married his wife, then with the others to Garabizam (cf. 4.2). From Garabizam, MO. moved towards Gabon, because he had heard that the Baka were living a good life in Gabon. After periods near Mvadi, and in Dezou, MO. and his family traversed the rivers Nouna, Sing, and Wa. They 'came out of the forest' on the River Wa where they met the Bakwele SM. who was on a fishing trip, and MO. and SM. became *ami*. As Yaye described, this friendship of MO. with SM. is the reason for their stay and her being in Ndoumabango now.



- a Baka House
- b Baka Kitchen
- Forest

Map 4.19 – Village Map Ndoumabango

Before settling in what is Ndoumabango today, they actually lived in three other locations nearby, which were between 2-6 km apart; first in Mekob, then in Kabos, then Guakonga, then Ndoumabango (known as Mekob in Bakwele, but a different location from the first Mekob). YM.'s younger clan brother and his family followed her to Gabon and Ndoumabango, where her brother then met his wife.

After a *molongo* of about 2 years, T. and his wife E. had spent several years living first in Dezou and later in Ndoumabango. E. described, and many others confirmed, that the *ambiance* between the Bakwele and the Baka in Ndoumabango was not good. This was also due to the village being a location of many deaths attributed to cases of *vampire*, which once again documents the correlation between *vampire* and a socially poisoned atmosphere. When E.'s daughter lost her first child to the *vampire*, they 'fled to Makokou, as there was no one left', as E. summarised.

4.3.5 Makokou

Makokou is the capital of the Gabonese province Ogooué-Ivindo, with about 12.000 inhabitants (cf. 1.2.2.2). It is unclear, when the Baka first came to Makokou, and several of the authorities in Libreville and in Makokou were even unaware of their current presence in the provincial capital, expressing great astonishment at my wish or statement to be working with them. At the time of writing, or rather during my last count in August 2011, the Baka were living in six different locations in Makokou, totalling around 60 individuals, who are there more or less permanently (table below).

Many of those in Quartier Central are children and grandchildren related to one man, JO., a Mbongo who sadly passed away in June 2011 at the age of about 82. JO. had come to the region along the Ivindo and around Makokou about 40 years ago, working as a hunter. After two years and many (typical) experiences of not being *bien garder*, of not getting paid for his kill, it was a Fang man, who made JO. come to Makokou and live with him in his house in the Quartier Central, the central market area of Makokou, treating him well. The actual living arrangements are such that there are two houses, one for the Fang family and one for the Baka, on the land, which belongs to the Fang

and his family. The one which the Baka now live in must be described as derelict, with no running water, makeshift electricity, and about to fall down.

Location of Houses	Number of Baka inhabitants
Quartier Central – ‘Maison Essouma’	12
Elarmintang	7
Maison Elouphe	7
Zoatab (2 Baka women living in marriage with non-Baka)	2
Behind Gitem	20
Mboula	10
<u>Total</u>	<u>58</u>

Table 4.3 – Baka locations in Makokou in 2011

One Baka man, NG., a Mofandje born in Akebale near Alat north of Mintom in Cameroon, had travelled with his family from Alat via Garabizam and Été to join family in Dezou. He and his family left Dezou due to intra-population fighting to first live in Ndoumabango, and then came to live in Elarmintang, which lies on the Western outskirts of Makokou. NG.’s wife, OA., had come from Ndoumabango to be with NG.’s older sister, because she was in hospital due to an illness. At some point, NG. came to be with his wife, following her. NG. hunted for a Fang man as his *friend*, and he and his family lived in a house in Elarmintang, which belongs to that Fang family. NG.’s family continues to do so since his death in 2001. A two-minute walk from this house live another Baka man and his family in a large stone house, which also belongs to a Fang family with whom the father is in relation of *ami*.

The reason I have portrayed the stories of these families is to draw together the mobility reasons to come to Makokou. In Makokou, as opposed to the area around Mvadi, there is no gold work, but there are many Fang, and the relationship structure of villager and ‘pygmy hunter’ between the Fang and the Baka can still be found.¹⁰⁹ I hypothesise that, at least initially, only those Baka who were working and travelling

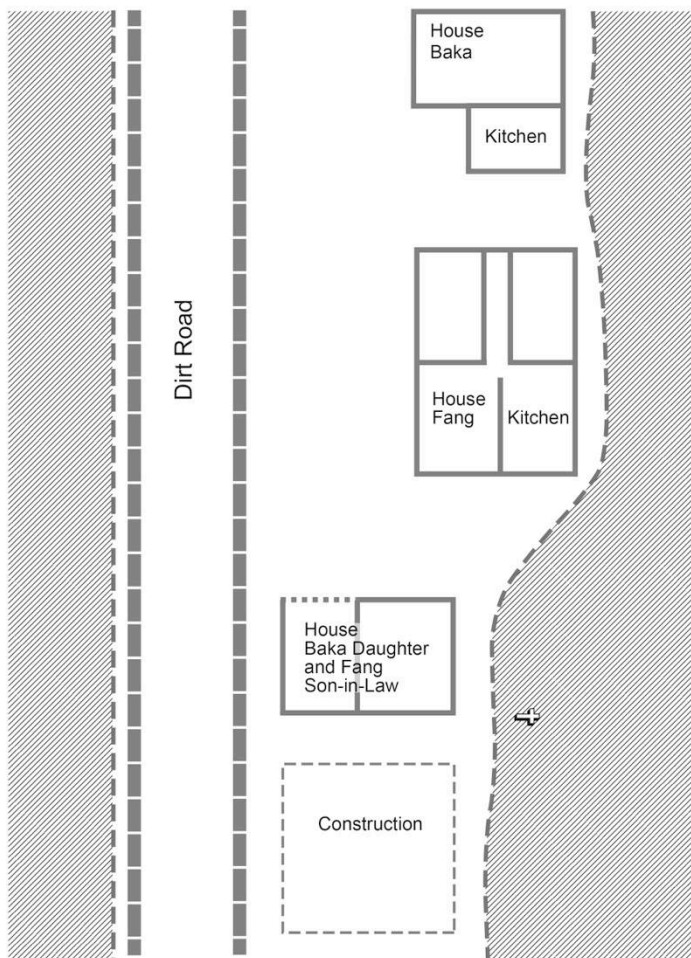
¹⁰⁹ The Baka still work as hunters for the Fang, especially for ivory, much to the chagrin of the WWF.

with a Fang *friend* came as far south as Makokou. However, these relationships are not simply governed by socio-economic considerations, but also by emotional proximity, as many have named children after each other, for example, one Baka son is named as the *homonym* of his father's Fang *ami*, i.e. the son carries the same first name as the Fang (cf. 6.3). Something which I only heard this once, but which must be mentioned regarding positive changes in the relationship symmetry between Fang and Baka, is that the Fang man gave this young Baka man, his *homonym*, a piece of land.

The other strong pull of Makokou is, of course, that it is a large town and MO.'s final move was to Makokou, because he 'wanted a village life which meant cars', as EM. described (EM. 28.7.11), which constitutes another example of the move for urbanisation (cf. 2.4). Their first location in Makokou was Zongayong, where just as in Garabizam, they had to ask the chef du quartier for permission to stay. Makokou was and is perceived as a location of economic opportunity, and Baka men travelled and travel from, at the time Été, today Adjab or Kabisa to Makokou to work; some return to the villages to get married. Makokou and Ndoumabango are also locations where individual Baka from Minvoul have come to visit; and in one case stayed.

Finally, one Baka woman AP. has come to Makokou all the way from Alat, where she left, aged about seven, with her family due to the war. Today, she is about 45 years old. AP. separated from two husbands on grounds of violence, the first in Été, the second in Makokou, and now lives with her children and third husband on the outskirts of Makokou.

Map MBOULA



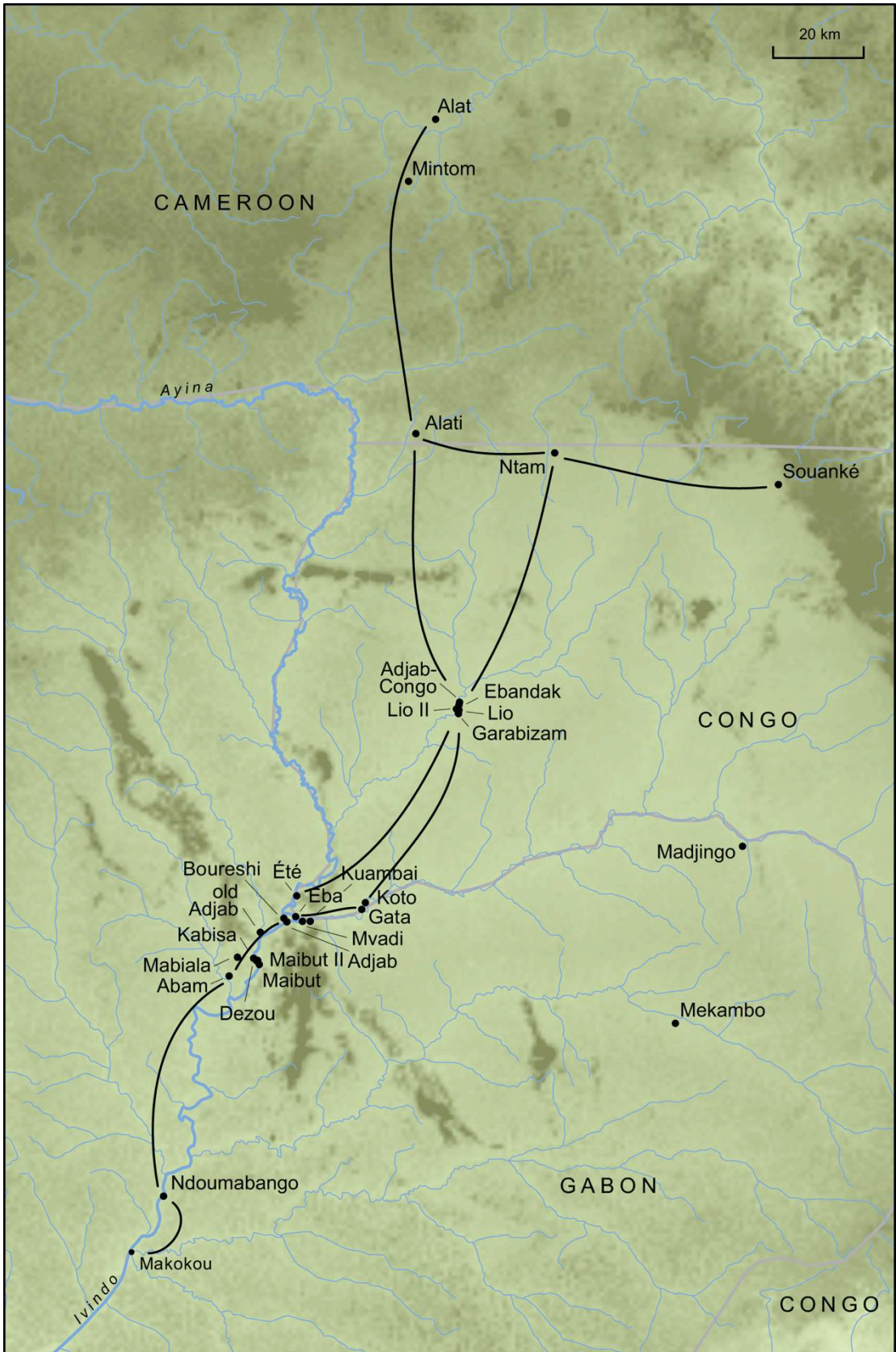
Map 4.20 – Plan of Houses in Mboula

4.4 Summary of Factors for Migration and Mobility from the 1960s to today

Taking this historical journey from the 1960s to today with the Ivindo Baka has documented how they and their forefathers were living in Cameroon or Congo, before moving to Gabon. The areas concerned in Cameroon and Congo, from which the migrations partly originated were, firstly, the village Alat near Mintom in Cameroon; secondly, the villages between Alati and Ntam on the border of Cameroon and Congo; and thirdly, the villages around Souanké in Congo. From there, the first movement was towards Garabizam in Congo. In Garabizam, the various groups stayed for different lengths of time in the villages of Lio II and Ebandak; before moving on to Koto, Gata, Eba, Kuambai and Été in Congo; or Dezou, Abam, Ndoumabango, Makokou, Adjab and Kabisa in Gabon. The attempt to detail only the most outstanding reason for mobility in any one particular village for the benefit of the reader has proven challenging, but, in turn, served to make evident and underline the multi-causality and interdependence of Baka migration, mobility and immobility. I have given examples of *molongo*, *mongengele* and *mosesanu* as introduced in Chapter Three (cf. 3.2). Moreover, I have shown that the phrase ‘we descended the Ivindo’ is not to be taken literally, but that the movements were undertaken in small (geographical) steps through the forest with long periods of sedentarisation, back and forth between old and new locations, a pattern and process termed *modulated movement*. The general design of the migratory movements is depicted in the map below (cf. map 4.20). The movements are shown as simple black lines, but this reductionist form is used to signify to the reader the *modulated movement*, which, if illustrated according to actual facts would look more like the first painting of a two-year old, a chaotic scribble of a plethora of lines.

4.4.1 Mobility Factors

The factors for Baka movement and migration I identified through the analysis of migratory history and life histories can be classified as internal or external to the Baka group, and some, which must be situated at the interstice of these two categories. It may seem contradictory to the understanding of mobility as relational to categorise



Map 4.21 – Baka Migration and Mobility Routes within Cameroon, Congo and Gabon

mobility factors as internal or external, but this classification and the way I define it, draws on an idea governing the application of the concept of motility, namely constraint. *Motility* analyses constraint and its impact as mobility, or immobility (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 749, cf. 5.2) and I, therefore, understand external to mean beyond the direct influence of the Baka as a group. I pinpoint violence in the form of military violence, *brimade*, or civil war, and, secondly, the regroupment activities in Congo and Gabon as a major cause for enforced movement. Thirdly, the outbreaks of Ebola, in the villages around Maibut and Gata, constitute a push factor. An external pull factor was, of course, the statement and invitation to enter Gabon by the late President Omar Bongo. During the course of the interviews environmental concerns were never related as reasons for mobility, but rather given as aids to locate an event in time (cf. 4.2.7). On the internal side, by which I mean originating from within the Baka community, the factor of *toma*, following, in its diverse forms of push and pull, following family, or being gathered to join other family members forms the baseline of movement. Secondly, the search for a good life, which is to be understood as constituted by economic improvement and (physical) peace, whereby the former in part, and the latter in its entirety, are of course the flipside of the external violence. Baka acknowledge violence as part of life, but the example of the village of Abam and the back and forth between Adjab and Kabisa, show that intra-group violence, and the experience of violence against the person, resulting from family feuds and adultery, also constitute mobility reasons.

At the interstice of internal and external, which means partly influenced and governed by the Baka, are, firstly, the inter-ethnic relationships and, secondly, sorcery. The quality of the inter-ethnic relationship, the *bonne ambiance*, *être à l'aise*, and *bien garder*, is decisive in whether the Baka like a place, and whether they stay or go. All interviewees would at some point refer to this, without prompting; it was just something that always came up in conversation, and the way it was said made it clear how important a criteria it was, and is. Time is of the essence in this dynamic, as the contrast between the short duration in Garabizam, and the long stay in Été documents, with what may best be understood as a try-out period of two years, the *ntumbu*. The close socio-economic relation of *ami* between a Baka and a Fang or a

Bakwele, which I have cited as essential to the movement of some Baka to Makokou, creates *toma* at the interstice of internal and external relations, and outside Baka clan dynamics. The sorcery of the *vampire* is an African concept as the Baka themselves emphasise, and is both larger than clan dynamics, but also forms a connection between the Baka and their surrounding ethnic groups.

Summary of Factors for Baka Mobility, Migration and Immobility	
External to Baka group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • civil war • paramilitary violence • <i>brimade</i> • regroupment • Ebola • invitation to enter Gabon by the late President Omar Bongo
Internal to Baka group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>toma</i> (following family) • visiting family • search for a good life (economic prosperity and freedom from violence) • family feuds • adultery • sexual adventure • alcohol • death of a loved one • searching for a wife • wanting a change from urban to rural life, and vice versa • (daily) subsistence (for example, collecting water and firewood, hunting, plantation work, trip to local shop) • earning money (<i>bricolage</i>, working as porter, carving oars and paddles, hunting, gold work, tracking for NGO, healing)
At Interstice of Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (inter-ethnic) relationships between Baka and their neighbours • sorcery
Connecting Internal and External	Mobility values (<i>bonne ambiance, être à l'aise, and bien garder</i>)

Table 4.4 – Summary of Factors in Baka Mobility, Migration and Immobility

As the analysis has shown, all factors of an ecological, social, political, emotional or other nature are influential in mobility considerations, and each location offers incidents of all or some of the aspects, evidencing the multi-causality underlying Baka mobility decisions, which I have conceptualised as a *motivational complex* along spatial and temporal lines (cf. 3.4).

The observant reader will have noticed that the factors listed above are not entirely of the same genre. Many of the external factors are aspects or results of the inter-ethnic relationships. This is especially the case, if the persons involved in these relations and the related mobility are more generally considered as 'players' in the Baka social environment, irrespective of their ethnic group, as I advocate in Chapter Six (cf. 6.2.2). With regard to internal factors, avoiding family feuds, escaping the repercussions of adultery, or the pursuit of alcohol were given as aspects of a 'good life' by the Baka themselves, and, therefore, nearly all factors listed can be summarised under this term. Searching for economic prosperity and freedom from violence are, of course, two very different aims from an outsider's perspective, but the majority of my interviewees did not distinguish between the two (cf. 3.2.3.3, cf. 5.3), and thus, I posit, they can and must be conceptualised together under the term 'search for a good life'.

These considerations lead me to argue that three factors dominate in Baka mobility and the *motivational complex: toma*; (inter-ethnic) relationships between Baka and their neighbours; and the search for a good life, for 'Gabon'. *Toma*, and relations with neighbours as factors of mobility document social relations as the essential quality of Baka mobility, which underlines the argument of mobility as a relational system developed in Chapter Six. The search for a good life can also be understood as ideational *toma*, so that *toma* may be deemed the only principal factor of mobility. Nevertheless, I would argue that Baka understanding supports the motivational triad, and, if anything, it is useful for analytical purposes to distinguish between the three factors. *Toma* is however the dominant mobility pattern, as I discuss below. Factors of subsistence mobility and more regular economic activities are also listed above, but the former fall outside of the research scope focused mainly on long-term mobility considerations, and are not contemplated in detail. A similar reasoning applies to the regular and irregular economic activities, but I devote the entire Chapter Five to gold work, owing to the impact of this activity on Baka sociality and mobility. Economic activities such as gold work and the search for the good life and economic prosperity can be distinguished on a temporal scale, relating to either short-term or long-term mobility considerations respectively. Sorcery plays an overarching role and often

constitutes a trigger for *toma*, but further field research would be needed to substantiate position and relevance within the *motivational complex*.

4.4.2 Mobility Patterns

Within the motivational complex, distinct mobility patterns emerge. The patterns consist of repeated separations and bringing together of family or clan units in endless movements, of fission and fusion, of *modulated movement*. Some separations are forever, but continuing *toma*, *molongo* and *circulation* counter this and ensure and maintain regular contact and information exchange. *Toma*, therefore, signifies not only a mobility factor, but also a mobility pattern. This pattern corresponds to previous descriptions of Baka mobility defined by the aggregation and dispersal of family units (Vallois & Marquer 1976, Bahuchet 1992b, LeClerc 2001), to show that mobility is not only defined by seasonal economic factors, but by social relations, and emotional attachment or animosity. My analysis highlights that this is not only the case with regard to the Baka group (LeClerc 2001), but the historical study brought out the importance of the interactions with Baka neighbours beyond socio-economic considerations in Baka mobility or immobility. This, in turn, stresses the extension of the unit of analysis beyond the residential group in long-term analyses.

The Baka I worked with and, also in part their forefathers spent long periods in and around one location, a fact that supports the argument that Baka are not averse to a (part-)sedentarised lifestyle (cf. 3.1.5). In terms of mobility, this means we are looking at long periods of 'relative immobility'; I say relative because there would have and still is daily mobility within the 15 km radius (*ici*, cf. 4.2.6). In lieu of an emic term, I posit 'wave' to summarise the mobility pattern or intricate *modulated movement* of the Baka' search and travel for a better life. By this I mean the setting off - staying for a while - setting off again, sometimes to continue, sometimes to return, and either can be a long way or just a few kilometres away. The idea of 'wave' suggests the summary picture of these movements over time, and was termed as such by the Baka themselves. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between the different time scales of the different mobilities, for example daily mobility, *molongo* and migration, different types of movement, which occur for different reasons at different

times. This distinction between short-term and long-term temporal concepts and practices is something known throughout anthropological studies (Gell 1992), and underlines Biesbrouck's observation that hunter-gatherer mobility theories have been too focused on the annual cycle (Biesbrouck 1999). Allowing for the long-term perspective makes evident the importance, if not the supremacy, of social factors in mobility, migration and immobility.

The area around Mintom, being the furthest north in Cameroon (cf. 4.1.2), addresses the fact that much movement in my analysis, strictly speaking, is cross-border or transnational migration. I questioned whether or not to refer to this body of literature, as the Baka do not perceive their movements as such, and national borders do not constitute a physical hindrance to their movement. Also, the inter-ethnic relationships of this region are not directly played out along national boundaries, but in terms of 'good ambiance' and ill treatment. On the other hand, the Baka discriminate against each other on grounds of nationality (cf. 2.4), even though the emic view is that national borders *per se* are of little relevance to their lives. From a historical perspective, the Baka went on *molongo* from and through Cameroon, Congo and Gabon, irrespective of national boundaries. During the life history interviews, so many times my interviewees would answer first with Congo, then say Cameroon, or vice versa, that I learned to ask simply for village names, ignoring national territorial considerations. Whether a place is located in Congo, Cameroon or Gabon is becoming relevant only now as the Baka have learned, just like their immediate neighbours, of the connection between natural resources and government or international funding for mining and related job opportunities, or of the connection between NGO aid projects and improved living conditions. This different appreciation of what are 'resources' is heightening the Baka intra-population differentiation, as I detail further in Chapter Five.

These observations lead me to follow the argument of Salazar that in such cases it is important to focus on regional mobility rather than international migration, analysing it in the specific context in which it occurs (Salazar 2010: 64). In the case of the Baka, the geographical regional context is the tropical forest irrespective of national borders; the cultural and socio-economic context is constituted by the intra-group and extra-

group interaction, in which nationality is starting to play a role as identity marker. From a contemporary perspective, region may be the appropriate term to describe Baka movements, which expand beyond the radius of 15 km around their main village.

In Kabisa and Adjab, there was constant talk of 'suffering', and the repeated appeals to me to act like a god, or an NGO aid worker, and pay for whatever it was the Baka thought necessary. Mixed in with this 'web of meaning', which is Gabon, were several voices about what the Baka (of Adjab) should do next to improve their situation. One man argued that the Baka in Adjab are too dependent on and limited by riverine travel, too far away from the benefits of a larger town, specifically Makokou. The mobility idea derived from these facts is to move to a location along the road between Maibut and Makokou to be better connected to urbanity. It will be interesting to see whether or not this idea will prevail and become reality; what is clear is that the search for 'Gabon', for a better life of wellbeing, economic prosperity and parity, and freedom from discrimination and violence, continues. Such a move would indeed alter the special situation of the Adjab Baka now living on the edge of a river, and 'relocate them to the roadside' like so many other *forest peoples* (Knight 2003). However, compared to the general negative (academic) assessment of roadside relocation, the Baka from Adjab are discussing this amongst themselves and consider undertaking this move without external forces urging them to do so. From this a parallel can be drawn to my earlier argument of 'auto-generated' sedentarisation along the Ivindo (cf. 3.1.5). If the Baka were to move as suggested at the time of my departure, this dynamic would amount to 'auto-generated' mobility and 'auto-generated' sedentarisation.

This development could then be considered as a further 'wave', and of the Baka no longer living in the forest, but moving on roads, and living in villages along roads. It would also be in line with the general rural-urban migration movement within Gabon from the small villages to larger towns and the capital Libreville, and the regional migration into Gabon (Bakewell & de Haas 2007, cf. 1.2.1). As AO. summarised:

There are many Cameroonians who are here and who are now becoming Gabonese. There are many Congolese who are leaving home when things do

not work out there. They come to Gabon and now they are becoming Gabonese (AO. 19.7.2011)

Thus, 'Gabon' is not just a guiding star for the Baka, but for many others. In addition, with the Baka there is still that sensation of fleeting, of people not actually knowing or planning where they were going, of sporadic and spontaneous movement, of an ideational mobility hard to grasp with words, a topic I address further in Chapter Six (cf. 6.4).

As the reader may have noticed, the mobility analysis within the historical account begins at group and clan level on the Congo-Cameroon border, but as the stories and locations of movement are situated further south towards and in Makokou, they become more related to and defined by individual mobility histories.¹¹⁰ The stories raise the theoretical question of how to conceptualise individual and group mobility in one framework, which is the issue I address in the following in Chapter Five. How do individual Baka dreams of going to Libreville or Europe go together with forest foraging, clan marriage rules, and lack of funds?

¹¹⁰ This is undoubtedly due to the logistical and temporal limitations on the research process; I only heard *about* Cameroon and Congo, so the information is indirect, less detailed and about the past, whereas in Gabon I garnered data through face-to-face engagement with living individuals.

5 From Mobility to Motility

This chapter addresses the question of how to account for individual mobility in a forest forager context. As detailed in the introduction (cf. 1.1.1), conceptual approaches in both the archaeological and the anthropological discussion of hunter-gatherers have examined mobility as part of human-environment interaction with regard to factors such as (food) resources, territoriality and seasonality. The predominant focus has been on the observable facts of resource-oriented mobility, which led, for example, to Binford's typology of *foragers* and *collectors*, and the differentiation between *residential mobility* and *logistical mobility* (Binford 1980). These continue to find application in archaeology today (Perreault & Brantingham 2011). The previous chapters of this thesis have built on ethnographic work with the Baka indicating how social factors are relevant to mobility, overriding purely environmentally determined approaches which pay little attention to the 'social environment' (Vallois & Marquer 1976, Dhellemmes 1986, LeClerc 2001, Joiris 2003). Chapter Four documented the dynamic of *toma*, following family members, as one of the principal factors in Baka mobility, and as one aspect of the *motivational complex* of social, economic and environmental factors as well as Baka mobility values.

In previous conceptualisations of hunter-gatherer mobility, the analytical focus has been set on hunter-gatherers as a group and on group mobility patterns, rarely on distinct life histories of individuals. As Biesbrouck has argued in divergence from dominant practice, 'the elements to be studied are individuals and nuclear families (or combinations of these) as opposed to residential groups' (Biesbrouck 1999). Bird-David has also addressed this bias in the study of hunter-gatherers focused on (corporate kinship) groups, roles and rules, arguing for an acknowledgement of the 'functional importance of single individuals' in facilitating fluidity and autonomy in hunter-gatherers (Bird-David 1987). Attempts to address individual mobility have been made, for example by Hewlett (Hewlett et al. 1982), but this was focused on quantitative research of individual life course mobility.

In Chapter Four, I related stories and indicators of individuals departing from group patterns, by being the first to initiate a new destination, to follow 'Gabon' in search of economic parity and freedom from violence. These movements mirror increasing social change and the mobility of 'leaving the forest' (cf. 2.4), which is not only physical and one aspect of 'auto-generated' sedentism, but which also suggests a deeper shift towards values focused on village life. This change coincides with the diversification of livelihoods beyond tropical forest foraging, to include subsistence practices such as hunting or honey collecting, as well as *bricolage* (waged labour) and salaried work. The latter can be as trackers for wildlife conservation projects or working at gold sites, as I describe in the following. There has been a shift from a foraging economy to a mixed economy in which gold mining plays a prominent role. With the money they earn, Baka participate in the cash economy and acquire personal material possessions. Taken together, these facts make evident that Baka social and spatial mobility differs from the 'nomadic foraging norm', and cannot be sufficiently conceptualised by models focusing predominantly on environmental factors and resource mobility.

In this chapter, I propose the concept of *motility*, which originates from biology and urban geography and refers to the *capacity or potential to be mobile*, as suitable to addressing the mobility diversity I encountered in Baka sociality in North-Eastern Gabon, and as an up-to-date way of approaching the changes in forager mobility. I present the case study of a man named PJ. and his work in the gold industry of Gabon to test the concept of *motility*. The benefit of employing *motility* is that it not only looks at actualised observable mobility, but also considers the choices and limitations, which *precede* movement. *Motility*, thereby, enables us to study the minutiae of the mobility details of individual life histories, which, in turn, constitutes an addition to hunter-gatherer theory-building often-focused on group mobility.

Motility also addresses another issue, namely the limitation of mobility models to questions of space and territoriality lacking a temporal dimension, which has been noted in the archaeological, anthropological, and sociological discussions (Kaufmann 2002), and which I addressed in the introduction. In considering the difference between potential and outcome, the actualisation of capacity as mobility or

immobility, *motility* evidences the personal, temporal variability in mobility and can help to document social change and inequality. *Motility* may, thereby, contribute to overcoming the environmental-social divide in the analysis of forager mobility. Given the discrimination against 'pygmies' and specifically against the Baka by their Bakwele neighbours from along the Ivindo as described earlier (cf. 2.3), the concept of *motility*, therefore, also suggests itself to the endeavour of taking a different approach to inter-ethnic relations.

I begin the argument for *motility* by showing how changing living arrangements are an example of the limitations of older mobility models, and why my attention was drawn to ideas from urban mobility. The focus of analysis in this chapter is set on economic mobility, but the inquiry also documents that the economic emphasis is incomplete without addressing dynamics of sociality, an aspect, which I then develop further in Chapter Six.

5.1 Gold Work and Dual Residence

The Congo Basin and North-Eastern Gabon are dotted with sites of mostly unregulated artisanal gold mining. These sites constitute an important source of income for many of the local communities as well as migrants from other African countries (Lahm 2002), although this type of gold work poses serious health risks, such as mercury poisoning,¹¹¹ and causes considerable environmental damage (WWF France 2012). Baka migrated to the Ivindo region starting around 60 years ago, some attracted by the gold stories of Gabon (cf. 4.1.3).



Map 5.1 – Overview of Gold Sites in North-Eastern Gabon including Mikouka and Minkébé

¹¹¹ Mercury is used to wash the gold and damages, in particular, hands, feet and the environment.

Gold work has been described as preferential to the dangers of the ivory trade, which is 'an evil thing before which the quest for gold sinks into a parlour game' as you can get killed for working in the ivory trade (Kingsley 2002). The Baka themselves share this opinion in that the elephant hunt is the 'big hunt and your heart has to be in it to be successful', but 'it doesn't pay, it is bad work and a waste of time'. Instead, one Baka man was keen to emphasise that 'gold work is self-determined - my work, my money, my pocket', and that he would only give the money he makes to his wife, and not share it with the community. This statement constitutes another example of a man trying to keep his money for himself (*beignet* selling, cf. 2.4.1), and in which he seems to have been at least partly successful. Working their own gold sites, or assisting others as hunters, cooks or porters at the gold locations, has become a substantial source of income, and the point in which they differ most from their kinfolk elsewhere in Gabon, Cameroon or Congo (Cathryn Townsend personal communication, Knight 2003, Paulin 2007).

Baka men often go to the gold sites for only 1-3 days, to get just enough money to tide them and their families over for a while, which appears somewhat closer to concept of immediate return, but the money made was, to my knowledge, only distributed amongst direct family. Moreover, these movements between Baka villages and gold sites call for an interpretation, which cannot be achieved solely by employing forager mobility concepts. In addition, Baka dwellings today range from mud-walled houses, some of which have up to four rooms; to the 'traditional' Baka round huts covered with leaves called *mongulu*; to simple tent-type structures made from wooden poles and large black plastic sheets; to shacks built with various materials in Makokou (cf. 3.1.1). Categorising mobility and settlement types, defining sedentism and nomadism, is as difficult today as it has been in the past (Kelly 1992: 43), and the increase in sedentarisation is a clear indicator that Baka movement is no longer adequately described as a dynamic of regular, seasonal dispersal and aggregation.

Four types of spatial movement or mobility of people have been proposed from within urban geography (Schuler et al. 1997): *residential mobility* (with reference to residential cycle); *migration* (international and interregional immigration and

emigration); *travel* (tourism and business travel); and *daily mobility* (such as commuting), all of which may combine to hybrid forms such as *dual residence* (Kaufmann 2002). The situation of several young Baka couples is such that the man lives in the gold sites, regularly sends money back to his wife in the village, and only returns home after several weeks, whilst the woman shares the house with and cooks for her mother-in-law and her small children. This mobility pattern does not fit neatly into the idea of hunter-gatherer residential mobility, and I would argue that these movements are better considered in the hybrid category of *separate home* or *dual residence* (Kaufmann 2002). The move from village to gold site for short, but irregular intervals could be considered as a form of Baka *commuting*. The same rationale may be applied to those Baka working as trackers for conservation projects.

The idea of Baka *commuting* supports the proposed extension of existing mobility notions beyond concerns of seasonal environmental parameters and resource availability or strictly kin-related movements, and calls for a clearer and more fluid conceptual interrelation of social and spatial mobility.¹¹² Thinking about Baka *dual residence* suggests that urban mobility concepts can be applied to tropical forest foragers, but leaves the difficulty of how to account for personal mobility stories, and how to cover overall diversity in movement and settlement patterns. It returns us to the question of whether the concept of *motility*, which I introduce in the following, can account for the temporal and personal variability in today's Baka mobility.

¹¹² These are both complex terms, but I generally understand spatial mobility to refer to geographical or physical movement, and social mobility to indicate the density of intra- and intergenerational development, including a change in income or position within the group.

5.2 Motility – the actor’s potential to move

Motility can be defined as ‘the capacity of a person to be mobile’ (Kaufmann 2002).¹¹³ Analysing *motility* means taking one step back from observable mobility, and ‘focusing on the actor, or group of actors, *before* they become mobile’, so looking at ‘the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the domain of mobility and puts this potential to use for his or her activities’ (Kaufmann 2002: 37, emphasis in the original). *Motility* suggests itself for an application to anthropological questions, as it ‘incorporates structural and cultural dimensions of movement and action in that the actual or potential capacity for spatio-social mobility may be realised differently or have different consequences across varying socio-cultural contexts’ (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750).¹¹⁴ It is further argued that *motility* can be the link between spatial and social mobility, as ‘*motility* goes beyond a simplistic separation between social mobility and geographic space by integrating these on the level of actors, culture, networks, institutions and society’ (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 745).

Kaufmann breaks down *motility* into three interdependent determinants: *access*; *competence* or *skill*; and *appropriation*. In short, *access* refers to the available choices in mobility, the ‘different forms and degrees of mobility’; *competence* includes physical, acquired and organisational skills and abilities, in particular ‘to recognise and make use of *access*’; and *appropriation* is the interpretation and acting on ‘a particular choice, including non-action’ which is ‘shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of agents, as it relates to strategies, motives, values and habits’ (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750).¹¹⁵ Most noteworthy here is the fact that aspirations, motivation and decision-making processes of actors are *explicitly* taken into account in

¹¹³ *Motility* is originally a term used in biology and medicine, which refers to the ability of an organism (ie fish), body or body part (ie eye or digestive system) to move, consuming energy in the process.

¹¹⁴ This contextual approach encompasses not only persons, but also goods and information Kaufmann et al. (2004).

¹¹⁵ It is noteworthy to appreciate here the nuances in Kaufmann’s writing, for example, when comparing the writings from 2002 and 2004, ‘*skills*’ become ‘*competence*’, presumably to encompass more clearly that which is innate and that which is learned. The notion of bounded movement seems to gain importance, and the idea of limitation is explicitly mentioned in relation to physical ability.

understanding mobility.¹¹⁶ The emphasis of analysis is on the personal project and reflects the 'key idea [that] every actor has an own potential for mobility, which can be transformed into movement according to aspirations and circumstances' (Kaufmann 2002: 15).

The important dynamic of *motility*, is to analyse any type of constraint and its impact as mobility, or immobility, as the 'study of the *potential* of movement will reveal new aspects of the mobility of people with regard to possibilities, and constraints of their manoeuvres' (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 749, emphasis in the original). For example, constraints to *access* could be 'the means of transportation and communication.., [the accessibility] of services and equipment at a given time,... location-specific cost, logistics ..., [or] the socio-economic position' (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750).¹¹⁷

Forms of mobility are further related to the different 'social temporalities' of daily life and the life course, a temporal distinction well known in anthropology (Gell 1992), and shown to be indispensable to mobility considerations in the previous chapter (cf. 4.4.2). The impact of temporality has been developed into the idea that mobility constitutes a form of capital, analogous to Bourdieu's other forms of economic, cultural and social capital, which can be exchanged (Bourdieu 1986, Kaufmann et al. 2004: 754),¹¹⁸ in that 'mobility is a value which carries its own differentiations. Using it effectively may allow one to acquire social status, while neglecting it may lead to its loss' (Canzler et al. 2008: 52). Conceptualising *motility* as mobility capital and analysing how mobility potential is enacted or constrained over a temporal expanse is advocated

¹¹⁶ This assessment also refers to Simon's critique of optimisation models. He had introduced aspiration levels into the debate in that the 'balance between the time required to meet needs and the total time available is maintained by the raising and lowering of aspiration levels' (Simon 1956). Simon concluded that an organism with multiple goals will aim for 'satisficing' not optimizing, whereby 'a satisficing path, is a path that will permit satisfaction at some specified level of all of its needs' (Simon 1956).

¹¹⁷ Looking at the definition of *access* and the 'location-specific cost', it is interesting to recall the notion of optimisation, for which the 'environment is seen as made up of resources whose acquisition entails costs and benefits' (Kelly 1995). Thus, the (limiting) costs of mobility are a concern in both approaches. The emphasis on contextualisation and constraint is particularly interesting, as it constitutes one suggested solution to the difficulties with OFT argued from within evolutionary biology in that Gray suggested 'to resolve the problems of OFT by rejecting functional explanations and reformulating organism—environment relations in terms of reciprocally constrained construction Gray (1987).

¹¹⁸ Hakim has argued that 'erotic capital' should be considered as the fourth type of personal capital in addition to economic, cultural and social capital in that it is 'increasingly important in the sexualised culture of affluent modern societies' Hakim (2010).

as a tool not only for gauging mobility and immobility as such, but also for making evident and conceptualising societal inequalities and social change (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 754, Flamm & Kaufmann 2006). Other forms of capital are seen as referring only to vertical hierarchies, but:

If spatial mobility is becoming essential to the construction of one's social position, may we not consider motility as a capital in its own right? Individuals may own it in small or large quantities, but above all they may own it in different ways, ... [as] motility refers both to the vertical and horizontal dimension of social status (Canzler et al. 2008).

Linking stratification and space, the analysis of mobility potential and outcome can be studied on a micro, meso and macro level; topics for such an analysis could be, for example, *access* to resource exchange (micro), *appropriation* of spatial mobility by different household members (meso), or the impact of geopolitical policies across regions (macro) (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 752).

Application and Critique of *Motility*

The concept of *motility* and the idea of focusing on the potential to mobility have been applied in the field of gender studies by Iris Young with regard to woman's bodily existence. In *Throwing Like A Girl*, Young examines the 'three modalities of feminine motility', to state that a woman experiences 'her body as a *thing* at the same time that she experiences it as a capacity' (Young 1980: 145, emphasis in the original).¹¹⁹ *Motility* has also come to be of importance in the field of sociology (Bauman 2000), and in human geography in distinguishing between *mobility* and *motility*, as has been recently emphasised:

¹¹⁹ The three modalities are '*ambiguous transcendence*, an *inhibited intentionality*, and a *discontinuous unity* with its surroundings' Young (1980). In her analysis, Young draws on Merleau-Ponty's locating intentionality in *motility*, whereby 'the possibilities which are opened up in the world depend on the mode and limits of the bodily "I can"' (Young 1980: 145, quoting Merleau-Ponty 1962: 110-112, 137, 148).

The term 'mobility' is used time and again in the sense of a disposition to mark the willingness of a subject or household to move house or to change a social position. This terminological irregularity can be avoided if the term 'motility', native to biology, is used to express the willingness to be mobile (Weichhart 2009: 15, my translation).

However, Weichhart maintains the distinction between social and spatial mobility (Weichhart 2009: 15), and does not employ Kaufmann's three elements of access, skill and appropriation. Other *motility* advocates are those advancing the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry 2006), especially John Urry, who has written in particular on 'motility patterns' in auto- and aeromobilities (Featherstone et al. 2005, Urry 2007), and Kesselring, who has used the concept to study 'mobility pioneers' (people living in mobile worlds, as he defines them), and their 'mobility strategies' (Kesselring 2006). Kesselring analysed how these people manage their lives, what were options for and constraints to mobility, to conclude with three mobility patterns.¹²⁰ Again this analysis does not employ Kaufmann's three *motility* determinants, although Kesselring is looking at exactly these issues, and I would argue that his study would gain much from such a three-dimensional structured approach. Kaufmann himself is well aware of the central criticism to his three determinants in that:

As access, skill, and appropriation are inextricably linked they do not provide adequate analytical differentiation of motility. Having aspirations, plans and projects – like access – is a skill; acquiring skills and giving oneself the means to gain certain types of access are aspirations. Having skills gives us access. In the same way having aspirations can be seen as access as well (Kaufmann 2011: 44).

Urry had argued to combine all three elements under the term *access*, in his understanding made up of four components, which are economic, physical, organisational, and temporal (Class et al. 2003, Urry 2007). Employing Bourdieu's

¹²⁰ The three mobility patterns are: Centred mobility management, Decentred mobility management, and Virtual mobility management (Kesselring 2006).

notion of capital, Urry argues further to reconceive access as *network capital*, which itself is comprised of eight elements (Urry 2007).¹²¹ However, *network capital* is not an attribute of the individual (Urry 2007), which highlights the distinction between Kaufmann's focus on the individual life project, and Urry's systemic approach as a proponent of complexity theory. Kaufmann 'proposes to leave this point open for further discussion', generalising that 'what *is* crucial to maintain is that an individual or group can have more or less motility, [...] and different, often incomparable *types* of mobility', which can be sedentism as well as mobility (Kaufmann 2011).

With regard to anthropological theory building, one of the highlights of the notion of *motility* may be the conceptualisation as mobility capital and as a tool for the description and explanation of inequality, which remains a cross-cultural research topic where anthropology can make a major contribution as a discipline (Tilly 2001). A central concern may be that the theoretical considerations behind *motility* are drawn from studies of societies with higher levels of mobility infrastructure, which raises the question to which extent it is possible to transfer the *motility* concept from the urban (transport-related) setting to, for example, the tropical forests of Gabon. Can such a concept to analyse mobility do justice to each particular case study and the emic dimensions involved? I now turn to the analysis of Baka artisanal gold work in North-Eastern Gabon, to see whether *motility* allows for the consideration of both group and individual biography in the context of modern day tropical post-forager mobility.

¹²¹ The eight elements are: 1. array of appropriate documents, visas, money, qualifications; 2. others (workmates, friends and family members) at-a-distance; 3. movement capacities; 4. location free information and contact points; 5. communication devices; 6. appropriate, safe and secure meeting places; 7. access to cars, planes etc; 8. time and other resources to manage and coordinate 1-7 (Urry 2007: 197-198).

5.3 PJ.'s Motility in Gold Work

To assess whether *motility* can be transferred from the urban context in order to enrich the understanding of Baka mobility, I would like to introduce 'PJ.', a Baka man of about 45. He is the second eldest son from the fourth wife of his father, and he himself has had three wives, fathered many children, 4 of whom are living. He is a strong, solid man with a broad grin, who likes to wear flamboyant football shirts. PJ. is an important man in the Baka community on the Upper Ivindo, because he is level headed and considered an authority on the topic of gold mining. I draw on his direct experience, as well as case studies and stories of other Baka along the Ivindo. By so doing, I support the argument that *motility* is identified on an individual level, but it is not formed individually' and is 'formatted by the life course of those involved and their financial, social and cultural capital' (Kaufmann 2002: 40). Having studied life histories as my central research method, the data collected is suitable to this theory building.

PJ. spent the first years of his life in Été, the small village on the river Ivindo near the Gabonese-Congolese border, the outskirts of which lead directly into thick rainforest (see map and information on village of Été under cf. 4.2.8). Growing up in this environment, PJ. described 'not knowing money, not knowing gold, but only knowing small jobs'. He was already a teenager when he and the other Baka first started hearing about gold in Congo, either through travelling to larger villages for provisions, or when kin visited with news from other (distant) places. The Été Baka would discuss this information amongst themselves and, as PJ. described, express their worry about not being able to participate. At some point, they heard of a new gold site several kilometres downstream in Gabon, and while PJ. stayed in Été, his father-in-law and other Baka went to work there, and so, as PJ. summed up, 'the gold came to us Baka like a joke', this statement reflecting the welcome nature of this development.

PJ.'s personal contact with the world of gold work was as a guide for white foreigners interested in the gold trade, and actually seeing gold sparked his wish to join the excitement. Many years on, he discovered the gold site *Dieu Merci* at Mikouka on the River Nouna, which came to be of central importance to the village of Adjab in Gabon,

where the Baka from Été had resettled in 2001.¹²² PJ. had set out from Adjab with the aim to improve his economic situation, to be more *at ease* (cf. 3.2.3.3, cf. 3.3.3). ‘I cut the forest, to find how I can also make some money. I will try to find gold, because now I am poor. How can I live?’ he told me. He laughed when I asked whether he thought I would also be able to just walk off and find gold, and explained the procedure to me:

If you want to find gold, you must take the machete. If you have a gun, you put the gun on your shoulders, you take your spade. *Allez*, you go, you cut down the forest, you see the river. You tell yourself: the site of the river has fallen just like that. You follow the river a bit further down, you do a probe, you see the results, you probe again. You tell yourself: here is a good spot, I will come back to dig gold. You return with other people, and start working. You see the results. Everyday you work from 7am in the morning to 3 or 4pm in the afternoon (PJ. 2.8.2011).

Other Baka men and women from Abjab came to work at *Dieu Merci*, the men working gold or hunting during the day, the women preparing the various meals, and gathering forest produce. In some cases, a couple would only work for themselves, but often they would all share tasks, a group of men digging gold, some men hunting, the women cooking and looking after the children, which highlights Baka mixed economy.

PJ.’s pride in recounting his story serves as a good example that in the analysis of mobility and the choices available and decisions taken to actualise that mobility, relying only on facts of observable movement will never tell the whole story. It misses motivational considerations and the interaction of individual and group in bringing about mobility or immobility. In the case of the Baka, it would miss the dimension of heart, head and spirit and PJ.’s individual wish to *be at ease*, to have a good life. If we take the mobility determinant *access* to include the choice of economic activities available to tropical forest foragers, it allows us to see the possibility of gold work as a considerable change in the *access* available to the Baka as a group on a meso level, and

¹²² The move occurred following continued attacks by Congolese militias, which caused them to flee Été (cf. 4.2.9).

to PJ. at micro level; the potential to improve their or his financial situation includes not only selling meat or making paddles, but gold work. This case also confirms that PJ.'s motility does not exist without relation to the group, that the composition of family and household¹²³ play a central role (Kaufmann 2002). PJ. on his own would not have been able to exploit the gold site Mikouka as successfully, and, had he pursued his endeavours without reference to Baka sociality, I imagine he would have been shunned in a way similar to the Baka woman D., as I detail later in this chapter (cf. 5.3.3).

5.3.1 Motoring Skills and Mobility Capital

In analysing the *motility* of PJ. and other Baka, I now assess the physical mobility involved in travelling to and from the gold work sites. All along the Ivindo and its tributaries, lacking any roads, transport is normally by motorised or rowed *pirogue*, by dugout canoe. No official riverine transport company operates along the Ivindo, so there is no set timetable; boats are owned by various people, and leave if and when they are ready. There are many pirogues, which carry only provisions to be delivered to the village shops along the river, but most transport both passengers and their luggage, and cargo.

It is with these pirogues that the Baka who want to travel to Makokou or the gold fields will catch a lift. This quite literally means deciding that you are ready to go, packing up a small bundle of clothes and personal items early in the morning, and listening for the sound of a motor. This event will normally set a kid to run down to the river and signal to the passing pirogue that there is someone wanting to travel. The pirogue will turn into the small landing bay and take on board the waiting passenger(s). More often than not, the few pirogues passing are going the wrong way, or are already full up. Knowing this, Baka and other passengers must simply wait until a travel opportunity arises. To the reader, this signals the very different sense of time

¹²³ The definition of 'household' has undergone several changes in the last few years, changing from a closed, spatial unit with a designated household head to the concept of the 'multi-locational household', whereby members of these households live in two or more locations, mainly in a rural and an urban one (Schmidt-Kallert 2009).

prevailing on the Ivindo. It is not possible to plan travel according to a schedule of arrival and departure in a way most people are used to. On the contrary, uncertainty is an essential aspect of this *motility*.

It was with great pride that PJ. told me about having his own out-board motor, describing how easy it had been to buy it with the large income from gold mining. PJ.'s statement struck me, as other examples had documented how Baka men and women had been prevented from accumulating wealth (cf. 2.4.1), and I propose a twofold explanation for his success. Firstly, he was admired for having the motor as something, which benefitted the Baka as a group, and it seems that the motor was seen as his property, and as that of the group. Secondly, he acquired it away from the village at the gold site, which he was in charge of, and I suggest that the impact of the change in location and his revered status, was to place him beyond the levelling mechanisms.

PJ. attached his motor to the boat of his *ami*¹²⁴ from the neighbouring village Mvadi, and seems to have used it for several months.¹²⁵ In terms of physical mobility, this allowed PJ. to organise travelling to and from the gold sites independently of other transport options. Moreover, it was mainly PJ.'s son, C., who would use motor and boat. As PJ. described:

‘It was him who would often take the motor. Two, three days, then he would return. Sometimes he would go as far as [the provincial capital] Makokou to buy goods to bring back to the gold site’ (PJ. 2.8.2011).

PJ. is here recounting how he and his son become part of the riverine network, transporting people and goods on the waters. This constitutes a large increase for PJ. and his son in *motility*, especially *physical* and *organisational skills* by learning to be a *piroquier*, the person steering the dugout. It is indeed an acquired skill to know how and where to navigate on the Ivindo and its tributaries, as they are not very deep.

¹²⁴ *Ami*, French for friend, describes a particular (kin) relationship between a Baka and someone from another ethnic group, which may be an economic exchange relationship, one aspect of which may be ‘free’ transport to the gold fields (cf. 6.1.1; see also Joiris 2003).

¹²⁵ The Baka only carve small canoes, not large-sized ones suitable for motorised riverine transport.

Especially in the dry season, it is important to avoid the many rocks in the river, which otherwise can easily lead to the keel-less pirogues capsizing. It can be assumed that during the time he had the boat and the gold fields were open, PJ.'s *ami* benefitted financially from any use the boat was put to. However, I became witness to this man coming to Adjab, seeking the return of his boat, and PJ. insisting he wanted to keep it, obviously very reluctant to give up his extended *access* and *appropriation*. This particular breakdown illustrates the problem of the overlap of the three *motility* determinants, but also shows how they can be usefully incorporated to give detail and depth to an analysis: in this case, *access* refers to the opportunity to become part of the riverine network; *competence* to the nautical skills necessary for safe navigation; and *appropriation* to the boat as a means of enacting *access* and *skill*. In this specific case, it could also be considered to group *access* and *competence* as the prerequisite of *appropriation*.

Looking back in time, we recall that to move for the Baka meant walking in the forest; Baka would travel by boat only in exceptional circumstances, or, as still today, paddle dugout canoes for daily trips to near-by villages and to sites along the river in order to fish, gather or hunt. However, for long-distance riverine travel to the gold sites or the provincial capital, Baka, like anyone else, depend on motorised transport, and travelling by pirogue has become an established practice in Baka society. But only for some, as the obvious limit to any riverine mobility is the cost of boarding the pirogue, or the cost of buying petrol for a motor, and often Baka cannot travel owing to the lack of funds, a lack of *access*. Mobility has been deemed a new factor of social differentiation (Bauman 1998), and between those who earn money they can spend on travel and those who don't. This is not only true for urbanites, but also for Baka on the Ivindo. Moreover, in both cases the difference between the haves and have-nots of travel funds creates tension and inequality within a group, emphasizing the correlation between sociality and mobility dynamics, and the growing differentiation amongst the Baka (cf. 2.4).

From the *motility* perspective, PJ. has used gold mining to increase his *access*, gain new *skills*, and acquire new knowledge, which has helped him to enact a higher level of

spatial and of social mobility. His son C. has also increased his *motility*, and one might argue, has benefitted from his father's. Both Baka women and women from other ethnic groups admired C. He engaged in a relationship with a young Baka girl and she became pregnant. Against the will of her parents and clan marriage rules, they stayed together, which constitutes an interesting example of the current social change in Baka society. It is suggested that the impact of C.'s newfound *motility*, his mobility capital, is so large that it outweighs and overrides established Baka social norms; C.'s mobility capital augments his economic and social capital to place him beyond the restrictions of clan marriage rules.

5.3.2 Making money... and sharing it

Considerable sums of money can be made in the artisanal gold sites set in the tropical forest far away from other human habitation, and daring traders ensure that this money can immediately be spent on things other than food staples, alcohol or cigarettes. The main items sold are clothes designed in the style of rap culture; SD memory cards holding the latest hit songs; radios with a slot for USB or SD-cards to play those songs on; and various other electrical goods, such as generators. Those Baka in North-Eastern Gabon working the gold sites have acquired material possessions with the money they earn,¹²⁶ and can no longer be considered to be within a purely immediate return economy with little interest in private property and mechanisms to counter hoarding behaviour (Woodburn 1982: 2). The possession of, for example, an out-board motor by one individual is not self-evident. On the one hand, it forms a great achievement, an example of outstanding *appropriation*, which yields admiration for P.J. from his older brother, but on the other hand, signifies a deviation from egalitarian sharing norms. Another example of this is N.C., a young Baka woman of 28, who delighted in buying opulent eveningwear.¹²⁷ The motor and eveningwear show how gold money is used to satisfy individual aspirations, and

¹²⁶ It is interesting to note here a paradox: unsavoury characters often work gold sites, but with the Baka, it is the group, which may be considered 'elite' which goes out to do the gold work.

¹²⁷ Rest assured of my surprise when we were standing in Adjap in a house walled with black plastic sheets, a mattress lying on the earthen floor, and she opened a ragged bag to show me a delicate light-blue taffeta dress, declaring excitement at the prospect of having an occasion to wear it.

constitute loci where spatial and societal mobility merge. Both cases also show how the income generated from the gold fields is beginning to divide Baka from a material point of view, thereby challenging fundamental norms and egalitarian levelling mechanisms.

One of the social norms is that children take care of their parents once they are encumbered by old age and can no longer lead a life directed by individual autonomy (cf. 3.2.3.3). With the proceeds from the gold sites, PJ. supports his direct family and his mother YC., who has been paralysed for many years and now walks with a cane. The support for the mother is divided amongst the kin network of her sons. Whilst PJ. and others are away earning money, some of the other brothers stay at home in the village to take care of and protect the houses and other family members such as their ailing mother, which again emphasises the role of family situation and household composition in *motility*, because they 'imply complex compromises of the individuals involved' (Kaufmann 2002). C., as PJ.'s envoy, transports the money from the gold sites to Adjab.

Increased mobility for one person may mean a decrease for another in that 'mobilities always have relational impacts and we must question what those are' (Adey 2010). Considered in this light, it can be argued that earning money to satisfy the social demand of parental-offspring care and the associated mobility is a relational matter for a Baka clan, and a good example of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of *motility*. PJ.'s duty to provide for his mother, limits his personal *motility*, and necessitates a certain immobility on the part of his brothers, meaning that they must stay in the village whilst he is away being mobile; micro and meso levels of *motility*, mobility and immobility are interconnected, brought about by the physical immobility, a lack of ambulatory *competence*, of their mother who can no longer walk in the forest. In conversation, PJ. calmly described this process of sharing money and responsibilities amongst the brothers as something natural and self-evident. Some younger Baka men, on the contrary, spoke of wanting to work only for their own wife and children.

It is here interesting to consider the difference between *motility* and mobility, between capacity and observable fact. Some writers have gone so far as to say that *motility* is 'the very structure of modernity itself... generating, allowing, and demanding mobility' (Junge 2004). This understanding gives predominance to an enabling character of *motility*, whereas, following Kaufmann's direction, I employ it to analyse limitations on movement, which I see situated at the interstice of *motility* and mobility. In a way they are two sides of the same coin, or as has been said 'mobility and immobility always go hand in hand – in an odd double-pack called "motility"' (Beckmann 2005).

5.3.3 Endogenous and Exogenous Constraints

PJ.'s ability to make money at the gold site to support himself and his family including his mother is constrained in many ways. The obvious factor in the search for gold, to any aspiration of finding it, lies in the non-human parameter environment, which restricts the availability and quality of gold. Secondly, and again on the macro level, the Republic of Gabon is governed through a hierarchical structure with the president at the apex and village chiefs at the bottom of the pyramid (cf. 1.2.1). It is custom for the chiefs to be gifted in return for their protection and judgement. The village chief and the district chief would visit Mikouka to claim what they considered to be their share of the proceeds, which could range from CFA 20.000 to CFA 200.000 (about € 30 - € 300). It seems that in return PJ. was allowed to call himself *chef du chantier*, head of the Baka gold site, although this was never officially documented. Whenever the chiefs had visited, there was no money to send home to Adjab.

On the meso level, another constraint and source of loss are dishonest commercial partners, who run off with the proceeds. PJ. experienced this at least once, and it was this that caused him to try for his own independent site. However, in setting up the gold camp at *Dieu Merci*, he was dependent on his brother-in-law for practical and legal reasons. PJ.'s *motility* is limited by Baka social status within Gabon, as people so far mainly unrecognised as citizens and unable to enforce legal claims. The final aspect of exogenous constraint is again related to Gabonese national interests. For many

years, the artisanal gold mining took place without much interference by the state, but in May 2011, this changed, as the army forcefully evicted all Gabonese and foreign nationals from the gold fields, including the site of Mikouka. The group of Baka living and working in *Dieu Merci* too were forced to travel to or return to their villages (map of village of Adjab documents the increase in population and dwellings cf. 3.1.1.)

The return to Adjab meant the abrupt loss of income, and brought about first the extreme mobility of packing up and leaving at a moment's notice, followed by the severe and enforced immobility of having to while away the time in Adjab. The men would sit in the early morning and discuss their situation, current political developments concerning re-entry into the gold fields, and what could be done to improve their situation, showing the will to continue the search for a good life.¹²⁸ The doubling of the population overnight put increased pressure on the always-scarce food situation, and the intra-group diversity and individual *motilities*, became more apparent: the discrepancy in French language ability, the difference in material possessions, the surety with which Baka from the gold sites expressed their views on politics, but most of all their willingness to change something. The conditions of *access* had been changed again, this time not for the better.

PJ., had put down his name for a government scheme called *carte des orpailleurs*, gold worker's card, an official paper that would allow him to take up work in the gold sites legally and independently. He was very excited about this prospect to again improve his *access*, and determined to get this paper at a cost of CFA 7.000 (about € 10). He was waiting to hear whether he had been picked from the waiting list, and kept inquiring whether I would help him with all the details necessary for an application, as he was aware that he would need new *organisational skills* to engage with the authorities.

¹²⁸ One reason for closing the gold sites was to protect wildlife, as increased human presence through gold work had meant increased and indiscriminate hunting of protected species. In a quirk of fate, WWF ended up adapting their policy about the gold sites, when they realised that elephant poaching was on the rise in order to make up for the loss of income owing to eviction from the gold sites.

From an intra-group perspective, it is possible to argue that gold work is an expansion of *motility* predominantly for male Baka and a constraint on that of women, who 'only help' the men by cooking. However, some women work in the gold camps independently as healers. In one exceptional case D., a Baka woman from Cameroon started out by selling cut manioc leaves, and later prepared and sold entire meals to the gold workers at Minkébé in North-Eastern Gabon. With this money she returned to her village, and became involved in transporting goods. Having made even more money through this mobility activity, she built a house. PJ. described the sad response of the other Baka to her success:

When she returned to her village, she built a house. But oh, she has just died. She was killed because she has constructed that house. She had built a real house, imagine, a Baka woman! (PJ. 2.8.2011).

In this case, the fatal constraint was jealousy coming from within her own community. Constructing a *mongulu* used to be a women's task, building a house is now a male activity (cf. 3.1.1), and PJ.'s comments address the fact that D. had undermined the changing gender roles, as well as putting herself beyond egalitarian levelling mechanisms – with fatal consequences. In another instance, a young man in Kabisa had prepared and sold *beignets*, fritters, every morning, but had to relent after a month (cf. 2.4.1). The social repression following his attempt to earn some extra money, which he intended to keep for himself, was so intense, that he simply had to stop. One could also say, his attempt to increase his mobility capital was levelled, in line with Baka emic values countering hoarding behaviour and any attempts of an individual to distinguish itself from the group. So, why did and does the same not happen to PJ.? The difference between him and D. as well as the young beignet man seems to be that the other two worked only for themselves, whereas PJ. employs his *skills* for the benefit of the Baka in Mikouka and his family in Adjab. I suggest this is the reason why his *motility* has not been constrained, his social and mobility capital not been forcefully levelled. On the contrary, he has achieved situational leadership and status, and been accepted as an authority on the topic of gold work, according to Baka values.

These examples document that examining the dynamic between aspirations and constraints, whether exogenous or endogenous, suggests itself as a suitable way to analyse the process of how *motility* results in either mobility or immobility. This is the case, in particular, for individuals and relates to how *motility* is built through ‘compromises made between aspirations, projects and lifestyle’ (Kaufmann 2002). This dynamic is an on-going adaptive process, both at group and individual level, but only by recording the nuances of personal cases can we build adequate models of larger adaptive cycles (Widlok et al. 2012). This suggests the inherent value of extending the unit of analysis for the study of the mobility of egalitarian hunter-gatherers, post-foragers, and groups caught between different modes of subsistence and social organisation to include both group and personal biographies.

5.3.4 Inequality and Social Change

Within hunter-gatherer studies, and, in particular, ‘pygmy’ studies, discussions on discrimination and servitude with regard to the suppressed ‘pygmy’ minority have long governed discourse (cf. 2.3). Therefore, analysing the ‘geometries of power’ (Adey 2010) through *motility* can be considered as a further reason why the concept suggests itself to understanding the activities on the Upper Ivindo. In the attempt to successfully work gold, not only the legal issues already addressed above as constraints, but also existing rivalries amongst the different ethnic groups along the Ivindo were played out in the gold fields. For the Baka, they had to contend with discrimination and prejudice, but it seems to have inspired them more than anything, as orders by neighbouring groups not to work gold were countered with determination. As PJ. recounts:

‘We told ourselves that no, we too, we will go and discover our own river and work gold. One day, you take the boat, with the gold money in your pocket, and go home. People ask: Who’s gold field is it? It belongs to PJ.. People express surprise. It’s PJ., oh. Yes. (PJ. 2.8.2011).

The astonishment expressed at PJ.'s success by Ivindo neighbours underlines how gold work has empowered Baka on an individual personal and a group level, and increased their social mobility.

Applying *motility* has allowed us to chart the details of the development and continuous growth of mobility potential through gold work from the moment the Baka first heard about it, through their initial involvement as guides to other gold hunters, to their direct participation in the sites of others, and lately to PJ.'s management of the gold site *Dieu Merci* with all the obstacles and limitations the Baka have had to overcome. PJ. and other Baka individuals *appropriated* this new mobility choice with the aspiration to earn money to improve their economic situation, and thereby gained mobility capital they are slowly turning into social capital. From an individual perspective, PJ.'s mobility capital has changed his standing in the Baka community, and he is now a figure of authority.

Comparison of Baka and Bakwele

Applying the idea of capacity and *motility* to the comparison of Baka and Bakwele as ethnic groups is an interesting enterprise. Considering their respective *access* and economic choices evidences the obvious difference that the majority of Bakwele fish, and the majority of Baka hunt (elephants). However, pondering their physical *motility* on the river Ivindo, as with the majority of Baka, the majority of Bakwele have neither the funds to travel along the Ivindo, nor do they possess their own boats or motors. Nevertheless, the Bakwele as a group have more motorised boats *per se*, and through kinship or friendship ties, it may be easier to catch a lift with someone. It would be most appropriate to apply the concept of *motility* to the topic of knowledge of plants for medicinal purposes (cf. 2.3.1, cf. 2.4.2). There are expert persons in both ethnic groups, and existing social constructions (and stereotypes) are ill-fitted to supply a researcher with adequate data. Asking who has *skill*, *access* and *appropriation* of medicinal plant knowledge would provide a different picture, and show Baka and Bakwele to be rather more similar than generally postulated.

5.4 Mobility Pattern - Motility Profile

The concept of *motility*, the idea of *capacity* for movement, taken from the urban, transport related setting into the context of Baka tropical forest foragers, enables us to look at what's behind the actualisation of Baka mobility to see aspirations, choices and limitations of individual life histories, as well as socio-economic and socio-cultural change from a group perspective. Applying more established approaches around environmentally focused theories would have been inadequate to explain the variation in mobilities and the (new) motivational patterns behind Baka movement. On the contrary, it is conceivable to include environmental considerations, understood as involving ecological and social environment, in the concept of *motility*.

The story of PJ. tells of the aspiration underlying his mobility projects as a desire to improve daily and long-term living conditions (cf. 3.3.3), and shows how he, as an individual, but within the context of the Baka group, has acquired new skills, changed his outlook, and gained respect from other Baka and neighbours – his personal dimensions of *access*, *competence* and *appropriation*. From a Baka group perspective, I charted the three determinants in group mobility to the new resource of gold work, and the intra-group contestation of Baka norms regarding material possession or marriage, as well as emerging inequalities owing to new forms of mobility and income, which conflict with Baka demand-sharing. Also, I documented the social development from discriminated minority to, at least, part of the community experiencing social mobility owing to their gold income. As PJ. himself pointed out recalling the official Gabonese hierarchy whereby the Kota are at the bottom of the Bantu ladder (cf. 2.3.2): 'Some Baka are now better dressed than the Kota'. This statement emphasises the importance of economic capital in (Baka) social mobility, but more importantly evidences the interconnection of micro, meso and macro levels in forming and analysing mobilities. I have employed *motility* to show how social and economic change are not merely functions of a global system but rather reinstitute local roots change in historical and cultural processes.

By documenting the intricate links between mobility and sociality, and by going beyond the observable, *motility* gives *depth* to the analysis of mobility. With regard to

Baka livelihoods, it documents how their economic and other activities extend beyond the hunting-and-gathering of their forefathers. Detailing the empowering and limiting aspects of movement, where Baka and humans in general shape their environment and lives, it shows the dimension environmental determinism would miss. *Motility* allows us to see social change as process and the complex interactions on all temporal levels of daily life and life course. It permits us to consider PJ.'s individual achievement, but always within the context of Baka intra- and inter-group relationality. Finally, the concept of *motility* is congruent with the idea advanced in the notion of the *motivational complex*, whereby Baka mobility values (cf. 3.2.3), Baka aspirations and dreams, are what ties together the different dimensions of Baka mobility.

Accepting the idea that a Baka has *dual residence* helps break down the exoticism around the *forest people*. *Motility* can, therefore, both enrich the understanding of (post-)forager mobility, and, through building a connection between urbanity and forest, allow us to see Baka activities from a more realistic, contemporary perspective. Considering this focuses the discussion away from *Wild Yam debates* onto the diversity of constraining factors, and shows that *motility* may possibly be considered a human universal. I suggest that the concept of *motility* would allow for the conceptualisation of Baka mobility in general, as it considers all aspects of Baka (well) being and allows for Baka intra-group diversity.

Generally speaking, the notion of capability or capacity has gained scientific prominence in feminist, developmental, legal, and anthropological studies, (Nussbaum 2003, Sen 2005, Rapport 2010), and the field of mobility studies within anthropology and archaeology can gain much by incorporating this approach into theory building. I argue that going beyond observable mobility is essential not only for better understanding Baka mobility, but for the hunter-gatherer and post-forager context in general. It is important to acknowledge difference and sameness between urbanites and their transport concerns, where learning, decision-making and defining life goals are presumed to be part of the run of things, and (post-)foragers, who are still (even by some of the researchers working with them today) seen as people determined by their environment and lacking personal ambitions. The concept of *motility* can be a helpful

tool in bridging the gap between the ecologically focused and the social, as environmental concerns can be included in an analysis of *motility* to see their constraining and enabling effect as mobility or immobility. Moreover, with regard to the ethno-archaeological discussion and the notion that forager mobility is best understood as a continuum (Kent 1992: 636), in which *motility*, giving increased attention to aspirations, skills and access, may provide a more fine-grained analysis along the continuum. Support for this approach can also be drawn from Ingold, who has already argued for the greater appreciation of skills as biological *and* cultural phenomena (Ingold 2000).

As we saw in the previous chapter, a select few individuals initiated going to ‘Gabon’, before it became a trigger for significant and noticeable mobility of Baka towards Gabon and along the Ivindo. Therefore, to successfully model human mobility and social developments over longer periods of time (Widlok et al. 2012), it is important to include the analysis of personal stories, not just that of individuals as, for example, under OFT. Of course, the search will always be for *patterns* of mobility, particularly within archaeology, and therefore, I propose to distinguish between a *mobility pattern* and a *motility profile*. My contention is that considering mobility choices and actualised mobility and immobility as evidenced by the *motility profile*, gives depth to data analysis irrespective of the temporal or disciplinary application. The table below evidences the more detailed data available through the application of *motility*.

Mobility Pattern	Motility Profile	
Gold as (new) resource Movement to and from gold sites	Access	Choice to work at gold sites Having outboard motor
	Competence	Working gold Driving pirogue
	Appropriation	Finding own gold site Travelling to gold sites independently and transporting goods along Ivindo

Table 5.1 – Comparison of Mobility Pattern and Motility Profile

With regard to the scope of *motility*, as the potential, which comes before observable mobility on a phenomenological, social or spatial level, I argue that the strength of the concept depends (as with so many others) on the way it is operationalised. There is a

need to detail and break down *motility*, otherwise it can rightfully be criticised as an all-or-nothing approach, and the *motility* of a person or group would remain indistinguishable. A strict delimitation between the three *motility* determinants of *access*, *competence* and *appropriation* as acknowledged by Kaufmann will remain elusive, precisely because of their interrelatedness. However, I suggest that the important aspect is to view them as heuristic tools, which can be subject to change and refinement, in a way similar to Nussbaum's approach, whereby she states that her list of ten *capabilities* is not final (Nussbaum 2003). The difference between Kaufmann's focus on the individual and Urry's on the system explained above, of course, blends with central debates in anthropology on social-individual, structure-agency. I suggest that here too the useful distinction may be that between mobility *pattern* and motility *profile* to show that both dynamics are mutually constitutive, but can and sometimes must be analysed separately.

Last but not least, *motility* connects well with my earlier conceptual idea of the *motivational complex* in that the choice of *toma* to follow kin relations, a socio-economic relation, or the idea of 'Gabon' could be considered one aspect of *access*, and the maintenance of the personal relations for the first two options a personal *skill*. In any case, I look forward to the further development of the concept of *motility*.

6 Mobility as a Relational System

This chapter works with the premise that the world and mobility are relational as a more appropriate theoretical conceptualisation (cf. 1.1.1), and according to the Baka themselves (cf. 3.1), an approach which, of course, mirrors the weight given to relationality as a concept in present day anthropology. Having documented the group migratory history of the Ivindo Baka in Chapter Four, and suggested how to conceptualise new individual and personal mobility patterns in Chapter Five through the concept of *motility*, I now turn to the detailed analysis of the inter-ethnic relations, as they also constitute a deciding factor in mobility considerations (cf. 3.3.2). I argue that a comprehensive mobility system is based in the understanding of Baka and their (inter-ethnic) neighbours, or mobility partners,¹²⁹ as a relational network. It is here important to recall the idea of mobility as a relation with environment and people, in that ‘mobility and immobility are understood as an effect or an outcome of a relation’ (Adey 2010: 18), which in this case applies to the Baka and their neighbours. Taking this approach enlarges the previous understanding of inter-ethnic relations between the Baka and their neighbours, which has been focused on the structural opposition of the parties concerned. Bringing in a multilateral approach presupposes, encourages and necessitates a diversified understanding not only of the Baka (cf. 2.4), but also of their social partners, in short of all partners to the (inter-ethnic) push and pull which results in mobility or immobility. An aspect of these relations, which has so far received little attention, is the quality of the personal relationships. Building on the work of Rupp, I will argue that affection plays a considerable role in relations and the mobility that results from them.

In the second part of this chapter, I return to the Baka understanding of the spatial, temporal and social as interconnected (cf. 3.1), to show how a fourth dimension, the mythical or spiritual, equally forms part of this interrelatedness. I analyse how the

¹²⁹ In this chapter, ‘players’ and ‘partners’ are used interchangeably as synonyms for the diversity of (neighbouring) relations the Baka have with other ethnic groups or other people. Moreover, I employ ‘players’ with recognition to the playful approach Baka adopt towards most things. However, the term is not to be understood as in the context of game theory or OFT, where ‘player’ involves a pay-off for the individuals or groups engaging with their environment.

signification of 'Gabon' is not just one of economic improvement, but relates to Baka sociality in the long-term, and is best conceptualised as a transfer of Baka mythical powers.

6.1 Special Aspects of Inter-Ethnic Relations

Having introduced the topic of inter-ethnic relations in Chapter Two (cf. 2.3), I will briefly summarise the main issues, before engaging with the specific aspects of these connections that I aim to highlight. The interactions between Baka (and other 'pygmies') and their neighbours are described and conceptualised predominantly as patron-client relationships. As Joiris has documented, the French terms often used are *clientélisme*, *clientage*, *propriété*, ownership, and *partenariat*, partnership (Joiris 2003: 2). In English, the terminology is often one of *friendship* or *patron-client* relationships. The specific case of the Efe 'pygmies' and Lese villagers interactions in the Ituri Forest gave rise to the expression of a *symbiotic relationship* (Terashima 1986); and was conceptualised as long-term trading partners, in what is called a *maia-muto maia* exchange system, who live together in a single social system, but as separate cultural entities (Grinker 1989). This kind of economic exchange relationship is attributed to all 'pygmies' (Bahuchet 1979), and in the case of the Baka on the Ivindo generally termed *ami*, friend.

In addition to the socio-economic dealings or mythical connections (cf. 2.3.2), the relations can be of a socio-political, or ritual nature, and mostly exclude matrimonial alliances. There are several factors, which (are perceived to) differentiate the Baka from their Bantu neighbours, and which have in the past and still result in abuse and discrimination (cf. 2.3.2). This fact may have led to the dominant conceptualisation of the relations as economic and ecological as hunter-gatherer and villager, and the socio-political understanding of the relation as domination and servitude (Rupp 2003, cf. 2.3). Recalling the quote from Joiris, this has resulted in 'a scientific tradition focusing on the study of Pygmy and villager communities separately as if they are not part of the same reality' (Joiris 2003: 2). Grinker had proposed a different approach with his work on the symbolic and structural aspects of Efe (hunter-gatherer) and Lese (farmer) relations in the Ituri Forest, but his model of two cultural entities within one society remains within the economic understanding of the two groups as trading partners (Grinker 1989, Grinker 1994).¹³⁰ In the following, it is my aim to give an inkling

¹³⁰ Grinker conceptualises Efe-Lese relations through the idiom of gender: farmers are male and foragers are female. Lese' wives are seen as outsiders by Lese men and incorporated into the Lese house on terms of inequality.

of the diversity of relationships, which make up the connected reality of the players along the Ivindo, and which suggests the need for a different understanding.

6.1.1 Economic Friends

Along the Ivindo, explanations of *ami* ranged from 'master' to 'supplier of poaching equipment'. The relationships of Baka who have an *ami* Fang from Makokou, or a Bakwele *friend* from Mvadi or Maibut, follow the distribution of ethnic groups along the Ivindo (cf. 1.2.2.2). The classic mobility associated with *ami* is to travel and hunt together, or of the Baka hunting for him. Many of these are long-standing and strong relationships with a noteworthy impact, as for example with B., where the friendship led to the establishment of the village Kabisa (cf. 4.3.3). On the other hand, the ties headed *ami* can be of a shorter duration. AB. described his relationship with the deputy mayor in Sangmélima in Cameroon. He had travelled there as a young man looking for a wife. After a bad experience with a woman, he met the deputy mayor who had exclaimed 'Oh, boy, you're really special, my heart knows you and I must stay together. You will become like my son', to which AB. replied 'Dad, that is what I want'. In this last statement, it is possible to see the polysemic nature of the inter-ethnic relationships. On the one hand, AB. who happily accepts the chance to learn from a non-Baka elder and develop very close ties with him; and, on the other hand, a member of another ethnic group providing protection to a Baka, and forming a unique and special relationship with him. However, this connection did not last long, as has been the case in many other situations.

Several men told me of having worked for a Bakwele *ami*, travelled, lived, and hunted for them, until the relationship had degraded to the point, where the Baka decided to leave. As one man summarised: 'They [the Bakwele and his cronies] were treating me too bad. So I left. I will not work for someone who treats me bad'. Lewis describes a similar dynamic for the Mbendjele relationship with *Bilo*, non-Mbendjele, which is also

Grinker argues that the Efe are the structural equivalent of Lese men's wives. The two groups are mutually constituted symbolically, and the structure of ethnic relations is based on the institutionalised inequalities that make up the Lese house and village. In all this, the Efe are considered only as trading partners of Lese men, and Grinker reiterates the well-established structural opposition used to characterise forager-farmer relations. (Grinker 1989, Grinker 1994).

considered a friendship and where the Mbendjele is 'able to leave and go whenever they like, as they will find new 'friends' if they are not satisfied' (Lewis & Köhler 2002). The *Bilo* neighbours, on the other hand, think of the ties as fixed, binding, enduring, and it is these 'opposed ideals' of the relationship, which lead to conflicts (Lewis & Köhler 2002). The situation along the Ivindo is equivalent to this interpretation.

Joiris has described this type of relationship as one aspect of the ideology of social solidarity, as a *ritual friendship*, which involves the exchange of goods and services between same sex partners, and which exists in addition to normal kinship ties (Joiris 2003: 61). The Ivindo Baka term for friendship is *loti*. Contrary to Joiris, who defines *loti* as ritual friendship between members of the same sex which can include wife swapping (Joiris 2003: 62), *loti* on the Ivindo could be between partners of the opposite sex, and was quoted to me as a relationship which is not marriage or otherwise sexual. Moreover, there was no reference to ritual, and *loti* could also be something occurring amongst the Baka themselves. In an earlier work, Joiris also identified *loti* in Baka intra-group relations, but this was with reference to friendship amongst great elephant hunters, so that in both her interpretations there is a focus on ritual (Joiris 1996: 263).

6.1.2 Shared Ceremonies

In addition to the economic exchange, the Baka in their classification as 'pygmies' are seen as powerful diviner-healers, and their attendance of a ceremony is considered beneficial, often essential, for the success of an event. On the Ivindo some Bakwele women take their children to Baka female elders to ask for a blessing. The term 'shared ceremonies' is used to refer to the initiation and circumcision rituals of *Edzengui* and *békà*, whereby males are initiated into secret societies, which transcend ethnic boundaries, and lead to 'spiritual fraternity' (Rupp 2003: 47). Bakwele warriors have long engaged with Baka men to gain knowledge of their spiritual life and hunting techniques, establishing pseudo-kinship links in the process (Joiris 1998, Joiris 2003). These pseudo-kinship links can be passed on from father to son, and result in an extended kinship network.

During my time on the Ivindo, the Baka of Adjab took part in the circumcision festivities and the anti-sorcery dance of their Bakwele neighbours in Mvadi. Baka classify any of these events as *veillée*, the general French term for all kinds of ceremonies, derived from *veiller*, staying awake all night, which is the time for the dances. The Baka emphasised the importance of taking part in these events, being there, dancing with the neighbours and each other to build and maintain good neighbourly relations. The circumcision and the anti-sorcery events differed in several ways. For the circumcision festivities, it was clear that the Baka *neighbours* from Adjab would come to Mvadi and join in the fun, but no express invitation was made. Whereas for the anti-sorcery dance, the attendance of the Baka had been deemed relevant on several levels. A so-called *tradi-practionier*, a healer who has received specialist training and who is recognised as an arbitrator by the Gabonese state, conducts such a dance. The Mvadi village chiefs who had initiated the anti-sorcery *veillée*, but more so the *tradi-practionier* himself, had called for certain Baka individuals to attend the dance based, as they explained, on their belief in the special powers of the ‘pygmies’, who would ensure the success of such an event. Other Mvadi Bakwele simply stated that they wanted to have fun with their Baka friends, and most people from Adjab did indeed attend the dance. These examples show that between the inhabitants of Adjab and Mvadi there exist close ties, which are of a ritual or spiritual character, and which in the case of the anti-sorcery dance occasioned the displacement of the majority of Adjab Baka to Mvadi for the night. As there are not enough dugout canoes for all the people to travel at once, this caused much discussion around travel logistics.

In Kabisa, some of the Bakwele expressed a great interest to learn about Baka rituals ‘because we are now neighbours’, and made a special effort to attend the different dances of a mortuary ritual in May 2011.¹³¹ On the death of a Baka, *Edzengui* and other forest spirits leave the forest to come and dance in the village. One of the Bakwele women was anxious about the smaller spirits, and became outright scared by *Edzengui*, who is about 2m tall and dressed in long raffia fibres, but was comforted by the Baka women and the Bakwele men who were with her. This did not dampen the

¹³¹ The map of Kabisa indicates the tomb of the deceased (cf. 4.3.3).
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overall positive consideration of Baka and Bakwele having sung and danced together. For their part, during the circumcision ritual in Kabisa in June 2011, the Baka would sing in Bakwele as long as there were Bakwele present, and would switch to Baka only once amongst themselves. These Baka-Bakwele interrelations in Kabisa are still young, but maybe, in time and with descendants, mutual interest and care will lead to the establishment of an (alternative version of) extended kinship network.

Taking part in each other's ceremonies is not only important with regard to rituals within the lifecycle, but also the more regular dances. Speaking about their migratory history, the Ivindo Baka described a village atmosphere as good, when Baka and their neighbours engaged in sharing meat and dancing together, as for example in Été; a friendly atmosphere makes Baka stay and, thus, directly impacts Baka mobility (cf. 4.2.8). As the examples document, shared ceremonies involving the Baka and their neighbours continue to take place. It is interesting to consider that many of the Adjab and Kabisa Baka once lived in Été and/or the other small villages along the Djoua, so that the relations between them and Mvadi Bakwele have existed for a long time, and that there is a long, but very mixed, history of shared ceremonies depending on the quality of the relationships of the people concerned. Generally, Baka participation in rituals retains a high relevance for their neighbours for ideological reasons based in the belief around the mythical spiritual powers of the 'pygmies'. With regard to mobility, dancing together is relevant for the duration of the stay in a location, but also brings about physical displacement for ceremony attendance.

6.1.3 Sexual and Matrimonial Relations

Inter-ethnic sexual and matrimonial relations can also take on various forms, and there are differences and similarities between the Baka and other 'pygmy' groups. Generally speaking, the Baka are exogamous, but do not intermarry with other ethnic groups. The Babongo in Southern Gabon did not intermarry with their neighbours, for example the Massongo, during the time of their discovery by Du Chaillu (Knight 2003: 86, cf. 2.3.1). Now, intermarriages occur between the Massongo male and Babongo female as well as between the Babongo male and Massongo female, but the former cases are

much more frequent than the latter (Matsuura 2006). An example from the Ituri forest are the *Bamboté (Mbuti)*, who intermarry with the *Bandundu*, but are despised by the Bantu group *Mangbetu* (Anita Daulne, personal communication). On the other hand, Fang and other Bantu tribes have consistently taken Baka women as second or third wives, to work as domestic helpers and because of their higher fertility.¹³² This has and continues to cause annoyance amongst the Baka, especially amongst the men who see this practice as a one-way street, as they themselves were rarely able to have loose or serious relationships with Fang women or those of other ethnic groups owing to the stigmatisation as 'pygmies'. As they complained bitterly to me: 'Baka men cannot flirt with Fang women, because we are too ashamed'. Considered from a historical mobility perspective, this may best be termed 'intermarriage immobility', or 'gender-selective mobility' (Thomas Widlok, personal communication).

One of the old Baka ladies, AT., told how the Fang men were very attractive to her as a young Baka woman. When her parents found out about her relationship with a Fang man, they were furious, so that she had to continue seeing him secretly. AT. also told of how her uncle was taking care of her after her parents died, but he too was against her relationship with the Fang and any question of marriage for two reasons. Firstly, he thought that a Fang can become a chimpanzee, and secondly, he was 'weary of mixing bloods', *ndze* in Baka, and 'wanted Baka and Fang blood to stay separate'. This statement that 'Fang have one blood, Baka have one blood' is firstly a clear statement of blood as identity marker and a clear separation of different ethnic groups from the Baka point of view. This statement also points to another interesting fact. As AT. described there was an illness between the Baka and the Fang 'over the power of blood and semen, which comes in when man and woman get together', effectively speaking about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). She told how Baka used to be faithful, until the women started seeing Fang and illnesses (STDs) started happening. She remembered hearing her parents talking about how this was due to a 'lack of respect', as Fang always had two or three girl friends. She explained that the man knows immediately after sexual intercourse that the woman was sick, whereas the woman will only know after long while. AT. then clarified how the Baka say that STDs

¹³² Also documented in the statement from St. Augustin (cf. 2.3.1).

came through the Whites, the French, who gave it to the Fang, who transmitted it to the Baka when Baka women had casual sex with Fang men. Cameroon is the place AT. remembers that Baka and White can and did intermarry (Projet Baka), because, as she said 'their blood is close'. STDs are also a topic on the Ivindo, where one woman in Adjab described hearing of her uncle's death from AIDS in Makokou.¹³³

This reference alerts us to the growing presence of Baka men in towns and cities such as Minvoul, Oyem and Makokou (cf. 2.4.3), which increases their chances of sexual interaction with non-Baka women. This is also due to the fact that they wear the same clothes as everybody else and are (no longer) directly distinguishable as 'pygmies' (Rupp makes a similar point for Cameroon, Rupp 2011). These types of inter-ethnic encounters can take the form of a one-night stand; or a relationship, which may remain loose, or become more stable and result in offspring. In any case, as I was informed during one memorable discussion whilst travelling from Adjab to Mvadi in a dugout, a Baka man will always use a condom, if he is not sleeping with his wife.

The high influx of West African males not only into Libreville, but also into the rural areas of Gabon has, in turn, led to Baka women getting involved with these men as well as with the other ethnic groups along the Ivindo. Again the relationship intensity can range from very short-term to deep emotional involvement and children. In one Baka family in Adjab, all the adult daughters are or have been married to non-Baka or non-Gabonese men, to a Kota, a Hausa and a Baka from Cameroon. In Adjab, these families kept very much to themselves. There was no animosity, but the Kota and Hausa husbands rarely came to sit with the Baka men in the *mbandzo*, the meeting place. Nevertheless, it seems that just like in many other parts of the world, young Baka people are marrying outside of established boundaries, breaking the borders set by clan marriage rules and parental guidance,¹³⁴ as we also saw with C. in the previous chapter (cf. 5.3.1).

¹³³ I learned of this in a typical ethnographer way on the last day, when the 'really good stuff' starts happening. I had been trying to find out about this uncle for quite some time, and everything about him was secretive, until I was literally about to get in the dugout to leave, and suddenly the 'true' story came out.

¹³⁴ This was one of my first impressions in rural Gabon, that I was seeing the local application of a global phenomenon, a true *glocal*.

Another type of inter-ethnic sexual relation is that concerning pornography. In the house of a Bakwele man in Kabisa were several pornographic magazines with French text. It was quite funny to see the cover page from one magazine, with both sides of the page depicting white busty blondes, appear in different Baka houses throughout one week. The Baka men were treating it as a prized possession and seemed to want to keep it quiet.

Baka women (on the Ivindo) often call men 'husbands' who are not their actual husbands. This does not seem to be a manifestation of loose sexual morals, as the Baka men are strong on jealousy and beating their women in cases of adultery (which, strangely, also seems to happen when the marriage is said to have finished). From the researcher's point of view, I was never given a satisfying explanation of this referential term, especially as it applies to both other Baka men, and people like the village chief DF., so I cannot but venture an explanation. In my understanding, this is a special version of *loti*, which seems to involve special ritual protection, in an understanding similar to that of Joiris quoted above.

The growing diversity of Baka sexual and matrimonial relationships is occasioned by a mobility, which is no longer limited to the forest and Baka clan structures, but which extends into the urban areas and to other ethnic groups (cf. 2.4). In turn, the growing mobility of Baka neighbours from near and far enables the diversity of these interactions, and exemplifies mobility as relation.

6.1.4 Alcohol in Inter-Ethnic Relationships

Alcohol abuse and high levels of addiction are rife in rural Gabon, and, very sadly, also with the Baka communities in Bitouga and all along the Ivindo. This applies not only to adults, but also to some of the children from the age of about eight onwards. Women drink continuously during pregnancy and whilst breast-feeding, and many men and women can only be classed as binge drinkers. Bottle contents are shared out in shots and served in plastic cups. If there is alcohol available, drinking starts early in the

morning and continues until there is nothing left. This applies to time spent in the village, *and* in the forest. Recently, little plastic sachets containing 5cl of whiskey or rum have arrived on the Ivindo. These can be conveniently placed in the trouser pocket or skirt material around the waist and consumed whilst carrying out forest activities. Alternatively, a plastic cup is carried along into the forest.

Alcohol is essential to the start of any type of song-dance the Baka are so famed for, and once there is no alcohol left, the singing and dancing ebbs away and people go to bed. Alcohol is part of ritual ceremonies such as circumcision festivities. Again, the ceremony cannot start if there is not enough alcohol, and in one case the alcohol designated for the circumcision was stolen. The mother of the circumcisee was so shocked on hearing this news, that she became paralysed down one side of her body. Tragic stories resulting from alcohol abuse are common, and there are many aspects of how this leaves the community dysfunctional. For example, Phil Agland's laudable film *Baka: A Cry From the Rainforest* recently documented how impure alcohol has literally wiped out an entire generation of Baka men in Cameroon (Agland 2011). It is a very sad topic, and much more could be said at this point, but I now turn to alcohol procurement and sale as one further aspect of inter-ethnic relations.

The image of a drunk Baka 'pygmy' is a common one in Minvoul and along the Ivindo. The Baka go to the next village, drink away all the money they have, then collapse somewhere behind a house or in a plantation and sleep off their inebriation. As Bakwele village chief DF. summed the Bakwele opinion on this: 'If one of them has come here [to Mvadi] to drink, why make problems for him? We must forgive.' It goes without saying that this type of behaviour is seen as despicable by the Baka neighbours, and serves to uphold the 'pygmy' cliché, even if many Bantu men and women behave in a similar fashion. The difference is that they will only very rarely drink as excessively as the Baka, who lie about in the village until they have sobered up enough to return home.

The Baka undertake wage labour for their neighbours, for which they mostly receive a payment. Officially, the Bakwele stated this is CFA 2000 per day, but the Baka

countered saying they only receive CFA 500, or CFA 1000 if they are lucky. The reduction is partly due to their alcohol and tobacco consumption during 'work time', as DF. explained:

They come to drink before going to work, so that we deduct what they drank from their daily wage. They won't start until they have had an advance payment, which we give them as drink. The Baka consume more than the village people; the Baka women, smoke a lot, drink a lot. The day you call them to work with you costs you more than two thousand francs, because every day they help you, you are expected to pay for all their needs; the tobacco is on you' (DF. 21.7.2011).

Similar interactions and practices between Baka and their neighbours have also been described in detail for other areas, such as the Bakwele village Ndongo in South-Eastern Cameroon (Kitanishi 2006).

The village of Kabisa is the access point to the gold camp Mabilia, which lies in the forest. The growing artisanal gold industry in this part of Gabon attracted a Fang, ME., to build a *boutique*, a small shop, in Kabisa (for map indicating location of his house and bar cf. 4.3.3).¹³⁵ At first, he and his wife sold various items including clothes, but realising that the Baka only came to purchase alcohol, he adapted his sales strategy. He now sells alcohol and a few food items, such as biscuits and dried fish; in essence, his shop is a bar, which has led to a sharp increase in Baka alcohol consumption in Kabisa.¹³⁶

In Adjab, I had watched many times, how whoever had a bottle of Pastis, a carton of wine, or a bottle of beer, would share this out following the egalitarian demand-

¹³⁵ Originally, the Bakwele from Maibut said ME. had no right to build in Kabisa, but with support from Makokou, the inter-ethnic conflict between him, a Fang, and the Bakwele was overcome, and now everybody including the Baka living in Kabisa seems happy.

¹³⁶ The Baka themselves have mixed views on this, and there is an increasing appreciation that the high levels of alcohol consumption are causing too many (daily) fights, often drawing blood, and that the community has a problem it needs to address (Appendix XVII – K.'s letter on the situation in Kabisa). In one case, a father started destroying his house because he was so fed up with his sons drinking too much, and wasting all the money they had earned on alcohol (cf. 3.1.5).

sharing principles, but during the last weeks of my fieldwork things started to change. Those Baka who had been working in the gold sites had been forced to return to their villages by the Gabonese authorities, as had all other ethnic groups (cf. 5.3.3), and they were looking for ways to make money. In what might be termed a swift move from demand-sharing to commercial exploitation, they started selling shots of *Pastis*, a French aniseed liquor, and whisky to the other Baka living in Adjab. This took on three different forms: Firstly, there were the Baka who had acquired some *Pastis*, and were selling this directly to the other Baka in Adjab. Secondly, one Baka woman had been given *Pastis* by her *ami*, and was selling this for him. He had promised her a share in the proceeds, but she had not received anything by the time I left. Thirdly, one Baka woman is married to a Muslim man, and they had also come to Adjab following the eviction from the gold sites. He was entrusted by one of the Muslim traders from the neighbouring village Mvadi to sell the small 5cl plastic sachets to the Baka in Adjab. The first and second examples document that alcohol is, possibly, the strongest factor in eroding egalitarian levelling mechanisms.

Generally speaking, alcohol plays an important social and ritual role in Baka communities. With regard to inter-ethnic relationships, it is one aspect of the pay for wage labour undertaken by Baka for their neighbours. In ME.'s bar, the Baka are paying consumers, and also in any other legal or illegal drinking location along the Ivindo. For those Baka based in Adjab, any excuse to go and stay in Kabisa and enjoy the bar atmosphere and the drinking were welcome and quite ridiculous pretexts were given to justify this mobility. Most importantly, the high dependency levels are starting to change Baka sociality and seem to be introducing a new hierarchy of those selling alcohol on their own count, or for a neighbouring *friend*.

6.1.5 Diversity of Neighbours

This brings us to address another critical issue in the discourse on inter-ethnic relations and inequality: the homogenisation of the neighbours (Rupp 2003). The simplification into forager-farmer, pygmy-villager relations, is equally punishing to the category of 'neighbours'. This has been the case from a historical point of view, as can be seen

through missionaries' observations regarding Baka-Fang relations, which showed how Fang treated any outsiders (not just Baka) with initial suspicion, and that, for example, the exclusion from mass was not an issue of discrimination specifically against the Baka (Knight 2003: 112). Nowadays, the similarities between, for example, Bangando and Baka in Cameroon are larger than the differences: individuals and families of both groups live either in the forest, or by the roadside; practising subsistence agriculture, or hunting and gathering (Rupp 2011), and the situation of Baka and Bakwele along the Ivindo is analogous.

On the Ivindo, the diversity of ethnic groups has increased through the influx of people from Cameroon or West Africa involved in trade, gold work or poaching. Especially West Africans have come to participate in the ivory trade as middlemen, and, therefore, they and the Baka are becoming economically involved. A fight between Baka father and son in Kabisa, where the son hit his father over the head with a bottle will serve as an example to highlight the intra-social repercussions of these 'new friends'. A Hausa trader had only paid the hunter, the son, a laughably small sum for a pair of elephant tusks. He had also given the son a 'mysterious pendant' and a ring, which were said to have magic qualities, therefore incredibly valuable and equivalent to the value of the tusks. Sorcery and witchcraft are great concerns in Central Africa (cf. 1.2.1, cf. 4.2.4), and when the young man proudly paraded around the village wearing his pendant, the other Baka became worried about the spells, the *vampire*, he might cast. The father then told the son to get rid of the necklace. The son refused and they ended up fighting, the son cutting the father on the side of the head with the broken-off bottle, thereby drawing blood. This was explained to me as one of the worst misdemeanours, as inflicting violence on a parent is a taboo in Baka society. Following a meeting of the elders, the son was condemned and asked to pay CFA 50000 in recompense to his father. Tensions remained high for a while, but at some point father and son were drinking together again, and, as far as I know, the damages were never paid.

This example shows the impact that short-lived economic ties between a Baka man and a non-Baka tradesman can have on intra-group dynamics, and how this type of

economic relationship cannot be classified as ritual friendship or alliance. As the population diversity along the Ivindo is set to increase further with a rise in gold work, it is important to raise attention to these new partners with which Baka individuals, rather than the group in an extended kinship network, enter into relations; moreover, as they are not simply for economic exchange, although they may bear semblance, as with the pendant above.¹³⁷ It is particularly the young men, who are looking for alternate ways of making money, and entering into these short-term engagements, which do not form part of a ritual friendship or long-standing extended kinship network.

There was another inter-ethnic aspect to the pendant story. Taking place in Kabisa, ME., the Fang owner of the bar, observed the fight and the surrounding events. Once the situation had escalated to a fight, one of the Baka elders turned to ME. for help in an extremely deferential manner. ME. recommended calling the meeting of the elders and hid the pendant once it had been taken off the young man. This was only one of the examples where I witnessed the Baka submitting to the opinion of a non-Baka neighbour in matters of conflict resolution and leadership. It suggests two things: Firstly, it confirms that inter-ethnic relations are not only dyadic, but that, in taking into account the diversity of the neighbours, they can be triangular, or multilateral. Secondly, the neighbours can also be distinguished as to the quality of the relationship with an individual Baka or the community at large. In this case, one player was deceiving a young Baka man and taking advantage of his youthful pride; the other partner was helping the Baka community find ways to resolve a conflict, and right a wrong.

6.1.5.1 Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations

Under this heading I address the relationship between the Baka and the *Ministère des Eaux et Forêts*, the Gabonese Ministry of Water and Forests, the ANPN, and the

¹³⁷ Another case of ill-fated exchange was a hunter, who had been promised an outboard motor in exchange for the ivory, and has not been paid anything up until my leaving. The Baka man telling this story considered this a sign that it is still the 'colonial epoch' for the Baka.

conservation NGOs. As I already described in the presentation of the field sites, these various relationships are fraught with difficulty, as there are two (opposed) parties: the Baka still (partly) living off the forest as hunters and the institutions officially charged with protecting the animals in the forest. On the one hand, the Baka are ignored or marginalised, as they are not official citizens of Gabon, and simply considered ‘animals’. On the other hand, they are the first in the line of poaching activities, as they kill the elephants and provide the ivory, so that the authorities cannot ignore them when drawing up their conservation strategies.¹³⁸

During one interview AO. remembered how, before 1982, along the Ivindo there was *libre service*, equating the forest with a self-service shop. He described that you could hunt and behave in the forest as you wished; how everybody did this; how people would hunt and only eat as much as they could; letting meat go to waste, because they knew there was an abundance of more. Foreign dignitaries would come to hunt, lavishly employing Baka ‘pygmies’ as local guides, and AO. and many other people of all ethnic groups described these as the ‘golden days’. Everything changed dramatically with the arrival of the WWF and the officials from the Gabonese Ministry of Water and Forests in 1982, when hunting was curtailed or forbidden (Overview of forbidden species in Annex X and XI).

The relations between the Baka ‘pygmies’ of Minvoul and the NGOs have been officially analysed, concluding with and documenting the need to consider both sides of the conservation story with regard to policy-making (Mve Mebia 2001).¹³⁹ The participatory mapping activities by *Brainforest* also aim to bring both sides and opinions to one table (cf. 1.2.2.2). One particular issue that is continually addressed is the so-called *zone tampon*, a perimeter of 5km around the national park Minkébé, where hunting and other forms of forest exploitation are allowed to a certain degree. During an interview with *Brainforest* in Kabisa in May 2011, the Baka on the Ivindo confirmed that they were using the same forest as their forefathers, but admitted to

¹³⁸ Initiatives such as *Edzengui* (cf. 1.2.2.1) have failed, but, hopefully, only for the time being.

¹³⁹ However, his work was financed by the WWF, and his annexe includes a list of names of Baka elephant hunters with the areas they hunt in and the amount of elephants killed. I find the publication of this information critical from an ethical point of view.

being unclear about the exact delimitations of the park, and the extent of the *zone tampon*. They further stated that their main resource today has become the River Nouna, but that this now seems to belong to WWF from the Baka point of view, as WWF surveys the river trade and confiscates all tools including arms, nets, and even motors, no matter on which stretch along the river. This debate on the wildlife protection policies continued during a visit of the local WWF employees from Makokou in Adjab in July 2011. The Baka bravely made their opinion heard and criticised that 'NGOs and other authorities don't speak with one tongue'. The WWF reply was honest, admitting that indeed the laws had only recently been changed again, in that the African forest elephant is now *intégralement protégée*, meaning fully protected without any exceptions.

What became clear during the various exchanges is that much strife between the Baka and the conservation authorities is due to bureaucratic sloth and ineptitude. It takes a long time before a decision taken somewhere in Europe, North America or Libreville regarding the protection of an animal manifests as lived hunting practice along the Ivindo. This shows that there are considerable players impacting on Baka lives and their mobility, who are no longer in their immediate physical vicinity. Incidentally, this is not only a problem for the Baka, but also the Bakwele and other ethnic groups. The situation for the Baka is, however, aggravated as often the Bakwele blame their own misdemeanours on the Baka, because they know they will be more easily believed than the 'pygmies'. AO. pointed to another problem: the many non-Gabonese who are entering the country illegally to hunt bushmeat and participate in the ivory trade, thereby contributing to the destruction of the forest. AO. recalled how the Baka used to hunt elephants only with a spear, how they then learned how to use nets and traps, but how now you go to prison if you have a gun to kill meat for your family. The Baka themselves are very worried about the large paths being cut into the forest and the situation of the elephants, AO. stating that 'at the time of our grand-parents, the forest was "virgin"'. As the Baka men summarised the problem at the end of one discussion with the WWF: 'We are here, but we don't know how to live, as only some of us have work and many don't. We want to follow the rules, but we have to live somehow'.

Some of the Baka men have worked for conservation NGOs in the national park Lopé in Central Gabon. From all accounts the people in charge and whom they worked for were white men and women from different European countries or North America. It cannot be said otherwise, but that these 'Whites' are considered to be at the apex of any Baka social hierarchy. Through this work those Baka involved were paid a basic salary, around CFA 95.000 per month, and now they concern themselves with questions of pension money. As one Baka man summed: 'That work becomes your life. It is the key to life, the money you get from your work', and the Baka used the money they earned to buy material goods. This may be a reflection of the socio-economic value of white people and Whites as a source of immense wealth in Baka terms (Lewis & Köhler 2002). During my time in Adjab, several of these men, and the women who had been with them, expressed great interest to work in conservation projects again, and explained that they would be prepared to travel far in order to do so.

Over the last approximately twenty years, the development of wildlife protection policies and the related institutions, as well as the incursion of logging companies into the forest has increased the amount of players in the social forest network. It has also limited the range of Baka mobilities in the forest. The quality of interaction between the Gabonese and foreign conservation organisations with the Baka depends very much on the approach and mind-set of the people involved on the side of the authorities, and on the will of the Baka concerned to become an accepted part of Gabonese society.

6.1.5.2 Village Chief

One further relation I would like to introduce is that between the official Gabonese village chief of Adjab, chief DF. from Mvadi, and the Baka population of Adjab (and Kabisa, if and when they are in Adjab). DF. described how God has made the different ethnic groups and languages, and to him the difference between Baka and Bakwele lies in the different ways of life, the different ways of working, and in the types and quality of infrastructure and in the size of the plantations. Interesting at this point in

the discussion is his relation to the Baka from the position as village chief, which he defined as:

My duty is to watch over the community, to take care of the people, to monitor the activities and the behaviour to avoid problems. I am head of the village to manage problems. I am like a father who gives advice to avoid bad things happening in the family (DF. 21.7.2011).

DF.' words express the idea of a duty of care for the Baka on his part (cf. 3.2.3.2).¹⁴⁰ He is not just the number crunching DF. looking for votes (cf. 4.2.10), but he is also the 'ritual husband' of at least two women from Adjab (cf. 6.1.3). In his position and role he combines pseudo-kinship links as well as the official position in the Gabonese hierarchy as village chief.

¹⁴⁰ DF. openly expressed jealousy about me getting more affection from the Adjab Baka than he did.

6.2 Relational Patterns of Mobility

The above examples document the diversity of relations of the Baka with their 'social environment', and how this is not restricted to their agriculturalist village neighbours. The description of the people who constrained PJ.'s *motility* in the previous chapter (cf. 5.3.3) highlights this relational diversity from the viewpoint of limitations in relationships. Moreover, even if we are looking at Baka direct neighbours, these can take on different roles, for example DF., who is both 'ritual husband' and Gabonese village chief. The interrelations take on economic, ritual, (pseudo)-kinship, sexual, and matrimonial dimensions. On the Ivindo, the Baka subsumed all these types of relationships under the term *bien garder* (cf. 3.2.3.2). Recognising the range of inter-ethnic relations, which differentiates from the predominant patron-client relationship model, and the impact this has on mobility, was also based on the analysis of individual case studies. In the following I present the four examples of NC., AB., L. and J., and their interaction partners. In the diagram, ego is highlighted in black. A line indicates a connection, a relationship, between ego and another party linked to a certain type of mobility. Before I turn to the details, I would like to emphasise that these drawings are employed to support an argument through visual means.

6.2.1 Individual Case Studies

6.2.1.1 Case Study NC.

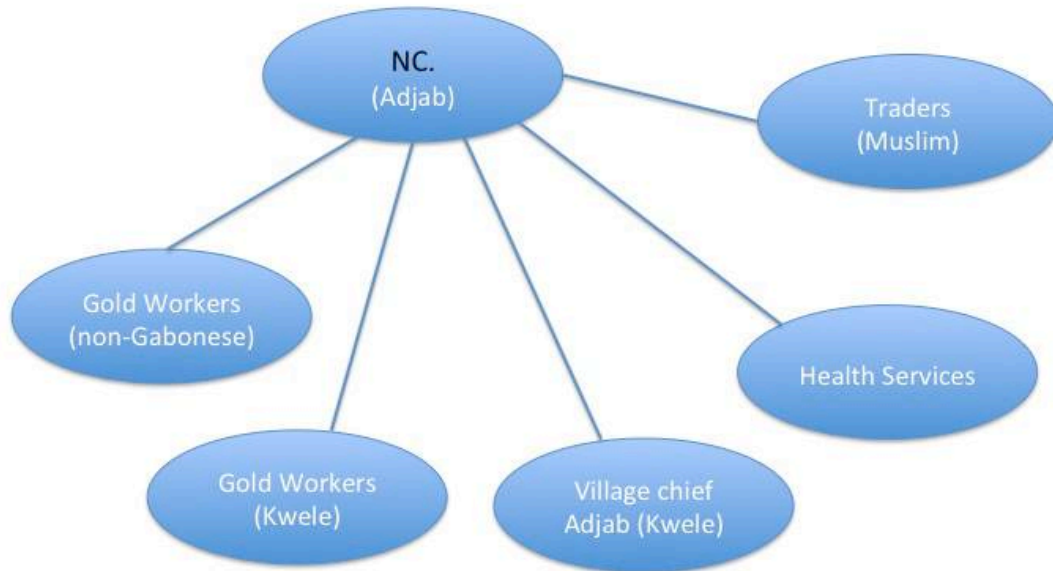


Figure 6.1 – Relational Pattern NC.

NC. is based in Adjab, but works in the gold fields with her husband and other family members, where she encounters local and non-Gabonese gold workers. In whichever location, she procures her subsistence needs from the forest and from local shops run by (Muslim) traders. Living in Adjab, NC. is officially 'guarded' by the village chief from Mvadi. She has had two difficult pregnancies and benefited from Gabonese health services to save her life and that of her children. NC. is mobile along the Ivindo to reach the gold locations, the traders' shops or the health clinic.

6.2.1.2 Case Study AB.

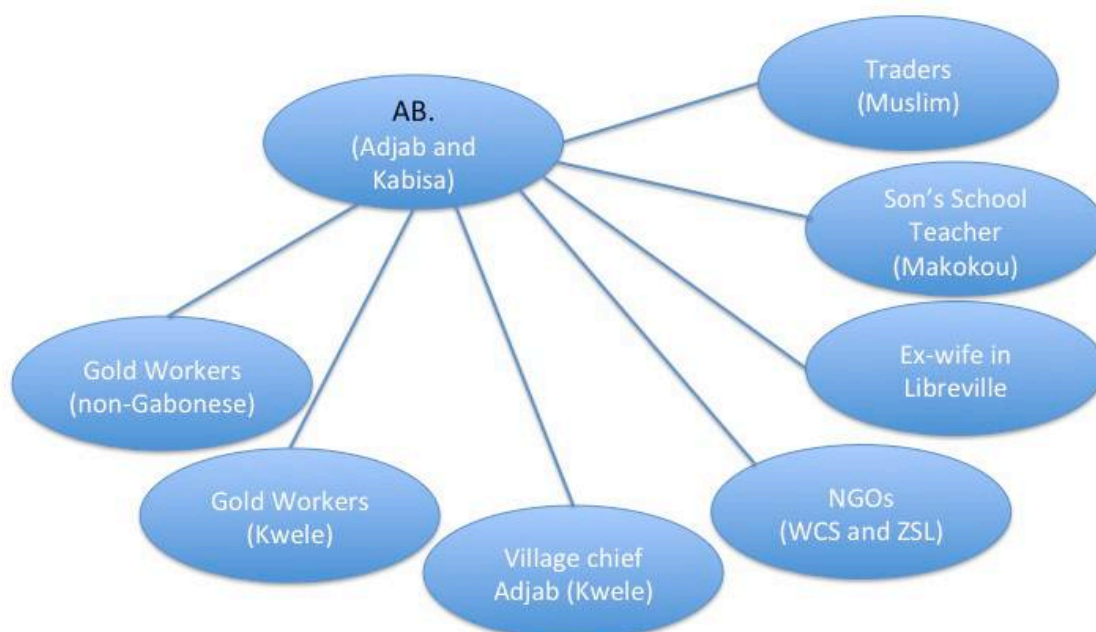


Figure 6.2 – Relational Pattern AB.

In AB.'s case we find the same situation with regard to the gold workers, the traders and the village chief. In addition, WCS and ZSL have employed AB. in various wildlife conservation projects over a period of eight years, for which he had to leave the Ivindo region and travel to Central Gabon, taking his wife and children with him. When they arrived in the national park of Lopé, his wife, MN. also found professional employment as assistant to a household manager. Since returning to Adjab, MN. employs her household skills to manage her family, which has raised her social standing in the Baka community; or one could say MN. has transformed her mobility capital into social capital (cf. 5.3.1). Several other family members worked with AB. in Lopé, and this mobility dynamic is equivalent to *toma*, even if not in the forest. In Lopé, AB. had encountered a Punu woman with whom he fathered a child. Those two now live in Libreville, and AB. stays in contact with them via mobile phone. As there is no phone reception in Adjab, he regularly travels to a place where one can (quite literally) 'catch'

reception. One of AB.'s sons has been attending school in Mvadi. In a case, typical for Baka school attendance (Agland 2011), his superior intelligence caused Mvadi children to bully him as a 'pygmy', and now he is being sent to school in Makokou. AB. and MN. travelled there to take him to the new school, and now maintain contact via mobile phone. AB. and MN. have two houses in Adjab, but *circulate* between Kabisa and Adjab.

6.2.1.3 Case Study L.

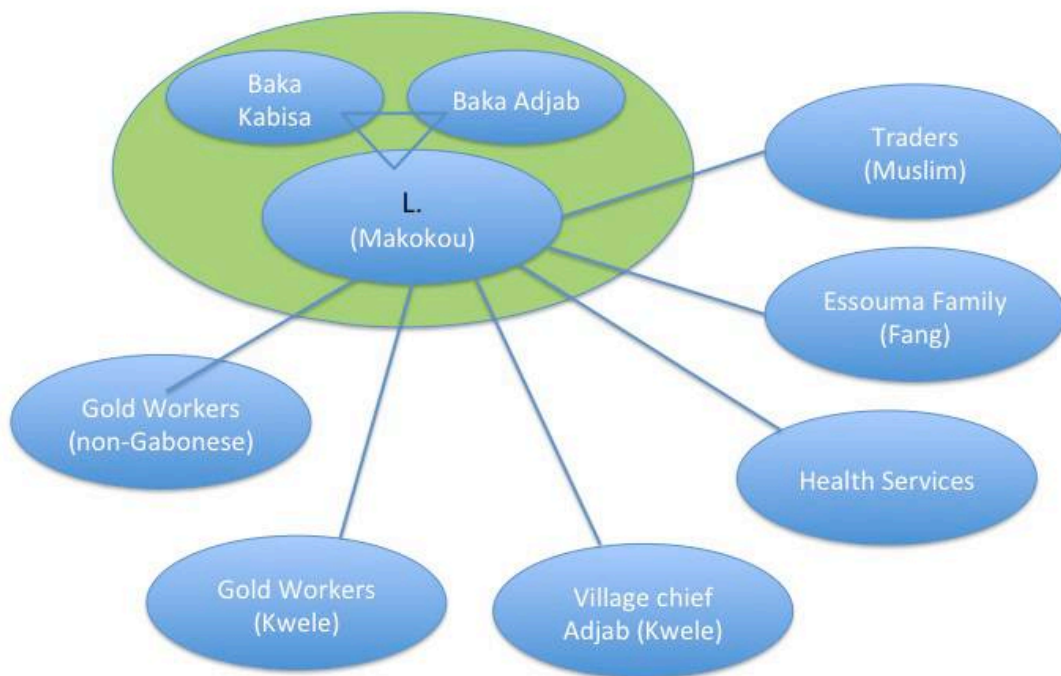


Figure 6.3 – Relational Pattern L.

In L.'s case, I draw attention to the continued mobility between Makokou, Adjab and Kabisa owing to her personal relations. L. grew up in Makokou, and became married to one of the brothers from Adjab as his second wife, following his visits to Makokou. They have three children and for a while lived together in Adjab. They are now separated, although, as I witnessed, this separation is not comprehensive, but means that L. has returned to live mainly in Makokou. Alternating with his first wife, L. goes to the gold fields with him. In Makokou, L. lives in the house of a Fang family. When she

returns from Adjab to Makokou she sometimes takes forest products, but always and more importantly manioc, back to the provincial capital (cf. 3.1.4).

6.2.1.4 Case Study J.

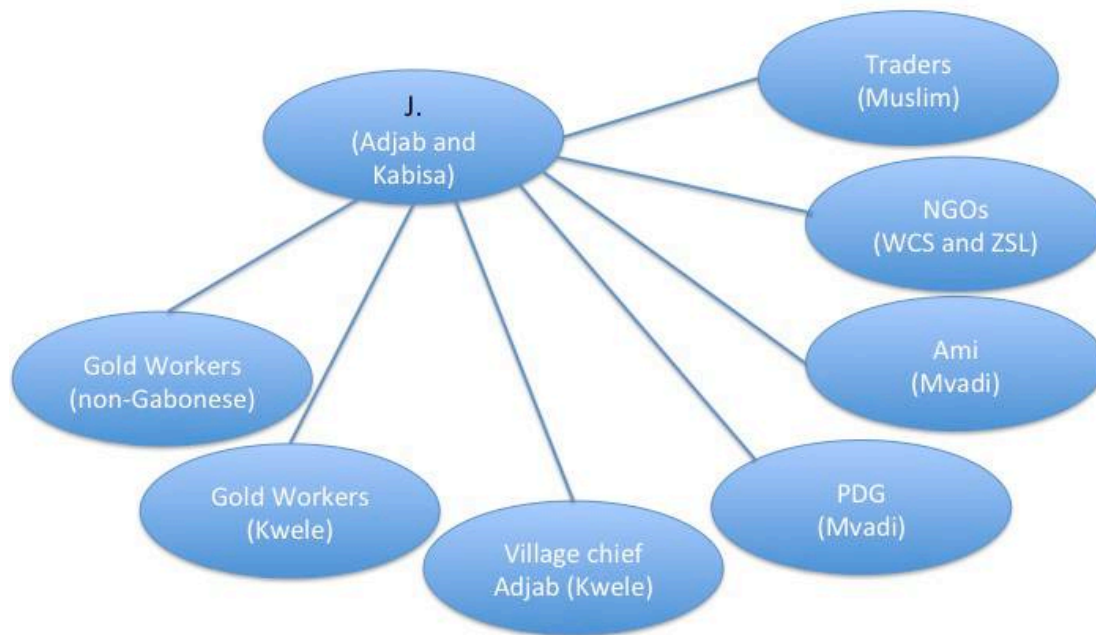


Figure 6.4 – Relational Pattern J.

J.'s situation is similar to that of AB., in that he has worked for WCS and ZSL and also took his family to Lopé. I have included the gold workers in the chart, as J. used to work gold and sometimes does so now for brief spells. Noteworthy in this case study are the strong relation of J. and his *ami*, for whom he regularly goes hunting. Also, J. initiated the formation of a PDG *cellule* in Adjab. The PDG, *Parti Démocratique Gabonais*, is the ruling party in Gabon (cf. 1.2.1), and seven Baka from Adjab, six men and one woman, have formed a *cellule*, the smallest political unit. They take part in the PDG events in Mvadi, and are hoping to thereby increase their social standing (Appendix XV shows J.'s electoral card).

6.2.2 Parties to Mobility on the Ivindo

Drawing together the case studies results in the diagram of relational patterns on the Ivindo below, which reveals and confirms the argument introduced above, that there are many new partners in the relational dynamic between the Baka and their social environment. Some of these are individuals of ethnic groups, or the relation is with the ethnic group overall, and some of these relations are between Baka and players without an ethnic connotation. The underlying green is employed to assist the reader and show where individual players belong to a larger group (which of course have their own internal relational dynamic not depicted here), but not as a typology of these players. In the case of the Baka themselves, the Baka from the individual village locations are grouped together. Here in particular, the chart does not reflect the social or mobility relations internal to the Baka as a group. In a similar way, I have clustered the Bakwele, including paramilitaries, who triggered much Baka mobility from a historical perspective (cf. 4.2.9). Governmental and non-governmental organisations are also aggregated. The Bakwele village chief straddles two categories, given his two roles, as described above. Again I draw attention to the fact that the chart does not reflect all layers of relational patterns on the Ivindo or the frequency of interaction and mobility associated with the relations. It is enlisted as an aid to the argument that inter-ethnic relations extend beyond the forager-villager dichotomy.

The diagram evidences the diversity of players and (inter-ethnic) relations between the Baka and their neighbours. These are multilateral relationships, which indicates two conceptual issues. Firstly, it is time to acknowledge this diversity and the relations involved, as Rupp has already successfully argued for the Lobéké region in Cameroon (Rupp 2011). Secondly, the relations cannot be ignored when conceptualising mobility patterns. The importance of this question and how this is done, to my mind, depends, in part, on the nature of the research question. In a study designated solely to questions of subsistence and resource-oriented mobility, the unit of analysis may be closely focused on the intra-group level, for example for a study of Baka manioc consumption, but even then the theft of tubers by Baka from Bakwele would have to be considered (cf. 3.1.2), and in some way extend beyond simply the Baka group.

Therefore, I suggest that with regard to questions of mobility as a method of social organisation, conflict resolution, searching for a sexual partner, attending rituals, securing the means of living *and* daily subsistence needs, so including long-term or short-term individual and group mobilities, it is essential to take a holistic look at Baka life. An analysis should include a detailed examination of all relations and their social context, beyond patron-client.

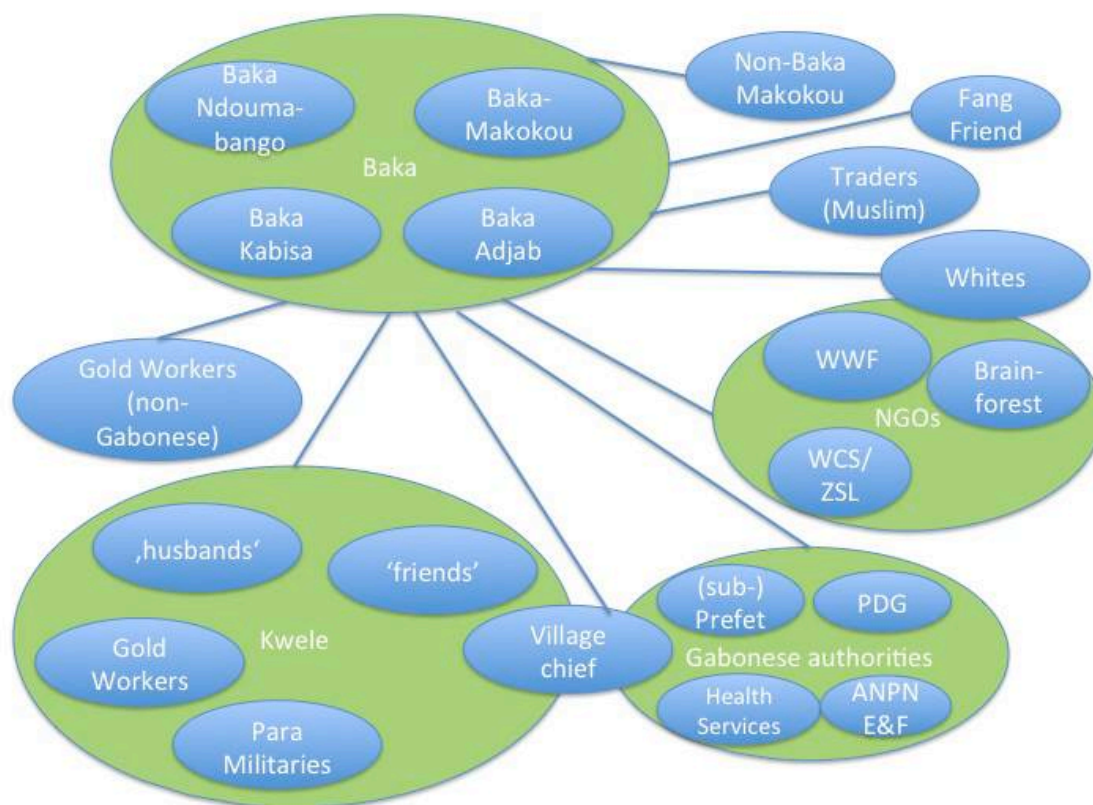


Figure 6.5 – Relational Patterns of the Baka and their Social Environment on the Ivindo¹⁴¹

This notion is inspired by the Baka emic perspective on relations, whereby they give relational information as indicators of location or reason for movement when describing their mobility; and how time, space and sociality are interrelated. One example is, of course, the term *mosesanu* (cf. 3.2.2), the mobility practice of circulating between to locations close to each other, which also refers to being neighbours, and the communication between two camps, via the paths that connect them. As I

¹⁴¹ The abbreviation 'Mkk' is short for Makokou
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explained in Chapter Four, *toma* is not only about following family, but also a *friend*, as was evidenced by the case study of the PO. family's displacement from Ebandak to Été (cf. 4.2.7). Moreover, this approach and suggested conceptualisation also mirrors the general social changes in Gabon and the Baka movement of 'leaving the forest', which entails that the 'other' from a Baka perspective is becoming more visible to the researcher. It seems feasible to argue that in the future, if the quality of the relationship is deemed appropriate, it is possible to *toma* individuals working for an NGO.

Literature documents how in the tropical forests of Central Africa neighbouring interaction is related to physical proximity. For example, the Babongo have a long history of shared migration, linguistic merger and inter-marriage with their neighbours the Mitsogho in Ikobe (Knight 2003: 112), and the Massango (Matsuura 2009). In a study of the Twa, it was shown how ethnic opposition becomes more entrenched when segregation and discrimination increases (Lewis 2000). In contrast, in areas with a rich history of ethnic diversity and movement, such as Sindara, (historically a nodal point for trade and transport), reports of discrimination are more rare (Knight 2003: 112). Recalling AM.'s positive accounts of the inter-ethnic relations in Ntam, where Fang, Ndjem, Bakwele and Baka live(d) together and which is also a nodal point on a trade route (cf. 4.1.1), gives a Baka example of this dynamic from a historical and current perspective. The examples from Adjab-Mvadi and the Baka in Makokou suggest that this is similar today. In a way similar to my argument in Chapter Two, whereby an overview of cohabitation modes of Baka and their neighbours should include those living their daily life close to others, and the *lacunae* of those living far away in the forest (cf. 2.3.2), I suggest that physical proximity or distance should not be taken as a criteria to include or exclude players in the Baka social environment from approaches to understanding Baka mobility.

I now introduce a further argument to support my idea, which takes the analysis to the level of emotions.

6.3 Economics and Emotions

As I recapped at the start of this chapter, relations between the Baka and their neighbours have mainly been understood from a socio-economic, socio-political or ritual point of view. In contrast, Rupp emphasises the variation in relationships, and the personal, emotional element of the inter-ethnic relations in her work concerning four distinct communities, the *Bangando*, *Baka*, *Bakwele*, and *Mbomam* in South-Eastern Cameroon (Rupp 2003, Rupp 2011). She distinguishes between three social dimensions within these relations - alliances and friendships, shared ceremonies, and cooperative activities – whereby:

Far from conforming to the simple, economic classifications of ‘pygmy’ and ‘villager’ into which equatorial African forest communities are often slotted, the diverse communities of South-Eastern Cameroon engage in manifold and changing social relationships, and identify self and other in multiple and shifting ways. ... The threads of affiliation and affection [...] are, in fact, thoroughly twisted and tangled together (Rupp 2003: 39).

A *homonym* is a namesake, and the practice of *homonymy* constitutes one of the forms of alliance, and refers to the common practice of naming Baka children after a close family member, or after an *ami*. Those who share first names, the *homonyms*, ‘typically enjoy an intimate relationship of sharing and support’ (Rupp 2003: 46). The Baka on the Ivindo spoke with joy of naming their children after an *ami*, which confirms that *homonymy* is not, as often previously thought, a negative expression of subjugation, but one of long-lasting friendship and emotional ties between Baka and their neighbours.

As I aim to show, the ‘affective entanglement’ is not only a question of identity, self and other as Rupp has argued (Rupp 2011), but also relevant to mobility through the relations with inter-ethnic and other players. In Chapter Three, I had introduced how Baka decision-making and related mobility are governed by heart and mind, and the spirit mediating between the two, so by affective and emotional considerations, which

extend into a spiritual domain (cf. 3.2.3). Bringing together this observation with the above arguments of affective concerns in inter-ethnic relations, allows us to see mobility as a two-way street on a personal level, as question and answer game within existing relationships, or as the proposal of new ones, or 'of effort and pressure' (Adey 2010: 18). This notion, of course, works against the dominant 'discourse of inequality [about villagers and pygmies]... which tends to ignore the complex tangles of sentiments that comprise Baka-Bangando relations' (Rupp 2003: 53), or Baka-Bakwele ones. Moreover, the discourse of inequality disregards the Baka intra-group differentiation (cf. 2.4), and the (simply human) variation in their interest for and response to the players in their social environment. Rupp describes an interview with a Baka man named Michel who has become critical of formalised partnerships between Baka and Bangando:

Michel's discussion of their relationships grew more complex after Michel had emphatically expressed his distaste for alliances and partnerships with Bangando. When pressed about why Baka would continue to work for Bangando – even voluntarily – if they harbour such negative emotions for their Bangando partners, Michel and his friend, Yana, who had been listening intently to Michel's discussion, both shrugged their shoulders as Yana replied:

Some Baka want to work for Bangando and some don't. Some Baka like Bangando, and some don't. Some Bangando like Baka and some don't. Baka work for Bangando because people have to do what they have to do for their families. But it's better if Baka work for themselves (Rupp 2003: 53).

On the Ivindo, I was given similar responses in that individual autonomy and freedom of association are not something restricted to other Baka individuals, but extends to all partners within the social environment. Relations can be wanted or unwanted and bringing in affect emphasises the non-observable component of mobility and the unspoken in human relationships, and may be understood as extending the idea of *motility*, of capacity (cf. 5.2), to relationships. 'Affect capacity', in turn, brings in

aspirations and a strategic component to mobility. From my observation and the life histories, *molongo* is undertaken with family or friends who are emotionally close; the same goes for hanging out in the village. I came to think of Baka kinship rules as a random way of bringing people together spatially, whereas the movement from one spatial location to another, for example from village to gold field, is then triggered by friendship and emotional ties, with other Baka or neighbours. This thought finds support in a recent study whereby ‘hunter-gatherers display a unique social structure where, firstly, either sex may disperse or remain in their natal group, secondly, adult brothers and sisters often co-reside, and, thirdly, most individuals in residential groups are genetically unrelated’, which results in ‘large interaction networks of unrelated adults’ (Hill et al. 2011). On the other hand, it may be seen as the ‘affective turn’ in anthropology (Clough & Halley 2007), and the idea of ‘radical relationality as the ability to increase one’s ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others, including non-human, post-human and inhuman’ (Moore 2011) entering into the understanding of the world of ‘pygmies’.

A further, very emotional aspect of the inter-ethnic relationship is the jealousy of villagers about (the perception of) the freedom of movement and the individual autonomy involved in Baka forest way of life. This refers to the small stature as something, which allows swift movement, and the prowess of going into the deep forest (Bonhomme 2005), as well as the perception of Baka as having mythical spiritual powers, which enable them to engage in and resist sorcery. The jealousy became tangible through various exchanges with non-Baka on the Ivindo, and was confirmed as an issue in discussion with Wenceslas Mamboundou (Wenceslas Mamboundou, personal communication).

Within forest forager studies, the walking paths, which traverse the forest and connect small and large forager camps as well as neighbouring villages have been closely studied and interpreted as paths of communication (LeClerc 2001). As I have shown, the groups along the Ivindo travel by canoe rather than through the forest, which inspired me to consider the routes of communication and interaction in a different way. My inspiration comes from social network analysis, where the attributes of a

relationship between two actors are understood to be about the duration of the relationship, the intensity, the underlying roles or the rights and obligations associated with it, and which are also conceptualised as paths of communication (Lang & Schnegg 2002). Taking this into consideration together with the observation of increasing sedentism, allows me to suggest that with the reduction in communication along distant forest paths (cf. 4.3.3), not just relational mobility, but the quality of the relation is to be considered as the resource and link. The moments of decision as to whether or not to engage with someone, from which result mobility or immobility and which depend on the quality and care within the relationship, can be conceptualised as the nodal points in the mobility network.

To summarise, personal relationships can be formalised and last for a lifetime as (ritual) friendships with a 'high degree of social interaction and emotional articulation' (Rupp 2003: 39). Or, they can be looser, ending when the Baka are no longer satisfied with the *bien garder*, the care-aspect of the relationship. As with *toma*, this applies to Baka intra-group and extra-group relations. From a Baka perspective, interactions with players from near and far, the context, and the emotional quality of these relations are an active part of social reality and thereby also of their mobility considerations. The important thing is that in most cases a relation is a question of choice, and that the emotional quality of the relationship is a decisive factor in what becomes mobility or immobility. This argument mirrors and extends my conceptualisation of Baka mobility as a *motivational complex* (cf. 3.4). Personal relations can be of a brief nature or last for a lifetime, and therefore, including emotional considerations in the conceptualisation of mobility applies to short-term and long-term approaches. Support for this idea can be drawn from the argument that *ntumbu*, a period of about two years after which Baka decide whether or not to move on or stay in a location depending on the quality of interaction with their neighbours (cf. 3.3.2). In this way, the quality of the relation is included in the spatial, temporal and social complex according to Baka understanding, and in an academic conceptualisation.

6.4 The Social and the Spiritual in Baka Elephant Hunting

The second aspect relevant to a general understanding of Baka mobility in the long-term is also derived from the Baka understanding of the world as relational. In particular, the point that all Baka terminology which reports their relation with space and time is organised from the 'point of view people's relation amongst each other from within an activity, with reference to unity of residential group' (LeClerc 2001: 112, my translation; cf. 3.1). The Baka understanding of the world as relational also includes the mythical plane. The tropical forest is not only a natural space of plants, but also an imaginary and social space and the seat of Baka mythology and ritual practices (AB. 2.8.2011; Tsuru 1998). The Baka relation with space constitutes the relation of the people amongst themselves, and at same time with the spirit world in what LeClerc has called the 'superposition of social and spatial world' (LeClerc 2001: 236); space, time, sociality and spirits are all interrelated. One activity where this becomes particularly evident is the elephant hunt.

The elephant hunt is the 'great hunt' in Baka understanding, and in past generations one or more ivory tusks were given as dowry. The elephant hunt has considerable mythical and social significance, as it necessitates bringing together male and female powers. LeClerc has conceptualised this as the division or opposition between 'symbolical efficiency' and 'technical efficiency', whereby the symbolic is associated with the women and the technical with the men (LeClerc 2001). The organisation of the elephant hunt is divided between the women using their clairvoyant powers to connect with the spirit of the elephant and orient the men towards the prey, and the men who carry out the hunt with technical skill. However, the spiritual powers of the women can only be effective if the community comes together to support them, which means that cooperation between women and men is necessary to ensure symbolic efficiency (Joiris 1993: 60). Given the relevance of the mythical dynamic, the success of the hunt depends on the women and they are deemed responsible for failure of the hunt in that 'for the Baka, the technical efficacy is subordinated to the symbolic efficacy' (LeClerc 2001: 263, my translation). My reason for detailing this aspect is the hypothesis that LeClerc advances concerning the relation between Baka

sedentarisation along the road and the elephant hunt. He argues that sedentism is directly linked to the lack of success in elephant hunting,¹⁴² but that sedentarisation did not bring about a change in Baka thinking. Rather the regroupment by the roadside was a 'mythological move' by the women to strengthen their female symbolic powers regarding the elephant hunt, firstly, to bring together the group in which are vested their symbolic powers, and secondly, as the elephant hunt is a 'total religious fact' (LeClerc 2001: 291). It is my argument that the understanding of the situation on the Ivindo shows certain parallels.

The Mythical Relevance of Gabon

Considering what constitutes mobility and immobility for the Baka on the Ivindo, firstly, returns us to the argument of dwellings as moorings and 'auto-generated' sedentism made in Chapter Three (cf. 3.1.5). In the above analysis of Baka movement to the roadside it equally became evident that the motives for the regroupment originated from within the Baka community. Drawing a parallel between the activities in Cameroon and those in Gabon gives support to the suggestion that the Baka on the Ivindo control and manage their levels of sedentism, and have done so for many years.

Secondly, on a spatial level, I have introduced how *following* is what constitutes observable Baka mobility, and at the same time is the relational mobility quality connecting many of the social partners in the Baka 'care-network'. The above example of the ritual elephant hunt has shown the relevance and interrelatedness of the mythical in Baka group mobility and immobility. During my time on the Ivindo, I did not witness an elephant hunt involving the entire group gathering in the forest to conduct such a ritual activity. Elephant hunting was limited to individual hunters who would sell the ivory for profit; on rare occasions elephant meat was eaten. It is, thus, my argument that the mythical is not only relevant to Baka hunting rituals, but that a parallel can be drawn to the migratory movements to and along the Ivindo. Thinking in a different time frame, 'Gabon' as the signifier for a search for a better life and freedom from discrimination (cf. 3.3.3) has served to bring together and hold together

¹⁴² LeClerc suggests that the Baka did not appreciate the demise in the number of elephants in Southern Cameroon from about the 1950s onwards (LeClerc 2001).

the family units on their move from Cameroon and Congo into Gabon; Baka have been following 'Gabon' rather than an elephant.

In this way, I suggest that 'Gabon' may be conceptualised as a 'long-term-elephant-hunt', a trigger for group unity, which spans several generations. I draw support for this idea from the fact that in Gabon too, the number of elephants is related to human impact (Barnes et al. 1991), and Baka elephant hunting has been severely limited due to hunting prohibitions (cf. 6.1.5.1). Accepting the premise that Baka conceptualisation and practice of the world as relational have changed neither in Cameroon (LeClerc 2001) nor on the Ivindo, allows us to see a transformation of Baka mythical and spiritual realm over the last fifty years. The validating (observable) counter-part of this idea is that, during this timespan, a large majority of the Baka have increasingly 'left the forest', have reduced their individual autonomy previously practiced by spending long periods in the forest as small family units, and are living in greater proximity to their neighbours.

It can be argued that 'Gabon' has threefold significance for the Ivindo Baka. Firstly, it stands for the economic improvement and a 'life at ease', free of violence (cf. 3.3.3). Secondly, it acts as the *glue* of Ivindo Baka society over long time periods, counteracting the loss of large group rituals (ritual elephant hunt), but also a general loss of ritual knowledge (cf. 2.4). Thirdly, it evidences Baka mobility in tune with larger social developments as many people are 'searching for Gabon' (cf. 1.2.1, cf. 3.3.3). It is further my contention that following the diminution or loss of seasonal dispersal and aggregation to maintain Baka sociality, the social *glue* has become divided into a physical and emotional mooring through dwellings (cf. 3.1.5), and the ideational mobility aspect of 'Gabon'. These two factors stand in relation as mobility and fixity, and, I suggest, constitute an essential underlying aspect of observable Baka mobility and immobility understood as relational. The relation between the ideational stimulus of 'Gabon' and observable movement can also be considered under *motility*, as potential and actualisation in mobility, and ideational mobility in the form of aspirations and dreams preceding observable mobility conceptualised as part of *appropriation* (cf. 5.2).

6.5 Relational Mobility on the Ivindo

Knowing about the type and quality of Baka-neighbour or Baka-mobility player interaction is essential to understanding the dynamics of migration, mobility, and immobility, towards and along the Ivindo. The diversity of relations underlies and causes the variation in mobility practices. Firstly, there is Baka intra-group differentiation¹⁴³ in that the Baka amongst themselves are not a homogenous mass, but show distinct characteristics and practices on a personal level and in the different locations not only along the Ivindo, but also in Minvoul, and, as the stories go, in Cameroon. The interactions with their neighbours go beyond purely economical exchange relations, and I advocate Rupp's threefold classification into *alliances and friendships, shared ceremonies, and cooperative activities* (Rupp 2003), for those relations involving affection and care. Again, giving visibility to the *lacunae*, one could consider adding a fourth category for those relationships which (claim to) have no strong emotional component.

This diversity of relational interaction is grounded in the fact that the neighbours are also heterogeneous, as is the tropical mosaic forest, in which most of these interactions take place. Accepting the diversity underlines the argument that 'it is a fatal flaw to study only parts of society, and that it is important to examine both partners' conceptions of each other in order to understand their relations' (Lewis & Köhler 2002, quoting Vansina 1990: 29), or as I would add, *all players' conceptions*.

From the above case studies and examples of inter-ethnic relations, I argue that in addition to economic, ecological, political and ritual considerations, one might speak of an additional layer in the inter-ethnic relations, something I term a 'care-network', which is often a prerequisite to mobility decisions. Much of the dynamic of *bien garder* underlying relational mobility is about ensuring the other's wellbeing. I take support for this idea from the fact that relations of affective solidarity and *bien garder* apply not only to the local group, but also in other locations. During visits, or ensuing from

¹⁴³ Employing this term, I support the analytic shift from difference to differentiation, from static to processual (Moore 2011)

other forms of mobility, a 'pygmy' moving from one camp to another will automatically be included in the local solidarity structures at the new camp (Joiris 2003: 60), as the migratory history in Chapter Four also documented.

Joiris has questioned whether and how the understanding of Baka inter-ethnic relations applies to the larger framework of hunter-gatherer studies, as complex interactions with neighbours have, of course, also been documented elsewhere (for example, Woodburn 1988). In her analysis, Joiris shows how, in other cases, inter-ethnic ties are less diverse and limited to one type of relationship, whereas the Baka have at least three different types of relation (Joiris 2003: 75) (cf. 6.1). With regard to mobility, it is important to see that these various relationships are not in opposition to mobility as a way of life (Joiris 2003: 68). It is exactly the diversity and flexibility of the relationships, inter-ethnic or otherwise, which supports the acephalous organisation of the Baka, and mobility as practice for conflict resolution and individual mobility.

However, Joiris makes an interesting point. She contends that the flexibility of the relational model is dependent on the neighbouring organisation also being characterised by mobility and a non-hierarchical political organisation; and she highlights that the communities involved in the study were all previously nomads or semi-nomads (Joiris 2003: 76). This point is also based on an earlier comparison with Grinker's observations in the Ituri, with which she finds 'astonishing similarities' to suggest that 'an inter-ethnic model of this type exists for non-hierarchical village societies' (Joiris 1998).¹⁴⁴ Joiris argues that the relational qualities will be different between 'pygmies' and local neighbours with a non-hierarchical and a hierarchical political structure' (Joiris 2003: 76). Going on from this argument, it bears thinking about whether mobility is not only a question of the social organisation, in this case egalitarian, which corresponds well with other non-hierarchical units, but a result of these relations. Turning the notion on its head, maybe the intensity and quality of the (inter-ethnic) relations is what made acephalous organisations originally possible?

¹⁴⁴ However, Joiris ponders whether this is a 'question of method and model' Joiris (1998).
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It has been described how inter-ethnic bonds remain for a lifetime unless there is a forced separation (Joiris 2003: 62). This is not only something documented by the migratory history of the Ivindo Baka in Chapter Four, but also something, which supports the argument of 'auto-generated' territorial stability (cf. 3.1.5). If there is sufficient care, peace and feeling at ease, then immobility sets in. As this PhD has shown, Baka group mobility along the Ivindo is decreasing, and above, I advanced the argument that the long-term impact of this change may be affecting and causing a two-fold separation in Baka mythological space and ritual practice, into related physical immobility and ideational mobility. On the one hand, establishing and maintaining group unity is no longer practiced through seasonal gatherings and ritual elephant hunting, but seems to be moving to a 'higher plane', to the image of 'Gabon' employed in the long-term to reunite clan and family members. On a short-term, proximate level, the increase in sedentarised lifestyle amongst the Baka is accompanied by an increase in the already established inter-ethnic relations and those with other players in their social environment. I hypothesise that this development will become even more important in the coming years and decades, as these interactions in the short term and the long term continue to trigger and impact Baka mobility and immobility considerations. Mobility conceptualised as relational, therefore, suggest itself as the appropriate theoretical framework for future analysis.

7 Quo vadent Baka?

The Baka way of life I encountered on the Ivindo and around Minvoul still has traces, but in many ways is far removed from the image of the forest forager, moving in small hunting groups, reuniting with his clan members at regular intervals throughout the seasonal cycle for ritual purposes and knowledge transmission. The changes I encountered concern a diversification of livelihoods to include subsistence agriculture, wage labour and gold work; gender roles; loss of ritual knowledge as well as dance and singing practices; and challenges to egalitarian demand sharing. Some of the Baka in Adjab have become members of the ruling party in Gabon, the PDG, and actively participate in local politics. All of the Baka in Adjab have their own plantations, the proceeds of which form the main part of their diet. Two poignant examples which lead me to argue that the Baka are post-foragers who value dwellings as moorings, remain sedentary for long periods of time, and are an ethnic group within a large network of diverse intra-group and extra-group relationships, some of which are characterised only by ethnic considerations.

This understanding of Baka as post-foragers also entails an appreciation of their intra-group diversity characterised by a trajectory along the River Ivindo of different practices and values ranging from the deep forest to village life to urban city dwelling. One aspect of this diversity results in my argument that for part of the Baka population along the Ivindo sedentarisation is 'auto-generated', that it is their wish to integrate into Gabonese society. The challenge has been to analyse and conceptualise Baka mobility practices giving due consideration to these observations on social transformation. It has been my aim to find the right theoretical approach, which allows for the inclusion of the diversity and differentiation, which make up sociality and mobility on the Ivindo in North-Eastern Gabon.

Baka daily mobility is related to collecting firewood, tending plantations, hunting, and taking the dugout canoe to go shopping or fishing. For the Baka themselves, the central aspect of mobility is *molongo*, walking and being in the forest for a period from three days to six months, which can include hunting for others, or only for oneself.

Waves of *molongo* are what brought the Baka to Gabon on a physical level. The reasons for travelling or migrating from Cameroon and Congo to Gabon were manifold. They can be categorised as internal or external to the Baka group, or situated at the interstice of these two categories, whereby internal and external differentiates between factors which enable or constrain Baka group mobility. These factors combined with Baka mobility values such as *bien garder*, taking care of someone, amount to what I have called the *motivational complex*.

The account of historic migration in Chapter Four documents the external reasons as, firstly military violence, *brimade*, or civil war. Also, regroupment activities in Congo and Gabon, and the outbreaks of Ebola constitute causes for enforced movement. An external pull factor was the invitation to the Baka to enter Gabon by the late President Omar Bongo. On the internal side, the factor of *toma*, following, in its diverse forms of push and pull, following family, or being gathered to join other family members, forms the baseline of movement. Secondly, the search for a good life, which is to be understood as constituted by economic improvement and the search for peace, as well as family feuds, and violence against the person, also constitute mobility or immobility factors. At the interstice of internal and external are, firstly, the inter-ethnic relationships and, secondly, sorcery. The quality and interplay of the inter-ethnic relationship, *the bonne ambiance*, *être à l'aise*, and *bien garder*, is decisive in whether the Baka like a place, and whether they stay or go. As I documented in Chapter Four, Baka spend long periods of ten years and more based in one village, if the overall village atmosphere is one of peace and ease. Following Vansina, this is a pattern, which already took shape in pre (-colonial) history, where Bantu villages became a stable point of reference for foragers (Vansina 1995).

I expanded on the importance of Baka interactions with their social environment in Chapter Six, documenting the heterogeneity of Baka neighbours and relational partners. Following Rupp and Joiris, I argue that this diversity of relationships must find recognition in the conceptualisation of inter-ethnic relations, beyond the 'pygmy-villager' dichotomy, and suggested to rather speak of mobility *players*. The relations between the Baka and their social environment are what triggers daily mobility,

molongo, immobility or other forms of mobility on the part of the Baka, and I postulate that a conceptualisation of Baka mobility is incomplete without taking them into account. Again building on the work of Rupp, I suggest that it is time to look beyond the purely economical to include the affective quality of these relationships as contributing to the realisation of any connection, and resulting mobility or immobility. The central inspiration for this idea comes from the Baka concept of decision-making, which includes all mobility considerations being guided by heart, mind and spirit. Most importantly, I identified *toma*, not only as a physical concept of following clan relatives or friends from other ethnic groups to a new location and the central emic reason for mobility, but as an ideational concept. Chapter Four evidenced that in the migration along the Ivindo the Baka were following 'Gabon' as a synonym for a better life; from a material point of view through earning good money in the gold fields, but also equating 'Gabon' with a more peaceful life, with less bullying and discrimination.

This conceptualisation builds on LeClerc's observations that for the Baka space, time, and sociality are interconnected and merged, from which, in turn, can be drawn three ideas. Firstly, this suggests the notion of the *motivational complex* along spatial and temporal lines. Secondly, if Baka understanding of their position in the world is relational, then mobility as their way of connecting the relational players in their social network must also be relational. With this concept, I build on the understanding of mobility as relational, mobility and fixity as interconnected, and immobilities or fixities as mobility enablers, advanced by Adey. Thirdly, Baka relational space also includes the mythical or spiritual realm, on a personal level with decision-making related to spirit guidance, but also on a group level. This was previously related to elephant hunting, but with loss of ritual knowledge and a demise in these established practices, I argue that mythical relations have split into two parts; on the one hand, as ideational *toma* following the image of 'Gabon' in the long-term, and on the other, as an increase in proximity and intensity of relation with their neighbours in the short-term. This again documents the interrelatedness of the spatial, temporal and social in Baka understanding, and mobility as relational. If we allow for this relational approach to mobility, then mobility is indeed one of the most valuable resources within a society and in its dealings with external mobility partners. In this context and fine-tuning

established mobility reasoning, emotions are not only relevant regarding conflict resolution, but affect many more types and levels of mobilities.

Gabon is the site of artisanal gold work in which some of the Baka participate with great success, and I was lucky to be there at a time of great upheaval when these gold fields were being closed by the Gabonese state. This gave me the chance to see the diversity of Baka sociality, and that the mobility associated with travelling to and returning from the gold fields, or household organisation where the husband is in the gold field and the wife is in the house in the village, cannot be adequately conceptualised by forager mobility theories. To account for Baka individual and group mobility related to gold work, I employ the concept of *motility*, the capacity to be mobile, as it not only looks at actualised observable mobility, but also considers the aspirations and limitations, which precede movement. I suggest that the three *motility* determinants *access*, *competence* and *appropriation* are useful heuristic tools in analysing the composition of personal or group *motility*, and resulting mobility or immobility. *Motility*, which can also be understood as 'mobility capital', allows for the adaptation of the unit of analysis to group and individual. The notion of 'mobility capital' is helpful in overcoming the divide between psychology, anthropology and sociology, and in studying social change and inequality.

On the Ivindo, I found myself catapulted into a world, which seemed to span aeons. The tranquillity along the river encompassed scenes from primal hunting to a Bakwele couple being accused of sorcery because they were using family planning techniques. In considering the application of my field data to larger questions, I was particularly struck by the questions around the inter-ethnic diversity and the urban-rural dynamic. How in what is perceived as this vast impenetrable expanse of the tropical forests in Central Africa, there have always been nodal points, large towns of human proximity and ethnic diversity with high levels of interaction, and limited discrimination. On the other hand, with increasing geographical distance from social centres, for example from Libreville to Makokou, or from Makokou to Adjab-Mvadi, there is little room for change in established practices, and increasing discrimination.

Much has changed on the Upper Ivindo over the last 20 years, and it became clear that the Baka as well as their neighbours are 'leaving the forest'. There is a general move by the Baka from the depths of the forest towards urban centres, and a growing interest in participating in what are perceived to be the benefits of urban life.¹⁴⁵ During my time on the Ivindo, I aimed to straddle the diachronic-synchronic disciplinary crux of studying the parts of society in order to understand the historical relevance, or looking at society as a whole, which means neglecting social change. As my field period was limited to one year, my fieldwork is best situated in the ethnographic present. I hypothesise that the process of 'leaving the forest' will continue and affect Baka mobility patterns in the long run. A continuing decrease in *molongo* will be coupled with a rise in the intensity of sedentarisation. This, in turn, will increase the frequency of extra-group relations, and the importance thereof to Baka lived mobility practices, and academic conceptualisations. I assume that the importance of mobility as a conflict resolution inherent to acephalous political systems will diminish as the age structure of the population changes, and with it the experience of it. In all this, Baka will undergo many changes in practice, but will retain their freedom of mind and their mobile mentality for a long time to come. As they become more physically moored, the ideational and emotional mobility is likely to increase.

On return to Europe, perusing my notes, I found myself considering the application of Kopytoff to the situation of the Baka in Adjab. In *The African Frontier*, Kopytoff argues that as Bantu Africans migrated into thinly settled areas, from the metropolis to the frontier, the frontier was at once the force for cultural-historical continuity, conservatism and transformation. Kopytoff's work was focused on the Bantu group, but maybe the idea of the so-called frontiersmen, who go out to found the new settlements can also be applied to the Baka. Amongst the Baka in Adjab, one voice emerged with great strength to argue that they are too dependent on and limited by riverine travel, too far away from the benefits of a larger town, specifically Makokou. The mobility idea derived from these facts is to move to a location along the road between Maibut and Makokou. It seems unlikely that the whole village will pack up and go (although one can never know), but maybe there will be a group of

¹⁴⁵ One of the saddening aspects is the dramatic rise in levels of alcohol consumption.

frontiersmen who set off to find a good space for a new village, to which more of the Adjab population can follow. Frontier in this understanding would be the *interstice* between the Baka and their social environment.

Undoubtedly, the Baka will continue to be on the move, whether they ‘follow honey’, or follow ‘Gabon’, and search for a better life of wellbeing, economic prosperity and parity, and freedom from discrimination and violence. Most Baka seem to embrace technological advances, and one Baka man took my music player with joy, envious of its capacity to store so many different tunes. The Baka neighbours will continue to ask for ritual protection from the ‘pygmies’, and be faced with the conundrum of needing the Baka in and out of the forest at the same time. From a developmental perspective, there are similarities between Baka traditions and those of the Cologne Carnival: both are struggling for youngsters to learn and continue the traditions. The Baka should not be condemned to stay in the forest, if they want modernity. The only thing which can be done, is to help them value what they have, and explain that if they go too fast they will end up losing something invaluable.

In summary, with this PhD I offer the first scientific portrait of the Baka living along the Ivindo in North-Eastern Gabon. I describe their sociality and practices, and highlight social change, as compared with the general depiction of Baka as mere tropical forest foragers or prehistoric relics. I work with the central idea of mobility as relational, whereby relational conceptually refers to the interrelation of movement and mooring, to the interaction of position and outcome as mobility or immobility. Relational also refers to the idea of mobility as socially produced. My second conceptual notion is that of *motility*, of the *capacity* or *potential* to be mobile. As *motility* analyses what comes before observable movement, it reflects the idea of potential and outcome, and I would classify it as a conceptual realisation of mobility as relational.

Applying these considerations, I introduce Baka emic mobility values to show that they are what connect the different factors and multicausality of observable Baka mobility to form a *motivational complex*. I further evidence that emotional and affective considerations between the Baka and their neighbours or larger social environment,

the mobility *players*, constitute a trigger for mobility or immobility, and for the choice in the type of mobility, especially in the long-term perspective. It is my argument that acknowledging the impact of personal relations and emotions on a larger temporal scale enables to go beyond the (temporal) limitations of ecologically determined approaches to mobility. Environment should always comprise the social dimension of environment, unless specifically defined otherwise. In all this, I suggest that extending the unit of analysis, to include the individual and personal or small groups, helps to see ideational mobility and the processes and patterns that bring about social change, in a post-forager environment and elsewhere. In this way, *motility* and relational mobility can be usefully employed to address one of the central topics in anthropology today as addressed by Nanneke Redclift, namely to get at the unspoken of human existence and sociality.

In his 2012 RAI speech,¹⁴⁶ Nigel Rapport emphasised the need of anthropology to ‘recognise capacities’, and the philosopher Martha Nussbaum¹⁴⁷ has advanced the ‘capability approach’ together with Amartya Sen. Accepting that capacity is a synonym for capability in sociological terms, documents the increasing importance of this approach in theory building generally. In Cameroon, one Baka healer had a vision, which foresees a Baka becoming president of Cameroon. In Gabon, there will hopefully soon be a seventh category and a new ‘capacity’ to add to the cohabitation list of Baka and their neighbours: a Baka village (of those who wish to become sedentarised) with their own Baka village chief officially recognised by the Gabonese state. And that will be a good reason to dance and have a party Baka style.

¹⁴⁶ Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) Conference ‘Anthropology in the World’, London, June 8-10, 2012

¹⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum is Albertus-Magnus-Professor 2012 at the University of Cologne.

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Glossary of Baka Terms

This list includes Baka terminology used in the thesis text. The Baka on the Ivindo employ many French words in their daily exchanges, for some of which there is no direct Baka translation. Therefore, both Baka and French words are jointly listed in alphabetical order, with the French terms indicated through italicisation.

Baka Term	English Explanation
a toda	In the same house, belonging to the same clan
amansi	end of the world
ami	socio-economic relation with member of other ethnic group
<i>batche</i>	large sheet of plastic, tarpaulin
bako a wule	the sun is no longer in the middle of the day, it has moved from there towards <i>dakala</i> , meaning evening which starts as 5pm
bala	collective forest camp
bele	forest
belebele	always or everywhere
<i>bien garder</i>	to take care of, being looked after well
bkbel	Bakwele
bo	person or people
bo siti	bad person
bo wamo	people from Cameroon
<i>bons</i>	small debt
bouma	dance
<i>bricolage</i>	waged labour
<i>brimade</i>	bullying
buma (buma-le)	heart (my heart)
<i>chocolat</i>	ingredient for (meat) sauce made from mashed fruit kernels
<i>cholère</i>	anger, rage
<i>circulation</i>	equivalent to Baka term <i>mosesanu</i> , to walk small distances at day or night; signifies neighbourhood relationship, the communication between two camps, and the paths that connect places; but includes short riverine travel
dadi bo	many people
dakala	evening, after 5pm
dja mbo kia	opening of the world

Edzengui	forest spirit
epesa	having a good time, a party (<i>faire l'ambiance</i>)
essanga	flood regions, forest areas unfit for planting or building
<i>être à l'aise</i>	to feel good
ewawa	a tree; Baka name for Été, the tree name in Bakwélé
<i>faire l'ambiance</i>	having a good time
gbagala	large semi-permanent settlement near farmer village
jugement	birth certificates
kabu	anger, rage
Kaka	Fang
keta	dreams, visions
limbanga	only the couple quits the group for more than a day
loti	friendship
ma ledji a bele	to come out of the forest
ma sela ee	to change a plan
ma simsa eke ma me	to have an idea
ma wele tou we	to make a plan
mabé	tree in Baka-Fang origin myth; Adjab in Fang; Moabi in French
mbambo	money
mbandzo	roofed assembly place in village
mbayi	a tree; Baka name for Kuambai, the tree name in Bakwélé
mbi	clan
me	ancestor spirits
mengoum	type of nut
mobo	fruit; looks like papaya, tastes like carrot
mongindi	between wulu spaces but not essanga
mokila	shape-shifting, power to transform into elephant
molongo	long walk in forest with family members for hunting or visiting (from several days up to 2years)
mombato	family quits group for more than a day
mon	money
mongengele	to walk far but not for a long period of time
mongulu	dome-shaped Baka dwelling
mosesanu	walk small distances at day or night; signifies neighbourhood relationship, the communication between two camps, and the paths that connect places
moyapa	family quits group for 2 to 3 hours
na bana djoko	to take care of, being looked after well
na dja bo djoko	to take care of, being looked after well

ndanda	place/location or moment
ndondo	wild yam
ndze	blood
nganga	healer
noo	family quits group for a day
ntumbu	time period of about 2 years
nuale	father, mother; depending on pronunciation
<i>pailles</i>	straw roof
paki	social unit of band and its territory
<i>pirogue</i>	dugout canoe
<i>piroguier</i>	helmsman of dugout
poki	honey
sendo	hunt
<i>souffrance</i>	suffering
<i>suivre</i>	equivalent to toma
tie	place or time
tolo a bo	cemetery
toma	moving to new location following family or a friend
<i>tradi-practionier</i>	<i>healer, specially trained</i>
<i>tuma</i>	<i>master elephant hunter</i>
<i>vampire</i>	sorcery
<i>veillée</i>	(ritual) ceremony; staying awake all night to dance
<i>vrai vampire</i>	Ebola-fever
wulu	soil for planting and building
ye	family lineage

Appendices

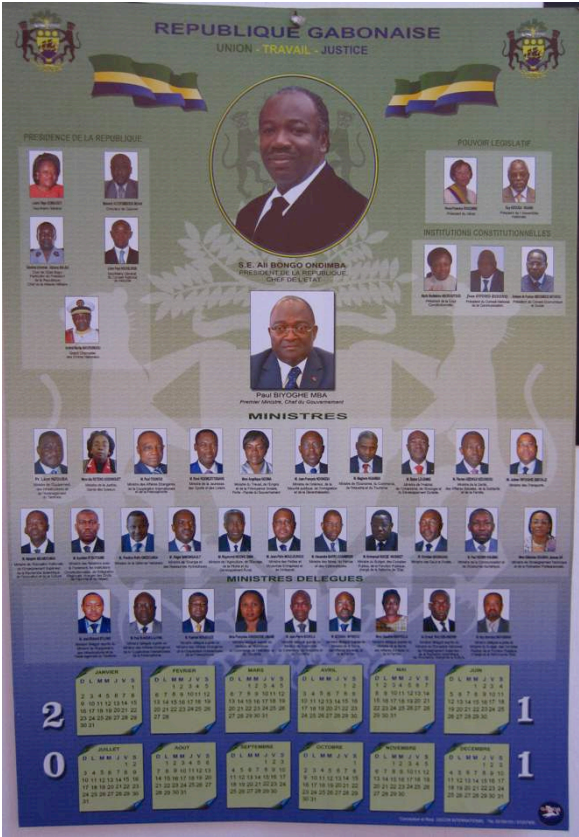
Appendix I – Poster for the Exhibition ‘Gabon - Ma Terre – Mon Futur



Appendix II – Official Logo for the Cinquanteenaire Celebrations



Appendix III – Depiction of the Gabonese political organisation



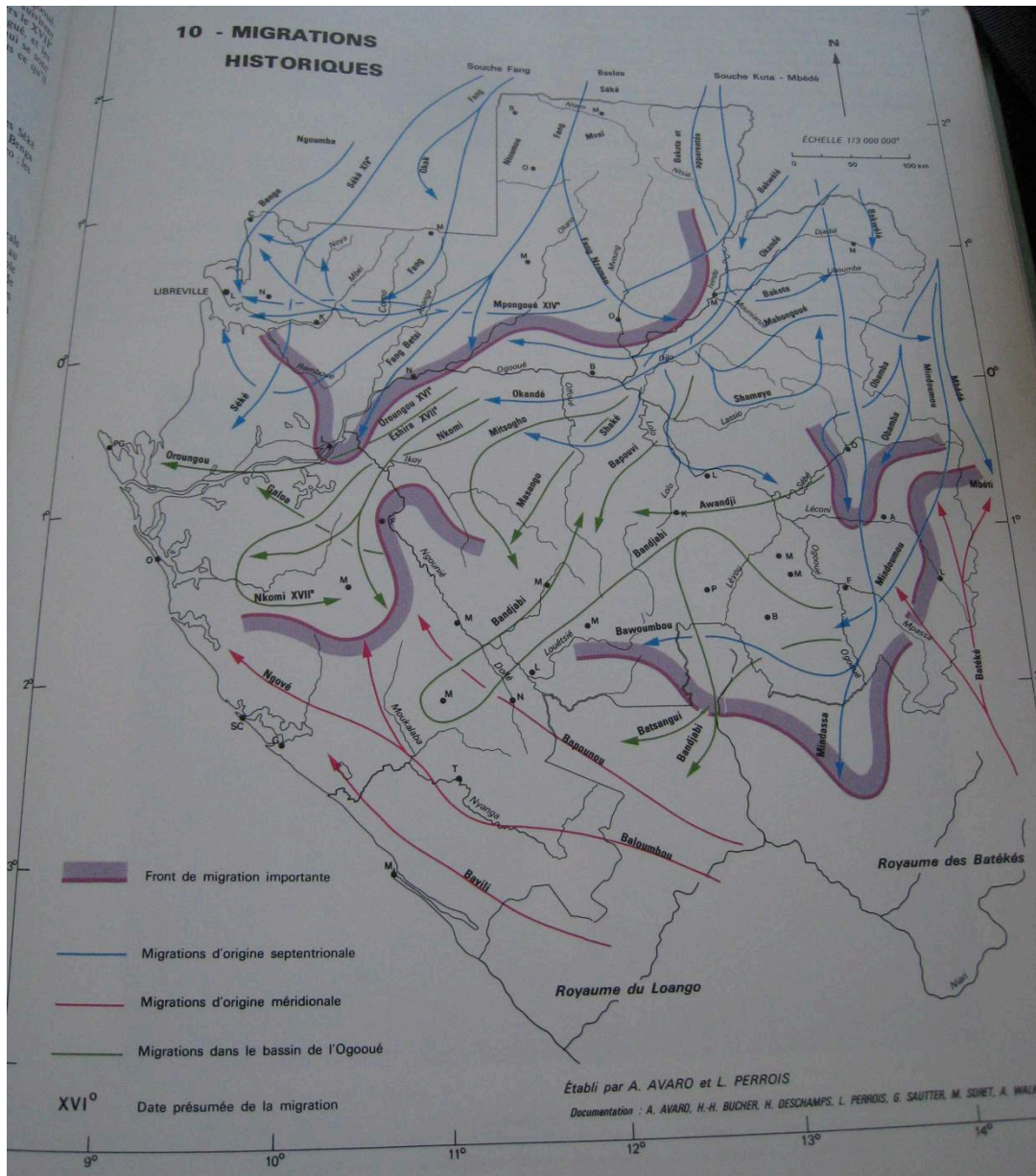
Appendix IV – Image of King Denis



5 - Le roi Denis

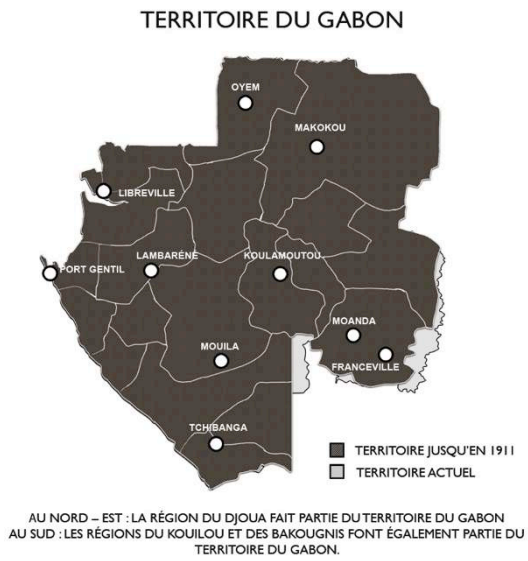
Source: Vincent Bobango, personal collection

Appendix V – Historic Migrations in Gabon



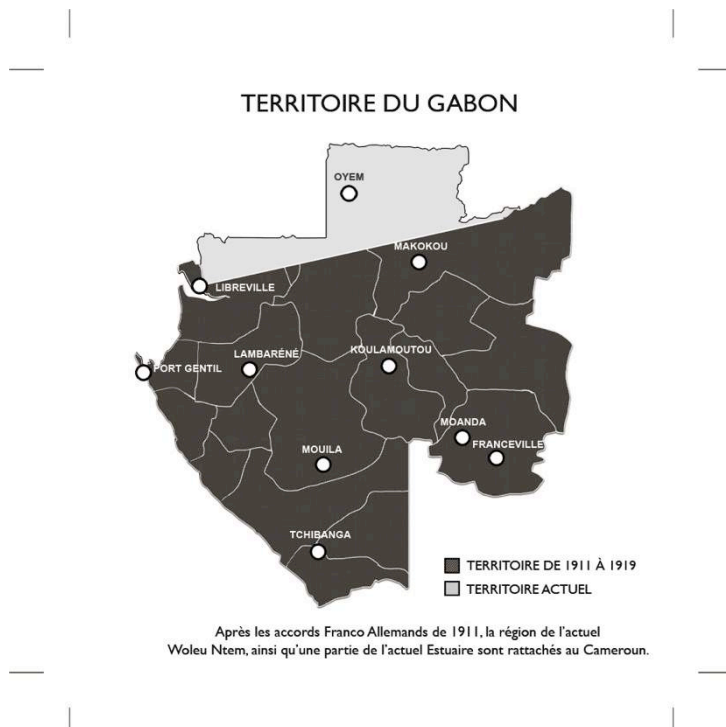
Source: Avaro & Perrois (1983) "Les migrations historiques" [map]. In Géographie et cartographie du Gabon: Atlas illustré. Ministère de l'Education Nationale de la République Gabonaise. Paris: EDICEF 43

Appendix VI – Map of Gabonese territory until 1911



Source: Vincent Bobango, personal collection

Appendix VII – Map of Gabonese-Cameroon (French-German) border during and after German colonial period from 1911 to 1919



Source: Vincent Bobango, personal collectio

Appendix VIII – Overview of Coats of Arms from the Provinces Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo,

Image of Shield



Location and Explanation of Coat of Arms

Region of Woleu-Ntem

Green colour of the shield: the forest. The two "wavy bars" are two rivers, the Woleu and the N'Tem. Pods: cocoa crops.



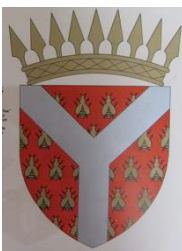
Commune of Oyem

Gold refers to cocoa, and Oyem as the central (Gabonese) market for cocoa crops. Green evokes the forest. The triangle represents Oyem's location on a plateau. The head of an eagle is borrowed from the heraldic symbol of Germany, and reminds of the German activities at the beginning of the 20th century, as Oyem was developed and expanded by the Germans.



District of Minvoul

Chevron: two roads leading to Minvoul. Catfish: fish production in the region. Red and white: coffee.



Region of Ogooué-Ivindo

The shield full of bees symbolises the nation of bees on the left bank of the River Ogooué south of the village Booué. The pall represents the confluence of the Ogooué and its tributary Ivindo.



District of Makokou

The point formed by the partition represents Mount Bélinga. The colour green evokes the forest, and the cocoa pod the important cocoa production. The (ancient) alchemical symbol for iron recalls the exploitation of this mineral in the district.

Appendix IX – Butterflies of Gabon



Source: Shell Gabon

**Espèces intégralement et partiellement protégées rencontrées sur la CFAD
(Concession Forestière sous Aménagement Durable) Mandji de CBG**

Espèces intégralement protégées
 “Leur chasse, leur capture, leur commerce et leur circulation sont interdits”

				
Potto de Bosman <i>Perodictitus potto</i>	Les galagos <i>Galago sp.</i>	Chimpanzé <i>Pan troglodytes</i>	Gorille <i>Gorilla Gorilla</i>	Aigle couronné <i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>
				
Daman des arbres <i>Dendrohyrax arboreus</i>	Chevrotain aquatique <i>Hyemoschus aquaticus</i>	Céphalophe à pattes blanches <i>Cephalophus ogilbyi</i>	Cobe de Fassa <i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Aigle pêcheur <i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
				
Pangolin géant <i>Manis gigantea</i>	Panthère <i>Panthera pardus</i>	Hippopotame <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Chat doré <i>Felis aurata</i>	
				
Crocodile du Nil <i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>	Tortue luth <i>Demochelys coriacea</i>	Oryctérope <i>Orycteropus afer</i>	Lamantin <i>Trichechus senegalensis</i>	

Espèces partiellement protégées
 “Leur chasse, leur capture, leur commerce et leur circulation sont réglementés”

		Chasse à l'éléphant et au buffle fermée depuis 1981		
Potamochère <i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>	Buffle <i>Syncerus caffer nanus</i>		Elephant <i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Mandrill <i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>
				
Python de Seba <i>Python sebae</i>	Céphalophe à dos jaune <i>Cephalophus sylvicultor</i>	Sitatunga <i>Tragelaphus spekei</i>	Crocodile nain <i>Osteolaemus tetraspis</i>	Faux gavial <i>Cataphractus congicus</i>

Grâce à un appui financier de :







© WWF 2007

2. de Krieger / 1997. The Nigerian Field Guide to African Mammals



ESPÈCES INTÉGRALEMENT PROTÉGÉES AU GABON



Leur chasse, leur capture, leur détention, leur commercialisation et leur transport sont interdits



Conformément à l'article 275 du code forestier, les auteurs des infractions vis-à-vis des espèces intégralement protégées sont punis d'un emprisonnement de trois à six mois et d'une amende de 100 000 à 10 000 000 de francs CFA ou de l'une de ces deux peines seulement.

République Gabonaise
 1. © Goups & Papi P. 2001. Fauna of Africa South of the Sahara. Ibis.
 2. © Goups J. 1993. The Giraffe Handbook to African Mammals.
 Avonlea press.






Appendix XII – HA.'s Account of Continued Movement

Researcher: And then you said the others remained near the river. You said the Whites stayed there.

HA.: Yes, because it was you [referring to the white researcher] who took the route to the sea; after the sea it was the Fang. After the Fang, they [the Baka] continued to walk along following the echo of the bees. The entire generation that was behind them when they cut the Moabi tree found a place. They [the Baka] have not found a place because they always followed the echo of the bees. When they arrived in the bush they said to themselves "from where we came, the others remained, we are only walking. Let us stop a little. This is where they went into the forest.

Researcher: So, in fact, the forest is where the Baka stopped?

HA.: That's it. This is why the Baka are attached to the forest, because when they came, instead of doing as others had done in choosing their place, they walked and stopped at the last moment. They continued, continued, continued. Because they saw that there was no more space.

Researcher: And the Fang also remained? Because it is often said that the Baka and Fang came ...

HA.: From Egypt. They all came from Egypt. The Baka were in front, everyone else was behind. Like I said, when they came out of the tree, the others saw a place where they could stay. The other ethnic groups remained there. Thus, each chose his place and only the Baka continued instead of stopping like the others. It was the echo of the bees, which attracted them into the forest. They saw that the others were staying, and they said, we too must remain.

Researcher: But in the forest, they continued to move?

HA.: Yes. In the forest, they were there, they leave the camp, they move to another camp, they continue to yet another camp. They had no fixed place. They were nomads.

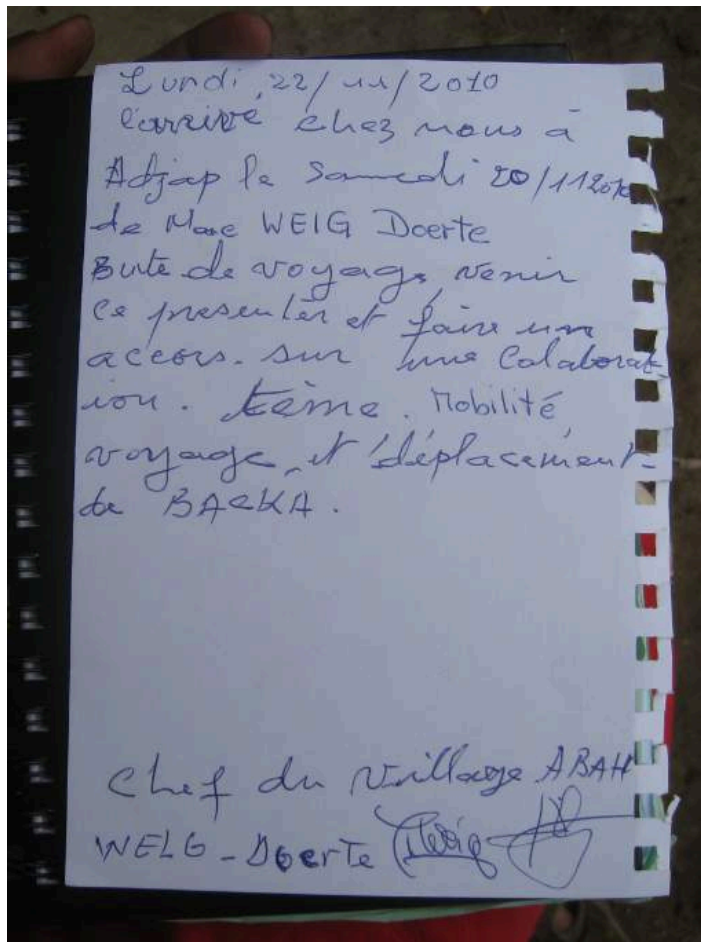
Appendix XIII – Excerpt from Distribution of Forest Peoples in Gabon 1998-2002

Below is a part-replication of 'Extent of [Knight's] Personal Knowledge of Forest Peoples in Gabon, according to accounts in situ and personal contact made during [her] 1997/8 (2002) Fieldtrip' (Knight 2003: 92-94). The excerpt given concerns the two provinces Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo. Surprisingly, Knight lists the Minkébé gold camp and the Ivindo River under Woleu-Ntem, although these are located in the Ogooué-Ivindo, as the name of the province even suggests.

Province	Environment	Forest People (Neighbouring Ethnic Groups)	Location: Core Areas	Known Villages (Population)
Woleu-Ntem	Semi-deciduous, marshy forest.	<i>Baka</i> , [Fang]	Minvoul area. Frequent movement of Baka between Southern Cameroon & Congo	Esseng (Mféfé-nlame), Elarmintang, Zangaville, Bitougha, Oveng Alène, Mimbang, Nkôgh akôme, Doumassi [323 Baka, 10376 Fang (National Census 1993); 364 Baka (Mve Mebia, WWF 2001)]. Roadside and Forest villages
		<i>Baka</i> , [Fang, Bakota]	Minkébé area, into Ogooué-Ivindo	Exact population figures of Baka in trans-boundary region is much higher, & subject to variability. Joiris and Bahuchet (1994) estimate as many as 3000. WWF estimate 500-700 resident in Gabon. Predominantly Semi-permanent settlements.
		<i>Baka</i> [Principally Bakwele]	Minkébé Gold camps Base of Nouna River, and mid-Ivindo River.	Baka Landing Site' (name given by Lahm 2002): established 1996 at old camp of SOGEMI. Baka fled Mayibeth II during second major Ebola outbreak [approx. 17]. Community recently relocated to Ete village in Haut Ivindo [approx. 50].
<i>Baka</i> [Principally Bakota, various Gabonese and West Africans]			Ngutu: mixed camp-a few Baka from 'Baka Landing Site' permanently resident. Source: Lahm (2002, 2003 - personal communication).	
Ogooué-Ivindo	Semi-deciduous lowland Tropical forest	<i>Bakola</i> , (or <i>Bakoya</i>) [Boungom, Bakota, Mahongoué, Bakwélé]	Mekambo between Mazingo & Ekata.	Dept Zadié: Canton Djouah: Etakangaye, Imbong-Mangombe, Mawa, Mbialola, Ngando, Tembe, Itoumbi. Canton Mbengoué: Maheka. Canton Loué: Coco, Mbéza,

				<p>Maboula-Ekata. [Adults: 851 (Odambo 1998); Population: 970 (Cabrol 1961)]. Roadside villages.</p>
		<i>Bakola</i> [Bakota, Bekwélé]	Belinga	<p>1 village reported (Mayers 1987). Bakola now moved (Lahm 2003-personal communication).</p>
		<i>Baka</i> [Bekwélé]	Ivindo River, North of Makoukou	<p>Doumabango (Mekob), [approx. 25-30] Source: Mve Mebia WWF 2002.</p>
		Baka, Bakola [Bekwélé, Fang, Bakota]	Makoukou	<p>Baka-Quartier Zoatab [approx. 20], Quartier Bienvenue [approx 15], Quartier Essick [approx. 20]. Village Alarmintang [approx. 15], Village Tsenkele [approx. 10] Source : Mve Mebia WWF 2002 Bakola - A few individuals based in Makoukou town for paid work.</p>
	Forest-savannah mosaic	<i>Babongo</i> [Simba, Masango]	East of Booué, Bordering Lopé	<p>Misangalani [approx. 28]. Roadside Village. Hombert (1985) mentions Okouga village in the same vicinity.</p>

Appendix XIV – Work ‘Contract’ with the Baka from Adjab



Text

Lundi, 22/11/2010

L'arrive chez nous à Adjab le samedi 20/11/2010 de Mme WEIG Doerte

Bute de voyage, venir se presenter et faire un accord sur une colaboration. tème. mobilité, voyage, et déplacement de Backa.

(Signé par Abah and Doerte)

Translation

Monday, 22/11/2010

Comes to us at Adjab on Saturday, 11.20.2010 Ms. WEIG Doerte.

Aim of her travel, to present herself and set up an agreement about a colaboration. topic. mobility, travel, and displacement of Backa.

(Signed by Abah and Doerte)

Appendix XV – Sample Baka Birth Certificate and Electoral Card

Sample Baka birth certificate (jugement)

REPUBLICQUE GABONAISE

Province de L'Estuaire - Libindo
Commune ou Préfecture de Nakokoou
Centre d'Etat-Civil de Nakokoou

ACTE DE NAISSANCE

VOLET NUMERO 2
(Volet à remettre à celui des parents investi de la puissance paternelle).

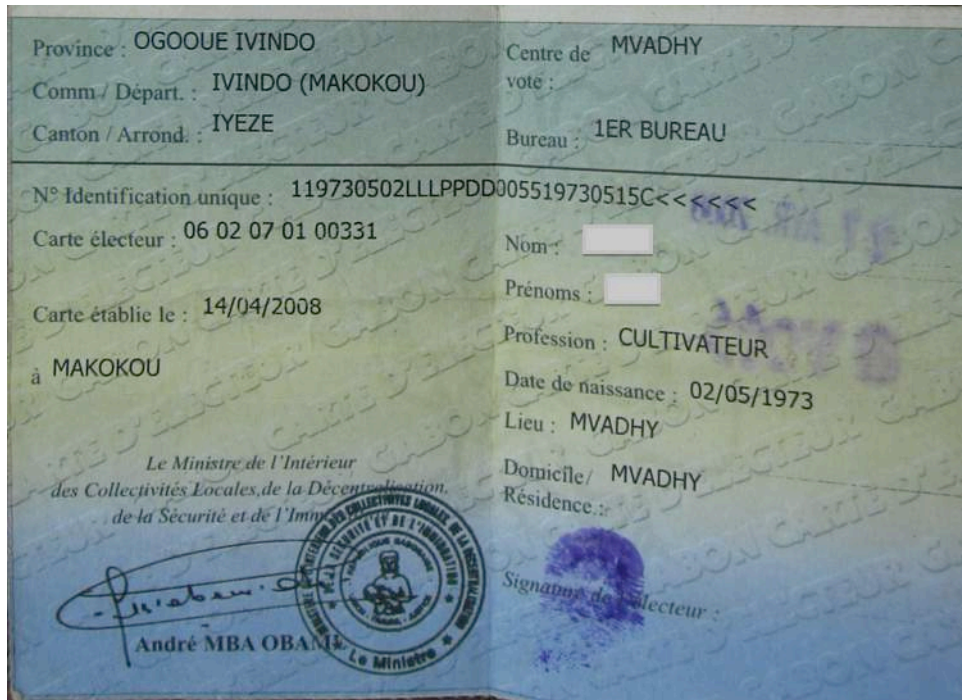
N° 41 Du 24/05/2007
Le (1) vingt quatre mai deux
mil sept
transcription jugement superjctacte
Suivant bulletin de naissance
N°063106-07 du 17/10/2007 du Tribunal
de première instance de Nakokoou
Qui a déclaré la naissance survenue
à NVADHY
Le (1) vers cinq neuf cent
soixante Treize
A heures
D'un enfant de sexe (2) féminin
Nommé (3) BIAKO
Partime
Né de (4) BONBI
Domicilié à NVADHY
Profession Sans
Nationalité Gabonaise
Coutume BAKA
(5)
Et de KIHO
Domicilié à NVADHY
Profession Sans
Nationalité Gabonaise
Coutume BAKA
Sa légitime épouse (6) Les parents (7)
Le déclarant (7)
L'Officier d'Etat-Civil
(Signature et timbre)
Vincent de Paul IVALA

Note très imp-
valable si elle

REPUBLICQUE GABONAISE
REGISTREMENT
DOMAINES
ET TIMBRES
200
FRANCS

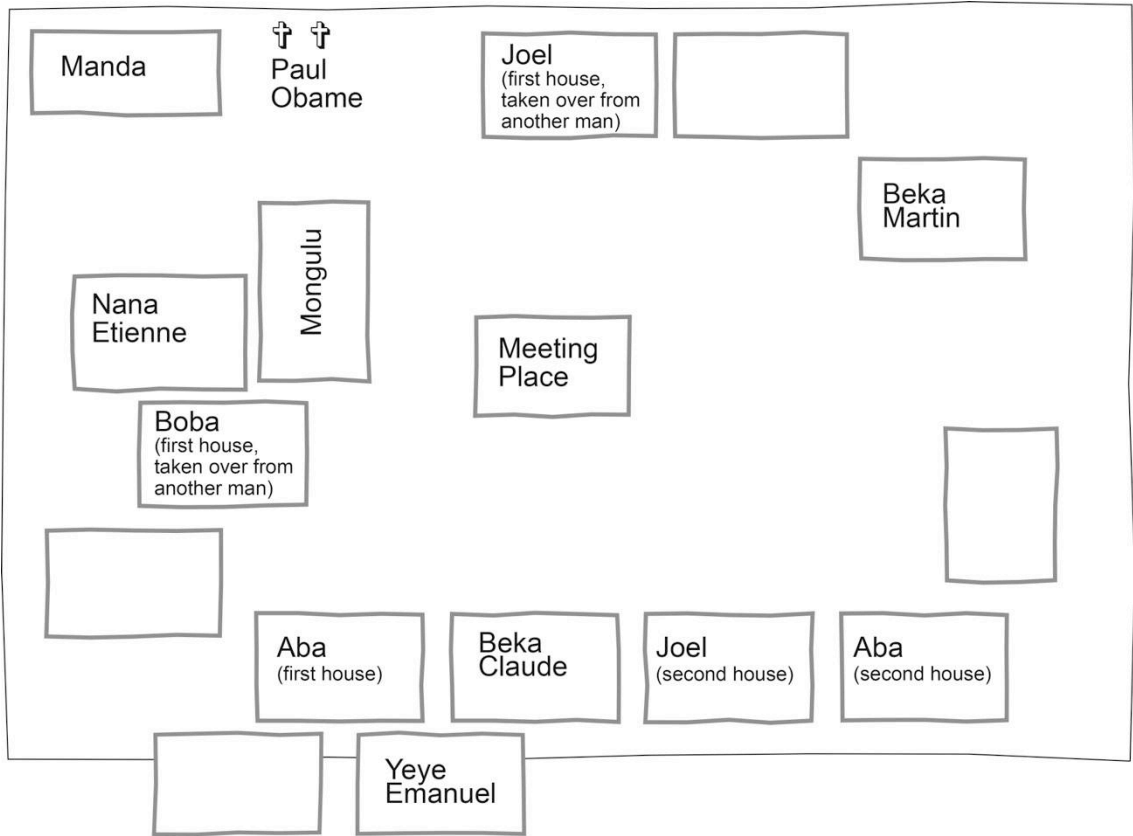
cet acte n'est

Sample Electoral Card

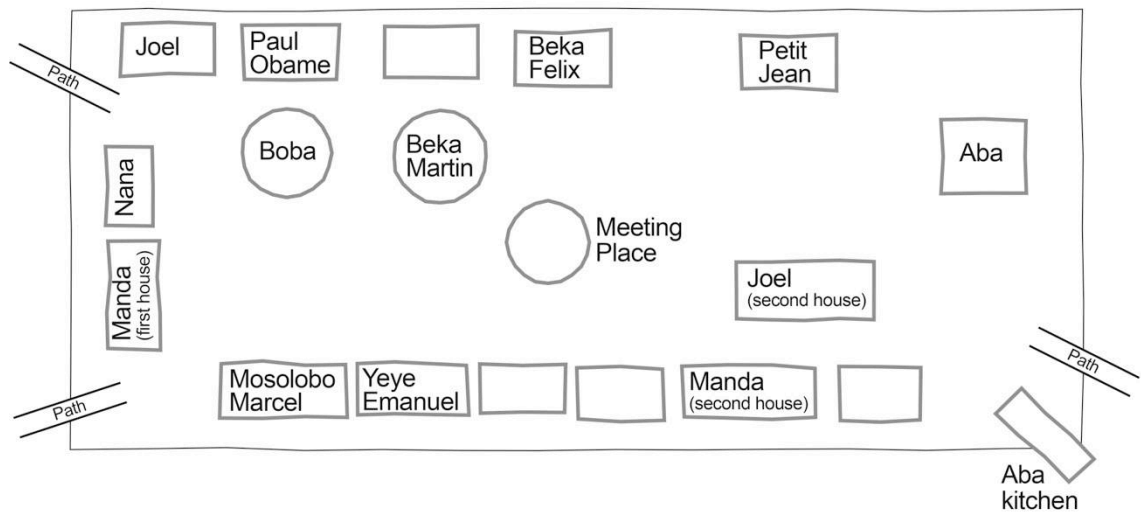


Appendix XVI – Different Maps of Été by AB., NR. and F.

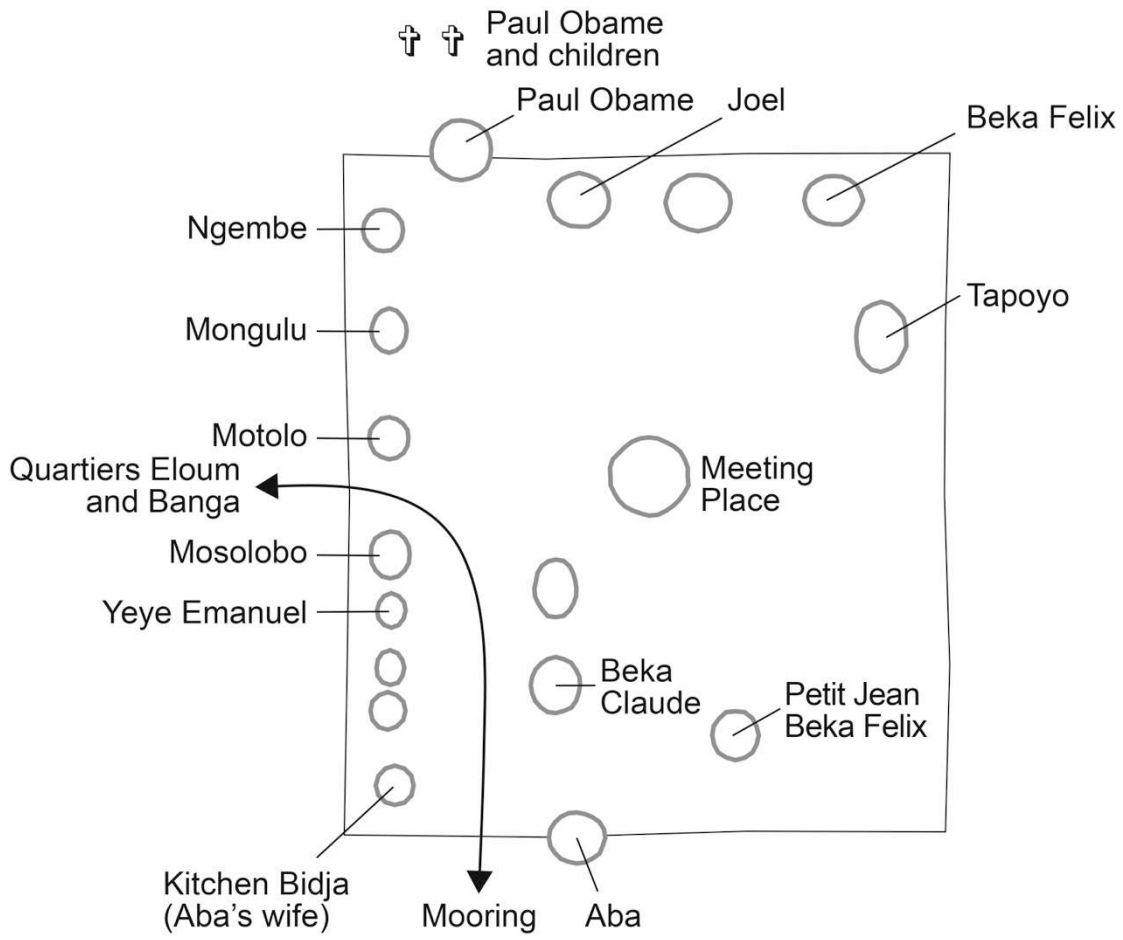
Map of Été by AB.



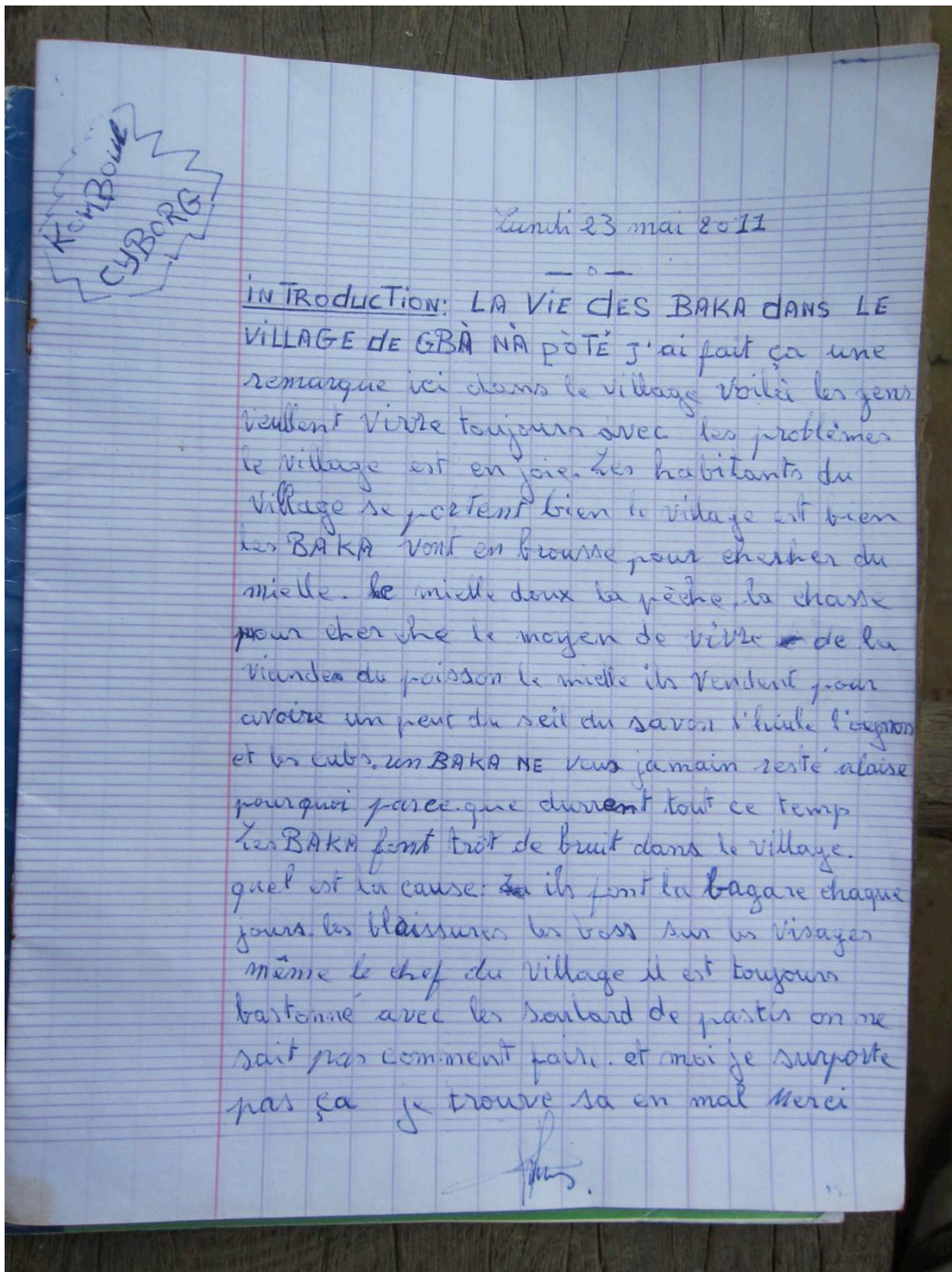
Map of Été by NR.



Map of Été by F.



Appendix XVII – K.'s letter on the situation in Kabisa



Text

Lundi 23 mai 2011

INTRODUCTION: LA VIE DES BAKA DANS LE VILLAGE DE GBÀ NÀ pòtè J'ai fait ca une remarque ici dans le village voilà les gens veullent vivre toujours avec les problèmes le village est en joie. Les habitants du village se portent bien le village

est bien les BAKA vont en brousse pour chercher du miel. Le miel doux la pêche la chasse pour chercher le moyen de vivre de la viande du poisson le miel ils vendent pour avoir un peu de sel du savon l'huile l'oignon et les cubes. un BAKA ne vous jamais resté à l'aise pourquoi parce qu'ils font tout ce temps Les BAKA font du bruit dans le village. quel est la cause: ils font la bagarre chaque jour. Les blessures les coups sur les visages même le chef du village il est toujours bastonné avec les coups de pastis on ne sait pas comment faire et moi je ne supporte pas ça je trouve ça en mal Merci

Translation (spelling mistakes translated in the sense of the letter)

Monday, May 23, 2011

INTRODUCTION: LIFE IN THE VILLAGE OF BAKA GBA GBÀ NÀ pòté (ed: Kabisa) I made a remark here in the village people want to always live with the problems the village is happy. The villagers are doing well the village is well BAKA go into the bush to look for honey Sweet honey fishing hunting to find a way to live of meat fish honey they sell to have a bit of salt soap oil onion and cubes. one BAKA never remains at ease because all this time The Baka are making too much noise in the village. what is the reason: they are fighting every day. The injuries to the face even the village chief is always pummeled with the pastis drunkards we do not know what to do and I do not support it I find it bad Thanks

Author: Komboul (Cyborg)

Doerte Weig

Professional Experience

Scientific Researcher, Collaborative Research Centre 806
University of Cologne, Germany 2010 - now

- Working on concepts of mobility, immobility and social change
- PhD Title: Motility and Relational Mobility of the Baka in North-Eastern Gabon
- Member of the CRC Programme Commission (2012)
- 'The Social Dynamics of Mobility', Paper for the International Conference on Congo Basin Hunter-Gatherers, Montpellier, France, 22-24 September 2010
- 'From Mobility to Motility: the Baka in Gabon', Paper for the VAD Conference, Cologne, May 31 – June 2, 2012

Head of Internal Communications
Bayer Business Services GmbH, Leverkusen, Germany 2003-2007

- Strategic development of corporate communications concepts; Strategic consulting to individual organizational units and within change management processes
- Organisation and development of internal communication instruments (print/online/events); Editor-in-chief of employee magazine and intranet (English/German/Spanish)
- Personnel responsibility; Content and cost control of external service providers

Scientific Interests

- Human Mobility and Motility
- Dance and Ritual
- Business Anthropology

Education

MSc Social Anthropology, University College London 2008 - 2009

- Dissertation topic: '5 Rhythms: Movement as Cohesive Force' (1st)

Bachelor of Laws (Hons), King's College London 1994 - 1998

- Diploma in German law following an exchange Year at the University of Passau, Germany, in 1996 - 1997

Abitur (Qualification equivalent to International Baccalaureate)
German School London 1990-1993

Language Skills

German/English Bilingual; French: Very good oral and written skills;
Spanish: Conversational level; Baka: Working knowledge