The Emergence of Inequality
in a Former Hunter-Gatherer Society:
A Baka Case Study

Cathryn Townsend

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Supervisor: Dr Jerome Lewis

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I, Cathryn Townsend, 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.
The Baka people of the western Congo Basin are associated with an immediate-return hunter-gatherer lifeway. During the twentieth century they began to sedentarize and to adopt agriculture due to external pressures. The Baka community of Asoumondélé are a group of 200 people, today pursuing a mixed subsistence strategy. They live on the border of Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo in a permanent village alongside Njem farmers, with whom the Baka have patron-client styled relationships often characterized by discrimination. The Baka are also politically marginalized as an ethnic group within the Cameroonian state. In 2006 an Australian mining company began establishing an iron ore mine near Asoumondélé. By 2008 a rudimentary dirt road was built in order to facilitate mining activities. The advent of the mine and road has precipitated rapid transformation in this Baka society, which had already transitioned some way from the immediate-return form of egalitarianism. This thesis shows that there have been three main factors in this process, namely 1) adoption of bride wealth practices due to involvement in the ivory trade which may date back as far as the precolonial period; 2) sedentarization and the concomitant switch to delayed-return subsistence practices since the 1980s; and 3) exposure to the monetarized global economy due to the arrival of the mine. As a result of the third step, an ethnic identity crisis has caused experimental and risk-seeking attempts to level up to those higher up the social hierarchy on the part of the Baka. Examples of this are their experiments with individualistic economic activities, changes in kinship organization, agitated ritual performances, addiction to alcohol and frequent outbreaks of intra-group and domestic violence. These new patterns amount to a failure of levelling mechanisms and hence the emergence of inequality, in particular an already entrenched power difference between gender groups. The thesis supports the hypothesis that the foundations of inequality are inextricably linked with gender inequality, where the proximate mechanism of its emergence is the creation of private property (aided by storage) and the ultimate mechanism is the reproductive advantage bestowed on those men who are able to accumulate wealth. Paradoxically, an innate psychological aversion to inequity may accelerate the breakdown of egalitarian society in situations where inequalities already exist.

ABSTRACT
Apprends-nous à reconnaître sous tout don suspect

La piste glissante aux lendemains mauvais

Apprends-nous à savoir que dans une âme pure

La vie, à peu d’exceptions, est une expérience dure

Teach us to recognize beneath any suspect gift

The slippery track to evil tomorrows

Teach us to know that for a pure heart

Life is with few exceptions hard experience

From A Um Nyobé Ruben

Jeanne Ngo Mai

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SECTION ONE

The Forest and the Light
CHAPTER ONE

The Forest and the Light

1.1. The Forest and the Light

The Baka only walked in the forest. This is what the children say. They walked through the forest in ignorance. They knew of nothing but stingless bee honey, honey and wild yams [sapa and essuma ndondo]². Those are the things they knew in the bush. Those who live in front of us and those who live around us had not yet arrived here³. People had not yet seen helicopters. People didn’t yet know of things like torches and lamps. The Baka did not yet know of the things of today. The Mbùnge [Whites] said: “These people in the forest, they need to come out. So that they arrive into the light, so that they arrive then into the light”. When they arrived into this light: “Oh! Oh! Oh! Ha! What’s making that noise?” Even though you brought them out of the forest, they are in the bush. Get them out of the bush! They should come out into the light. We must get them out of there. They are still in the bush. The Baka are still in the bush.

These are words spoken to me by an elder Baka man, and Cameroonian citizen, Mpako André⁴. He reflects on changes he has observed in his community since the time when

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² Two varieties of wild yam are listed.
³ He is referring to the various newcomers who have arrived in the village.
⁴ From an interview of October 2011.
he was a boy, and on how a new generation have come to see that past. As a boy, his people were a small band or community of hunter-gatherers who moved from camp to camp in the Congo Basin rainforest. They were the core of what was to become a settlement of about 200 Baka people, quartered alongside a pre-existing village of Njem cultivators called Asoumondélé. The pathway through this village was to become a road, opened to facilitate the activities of a foreign-owned iron mine. And the Baka community became increasingly committed to leaving their forest ways in the past, and adopting what they came to see as the superior and modern lifestyle of other ethnic groups; above all, white people.

Mpako concludes his words with a plea for the future, which he hopes will see the Baka no longer differentiated from other people because of their association with the forest. He explicitly associates such a future with “the light”. In doing so, he is mimicking the evangelistic Christian discourse that is so prevalent in Cameroon, but perhaps also reflecting a Baka preoccupation with the transformative power of firelight, the mastery of which separates humans from animals in Baka cosmology (Köhler 1998: 437-524). He alludes to a past in which there were no torches and lamps. The road has brought in the new marvel of electric light, as little stores with small generators have mushroomed in the border town of Ntam, 7.5km away.

My research details the story of how life has changed for Mpako’s community, how life became saturated with inequalities and status distinctions, and how property became profoundly important to this particular community of Baka people. It also tries to explain why these changes happened. The transition from a relatively independent hunter-gatherer way of life to becoming subjects of the state, incorporated into local commercial practices and the global economy, has been equivocal. Clashes and
contradictions in values and practices abound, and people often express their ambivalence about the future and how they foresee their place in it.

The Baka, like other so-called Pygmy populations in equatorial Africa, are stereotyped as primitive and animal-like, by local so-called Bantu (or Kaka<sup>5</sup>) peoples, who were traditionally farmers. Pygmy and Bantu are terms used in the Congo Basin to describe local categories, although the Baka of Asoumondélé told me that they think the use of the word Pygmy is derogatory and dehumanizing. These stereotypes of Baka people are partly due to their close association with the rainforest, and the highly mobile life they led there up until recently.

Equatorial Africans tend to mythologize forest hunter-gatherers as closely akin to animals, specifically chimpanzees, because of their short stature and ability to live off the forest. Such negative stereotyping has been described, for example, by Jerome Lewis (2002b) of the Aka in the Republic of the Congo, and by Roy Richard Grinker (1994) of the ideologies and practices of inequality between Lese farmers and Efe foragers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Negative stereotypes and discrimination towards hunter-gatherers are widespread and form a central component of inter-ethnic relations in the Congo Basin region (Vansina 1990: 56-57, Klieman 2003, Bonhomme et al. 2012, Moïse 2014).

I myself have heard a wide variety of Cameroonians from different regions and walks of life calling the Baka derogatory names<sup>6</sup>. The Baka are often spoken of as dirty, unwashed, uneducated, and intellectually incapable. This exotic, bestial image

<sup>5</sup> *Kaka* is the Baka word used to describe local non hunter-gatherer peoples.

<sup>6</sup> I also heard Mbuti hunter-gatherers of the Ituri forest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) described in derogatory terms by BaBila locals and by conservation staff working within the Okapi Faunal Reserve during fieldwork for a Masters degree dissertation in 2008.
is reinforced by their history of egalitarianism, a mode of social organization so different to that of all the other peoples they have come into contact with. The rigorous egalitarianism of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers is of the type sometimes known as assertive egalitarianism (Woodburn 1982a) or non-competitive egalitarianism (Woodburn 1982a, Endicott and Endicott 2008, Boulanger 2013). It is characterized by social practices such as sharing, mobility, avoidance of conflict and levelling mechanisms that ensure parity between individuals in terms of wealth, power and prestige, in addition to a profound disengagement from property rights. The Baka have become legendary for their lack of respect for property; indeed they are often labelled “thieves”. Kaka farmers say that the Baka will help themselves to crops in the same way that a troop of raiding animals would do. The Baka are also criticized for being incapable of saving money, maintaining their houses and accumulating property.

Mobile bands of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, including Mbuti, Mbendjele, Mikaya and Baka ethnicities, have been observed to distinguish between open, hot spaces – seen as undesirable, dangerous, noisy and diseased – and shady, cool spaces – seen as pleasant, peaceful, calm, and life-giving (Turnbull 1966: 21, 60, 1983: 32; Lewis 2002a: 65-6, 89-91, 212, 266; Köhler 1998: 165-6).

But some former hunter-gatherer ethnicities, such as Tua and Luma, have opted instead to settle in the bright and noisy open spaces, abandon forest activities and take on new identities (Lewis 2002a: 58-66). This thesis is, in part, the story of how Baka people of Asoumondélé have been driven to take on new identities and embrace “the light”. It is also intended as a case study that can contribute to a broader cross-cultural understanding of how inequalities take root in formerly egalitarian societies, both now and in the past. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the theoretical issues of egalitarianism and social transformation, while Chapter 2 will resume discussion of
the specificities of the situation facing the Baka of Asoumondélé and also start to explore the causes of inequality in this Baka case study.

1.2. The Emergence of Inequality in Egalitarian Societies

Research Questions

How is the balance of power overturned in egalitarian societies?

Beginning with the premise that there are a variety of possible routes through which social transformation can occur, I use two categories – material and ideological – to trace the different catalysts of change. The term material refers to physical resources that are used to sustain human life and enable social relationships. My use of the term ideology is different to Karl Marx’s, which holds that ideological consciousness is determined by the social order and the relations of production (1844). The premise of my research allows more room for those eventualities where change comes about through the imaginary capacity and agency of individuals. I therefore use the term ideology to refer to “that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defense of patterns of belief and value” (Fallers 1961: 677-8, quoted in Geertz 1973a: 231).

Marx’s assertion that cultural representations are subordinate to the economic foundation of society so that it is possible for a false consciousness to privilege the economic interests of an elite group is certainly relevant to this case study. But in reality, economics, ideology, and a range of cultural practices are tightly interwoven, as is evident from ethnographic comparisons of the cosmological and economic

In general, what I mean by *economic* is that the practices so described pertain in some way to the procurement, production, transfer or consumption of the material goods that are both necessary to support life, and which may serve social functions such as creating obligations or attachments. As such, the term economic is not synonymous with the term material but refers to a form of cultural *practice*. Practice is that active and ongoing dimension of cultural life which may contain elements of both the material and the ideological but is not reducible to these. Economic practice necessarily refers to material resources but also to the ideas, knowledge, innovations, processes and institutions that a society uses to control material resources. Indeed, the economy of a particular society or community is an aspect of the culture of that society, partially constrained by ideological concerns, and partially constrained by the natural and manufactured resources available to it.

My application of terms such as *ideology*, *material* and *economics* is methodologically necessary in order to be as specific as possible about the causes of social transformation, and does not indicate that these domains should be considered in isolation from one another. In the case of the Baka, their economic strategy is now a mixed one, whereas their recent past was centred around an *immediate-return* economy based on gathering and hunting (Woodburn 1982a).

The overall aim of my research is to identify and analyse the interrelationships between the material and ideological causes and symptoms of changing Baka cultural
practice in order to better understand both how and why inequalities emerge. As I will come to explain, there have been some material changes to the natural resources that the Baka have traditionally used in order to conduct their gathering and hunting activities. Yet an additional factor motivating the change towards a mixed subsistence strategy has been ideological; a mixture of social and political pressure from outsiders and new ideas and opportunities arriving.

Is social inequality always tied to the alienating modes of production that stem from private property ownership as Marx (1844) suggested?

Drawing on Woodburn’s (1982a) categorization of human societies into two basic types of system: 1) immediate-return (egalitarian, focused on the subsistence needs of the present); and 2) delayed-return (differentiated, focused on long-term investments of labour in order to acquire a material yield in the future), I analyse the relationship between production and distribution practices and the social organization of an egalitarian society in transition. The key point that makes Woodburn’s distinction apposite to this research question is that the immediate-return society has certain ideological principles and affiliated practices that disengage people from the potential that property ownership has to create differentiation (1982a: 445), hence private property does not exist in the immediate-return society.

Collective property does exist in immediate-return societies. For example, Lewis (2015: 3) describes how, for the Mbendjele (BaYaka) of the Republic of the Congo, food resources gleaned from the forest must be shared out according to specific rules, and even personal possessions, such as a woman’s basket, machete and cooking pots, must be shared on demand when not in use by her. Private property (land-tenure rights
or the ownership of environmental resources) does not normally exist in the immediate-return society, although a particular clan may be associated with a particular territory for more than one generation as their subsistence requires an intimate knowledge of the wild resources available. This is a form of collective ownership.

The three ideological principles that disengage people from property and thus help to perpetuate an immediate-return egalitarian society, as theorized by Woodburn (1998), are: 1) demand sharing (in which donor obligation and recipient entitlement is stressed); 2) the rejection of reciprocal relations of exchange; and 3) the disengagement of people from private property and the rejection of claims to property rights over fixed resources such as land.

This thesis at least partially accords with Marx’s theory of historical materialism, in that privately-owned property is the major means by which inequalities between Baka people have been created and sustained. In particular, it supports the hypothesis that was put forward by Marx’s collaborator Fredrich Engels (1884), that:

...The first class antagonism appearing in history coincides with the development of the antagonism of man and wife in monogamy, and the first class oppression with that of the female by the male sex (Engels 1884: Kindle Edition Loc 1396).

Engels’s hypothesis that the emergence of private property and the conversion of women’s labour into a private service form the basis of other inequalities was corroborated by the anthropologist Eleanor Leacock (1972), based on twentieth century data, including her own research with Naskapi (Innu) hunter-gatherer-fishers of Labrador. However, property ownership does not exist in a vacuum. It is also
necessary to consider the emotional, ideological and cultural reasons that social norms and principles relating to property can change. In this respect, the marginalization and discrimination that Baka people experience within broader society is also a key driver of the emergence of inequality.

*Is the ideological dimension of human life just as likely to generate social change as the material?*

Woodburn (2005) stresses that religion and ritual in hunter-gatherer societies are contexts for the development of ideas, practices and values, and that they are not just “symbolic by-products” (2005: 25) of the political or economic domain. In this respect, Woodburn’s theory is more akin to that of Weber than to that of Marx, as Weber (1905) was concerned with demonstrating how ideas and values that are derived from religious life are interrelated with economic life and not defined by it.

It is through both rights to property and the ideologies linked with such rights that social structures are established and maintained among hunter-gatherers, according to Woodburn (2005). There is no *a priori* causal relationship between the political ideology and the economic domain of a society in terms of Woodburn’s worldview. The mutual causality between these two domains may flow in either direction in different historical contexts. This is evident Woodburn’s discussion of how African hunter-gatherers and Aboriginal Australians share the same immediate-return subsistence practices, but whilst the ideologies of African hunter-gatherer groups are usually egalitarian and supportive of immediate-return practices, the Aboriginal Australian religious systems are governed by a delayed-return ideology that produces social inequality. The labour and reproductive capacity of both women and young men
are controlled by elder men by means of manipulating access to the initiations necessary in order for young men to marry (Woodburn 1980b).

Nonetheless, material factors can determine that a society will inevitably develop a delayed-return economy and ideology. For example, environments of high seasonality or arctic conditions require storage of produce for harsh weather in the future, which leads to differences in wealth and power. This is because the surpluses so created can be used to create dependencies and to justify hierarchies by those who are so inclined. Also, societies that rely on fixed critical resources (such as the salmon rivers of the Kwakiutl) tend to develop social stratification in order to both protect and intensively exploit such resources, as discussed in Chapter 8.

In terms of the Weberian concept of elective affinity, as explained by Gerth and Mills (1948: 63), there is no pre-established correspondence between ideas and economic interests, but ideas that do not ultimately converge with the interests of a special social stratum tend to be abandoned during the course of history. In an absolutely egalitarian society there should be no elite groups (and ideology should fit the interests of all), but the crucial point is that Weber allows for mutual interrelation between ideas and interests and thus accommodates the possibility of ideologically-driven change.

As mentioned above, ideological factors are extremely important in this case study of the emergence of inequality among the Baka of Asoumondélé, particularly ideological responses on the part of Baka people to discrimination by outsiders. A related channel for transformation that my research highlights is the affective domain, which has previously received little attention in the literature on the emergence of inequality in hunter-gatherer societies. Emotions are not ideology per se, but as an
integral feature of the human mind and its cognitive processes, they are elemental to the way that ideologies are shaped and responded to.

1.3. Defining Egalitarian

The definition of egalitarian according to the Oxford English Dictionary Online is:

...based on, or holding, the belief that everyone is equal and should have the same rights and opportunities.

The term egalitarian has also frequently been used to describe various hunter-gatherer societies that are highly cooperative and non-competitive, for example by renowned hunter-gatherer specialists Richard Lee (1982) and James Woodburn (1982a, 2005).

Richard Lee (1982: 52-3) explains that:

Central to the foraging mode of production is a lack of wealth accumulation and the social differentiation that accompanies it. This lack of accumulation, even though the means for it - free time and raw materials - are at hand, arises in part from the requirements of the nomadic life.

The social features that lead to classification as non-competitive or assertive egalitarianism include relatively equal social representation between genders; the absence of hierarchical relations and authoritative leaderships; the absence of wealth accumulation; demand sharing of food and material goods; the absence of particularistic social ties and dyadic relations of indebtedness; mobility; flexibility in living arrangements; and avoidance as a preferred means of conflict resolution. Not all
of these features are necessarily present in the same ways in different egalitarian societies, but demand sharing, the right of all members of a society to share goods equally, as outlined by Barnard and Woodburn (1988), is central in ensuring that material inequalities do not develop.

Another important element of non-competitive egalitarianism articulated by Richard Lee (1982), in reference to the egalitarian social relations of the San, is the punishment of authoritative, stingy or arrogant behaviour by means of rough humour, put-downs and ostracism:

*It is not simply a question of the absence of a headman and other authority figures but also a positive insistence on the essential quality of all people and the refusal to bow to the authority of others, a sentiment expressed in the statement: “Of course we have headmen... each one of us is headman over himself”* (1982: 887).

Woodburn’s (1982a) distinction has been empirically proven, as demonstrated by the fact that it was taken up readily as a useful analytic tool by many hunter-gatherer specialists studying geographically diverse populations. It is still widely in use by hunter-gatherer specialists today. In addition, there have been a range of different ways of articulating the principles behind the same phenomenon that Woodburn describes alternately as immediate-return, non-competitive and assertive egalitarianism, alongside a continuum of variations on this theme that leads eventually to the delayed-return end of the spectrum.

Richard Lee (1982), for example, had also noticed that “among the foragers, society demands a high level of sharing and tolerates a low level of personal accumulation” (1982: 890). Moreover, Lee described how gender relations were relatively egalitarian
among the !Kung, that their values were matched to their mobile lifestyle, and that the demands of collective existence in such an egalitarian society are not achieved effortlessly but require a constant struggle against selfish, arrogant and antisocial impulses.

Alan Barnard (2002) has subsequently used the term *foraging mode of thought* to describe an ethos found among hunter-gatherers, former hunter-gatherers, Gypsies and urban beggars in which “sociality depends on sharing, and is offended by accumulation” (2002: 7). According to Barnard, forager values can be retained in spite of the loss of a strictly immediate-return economy, at least in the short term.

Meanwhile, Polly Wiessner (2002) has described egalitarian social structures as “complex institutions that arose historically to reduce the transaction costs of exchange” (2002: 252). Egalitarianism is not the product of organizational simplicity or the *tabula rasa* of human affairs, but rather it is “the outcome of complex institutions and ideologies created and maintained by cultural means which empower a coalition of the weaker to curb the strong” (2002: 234-5).

**The Systemic Nature of Egalitarian Social Organization**

By identifying categories such as egalitarian or hierarchical, anthropologists have provided a useful means of differentiating between varied patterns of political and economic organization. Through such means, we can see that those societies classified as egalitarian tend to follow a hunter-gatherer way of life. But viewing a community in these terms could obscure our understanding of the complex, porous, dynamic or ephemeral nature of social organization. For example, Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Rane Willerslev (2007), drawing on Marilyn Strathern’s (1982) critique of the
conceptualized parts and wholes of social systems, argue that Woodburn’s (1998) distinction between delayed-return and immediate-return is ephemeral. Each order always carries the potential to be subverted and transformed into the other, and thus each is the shadow concept of the other. Likewise, Woodburn’s (1998) distinction between sharing and exchange (or demand sharing and generalized reciprocity) is described as a shadow concept.

Corsín Jiménez and Willerslev (2007) make a valid point, however Woodburn has long made it clear that the distinction between immediate-return and delayed-return is only a heuristic distinction between ideal types, and furthermore that there is a continuum of political styles between these two ideal poles. Also, many immediate-return societies have highly resilient and enduring institutions and protocols that specifically alienate people from the property rights that lie behind reciprocal exchange relations, and which also instil other egalitarian values in their members. This is because egalitarian hunter-gatherers are acutely aware of the inequitable effects that property can bring about.

Nonetheless, there are ample ethnographic examples of situations where social order has the shadowy quality identified by Corsín Jiménez and Willerslev. Edmund Leach’s classic study of the Kachin and Shan peoples in the highlands of Burma (1954) critiqued static functionalist models of social structure, arguing instead that societies are unbounded and unstable. The main ethnography describes the social structure of the entire region, incorporating different ethnic and language groups in a constant state of oscillation between two forms: gumlao (“egalitarian”) and gumsa (influenced by the hierarchical and elitist values of the Shah).

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7 The term *equalitarianism* is synonymous with *egalitarianism*
Recently, archaeologist David Wengrow and anthropologist David Graeber (2015) have drawn upon Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat’s study (1904-5) on the seasonal variation between equality and hierarchy in Inuit social organization, along with other classic ethnographies on seasonal variation in social organization, to argue for “an alternative model of ‘Paleolithic politics’”. Their approach emphasizes “the ability of hunter-gatherers to alternate – consciously and deliberately – between contrasting modes of political organization, including a variety of hierarchical and egalitarian possibilities” (2015:1). The ethnography detailed in my own thesis provides support for such an alternative model of Paleolithic politics insofar as it relates to the Upper Paleolithic in Europe but not for the application of this model to the Paleolithic as a whole.

The main difficulty with defining a particular ethnic group or community as a discrete society is that interaction with neighbouring communities, in addition to internal dynamics, result in all the fluctuations of social structure that have been so evident during the course of world history, including the examples mentioned directly above. Societies should thus be seen as a complex web of systems and subsystems. Complexity has often been simplified and misrepresented under the rubric of physical determinism, as criticized by the philosopher of science Karl Popper in his metaphor “all clouds are clocks, even the most cloudy of clouds” (1972: 210).

Clocks are precise, regular and orderly physical systems that can be reduced to their principles by the scientific method relatively easily whereas clouds are more chaotic, “highly irregular, disorderly, and more or less unpredictable” (1972: 207). A mistake of modern science since the Newtonian revolution has been to treat everything as if it
were a clock. This is what Popper called physical determinism, the notion that everything is predictable and it is only ignorance of the laws of nature that makes things seem as if they are clouds (unpredictable systems).

Popper argued instead for a philosophy of indeterminism, the idea that all clocks are in fact clouds, that the world is not a physically closed system that operates with predetermined precision and has no interaction with anything outside of it. Indeterminism allows for the possibility of free will and creativity, whereas “the nightmare of the physical determinist” (1972: 217) is that the consequence of treating the unfolding of the universe as if it were predetermined by physical laws is that human consciousness and agency are reduced to mere epiphenomena.

Nonetheless, the problems created by determinism should not prevent us from systematizing the description of social life. Popper also argued against the notion that the only alternative to determinism is chance. Rather, we should seek to understand how such non-physical things as purposes, deliberations, plans, decisions, theories, intentions and values can play a part in bringing about physical changes in the physical world. “We have to be indeterminists, to be sure; but we also must try to understand how men, and perhaps animals, can be ‘influenced’ or ‘controlled’ by such things as aims, or purposes, or rules, or agreements” (Popper 1972: 230).

Popper never dismissed the possibility of, nor the need for, systematisation. He concludes that “it is unsatisfactory to look upon the world as a closed physical system – whether a strictly deterministic system or a system in which whatever is not strictly determined is simply due to chance: on such a view of the world human creativeness and human freedom can only be illusions” (1972: 254). He offers instead a view of the physical world as an open system, containing many subsystems that constrain and
control one another, interacting in processes of trial and error-elimination that culminate in emergent phenomena such as biological novelty, consciousness and the growth of human knowledge.

If such an approach is possible for a phenomenon as difficult for science as human consciousness, then social organization is not beyond the reach of theoretical systematization either - as has been the common-sense position of social scientists since Marx, Weber and Durkheim. My response to critiques of the theory that egalitarian societies are systems of a kind (on the grounds that it amounts to naïve structural functionalism) is that the theoretical systematization that I employ is not necessarily anathema to post-functionalist theories as it does not treat societies as closed and self-sustaining systems. Rather, societies are subsystems in the evolutionary processes that comprise the physical world, which is itself an “open system” (Popper 1972). Multi-level selection theory, especially the principle that selection on cultural group differences is an important element of evolution (Boyd & Richerson 2005, Jablonka & Lamb 2014), fits with this approach to societies as open subsystems.

My approach also focuses on the way that social life is in constant co-creation by those inhabiting a particular community, taking into account the physical constraints on such creation. I therefore examine the internal and external factors that disrupt an egalitarian flow of sociality; factors that include, in the case of the Baka, bridewealth payments, sedentarization, charismatic individuals, loss of land, opportunities for paid employment, evangelism, outsiders imposing a new patriarchal order, and militarisation of the forest (soldiers during the 1960s and 1970s, eco-guards and border guards today).
Egalitarianism and the Enlightenment

Although the term egalitarianism connotes Enlightenment ideals, and this is problematic, the inverse is equally problematic, this being the assumption that the hierarchical power structures found in agricultural and industrialized societies must apply universally. This was raised by Marshall Sahlin (1972), when he claimed that Neolithic and bourgeois ethnocentrism had previously obscured, from anthropological vision, a type of affluence in hunter-gatherer societies based on the absence of an economic imperative of insufficiency. Rather, hunter-gatherer affluence is based on taking care of basic needs within four to five hours per day, leaving plenty of time over to spend on leisure activities with family and friends. They achieve this by having limited needs and satisfactory techniques rather than long working hours to earn enough money to buy the glittering array of goods that are somehow always just beyond reach.

Whereas hunter-gatherers achieve their version of affluence easily, other modes of human ecology can never achieve the same. The hard labour exerted is never sufficient to acquire the illimitable and superfluous goods and services, which ultimately come to be considered necessities by those who desire them. Yet Sahlin’s use of the concept of affluence is questionable considering that hunter-gatherers do have insatiable wants for valued goods such as honey and fatty meat, and that they are constantly demanding goods from each other rather than sitting back calmly and enjoying their affluence. Demanding behaviour is in fact an active aspect of creating egalitarianism, behavior which is emphasized by Woodburn through his use of the word assertive to describe it.
Despite its polysemy, the term egalitarianism has gained currency in the anthropology of hunter-gatherers because it describes a tangible, empirical phenomenon rather than a utopian ideal never completely realized. Most meritocratic societies, for example in the United Kingdom, are widely considered to be egalitarian. Yet such societies emphasize equality of opportunity (overlooking class, gender and ethnic discrimination), and ignore inequality of outcome, which allows economic inequality to emerge (supposedly through individual merit but in fact also due to economic, regional, class and educational advantages or disadvantages that begin from birth).

**Woodburn’s Distinction**

Woodburn (1982a) lists the following interlocked characteristics as definitive of contemporary immediate-return societies:

> A system of material production for immediate use without significant storage or investment; an egalitarian ideology and an egalitarian practice in which even intergenerational relationships are near-equal; a system of social relations and social groupings minimizing dependence and stressing direct, individual access to material resources, to knowledge and to skills with these resources, this knowledge and these skills not controlled or allocated by people of senior generation; an emphasis on individual freedom to select on a day-to-day basis one’s residential and other associates; a system of transactions focused on entitlement to share other people’s recognized property, the recognized yield of other people’s labour (2005: 20-21).
Delayed return, by contrast, is a classification that refers to all forms of human social organization where labour must be invested over time before a yield can be utilized. This form of organization has material and political implications that result in inequality between members of such societies, including many hunter-gatherers.

Woodburn emphasizes that his model is a theoretical or heuristic device to be used to orient a society along a graded range of behaviours rather than a literal either/or distinction. Distinct societies will be at different places along the range, with Hadza society perhaps being the most extreme immediate-return society observed. It is best to think of these categories as ideal types, following Max Weber’s definition:

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. (Weber 1949: 89-90).

It cannot be stressed enough that there is a continuum between immediate-return and delayed-return, a range of positions into which a society might fall, especially if that society is in the process of settling, or has recently sedentarized. A particularly salient example of such variation is that of 20th century Aboriginal Australian societies, which were generally observed to have largely immediate-return economies but delayed-return religious practices (Woodburn 1988, Keen 2005; see Elkin 1945, Meggitt 1962 for early 20th century ethnographies). Moreover, only those societies that most closely approximate Woodburn’s (2005) immediate-return characterisation can properly be described as egalitarian. Some of the elements of his characterisation can perhaps also
be applied to some relatively mobile shifting cultivator societies, albeit with the
notable exception that such societies do not prevent storage and accumulation.

**Egalitarian Societies versus Acephalous Societies**

Sometimes the term egalitarianism is applied misleadingly to forms of social
organization that involve extreme gender or age-seniority inequality, economic
stratification and/or authority figures. This has contributed to serious
misunderstandings both within social and evolutionary anthropology and across those
academic disciplines that have an interest in human evolution, such as archaeology,
evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology. For example, it is widely assumed
that violent male reproductive competition, gender inequality and warfare are
universal features of small-scale societies and characteristic of the evolutionary history
of humans. A wider understanding of the characteristics that distinguish non-
competitive and highly mobile egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies from other, less
egalitarian, small-scale societies could forestall some of these misunderstandings.

Delayed-return hunter-gatherer societies (such as those of the Okiek of East Africa
and the Inuit and Yupik peoples of the circumpolar regions), big men societies (such
as those of Papau New Guinean horticulturalists) and non-stratified lineage systems
(such as those of the Tallensi horticulturalists of West Africa and the Yanomami
horticulturalists of Brazil and Venezuela) are all acephalous societies that are often
misleadingly described as egalitarian because of their lack of enduring hierarchies
and/or highly centralized leadership (see Sahlins 1963, Whitehead 1984, Godelier &
for examples). Edmund Leach’s classic study of the *gumlao* and *gumsa* social modes
in Kachin, Burma, although useful in demonstrating the possibility of fluid transition from one political system to another, creates this same kind of confusion in his description of the non-stratified *gumlaq* mode of society (Leach 1954).

My own use of the term egalitarian describes more than the absence of hierarchy: rather, it refers to 1) a generalized absence of inequality; and 2) the assertive practices of egalitarianism that work together to achieve this absence of inequality. A society that lacks a hierarchical leadership structure but does not conform to egalitarian principles in terms of its other features, such as relative gender equality, is better described as acephalous. Acephalous has the root meaning of *headless* and is thus better suited to describe social organization that is characterized only by the absence of top-down leadership or centralized power structures.

African societies that fall into the acephalous category tend to be farming communities with ancestor worship – gerontocracies. Although lacking hereditary chiefdomships, they are usually characterized by the existence of leaders for every patriarchal lineage, opportunities for individuals to achieve status through the acquisition of wealth, and both age-based and gender-based inequality. The inequalities involved in delayed-return hunter-gatherer and other acephalous societies may actually be extreme, and highly detrimental to the individuals debilitated by the inequality concerned, for example the violence against women described by Meggitt (1962) of the Walpiri Aboriginal Australians.

Archaeologist Brian Hayden (2014), a specialist in *trans-egalitarian societies* sums up the issue as follows:

*...ethnographers often refer to any non-stratified society as ‘egalitarian’. Thus, they would include Mayan villages and villages with big men in New Guinea as*
egalitarian societies (e.g. Wiessner 2002). However, despite frequently professed egalitarian ethics in these communities, they harbour major inequalities in wealth and power that make it difficult to consider them as comparable to the sharing-based egalitarian societies such as the !Kung or the Hadza. Thus, archaeologists like myself tend to reserve the term ‘egalitarian’ for simple hunter-gatherers lacking private ownership, prestige goods, pronounced socio-economic differences, economically based competition, but emphasizing sharing and equality. In fact, the obligatory sharing that characterizes true egalitarian societies (together with minimal private property or ownership of resources) is antithetical to the production of prestige items or wealth for personal uses. (2014: 643).

Hayden does not, however, point out the importance of gender inequalities in these determinations, even though profound gender inequalities lie at the heart of the differences between acephalous and egalitarian societies. As Polly Wiessner has noted: “Women can be powerful watchdogs of inequality, and in societies where men and women have roughly equal roles in enforcement inequalities are likely to have a much more difficult time taking root” (2002: 252).

Given this precedent in small-scale egalitarian societies, it is perhaps not surprising that the successes of the women’s emancipation movements during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century in the West are now widely acknowledged as precursors to the subsequent rise in some egalitarian phenomena, such as the civil rights and peace movements (Early 1990, Alonso 1993), although economic inequality remains noticeably present in Europe and North America.
Acephalous societies are patriarchal societies that have established institutions of gender inequality. Ann Whitehead (1984) has demonstrated that unequal access to resources in a nominally egalitarian society of sedentary subsistence agriculturalists, the Kuasi of North East Ghana\(^8\) means that women do not have the status of fully acting subjects, especially in the realm of marriage. She describes how differentiation on the basis of age seniority and gender may be marked in kin-based, small-scale societies despite their ideology of sharing, and that these inequalities arise in the household and kinship system.

This is a very important observation because it highlights the range of political differentiation that may exist in small-scale societies, and how some types of inequality are overlooked. In Chapter 6, I examine how inequalities are emerging among the Asoumondélé Baka in their household and kinship system, particularly gender inequality. Unfortunately, Whitehead herself falls into the trap of assuming that gender inequalities of the type she noticed among the highly patrilineal Kuasi are common to all foraging and simple agricultural societies, which she refers to by turns as *pre-state societies, non-class societies* and *egalitarian societies*.

Such imprecision is best avoided. There are important distinctions between many of the small-scale societies often conflated together by the term egalitarian and, in my view, much greater efforts should be made in anthropology to systematize these distinctions more thoroughly and more consistently.

A salient example of the misrepresentations that follow from describing acephalous societies as egalitarian is to be found in the following remark about human nature by

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\(^8\) The Kuasi are ethnically related to the Tallensi studied by Meyer Fortes.
Napoleon Chagnon, who extrapolated from his work with Amazonian Yanomami horticulturalists (quotation marks in the original):

*If we consider polygamy to be a prerequisite of leaders and a mark or measure of inequality, then in the world’s so-called “egalitarian” societies not all men are in fact equal, at least insofar as their reproductive potential and ultimate biological success are concerned.* (Chagnon 1979: 375).

Chagnon is correct in that most small-scale horticultural and pastoral societies cannot properly be described as egalitarian, because polygamy, gender inequality and status competition are widespread in these. Yet paradoxically, such societies are *not* in fact representative of those societies that *can* accurately be described as egalitarian. The simplest small-scale societies observed to date are the gender egalitarian societies of immediate-return African and Southeast Asian hunter-gatherers. The social organization of these immediate-return societies stand in stark contrast with other small-scale societies in that they are typically monogamous and non-competitive. In light of this, Chagnon’s argument that the (polygamous and competitive) societies he describes are characteristic of reproductive behaviour in “the greater fraction of our species’ history” (1979: 375) is dubious.

If the reproductive patterns of any modern societies are to be considered exemplary of our evolutionary past (and setting aside the range of problems such ahistorical comparison entails), surely anthropologists should focus on mobile hunter-gatherers in Africa rather than sedentary horticulturalists in the Amazon.

Chagnon notes that not all human status struggles relate to control of material resources, on which point he is of course correct. However, his argument that “struggles in the Stone Age were more likely over the means and ends of reproduction”
(1979: 375) – by which he means violent male competition over females - is unlikely. It is now known that the reproductive history of African hunter-gatherers has involved a high degree of matrilocality and matrilineal fertility inheritance (Blum et al. 2006, Schlebusch 2010, Verdu 2013, Dyble et al. 2015), which indicates that hunter-gatherer women have long had a say in who they will marry and who their residence partners will be. In other words, their social organization is not the patrilineal type that would allow bride capture or bride wealth practices to flourish.

Thomas C. Patterson (2003) discusses how assumptions about the universality of violent male competition and unequal gender relations have brought misunderstandings into the way that hunter-gatherers have been perceived in academia. These misunderstandings continue to date, where intergroup aggression linked with male reproductive competition is considered characteristic of small-scale societies regardless of whether they be pastoralist segmentary societies or egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies (compare Pinker 2002, 2011; and Glowacki & Wrangham 2015 with Kelly 2000, 2005; Fry 2011; and ed. Fry 2013).

1.4. The Evolution of Egalitarianism

An explanation of the evolutionary emergence of the egalitarian predisposition is required in order to account for the range of political behaviours observed in contemporary human societies (from extremely egalitarian to extremely hierarchical), in comparison with the consistently present dominance hierarchies of non-human primates such as chimpanzees, gorillas and (to a moderate extent) bonobos. The range
of human behaviours indicates that egalitarian tendencies came about due to unique selection pressures on our particular (*Homininen*) lineage within the *Hominidae* subfamily of the *Homidea* taxonomic family.

An inference of this kind rests on the comparative phylogenetic method in evolutionary biology in which it is expected that related species will exhibit similar adaptations not because they evolved them due to separate evolutionary pressures but because they belong to the same common phylogeny (Harvey and Pagel 1991, Futuyma 1998). This phenomenon is known as *phylogenetic autocorrelation* (Felsenstein 1985). The comparative method is used to yield facts about the different morphologies of the living world. It relies on the reconstruction of phylogenies, and on solving problems by testing them against probabilistic statistical models. Divergence from autocorrelation is what needs to be explained in terms of selection pressures. It is thought that cooperative egalitarian behaviours first emerged due to unique selection pressures during the *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* phase of the human lineage. The selection pressures involved may have been multiple and thus are best understood from the vantage point of cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Cognitive psychologists Andrew Whiten and David Erdal use the term *counter-dominance* to describe the practice whereby coalitions come together to curb the behaviour of dominant individuals, thus creating more egalitarian social conditions (Erdal & Whiten 1994, 1996; Whiten & Erdal 2012; Whiten 1999, 2006). In a recent paper (Whiten & Erdal 2012), they argue that the unique selection pressure involved in human evolution was the formation of a socio-cognitive niche that included multiway positive feedback loops between five elements: 1) cooperation, 2) egalitarianism, 3) theory of mind, 4) language, and 5) cultural transmission.
Within this adaptive niche, which the authors call *deep social mind*, there is a tight interlinkage between egalitarianism and cooperation, which allowed hunter-gatherers to successfully pool together to procure and share resources. Cooperative egalitarianism in turn supported cultural transmission of knowledge. The acquisition of language and mind-reading⁹ capabilities that could subsequently be created through sharing knowledge in turn allowed for the interpersonal coordination of activities, which ultimately reinforced the egalitarian cultural ethos.

Evolutionary anthropologist Christopher Boehm (1993, 1999, 2012) uses the term *reverse dominance* or *reverse dominance hierarchy* to describe the outcome of such practices, with the implication that egalitarianism evolved by means of the majority in social groups coalescing to rebel against the tyranny of alpha males. Boehm (2012) proposes that human morality is the product of egalitarian behaviours over the course of six million years, during which social controls such as punishments exerted against antisocial and selfish individuals created selection pressure that worked in favour of altruistic behaviour and against despotic or antisocial behaviour. The egalitarian social organization of hunter-gatherer bands thus led to the emergence of a social conscience including feelings of virtue and shame.

Despite the high value of his contribution, Boehm does gloss over: a) the importance of gender, age, and wealth inequality, and b) the enormous variation in different types of political system which he describes as egalitarian (1993, 1999). For example, with regard to b), he writes:

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⁹ Mind-reading is a term used in psychology to describe the ability of humans to form theory of mind or attribute thoughts, intentions or desires to others.
...it seems arbitrary to contrast "acephalous" societies ... with moderately hierarchical societies exhibiting a stronger role for leaders which nevertheless display firmly egalitarian attitudes and behavior, such as complex hunter-gatherers ..., "bigman" societies ... and their "great-man" variants ... and even chiefdoms in which leadership is relatively weak (1993: 228-229).

The drawback of this approach, which conflates categories and omits to consider gender relations, is pointed out in the comments on Boehm’s article – in particular those by hunter-gatherer specialist Susan Kent and cultural anthropologist Bruce M. Knauff. To reiterate, the political differentiations (or inequalities) involved in some of the societies that Boehm would designate as egalitarian are far from arbitrary. They profoundly affect the lives of those who are assigned an inferior status in these systems, such as women who have no control over whom they marry and who may be mistreated by their husbands.

One of the functions of my thesis is that it indicates that the emergence of gender inequality can form the basis by which other types of political inequalities are established. The implication is that gender inequality could have been the most powerful catalyst in the emergence of hierarchies throughout the course of history. Despite the utility of Boehm’s evolutionary theory, which views egalitarian societies as reverse dominance hierarchies in which the weak combine forces to dominate the strong, his elision of both gender politics and sex differences in reproductive strategy leads to certain blind-spots.

Susan Kent pointed out the issue of gender in the comments section of Boehm’s original (1993) paper:
I wonder if assumptions concerning hierarchies, assertiveness, and dominance can be generalized as "human nature" when women are basically excluded from study, despite the importance of their political activities in egalitarian societies (see, e.g., Lee 1982; Silberbauer 1982). Boehm's definition of political leadership as pertaining only to males unintentionally implies that women are not as assertive even in highly egalitarian societies or that political proclivities are not part of human nature, only male nature. How do assertive women in egalitarian societies fit Boehm's theory? (Kent, commenting in Boehm 1993: 243).

As Chris Knight puts it, “Boehm (1999) does consider distinctively female strategies, but only when dealing with chimpanzees. As he turns to consider the emergence of human hunter-gatherer egalitarianism, sex suddenly disappears” (2014: 353). The gender-egalitarian nature of immediate-return societies has important implications for the evolution of egalitarian tendencies in modern humans, which may have come about as the result of levelling in reproductive fitness (Power 2014).

1.5. Gender Egalitarianism

Gender egalitarianism can be achieved in more than one way. Agnes Estioko-Griffin and Bion Griffin (1981) have described male-female equality among the Agta hunter-gatherers of eastern Luzon Island, the Philippines, suggesting that the Agta could be viewed as a gender-egalitarian society because Agta women and men have equal authority in decision-making, and Agta women have a high degree of control over their sexual and reproductive lives. Gender egalitarianism is linked with largely equitable
and non-differentiated contributions to group subsistence by men and women but cannot be reduced to a simple relationship between food production and status. Agta women remain in control of their own production, which is key to determining whether or not gender equality can be seen to exist.

Kirk Endicott and Karen Endicott (2008) have observed a similar form of gender egalitarianism among the Batek of Kelantan, Peninsula Malaysia. The Batek recognize physical differences between men and women without imposing evaluative significance on these. Gender roles are defined but not immutable. Agta, Batek and Chewong (Howell 1981, 1984, 1988) societies of Southeast Asia exemplify a type of gender egalitarianism that involves minimal differentiation and the rejection of aggression and violence. For example, Signe Howell (1989) tells us that Chewong concepts of human nature consider the qualities of shyness and fearfulness to be normal, whilst anger, quarrelsomeness and bravery are not. Furthermore, “they do not conceptualize specifically male characteristics as opposed to female ones” (1989: 46).

By way of contrast to these Southeast Asian examples, a differentiated – and more assertive – form of gender egalitarianism has been observed among African hunter-gatherers. Colin Turnbull (1981) stressed significant gender differentiation among the egalitarian Mbuti of the eastern Congo. This differentiation was not confined to the economic level but was the subject of ritual elaboration. Subordination was absent because the interdependence, or complementarity, of women and men was emphasized by the gender-differentiated nature of Mbuti ritual and everyday life.

Jerome Lewis (2002a, 2006) describes assertive gender egalitarianism among the Mbendjele (BaYaka) of the Republic of the Congo, where women use solidarity to resist attempts by men to dominate by means of physical strength. Gender
differentiation in Mbendjele life includes style of behaviour, different work roles, segregated spaces, and an emphasis on sensuality and sexually explicit imagery in ritual. The cultural importance of the female gender is its sexual and reproductive potency, whereas for the male gender it is in obtaining highly desirable meat and honey, resulting in differentiated gender roles. The interdependency between these roles is expressed in the embodied code of ekila, which anchors mnemonically on a dialectic between the symbolism of menstrual blood and the spilt blood of hunted animals.

Richard Lee (1978, 1982) found that among !Kung San hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari, dominance of one gender in one sphere did not lead to dominance in other spheres; there was no evidence of either oppression or sexual exploitation of !Kung women. Alan Barnard (1980) made a similar observation of the Naro (Nharo) Khoe hunter-gatherers of Botswana; amongst the Naro, there was significant gender differentiation in the economic sphere, and in the ritual sphere male hunting prowess was celebrated in contrast to female seductive power. This differentiation did not lead to gender inequality among the Naro.

Turning to the question of how gender egalitarianism may have evolved, evolutionary anthropologists Camilla Power and Leslie Aiello first suggested that symbolic culture emerged in humans as “a set of deceptive sexual signals aimed by female kin coalitions at their mates to secure increased male reproductive investment” (1997: 154). It is likely that egalitarian societies were established as the result of such female reproductive strategies, as theorized by evolutionary anthropologist Camilla Power (2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).
Evolutionary anthropologist Kristen Hawkes and colleagues (Hawkes et al. 2000, Hawkes and Coxworth 2012) have suggested that the reason postmenopausal women survive long past their reproductive years is that their role in helping to care and provide for the offspring of closely related kin is adaptive. This is known as the grandmother hypothesis. Anthropologist and primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (2009) has extended the grandmother hypothesis to form a broader cooperative breeding hypothesis. She argues that the human cognitive capacity for intersubjectivity is the evolutionary legacy of caregiving interactions between infants, mothers and other kin. Cooperative caregiving was required to support the long infancies of humans and it was provided mostly by female kin due to variable male commitment to childrearing. This theory is supported by studies which show a high level of alloparenting in contemporary hunter-gatherer societies.

Camilla Power links the cooperative breeding hypothesis with the invention of egalitarianism and symbolic culture in her Female Cosmetic Coalition model. She suggests that egalitarianism, ritual and symbolic culture came about as a result of the new female reproductive strategies instigated by cooperative breeding. If Power’s model is correct, female kin coalitions would have used deceptive sexual signals to secure the increased male investment necessary to bear the escalating costs of producing large-brained infants.

Reduced reproductive competition between males was a precondition for the levels of prosociality, intersubjectivity and male investment in childcare required for the final phase of rapid brain expansion and the emergence of language 300,000 to 200,000 years ago (Power 2014a; cf. Pawlowski, Lowen, and Dunbar 1998; Lindenfors 2005; Hrdy 2009). Thus, by the logic of Power’s theory, dominance levelling between males was driven initially by female reproductive strategies utilized to minimize female
reproductive stress. These conditions would have also facilitated the creation of those aspects of gender equality observed among extant immediate return hunter-gatherers; for example female alliances, lack of reproductive coercion, and relatively high male investment in child provisioning (and possibly also childcare as suggested by Hewlett (1991)). Bride-service was likely the form in which most male provisioning appeared. Male reproductive strategies would have also changed in response to the new female strategies, with males becoming choosier about their mates as their reproductive efforts became costlier.

Power argues that a sexual signalling theory for the emergence of symbolic communication and language requires that the sexual selection model describing most animal species (i.e. male-male competition versus female choice) must be reversed in the human context. She notes that there is strong justification for such a reversal in terms of heightened female reproductive costs, and a concomitant increase in male provisioning as a result of sexual selection pressures that came with increased encephalization.

Furthermore, Power notes that the increased effort by males in obtaining sexual access, in terms of the theory of parental investment and sexual selection (Trivers 1972), means that males should have become choosier and females more competitive. The fact that humans do not follow the usual male competition / female choice (MCFC) model of sexual selection has been argued independently of Power’s theory by evolutionary psychologists Steve Stewart-Williams and Andrew G. Thomas (2013a, 2013b), who propose instead an MMC (mutual mate choice) model. They argue that pair bonding and bi-parental care has been important enough in human evolution to lead to a very gentle decline in both general and psychological dimorphism.
This thesis points to the importance of the re-emergence of gender inequality as the basis by which other types of social inequalities are also re-established, for example due to an increase in male reproductive competition that comes about alongside differential property ownership and polygyny. This includes two domains of potentially important insights into human political behaviour, namely: 1) the mechanism/s whereby non-competitive egalitarianism first arose and then became firmly established among early *Homo sapiens* in the African Middle Stone Age\(^\text{10}\), and 2) the mechanism/s whereby inequalities may have begun to take root in the period during the appearance of politically complex societies from approximately 40,000 years ago onwards.

### 1. 6. Social Continuity and Transformation

Woodburn (1982a) claimed that immediate-return societies are coherent, viable and flexible systems capable of enduring by means of their own internally-derived momentum even in the face of strong external pressures. Woodburn identified what he terms *levelling mechanisms* (1982a: 437), which are used by egalitarian societies to maintain egalitarianism. Levelling mechanisms include flexibility in living arrangements, which allows people to distribute themselves in relation to the resources available and to avoid conflict situations or attempts by others to assert authority. Other levelling mechanisms listed by Woodburn are equal access to means of coercion; equal and independent access to food and other raw environmental resources; the obligation to share resources; sanctions against the accumulation of

\(^{10}\) 250-300 ka (McBrearty & Brooks 2000).
wealth; the circulation of possessions; and informal leadership or individualism in decision-making.

Ron Brunton, however, argued that egalitarian societies are always “culturally unstable” (Brunton 1989: 673). Brunton noted that Woodburn’s (1979) model is based not solely on economic factors but also incorporates a cultural principle by which people are disengaged from property by means of levelling mechanisms. It is this principle which Brunton claimed leads to a problem in the transmission of cultural knowledge. When ideas are disengaged from their producers, evaluation of these ideas according to criteria of cultural orthodoxy becomes impossible, as there is nobody with the authority to make such evaluations.

But Brunton’s argument is subject to criticism, particularly in that it cannot account for how egalitarian societies arise in the first place and subsequently persist long enough to be ethnographically identified. His claim that the intellectual and moral dimensions of egalitarian societies are rudimentary or impoverished heaps of random elements is inadequately substantiated. It is undermined by deep symbolic analyses of egalitarian cultures, as provided by Lewis (2008, 2014b) of Mbendjele culture, or even a more holistic reading of the ethnographic examples he draws on to validate his argument, for example Turnbull’s (1966, 1983) accounts of Mbuti cultural life. Brunton’s assertion that cultural transmission within a society depends on evaluation, which in turn depends on hierarchy, is faulty because the inductive linkage between these elements derives from an undemonstrated premise that transmission universally depends on intellectual authority. See also Thomas Widlok’s (2005) critique of Brunton’s argument.
Lewis (2008a) argues that the cosmological belief system and moral code of the Mbendjele, known as *ekila*, is transmitted through a pedagogical process anchored in bodily experiences of maturation rather than individual or institutional authority. Lewis (2002a) has suggested that the *ekila* system may function as a levelling mechanism, and a key component of the way non-explicit egalitarianism works, as the Mbendjele do not have a formal discourse on equality.

**Encompassment versus Encapsulation**

Many hunter-gatherer groups known to have been egalitarian in recent history now show signs of rapid change towards less egalitarian forms of social organization and delayed-return economic practices (see Lewis 2005, Köhler 2005, Guenther 2005; Oishi 2012 for examples of African hunter-gatherer societies). It is therefore important to theorize how external communities and global influences may be triggering such transformation. The diametrically opposed theories of *encapsulation* and *encompassment* each aim to schematize how egalitarian and non-egalitarian societies emerge and develop in relation to one another.

In the theory of *encapsulation*, egalitarianism is understood to be an oppositional response and/or a collapse of the social system as the result of domination from outside groups. Encapsulation is argued to occur when hunter-gatherer groups are isolated and surrounded by more powerful peoples. An advocate of this approach is Edwin N. Wilmsen (1989), who claimed that egalitarianism among San groups is nothing more than the result of their lowly position in the highly stratified context of southern Africa. Woodburn (1988), however, argued that it is erroneous to deny the cultural integrity
of groups organized by immediate-return systems, as such systems are coherent and satisfying to people in their own right.

In direct contradiction to the idea of encapsulation, my thesis demonstrates that, at least in the case of the Asoumondélé Baka, increased exposure to hierarchical society, and experience of being assigned to the lowest underclass, has not resulted in egalitarian opposition. Instead, it has resulted in the community softening their egalitarian ideals. They have, for example, turned to mimetic experimentation with the status-seeking socioeconomic values and practices of their non-egalitarian neighbours, the hierarchical state, and foreign commercial stakeholders in the region. Accordingly, theories of hunter-gatherer encapsulation and all related theories which posit that egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies continue to exist only as the result of marginalization, or that egalitarianism arises only in cases where people have been pushed into resource-scarce zones, are demonstrably flawed. The Baka case study is an example of the exact opposite occurring.

Nonetheless, it is not inevitable that hierarchical social and economic pressure from influences external to a community will erode egalitarianism, at least in the short term. Endicott (2005), and Endicott and Endicott (2008: 149), argue that access to external trade networks and other delayed-return economic processes do not necessarily undermine gender egalitarianism in hunter-gatherer societies. The egalitarian Batek of Kelantan, Peninsula Malaysia, have been involved in trade relations with Malay groups for thousands of years, yet Batek gender relations remain equally balanced. However, an important mitigating factor is that the Batek have never been politically dominated by Malay groups, which historically have not been numerous or well organized enough to do so. African hunter-gatherers, on the other hand, have come under considerable political pressure from food producers.
The situation has recently been changing for the Batek, as the global economy has come to place unprecedented demands on Batek resources. Lye Tuck-Po (2004) has shown that the Batek are responding to recent encroachments on their forest environment by trying to voice their environmental concerns to the outside world, and also by trying to re-imagine an egalitarian future within it. It remains to be seen how the Batek will manage to negotiate this situation.

In stark contrast, there is ample historical evidence of the political domination of food producers and imperialist land-grabbers in Africa, who have exploited and discriminated against African immediate-return groups, including the San of southern Africa, Congo Basin forest hunter-gatherers, and the Hadza of East Africa. Also, in the case of Central African hunter-gatherer groups, there is a long history of trade with outsiders, notably in ivory. The predominant way in which African hunter-gatherers have responded to domination and encroachment from outside groups has been selective and subversive engagement, alongside the avoidance strategy\(^{11}\) when outsiders attempt to assert authority or dominance.

For Congo Basin hunter-gatherers this has resulted in the classic division between forest and village life first noticed by Colin Turnbull (1966) of the Mbuti, and since expanded upon by others (see especially Köhler & Lewis 2002, Moïse 2014). In the village, Congo Basin hunter-gatherers behave as if they are subservient to the sedentary farming peoples with whom they have economic exchange relations, however this apparent dependence is negated by the ever-present possibility of escaping into the forest, which the mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle affords them. In

\(^{11}\) The avoidance strategy is the avoidance of interpersonal conflict by moving away from the source of trouble.
the Pygmy autochthonous tradition, according to ethnohistorian Robert Moïse (2014), the tendency has been to deliberately minimize time spent in Bantu villages in order to avoid attempts by the Bantu villagers to dominate, and to use “buffer zones” between Pygmy residence settlements and the villages of their Bantu alliance partners during the seasonal periods when they provide labour on Bantu farms.

Encompassment, a concept developed by Nurit Bird-David (1988), is the inverse of encapsulation. In reflecting on the social organization of the Nayaka (Naiken) of South India, Bird-David argued that a working paradigm for hunter-gatherers should assume long-standing contact with external groups. The formula that allows the hunter-gatherer lifestyle to persist despite pressure from the surrounding social world is the encompassment of external codes of social interaction within their own social system in a way that contrasts the systems and thus allows them to utilize other peoples as economic and social resources.

A couple of examples lend weight to Bird-David’s theory of encompassment. Lewis (2002a, 2002b) documents how the Mbendjele (BaYaka) of the Republic of the Congo use animal names to refer to neighbouring farming peoples and visiting white people because they see them in terms of their potential as resources and thus cast them as prey. This is in contrast to the way that Mbendjele relate to other hunter-gatherer peoples, who are referred to by ethnonyms and not by economic value.

12 Moïse uses the term Pygmies where I would use the term Congo Basin hunter-gatherers. I have not substituted my preferred term when referring to his work as he argues that the hunter-gatherer studies approach obscures a true understanding of history by presuming that economy is its main driver. Although I do not agree with this element of his argument, in order to correctly represent his views, I retain his use of the term Pygmy in reference to his work. While the term Pygmies is arguably a local category, the Baka people I spoke to feel that it is derogatory and dehumanizing, and I therefore avoid the term elsewhere in my own writing unless referring to another author’s use.
Alan Barnard (1989) demonstrated that among the egalitarian Naro (Nharo) San of Botswana and Namibia, a universal system of kinship terminology applied to all Naro. It applied even between people of Naro band-clusters that were spatially separated, whereas neighbouring Bantu-speaking peoples and white farmers from South Africa were excluded.

Helga Vierich (2008) argues that during her fieldwork in the late 1970s with Kua hunter-gatherers in the Kalahari, it was apparent that the Kua had long lived in close proximity with BaKalagadi and BaKwena herders and farmers, and that there were varying degrees of employment in the farming and herding economies of their neighbours, as well as opportunistic occupation with other economic activities, such as craft production or travelling to work in the diamond mines in South Africa. Yet employment relationships were rarely long-term, and there was no permanency to any economic pattern observed apart from hunting and gathering.

It was also clear that the Kua, despite living for some centuries on the very edge of the ethnic boundary, had remained very flexible. In a lifetime, people might move back and forth between various economic options many times. Sometimes they spent a few years working as herders at cattle posts, and then returned to the life of independent hunter-gatherers (Vierich 2008: 4).

According to Vierich’s report, the Kua did not typically switch to other economic activities, such as keeping garden plots or larger fields, as the result of exposure to examples of a “better way of life”, but tended to adopt these most in patches where there was significant narrowing of their foraging options as the result of resource pressures on their traditional territories from outsiders. Such resource pressures included the over-grazing and over-farming of land, leading to: a changing ecology
with fewer edible wild foods; occupation of seasonal pans and desert springs by cattle-owners; and the disappearance of large game herds from the region, partly as the result of changing ecology and partly due to the emergence of a commoditized bush meat trade.

The Kua identified strongly with ethnic markers that were associated with their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, including a particular temporary style of dwelling; specialized types of clothing, tools and equipment; wild foods; and the activities of hunting and gathering themselves. Material culture and activities that were seen as ethnic markers of BaKalagadi and BaKwena were sometimes utilized by the Kua, but the ethnic boundary was maintained and the Kua were not controlled by their neighbours because of their ever-present capacity to melt into the bush at a moment’s notice. In maintaining this boundary, the Kua were clearly encompassing BaKalagadi and BaKwena codes of social interaction within their own system in a way that contrasts the two systems, and which allowed the Kua to utilize these other peoples as economic and social resources.

**Moïse’s Autochthonous Tradition**

Robert E. Moïse’s achievement of piecing together a history of a Pygmy *autochthonous tradition* is best analysed within the context of the theoretical concept of encompassment discussed above. Moïse (2014) has argued that, in addition to the *equatorial tradition* that ethnohistorian Jan Vansina (1990) has identified with Bantu peoples of equatorial Africa over the longterm, there has been a distinctive set of principles, practices, and institutions in the political domain of Pygmy peoples in equatorial Africa, which Moïse (2014) refers to as an autochthonous tradition.
The autochthonous tradition differs from the Bantu equatorial tradition, according to Moïse, in that Pygmies value autonomy so highly that a) the competition between big men characteristic of the Bantu tradition is absent in the Pygmy one, and b) this prevents hierarchies from forming. A second principle of the autochthonous tradition is entrepreneurialism, according to Moïse.

Although Moïse’s achievement is extremely useful in that it clearly highlights the distinctive and continuous egalitarian ideology of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, his characterization of the authochthonous tradition as consisting in the two principles of autonomy and entrepreneurialism is not a sufficiently holistic description of its social and political implications. Indeed, Moïse avoids reference to egalitarianism or equality as descriptive terms, alluding only to the emergence of inequality in equatorial Africa more generally, and the separatist reaction to it on the part of autochthons who subsequently became members of “the Pygmy social category” (2014: 102).

Returning to Moïse’s (2014) argument, my primary objection is that for Congo Basin hunter-gatherers a) autonomy is not a sufficient and necessary principle in their egalitarian social tendencies, and b) entrepreneurialism is not a distinctive feature of their societies.

With regard to autonomy, it is an accurate description insofar as the ethnographies of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers do show the tendency towards what Moïse calls contextual clientship with outsiders, by using strategies that minimize the inconveniences of clientship relationships while gaining access to the resources of their so-called patrons. Autonomy also pertains to a tendency for hunter-gatherer residential groups to keep their living space at a distance from the Bantu groups with whom they have social and economic relationships. As indicated before, such practices
correspond with Bird-David’s (1988) concept of encompassment, where outsiders are utilized as social and economic resources. The egalitarian sharing ideology of the hunter-gatherer group is thus retained, rather than overwhelmed or dominated, by the social and economic practices of the outsiders.

On top of this apparent group autonomy, Moïse (2014) also stresses individual autonomy, and it is true that a certain degree of independence and an aversion to authority among Central African hunter-gatherers has been described in the ethnographies (e.g. Turnbull (1966), Hewlett (1991), and Lewis (2002a)). However, this dislike of being told what to do, controlled by, or indebted to other individuals is tempered by the norms and constraints exerted by the social group. It goes hand in hand with a requirement to be humble. As Lewis notes of the Mbendjele:

*People recognise each other’s skills but it is impolite to refer to them. Instead hunting success is talked about in terms of the personal and mystical relationships expressed in the concept of ekila… This is related to the Mbendjele’s egalitarian ethic, in which individual ability is downplayed and represented as a consequence of their conduct in relationships with other people and mystical agents.* (Lewis 2002a: 251).

During my own fieldwork with the Baka of Asoumondélé and with Mbuti people in the Ituri Forest, DRC, I noticed a certain freedom of personality and freedom to make decisions about one’s activities and movements. It is acceptable both to be different to others, in terms of personality and physical appearance, and to go about doing things differently from them. But these freedoms are always limited by moral and jural prescriptions. An individual is subject to social pressures, such as ridicule, if he or she acts without consideration for others. For example, a woman who did not perform
daily chores such as cooking and collecting firewood for her household would be subject to gossip and censure. An old man who tried to dominate a likano fireside storytelling session by telling tale after tale, and not allowing others their turn, would be subject to ridicule by the entire group involved in storytelling.

I therefore suggest that the terms authority avoidance or dominance avoidance are more apt descriptions of the type of social behaviours observed in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies, which are sometimes referred to as autonomy or individualism. Autonomy is also not a sufficient description of the largely egalitarian social tradition of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, as it downplays elements such as the gendered division of labour alongside largely equal relationships between the two gender groups, rigorous sharing practices, and so on.

I am also not convinced that entrepreneurialism is particularly characteristic or distinctive of the Congo Basin hunter-gatherer social tradition. The Cambridge Dictionaries Online defines an entrepreneur as follows:

...a person who attempts to make a profit by starting a company or
by operating alone in the business world, esp. when it involves taking risks.

Apart from the implication of individualism once again, there are two elements to this definition: 1) profit-making, and 2) taking risks.

Rather than being specific to, or characteristic of Congo Basin hunter-gatherer societies, some form of these two types of behaviour are common to all human societies to varying degrees. Indeed, profit-making behaviours are not particularly marked in Congo Basin hunter-gatherer societies because of the social requirement to share within a residence group, and sometimes more broadly. Serge Bahuchet (1990) has compared Aka sharing practices with those of Mbuti and Baka, and found that for
all of these ethnic groups sharing is a way of pooling risk, which satisfies two complementary functions: 1) to combat food insecurity, and 2) to encourage group cooperation. The social pressure behind demand sharing also negates the idea of autonomy put forward by Moïse (2014). As noted by Timothy Ingold (1986), sharing is an act of reaffirming commitment to the community, and putting the needs of the community before one’s own.

Axel Köhler (2005) has argued that Baka sharing practices are most dominant in temporary forest camps, whereas in Baka villages exchange is the more prevalent: “as much as sharing is under pressure in the village, so is commoditisation in the forest sphere” (2005: 40). Furthermore, there is a gender divide, with men more likely to be involved in monetary transactions than women. Entrepreneurialism is thus not a universal, constant or perpetual feature of Congo Basin hunter-gatherer social life.

At any rate, whatever historical tendencies there may have been towards profiteering, adopting new subsistence strategies, and taking risks in Congo Basin hunter-gatherer societies, it seems that there is an at least equally strong tendency to stick to tried and tested sharing practices. Indeed, as Moïse (2014: 95) himself argues, one of the reasons that autochthons came to have an inferior Pygmy ethnic identity and social status is because of their refusal to embrace the accumulative, profit-making big man political system of their Bantu neighbours.

*Once banana cultivation and iron production became well-established in the region, new forms of specialization emerged that created divisions between immigrants and autochthones: Bantu groups became occupied with the spheres of trading wealth, political power, and warfare, while autochthonous groups remained focused on the material resources and mystical powers issuing from*
the forest. Then, as the effects of these innovations began to be felt within the region, increasing levels of political, economic, and military power were required to hold one's own. Yet because the political culture of autochthons mitigated against the accumulation of political power, and they were unable – or unwilling – to respond in economic and military domains, they failed to keep pace with this escalation. As they came to lack those things that conferred value on Bantu – wealth, power, military force, etc. – they came to be regarded as social inferiors... (Moïse 2014: 95-6)

What seems most distinctive about the social tendencies of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers (a characteristic which they share with other hunter-gatherer groups) is their tendency to participate in separate modes of economic transfers, where the in-group context is premised on sharing, and the intergroup context is premised on exchange. The in-group context may be the ethnolinguistic group, or might even extend to neighbouring ethnic groups who practice a similar hunter-gatherer lifestyle, whereas the intergroup context is about complying with other types of economy where necessary. Köhler (2005) has observed and described this type of switching between economic transfers in the forest camp and village contexts among the Baka near Souanké in the Republic of the Congo.

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13 See Woodburn’s (1998) article ‘Sharing is Not a Form of Exchange…’ for a clear distinction between these two types of economic transfers.
Critiques of the Hunter-Gatherer Studies Approach

According to Moïse (2014), the hunter-gatherer studies approach to Pygmy history has privileged the economic level of society as the major driver of history, leading to the neglect of other cultural spheres such as politics, ideology and individual agency.

According to Moïse:

...the fact that, within the era of ethnographic observation, Pygmy peoples have been practicing forms of economy based on hunting and gathering is taken as a sign that, through some form of historical isolation, Pygmy cultural practices have remained unchanged since ancient times (2014: 86).

To the contrary, Bird-David’s (1988) concept of encompassment, along with the other works of scholars interested in hunter-gatherer studies cited in my discussion of encompassment above, demonstrate that hunter-gatherer researchers do not treat the various hunter-gatherer groups that they study as social isolates but rather as a diverse range of peoples, some of whom have demonstrated a tendency, in their known histories, to actively employ the strategy of encompassing outsider ideologies into their own egalitarian ideology. For example, in a volume edited by Susan Kent (1989), she notes that its diversity of case studies “show that the existence of pristine groups completely unaffected by their neighbours is simply not a tenable position whether applied to archaeological analyses of the past or to ethnographic analyses of the present” (1989: 133). Neither should research be atemporal, but rather historical changes and their ramifications should be incorporated into the research design, leading to new insights about both present and past, Kent argued back in 1989.

One of the major comparative insights provided by the hunter-gatherer studies approach is that the mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle is particularly conducive to an
egalitarian ethos that allows hunter-gatherers to cooperate selectively with outsiders, but it also allows them a certain capacity to control the terms of such collaboration because they have the freedom to walk away. This is surely one of the reasons why the adoption of any delayed-return economic practice that requires the restriction of mobility or long periods of sedentism, such as reliance on fishing or horticulture, has the capacity to gradually undermine the egalitarian ideology because the avoidance mechanism – the capacity to walk away – is much less achievable in such an economy.

Economic practices that restrict mobility may be classed as either hunter-gatherer (e.g. fishing) or horticultural, and some shifting cultivator populations may be more mobile than some hunter-gatherer populations. To re-iterate, while a mobile hunter-gatherer economy does not predetermine an egalitarian ideology, it does help to make it possible. Eschewing the hunter-gatherer studies approach in effect elides this important comparative insight, which is amply supported by empirical evidence from hunter-gatherer studies, in which there has long been sensitivity to the multiple dimensions of culture. See in particular Kent & Vierich (1989), who empirically disproved the myth of ecological determinism in mobility and site spatial organization of Basarwa (San) and Bakgalagadi (Bantu) sites in the Kalahari of Botswana almost a quarter of a century ago.

Stephanie Rupp (2011), makes a similar charge to that made by Moïse (2014: 86), against the hunter-gatherer studies approach (quotation marks in the original):

*Despite the breadth and depth of “hunter-gatherer” studies over the past half-century – research that reveals the diversity and dynamism of “hunter-gatherer” societies throughout the world – the subfield remains curiously dedicated to the flawed concept at its core* (2011: 43).
Rupp’s criticisms all stem from her unease with using the hunter-gatherer form of subsistence as a conceptual category – she points out that the category suggests homogeneity and therefore squelches differences between the people placed in this category, and claims that there are no equivalent indigenous categories for hunter-gatherers and farmers. Yet the same might be said of any category used within anthropology or indeed anywhere in academic or non-academic language, including the ethnic labels Rupp herself uses. Her assertion that there is an absence of indigenous categories for hunter-gatherers and farmers is at odds with the observations of most ethnographers who have worked in the Congo Basin, including my own observations.

The fact that the category itself does not tell us everything about the things inside the category does not negate the usefulness of the category in its capacity to underline the similarities and differences between its contents and those of other categories. This is precisely the aim of comparative anthropology, and hunter-gatherer studies has been one of the most useful categories in the discipline. It is this very analytic aspect of the concept hunter-gatherer that Rupp takes issue with. Rupp’s work on stereotypes in the Central African context will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

These, and other, comparative examples will serve to add valuable insights as I piece together the different elements that have caused the Baka community in Asoumondélé to begin to transform into a politically differentiated community where property is valorized.

This research has been conducted under the expectation that comparative research on the emergence of inequality among previously immediate-return societies will allow more generally applicable principles to be identified and analysed. I compare my
findings with those of Csilla Dallos (2011), who studied emerging inequality among Lanoh hunter-gatherers of Peninsular Malaysia, in the concluding remarks to this thesis. My findings differ to those of Dallos in that they point to the importance of private property and gender as fault lines in egalitarian societies through which inequalities can emerge, whereas Dallos emphasises the differential power of age categories.
Figure 1.1.a & b Children of Asoumondélé
CHAPTER TWO

Bissoubilam and Asoumondélé

2.1. Setting the Scene

My fieldwork was conducted with the Baka people of southeast Cameroon during the period from December 2010 to September 2012. The findings of this thesis relate specifically to that period and cannot be glibly extended to any timeframe beyond that point, though I sometimes make use of the ethnographic present due to a preference for simple prose. Nonetheless, I do intend that my thesis serve as a case study for how inequality might emerge in diverse scenarios, while recognising that the specificities of this example are contingent on the unique context and history of my fieldwork site.

The Baka people live in an area bordering Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon and the Central African Republic. In general terms, they are an ethnic and linguistic group that have been associated with an immediate-return hunter-gatherer lifestyle, as well as a gradual process of sedentarisation and the adoption of small-scale agriculture, since the first archival records of the Baka at the start of the 20th century (Regnault 1911; Althabe 1965; Dodd 1978; Joiris 1996; Leonhardt 1998; Kitanishi 2003, 2006; Köhler 2005, Oishi 2012). For the most part, they now primarily practice small-scale shifting agriculture alongside hunting with wire snares, and their social and political organization involves some degree of stratification and considerable gender inequality.
The radical transformation away from egalitarian social organization evident in Baka society can perhaps primarily be attributed to a forcible sedentarisation and development programme imposed by the Cameroonian state (Hewlett 2000, Leonhardt 1998). Other outside forces that have eroded egalitarian Baka culture during the postcolonial era include the construction of a road network in the southeast during the 1950s, the upsurge in logging activities during the mid-1980s (Leonhardt 1998: 8-9), a cacao boom during the 1970s (Köhler 1998), and subsequent exposure to the market economy (Oishi 2012, Weig 2013).

According to ethnographic reports (Leonhardt 1998, Köhler 1998), Baka social organization has been classified as immediate return according to Woodburn’s (1982a) categorization of human societies. Increasing transformation away from a mobile hunter-gatherer life towards a sedentarized, politically-differentiated life has also been documented.

The Baka are ethnically related to the Aka hunter-gatherers of the Republic of the Congo (Bahuchet 1989, 1993b). Contemporary Aka societies, such as the Mbendjele studied by Jerome Lewis (2002a), largely conform to the immediate-return egalitarian classification. The Aka and Baka, although they speak distinct languages (the former primarily Bantu14 and the latter primarily Ubangian), share a large vocabulary of forest-related words and a rich world of cultural concepts and ritual practices. This leads Lewis to use the indigenous regional ethnonym Bayaka to encompass all groups (Lewis 2002a, 2008a, 2014a, 2015). The Baka and Aka were thus once the same group, with a shared proto-language that Serge Bahuchet and Manuel Thuret (1999) call Baakaa.

14 Bantu is used to refer to a language group here.
Figure 2.1. Map depicting situation of Asoumondélé I
The group of people that I worked with most closely were the Baka villagers of Asoumondélé II, on the border of the Republic of the Congo. While I surmise that their story has much in common with those of Baka from other regions, I also find that there are some permutations that are more specific to their particular geographic and

historical location. As Hewlett (2006) and Joiris (2006) have noted of Central African hunter-gatherers, there may be just as much variability in cultural patterns within an ethnic group as there is between groups.

The village of Asoumondélé falls into four separate clusters, three of which lie in the East Region of Cameroon (geographically in the southeast portion of the map), in the Ngoïla Subdivision of the Haut-Nyong Division. The fourth cluster lies in the Republic of the Congo. Asoumondélé I and III in Cameroon are both populated solely by the local Njem people, who are traditionally shifting cultivators but are now involved in more intensive cacao cash cropping and employment at the new iron ore mine that has recently been established at the nearby village of Mbalam. Asoumondélé I is the home of the chef de canton, a minor administrative position in the Cameroonian state.

Asoumondélé of the Republic of the Congo is primarily populated by Baka, many of whom are relatives of the Baka of Asoumondélé II in Cameroon. Asoumondélé II is relatively diverse ethnically. It has both Baka and Njem (Kaka) residents living in segregated spaces, and a state-appointed chief for each of these populations. There is also a small population of outsiders – mostly small-scale entrepreneurs who dabble in a variety of activities, with the exception of one man (who claims to be a pastor) and his wife, whose main economic focus seems to be selling alcohol to the Baka (throughout my entire stay I never once observed him attempt to conduct any religious activity of any kind).

The village and surrounding area had been extremely isolated prior to the period in which I conducted my research, as there was no road going there until the year 2008, only a foot-track. There had also been a distinct absence of commercial and non-profit
organizations working in the area in preceding decades compared with other parts of the East Region, where there was a more developed road network, and foreign companies and non-profit organizations were present, as well as a higher concentration of small-scale entrepreneurs. This indicates that the Baka groups around Asoumondélé have a shorter history of sedentarization and exposure to centrifugal and globalizing forces, although their association with the non-egalitarian Njem extends back into pre-colonial history.

The Baka ethnic group as a whole are also known to have a long history of interaction with other farming groups, thus their exposure to more hierarchical and authoritarian forms of social organization has extensive historical traction. It is theorized that Congo Basin hunter-gatherers began developing exchange relationships with farmers (relationships of the kind seen today) from 1,400 CE onwards, during which time the foragers developed into different linguistic groups through the adoption of the languages of the farmers (Bahuchet 1987; 1993a; 1993b).

There was a period of mass migration, displacement and tribal warfare in the region from the early 19th century up until the period of colonial conquest by competing German and French forces in the late 19th century, followed by German and French colonial rule and rivalry over borders in the early 20th century up until the First World War. The period of colonial rule was also marked by rubber wars fuelled by a trade of guns in exchange for rubber and ivory (Köhler 1998, Siroto 1969). After the First World War, Germany ceded their colonial control of Cameroon to the French and the British.
Local people, both Baka and the neighbouring Njem, spoke to me of a recent history of *enclavement*\(^\text{16}\), including economic and political reliance on the nearby city of Souanké in the north-western Sangha Region of the Republic of the Congo, and participation in a Congolese-aided insurgency by the *Union des Populations Camerounaises* (UPC) against the Cameroonian state led by a Cameroonian rebel named Woungly Massaga. Locals say that the insurgency was brutally suppressed by Cameroonian military forces after a dirt road was built as far as the town of Mintoum (approximately 142km from Asoumondélé) in 1967.

In his 1998 PhD thesis, which examines the implications of sedentarization on Baka people of the Souanké region in the northwestern Republic of the Congo, Axel Köhler also noted the history of such *enclavement*, using the same term that locals in the Asoumondélé district use:

*During the twentieth century the district has had a relatively small, stable and not too heterogeneous population. There has not been an influx of immigrants or refugees in search of land for farming, and only a small number of immigrant Muslim traders have established themselves in commercial centres. There has been a very limited industrial exploitation of minerals in colonial times, mainly of gold, and to my knowledge there has never been any form of logging, the scourge of tropical forest-dwellers in many other places. To the contrary, the absence of external influences, the increasing enclavement of the district and the consistently small number of its inhabitants have added to its appeal as a potential conservation area* (1998: 21).

\(^\text{16}\) They use this French word to mean isolation
Köhler (1998: 92) noted that, at that time, Souanké Town was dependent on the import of commodities from Mbalam (via motorbike on a foot-track from Ngoïla). The commodities were then carried via footpaths through the forest to Souanké Town on the backs of Baka porters, organized by Muslim traders. Asoumondélé II is approximately 3km from Mbalam, and many of the Baka at Asoumondélé now remember those days of carrying heavy burdens with antipathy. A newly built road has changed things. It now links Asoumondélé (and Mbalam) with the nearby border town Ntam, and ultimately with the large Cameroonian town of Sangmélima which has a paved road to the capital, Yaoundé. Although the attitudes of members of the Baka community towards this road range from positive to ambivalent, one of the perceived benefits is that commodities are now much easier to obtain.

Sedentarization of the Baka along the roads in Cameroon began during the 1950s and 1960s, spearheaded by a government programme (Hewlett 2000) but aided by NGOs and missionaries, who built schools and hospitals to fix people along the road, and logging companies, who offered jobs and the rhetoric of development. Sedentarization was also fuelled by the emergence of cash cropping in the form of cacao plantations during this period, a market that went into decline during the 1980s (Köhler 1998).

Despite the relative isolation of the Baka of Asoumondélé, the high impact of development projects in the southeast of Cameroon as a whole seems to have had a knock-on effect on the Asoumondélé population through diffusion from other Baka groups undergoing processes of transformation. The highly social, mobile forest lifestyle pursued by the Baka in the recent past has allowed for rapid cultural assimilation between widely dispersed Baka communities. Nevertheless, I have collected evidence through the oral histories of various informants in the region of
Asoumondélé and surrounding areas that the government programme of sedentarization was extended to these people only by some point during the 1970s or early 1980s, mostly likely in the early 1980s. Before that time, the core community of what is now the Baka quarter at Asoumondélé II had a base camp some few kilometres away which was called Bissoubilam. The elder generation still occasionally refer to the community as Bissoubilam.

An Australian mining company, Sundance Resources Ltd, became interested in iron ore near Asoumondélé during the years 2006 to 2007. The company\(^\text{17}\) found a large deposit around the village of Mbalam, with the help of six Baka guides from Asoumondélé II led by a Baka man named Assembe Pierre. At the time of writing, the company has a stated plan to extract 35 million tonnes of iron ore from an area surrounding Mbalam, in Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo, over a period of 35 years (it was formerly forecast to be 25 years). It has two subsidiary companies, Cam Iron SA (90% owned), and Congo Iron SA (85% owned), which make up the Mbalam-Nabeba Iron Ore Project. This project aims to develop mines, railway infrastructure (a 510km railway line from the Mbarga mine in Cameroon and a 70km rail spur line connecting the Nabeba mine in the Republic of the Congo for the transport of iron ore to the Cameroon coast), and a coastal port in Cameroon at Lolabe, near Kribi.

A Chinese company, Sichuan Hanlong (Group) Co, made a bid for Sundance in 2012, which, due to the fact that the funding for the takeover was not forthcoming as expected, had fallen through by the time of the submission of this thesis. Thus the mine

\(^{17}\) The information in these paragraphs was taken from the website of Sundance Resources Ltd on 14/06/2015, except for the information about Sichuan Hanlong Co, which was in various financial news reports.
had not yet moved into its production phase during the course of my study, which took place between 2010 and 2015, despite having produced a “Definitive Feasibility Study for Stage One” and a “Pre-Feasibility Study for Stage Two” of the project (the two different phases refer respectively to a ten-year focus on producing standard hematite iron ore and a subsequent focus on producing itabirite hematite concentrate).

Sundance established headquarters in Mbalam and opened a dirt road between Ntam and Mbalam going over to Souanké, in the Republic of the Congo, during the years 2007 to 2008. The entire stretch of road between Yaoundé, Mbalam, and Souanké was in the process of being widened and paved during my fieldwork. Plans for the construction of a 485km railway line and water canal in order to carry the ore between Mbalam and the coastal port of Kribi had also been publicized. A dirt road going from Mbalam to Ngoïla, capital of the Haut-Nyong division of Cameroon, had recently been constructed at the start of my fieldwork, but was almost impassable at that time. The road had been widened and flattened by the time I left, and was used as a thoroughfare by officials and NGO workers in four-wheel drive vehicles, as well as locals on motorbikes.

The influx of recruited personnel to the region, as well as of entrepreneurs newly able to access the area by road, has caused dramatic changes to the lives of local people. At the time of writing, the mine has not yet begun its extraction phase, but when it does, I expect that the rate of environmental and social change in the region will accelerate exponentially.

The Baka villagers have a severe problem with alcoholism, which intensified with the opening of the road. Previously, only palm wine and distilled alcohol made from maize was available from the Njem, and this was not particularly affordable to the
Baka people. Rather, alcohol was used by the Njem to lock the Baka into performing cheap labour in exploitative client-patron relations (often remuneration would come exclusively in the form of distilled alcohol). However, a combination of two related factors has changed this. Firstly, the economy of the Baka has rapidly moved from one primarily based on sharing among themselves, plus supplementary exchange of labour and meat for alcohol, farm produce or small amounts of money (with the Njem), to a highly monetarized one. This is due to the fact that new activities relating to the mine have made formal and informal employment more widely available, and also due to the opening of the road, which has brought small-scale entrepreneurs, fortune-seekers and economic adventurers to the region.

Entrepreneurs pay Baka individuals for bushmeat, ivory, gold (mined through artisanal methods), and miscellaneous items foraged from the forest, which the entrepreneurs go on to sell in the Cameroonian capital, Yaoundé, or in the burgeoning town of Sangemelima (169km by paved road from Yaoundé) from which the new road to Souanké ultimately extends. The same entrepreneurs bring cheap, low-quality, industrially manufactured and artificially flavoured alcohol sold in small plastic sachets into the region for sale to local people.

Both Baka and Njem men and women have formed the habit of spending a large portion of any newly-earned wages on purchasing alcohol. According to a news report in May 2014 by Roland Muma18, Cameroon made the consumption of these sachets illegal due to the high levels of alcohol addiction among Cameroonian, and because of the unacceptably high levels of methanol they were found to contain. Methanol is a toxic substance that causes sight loss and neurological damage. Baka people have also

18 See Web Sources
reportedly sold their votes during the 2013 legislative and municipal elections for two sachets of liquor, according to Ngala Killiam Chimtom (September 2013)\textsuperscript{19}.

The Baka quarter of Asoumondélé II is situated very close to the road. When I first arrived in January 2011, the charming entranceway into the Baka part of the village consisted of a narrow footpath framed by two interlocked \textit{fromagier} trees that formed an archway (see Figure 2). During the course of my fieldwork period, this entrance was replaced by a second pathway that had formed next to the roadside shop (opened by a Bamiléké entrepreneur from the Western Province of Cameroon in 2008). This new entranceway was later widened by a Caterpillar at the instigation of the mining company, Cam Iron, in order to allow vehicles to enter the central village space. While it was fairly rare for a Cam Iron or NGO four-wheel drive to come into the village, by the end of my stay the buzz of motorbikes coming in and out of Asoumondélé II (usually on bushmeat-related business) had become as regular as the buzz of flies and other biting insects.

\textsuperscript{19} See Web Sources
The Bamiléké shop sold household goods and work materials targeted towards the villagers, for example paraffin, soap, vegetable oil, batteries, cartridges for hunting rifles, wire cable for snare hunting, second-hand clothing, cigarettes, cheap alcohol in
sachets, machetes and so on. It also stocked petrol and a few (unchilled) bottles of beer and soft drinks for the occasional passing truck driver. The Bamiléké trader lived with a local woman, who would often buy the carcass of an animal from the Baka (or indeed a Njem hunter), then prepare food to serve by the plate in the patio area of the shop, which had become a popular social space in the village. I was surprised to find that, if they came into some money, some Baka men would readily part with it in order to buy these relatively expensive plates of food or beignier (doughnuts) made on a daily basis by a Bamoun woman living in the Njem quarter.

The Baka population of Asoumondélé II is clustered in a deep enclave leading off from one side of the road, whereas the Njem and étrangers (foreigners) are scattered alongside the road itself. The generic local term for local non-Baka residents of southeast Cameroon is Bantu, and the Baka word for this is Kaka, while white people are known as Mbëngë. The Cameroonian government created a new chieftancy for the Baka population of Asoumondélé, despite the fact that there was already a Njem chief in residence. The Baka population, as surveyed in November of 2011, consisted of 129 adults and 68 children. I drew up a basic map of the village in April 2012, which details 13 households, some of which were quite extensive and consisted of several wattle-and-daub houses (see Figure 2.4.).
Figure 2.4. Map of Baka quarter of Asoumondélé II
The Baka chief of Asoumondélé II, Mengbwa Samson, in his late thirties, was educated at a Catholic school in a town called Lomié (about 125km from Asoumondélé). He is the only literate Baka person in the community, and he says the role of chief was bestowed upon him by his uncle Mpako André, who recognized that he had the necessary skills. Mengbwa is a gifted communicator, and is often required to attend state-organized meetings, and meetings with stakeholders in the area to represent the Baka community in general. He is a representative of not only the Baka people of Asoumondélé but for all the Baka people of smaller villages nearby, as he is the only Baka chief in the area that has a formal education and a state-appointed position. (Asoumondélé II has the largest Baka population in the area.)

Apart from his institutional power to represent the Baka community, settle minor disputes and communicate decrees from the state and related bodies (such as conservation organizations), Mengbwa has charismatic power in his own right. He is a persuasive and charming man, who is generally well-liked in the community. Despite that, he is sometimes involved in petty disputes with other members of his household, and on occasion with other men in the Baka community who are offended by what they perceive to be his non-sharing behaviour.

The Asoumondélé Baka usually support the plans Mengbwa puts forward in his orations because they are made by prior consultation with representatives from each household. Still, there have been times when he has failed initially to persuade the community to follow a plan. For example, it was decided by Afrika Macht Schule that the Baka should build their own classroom for the new school but Mengbwa initially had great difficulty in persuading people to contribute their labour without some form of payment. He did finally succeed in rallying the community, although the school opened late as the result of this initial torpor.
Mengbwa is also the only Baka man to have more than one wife. He has two wives, neither of whom has any surviving children. He has three deceased children with his first wife and no children with his second wife. He told me once or twice that he was looking for another wife. Such polygamy, although not unheard of among the Baka, is more typical of Kaka households like those of the neighbouring Njem. Mengbwa’s household resembles a Njem household in other ways also, as he has set himself up as a big man, imitating the political organization of the Njem by having a number of allied adult males in his household who benefit from the wealth he is accumulating (see Chapters 6 & 8). Also, the absence of offspring may explain his motivation for acquiring more than one wife.

Baka and Njem relations are typically troubled by exploitation and discriminatory discourse on the part of the Njem, with resentment and quiescent resistance on the part of the Baka. There are also instances of more positive interethnic relationships, but by and large relationships are characterized by tension. The Njem generally consider their culture to be superior and more socially evolved than that of the Baka, who some Njem individuals liken to animals.

The Njem residents of Asoumondélé II, although they are poor farmers, are better adjusted to convening with the influences from outside that are becoming increasingly important to the way of life in the area. They generally speak better French (especially in the case of women, as most adult Baka women speak little to no French), have had more access to basic schooling, own more property, and have manual skills more attractive to employers such as Cam Iron (for example carpentry or mechanics). Njem farmers typically employ Baka labourers to work on their farms during clearing, planting and harvesting, for which the Baka may be paid as little as 500 CFA per day (about 56p sterling), or merely given some food and alcohol.
The Baka are resentful of outsiders to some degree, although they also say they would like more outsiders to come to their village to help set up projects that will bring them wealth. These outsiders fall into two categories, black and white, or Kaka and Mbûnge. The Kaka outsiders are categorized locally as either Bamiléké or Muslim traders (whom they generically refer to as Hausa, but who in fact are more likely to be Fulani or Bamoun people from other parts of Cameroon). The Mbûnge include myself and a handful of executives at the mine.

Baka people know that the traders substantially inflate the price of goods in Asoumondélé, when they compare these with merchandise to be found in nearby Mbalam or the border town of Ntam. The Baka, who have been reorienting from a demand-sharing background, do not always recognize the new capitalist principles that are now becoming well-established in the area (such as profit making), and some of them perceive the mark-ups in their local shops as cheating on the part of the traders.

The fact that these same traders pay the Baka lower prices per gram of gold (20,000 CFA in Asoumondélé, as opposed to the 23,000 CFA standard exchange in Ntam), reinforces the Baka perception that the entrepreneurs are bo na siti, or wà.binjì (bad people, or cheats). An elderly Baka woman told me that she expected that the traders should excuse her if she didn’t have enough money to pay for the soap or paraffin she wanted to buy. If she didn’t have the asked amount available, the shopkeeper should simply accept what she could give in exchange for the soap – but they do not.

The overwhelming majority of Baka adults in Asoumondélé have had no formal schooling, and the others have only one or two years, therefore the numeracy skills required for monetary exchange are a challenge. Outsiders have long exploited this vulnerability, causing further resentment on the part of the Baka. For example, one of
the traders told me that when he first came to Asoumondélé in 1981, the Baka people, who were still living a mobile life in the forest, were easily tricked into exchanging a day’s labour or an animal carcass for one very small coin. Gradually they became wiser in their financial dealings, after they settled along the footpath at the instigation of a government delegation that came for the purpose of sedentarizing the Baka in the region.

The general failure on the part of the traders in the village to share with the Baka, along with the inflated prices of their goods and their perceived penchant for cheating, was deemed unacceptable by many Baka individuals. This can perhaps be understood by recognising that the Baka still have the substrate of an egalitarian demand-sharing ethos in place, which coexists alongside evident transformation in exchange practices. In an egalitarian system deviant roles have clear linguistic labels, such as bully or cheat, in order that they may be dealt with appropriately by the community in order to suppress domineering behaviour and maintain the egalitarian system (Boehm 1999:192).

The Bamiléké trader, Tonta, and the pastor imposter, Emmanuel, are two of the four outsiders who had the most interactions with the Baka of Asoumondélé II during the course of my fieldwork. The third and fourth were myself and the new Njem schoolmaster, Patrice. We four outsiders were all almost continuously resident in the Baka quarter of Asoumondélé II during the period concerned. Patrice, who speaks some Baka, came to the village from his native Ngoïla in January 2012 to fill the teaching role created by a new community school. According to my Baka interlocutors, Patrice’s linguistic competence in the Baka language was moderate.
Other outsiders of note in Asoumondélé II, living in the Njem quarter, were two Fulani / Fulbe traders, Oumar and Saikou, and their respective families. To the best of my knowledge these two lived by the Muslim interdiction not to buy, sell or consume alcohol, which also lessened the extent of their interactions with the Baka during the period of my stay. However, they both acted as patrons to Baka people, in patron-client styled relationships of employment and trade. Saikou, who moved to Asoumondélé in 1981, claims to have introduced the Baka to artisanal gold-mining technology on his arrival. All of the traders had large plantations requiring Baka labour. Oumar occasionally sold alluvial silt, used for building, to Cam Iron. This was dug up by Baka men and transported out of the forest on their backs, for payment of 20,000 CFA (approximately GBP22) to share out among all the labourers involved.

The Baka residents of Asoumondélé have ambivalent (and increasingly resentful) attitudes towards white people, or Mbúngé. This is largely as a result of their interactions with Cam Iron personnel, and the disappointment they have experienced as the mining project unfolds. It is probably fair to say that Baka expectations of the project were naïvely unrealistic from the outset. This is partly because the wealth of Mbúngé is legendary in the region (as I was acutely aware due to the financial expectations the Baka levelled in my direction). A non-literate and previously isolated population, they do not relate easily to the differences between the roles and financial capacities of a research student, an NGO worker, or a mining tycoon.

The Baka have also witnessed the arrival of white people in helicopters and brand new four-wheel drive vehicles, and they simply expect that some of the wealth on display must soon be shared with themselves. Knowing little of the workings of capitalist transactions which are now being institutionalized in their locale, the Baka project the lingering ethos of a demand-sharing economy onto this new world and their
perceived future within it. Promises of the benefits to the local community were made during meetings that took place as part of the environmental and social appraisal phase of the mining project. The Baka community of Asoumondélé II are frustrated that they have not, as yet, seen the promised benefits.

This is what some of my interlocutors had to say:\textsuperscript{20}

Bèbè Fabrice, self-described as \textit{kobo} (an elder man):

\textit{What trouble our grandparents saw\textsuperscript{21}. That is what is happening to us also. That’s what has come to us, the children. So this is my Mbünge sister here, so this is my sister here\textsuperscript{22}. But we do not see what is happening out there with the Mbünge. We do not see those things they have here, we do not see those things here. How will we live with this lie? How can we live with it? When a disease gets hold of me here, where will I go for treatment before I die? The words that I speak are worth nothing.}

Yeye Emilienne, self-described as \textit{sia} (young woman):

\textit{Before the road was built, we didn’t receive anything. Once the road arrived, we didn’t see anything good here either. They deceive people, these things are not coming. You do nothing but work for nothing, they deceive you. We’ve been in meetings without seeing anything good come of them. Without seeing the things that were promised.}

Sawa Janvier: self-described as \textit{èwanjo} (a young man):

\textsuperscript{20} Names have been changed to protect identities, comments are extracts from a focus group on the topic of the road conducted in May 2012.
\textsuperscript{21} He is referring to exploitative Baka-Njem relations of recent generations.
\textsuperscript{22} He is referring to me.
The Mbúnge have come here. And we explored the forest for nothing, as they say. Goods have come to this village. Up until now, this wealth has not reached us here in this village. These things, they come and give to the Kaka, and the Kaka come and give us a little bit of it.

Nkpano Jacquette, self-described as mbotàki (a middle-aged woman):

We were all taken in by the lies of the Mbúnge. The Mbúnge do not give us anything. We suffer through our work without seeing anything come of it. They send things that don’t arrive here with us. …

The Mbúnge hold meetings and meetings. They give us nothing. In the meetings they give nothing to people. Where are the gifts one gives at a meeting? …

As I speak, I want good fortune to arrive. I want money and goods in front of me. We have suffered so much. We have worked so much. The good life must arrive to make us laugh. Your heart is relieved to see money in your hands. Lots of goods have arrived. But we don’t have hoes, we cultivate our fields with nothing but machetes. Where are the hoes they sent us? There is nothing. Where are the aluminium roof houses they said they would come to build? There are none of these things. We don’t see them.

While increasingly resentful and worried, a degree of optimism remains, as many are reluctant to accept the idea that their expectations of a new and wealthy lifestyle were unfounded, and that perhaps the Mbúnge have promised them things that they will not deliver. Further ambivalence can be detected in the fact that many people say that life prior to the construction of the road was difficult and demoralising, and that they are wealthier and happier as a result of the arrival of the road, and with it, a new era.

Sawa Janvier:
I want a lot of money. I want the money to improve my living environment. I want the children and myself to live well in our family. I want to live well, without trouble in our family. That is why I want to talk, I want money. With this money, I’ll buy a motorbike like those the Kaka get about with. If I bought a bike, then when someone becomes ill, I could take them to the clinic on the bike. That’s my point of view, I ask for nothing but money. In the house I live in, I ask for nothing but money.

Abélé Bernadette, self-described as kobo (an elder woman):

If they have mercy on me, they will build me a house with an aluminium roof. Bring us the good stuff. We have all been in meetings. We have all been in meetings. The work has come here, it arrived just like that. The Kaka snatched this work away from us. Bring the good stuff. So that I, an old woman, can buy soap, paraffin, a torch, a machete and salt.

When I first arrived in Asoumondélé, the Baka people were hopeful that I had arrived in order to improve their lives, and repeatedly asked me to open a school. They claimed that the school that had been opened in Mbalam, with the financial support of Cam Iron, was situated too far away for the children of Asoumondélé to walk there. They also said that the Baka needed their own school as the Baka children were ostracized by the Njem children, and made to feel ashamed of their lack of school uniforms and books.

As a previously immediate-return society with a tradition of demand sharing, it is at first appearance somewhat puzzling that the Baka seem to have developed such an insatiable desire for wealth and property. However, it should be born in mind that they have similarly endless appetites for desirable foods such as honey and fatty meat (good
Woodburn conceived a determining feature of such societies to be the possession of a combination of practices and ideological principles that disengage people from private property and its differentiating potential. Clearly, such practices and principles must operate less effectively in societies that are transforming towards delayed-return organization, so that the acquisition of property gradually becomes valorized.

The Baka still expect large shares of the excesses around them, applying an immediate-return ideology to all the new merchandise now arriving. In the case of interactions with Kaka they have long practiced an exchange economy. Now, with the arrival of market forces and the mine, they are entering into the cash and wage economy, but, lacking relevant cultural models, they are applying the logic from the immediate-return and exchange models they do know to try and understand it. The desire to obtain and consume material goods is not in itself alien to a foraging society, in which the forest is seen to provide in abundance (Lewis 2008, Bird-David 1990, 1992). It is the requirement that goods be shared equitably that is undermined as political asymmetry begins to emerge and goods are accumulated, differentially distributed or exchanged with some kind of expectation of reciprocity.

Axel Köhler (1998) and Takanori Oishi (2012) have documented this process among Baka communities who have taken up the plantation of cocoa as a cash crop. Many Baka communities in the Republic of the Congo have been planting cocoa since the 1970s and some have become very successful according to Köhler (1998). Oishi (2012) observes that in a village called Ndongo in southeast Cameroon eastwards of Asoumondélé, unrestricted access to the market economy, which would previously have been mediated through a neighbouring farmer or Kaka paymaster, allows the Baka greater autonomy at the local level. However, it also allows for the emergence
of differences in status between Baka individuals, as a minority adapt more quickly to the delayed-return, market-oriented practices required than most. Oishi also observes that a strong desire for alcohol and consumer goods leads most Baka individuals to spend their cash immediately upon acquisition. This is a useful analysis, comparable to the transformation taking place in Asoumondélé. Notably, spending all one’s money on consumables is immediate-return behaviour, and is likely at least partly the result of social pressure to share.

Although the Baka of Asoumondélé II have not yet embarked upon running any capitalist enterprises of their own, they spend much time discussing the commercial ideas they hope to implement when all the promised newcomers to the mine arrive with their attendant wealth (this has repeatedly been promised by agents from the government and the mine as they gear up for the extraction phase). My analysis indicates that there are strong ideological and affective components driving this emerging materialism, as I argue throughout this thesis. These factors were first galvanized by involvement in the ivory trade which led to the adoption of bride wealth by the Baka (Köhler 1998, 2005), and then intensified, firstly through sedentarization with its concomitant switch to a primarily delayed-return economy, and finally through the explosion of globalized modernity onto the scene in the form of the mine and the road.

2.2. Identity Crisis and Encompassment

During my fieldwork, I observed that the Baka of Asoumondélé were grappling with a crisis of their ethnic identity; an internalisation of the extreme negative ethnic
stereotyping and political marginalization that has been directed at them. Although
discrimination has perhaps been a feature of relationships between Bantu and Pygmy
peoples since the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era (Moïse 2015),
the Baka have always had the option of practicing encompassment (Bird-David 1988),
which is premised upon the capacity to walk away.

Since adopting the sedentary lifestyle, they will have come into daily contact with
outsiders, and their social and economic relationships with the Njem have clearly
become of heightened importance in their lives. They may have become increasingly
vulnerable to *structural violence* (Farmer 2004) as the result of adopting a more
sedentary lifestyle, and of the concomitant increase in exposure to the discriminatory
attitudes among other ethnic groups towards them.

Furthermore, in recent decades the exodus of rural youth to urban centres to take
advantage of more lucrative employment and education opportunities has left Kaka
farmers with a shortfall in labour. As Lewis (2002a) describes of present-day
Mbendjele - Bilo relations, during the 1970s the Bilo farmers started to lose a source of
labour – their young people – to schooling and to urban centres, and thus became more
dependent on securing Mbendjele labour. This increased need for labour means that
Bilo came to rely on coercive measures such as debt-relations, threats of sorcery and
violence, and actual violence in order to secure Mbendjele labour. At the same time,
Mbendjele have become less credulous in what they are prepared to accept in exchange
for labour. This new shrewdness on the part of the Mbendjele is the result of increasing
exposure to the village way of life since the end of the dangerous colonial period when
many hunter-gatherer groups stuck to the forest as much as possible.
Lewis’s description matches what many Baka and Njem people told me about their relationships with one another. The Baka complain that the Njem do not pay them enough for their work and hence they look for it elsewhere as much as possible. The Njem say that the Baka have become lazy, unreliable and demanding. In addition, the Njem often ply the Baka with alcohol to get them to work. As I discovered when my own wattle-and-daub house was being built by the Baka community, it was expected that I would provide alcohol and food for labourers to aid their work in addition to the money that I had agreed to pay them at the outset. Alcohol is consumed during labour, even in the midday sun on the hottest of days.
Oppositional relationships with outsiders have been common to egalitarian societies throughout recent history as the result of what Sahlins calls "neolithic prejudice" (1972: 305), and latent resistance on the part of egalitarian peoples to the domineering attempts of others (Turnbull 1966, Bird-David 1988, Woodburn 1997, Leonhardt 1998, Köhler and Lewis 2002). However, the radical contrariety found among the Asoumondélé Baka perhaps moves a step beyond the oppositional relationships witnessed by anthropologists before. It manifests in troubled memories of the past, antagonistic relationships with outsiders and internecine conflicts with each other in the present, and culminates in an extreme anxiety about the future frequently expressed by many of my Baka interlocutors. This is because the Baka community are no longer able to encompass the outsiders’ modes of social interaction in the manner described by Bird-David (1988). They are unable to use these other peoples as economic and
social resources and subsume their opposing ideologies. I will delve into the reasons for this as the thesis progresses.

I found most Baka individuals in Asoumondélé to be resentful of their lowly status in wider society, particularly the younger generation who are now in their twenties. They expressed a strong desire for political equality with their Kaka neighbours. Desperate for such change to come about, Baka people generally find their degraded status in the eyes of others distressing.

The kernel of my hypothesis is that the Baka now feel that improving their status and power in Cameroonian society is dependent on obtaining economic equality. They feel this way, I argue, as a result of two related factors. Firstly, Baka recognition of the hierarchical power structures weighing down on them, and the resource pressures and negative emotions brought about as a result of structural violence. Secondly, the ideology that wellbeing can be obtained through upward economic mobility is classic development discourse. This is the principle that underlies the mining company’s social and environmental assessments, and their public relations materials, in which they confidently state that:

...in keeping with Sundance’s commitment to sustainable development, Sundance recognises the importance of the Equator Principles and the IFC Performance Standards in governing Project activities. The Company’s Environmental and Social Policy commits the Project to Sustainability and Capacity Building, which will make our vision of “Leaving behind a better future for the next generations” a reality. (Sundance Resources Ltd website)23

23 Taken from Sundance Resources Ltd website on 09/03/15.
Because this recognition provides the impetus for an increase in materialism, it also drives further political disruption within the internal micro-society of the community, and consequently more social transformation. The demand sharing ethos from Baka to Baka is in some respects dimmed by a new desire for individual wealth and accumulation, and as modernity bursts into Asoumondélé with stunning force, new expectations and demands are coming into play. Delayed-return praxis has been shuttled into the spotlight, along with the emergence of explicitly capitalist ideas, but underlying the new is the insistent claim that the Baka are the equals of others and that the Baka should share the material wealth that others possess in excess.

The Baka people of Asoumondélé seem to have digested the fact that there is now unprecedented pressure on them to adapt to a new way of life, and they are thus caught up in a seemingly inexorable process of reorienting towards the delayed-return ideology of others. And it is thus they, and not the others, who feel compelled to belatedly join the race for wealth and status in order to rise in the national hierarchy. There is a prescience that only material goods will allow them to overcome the degrading aura of primitivity and animality that sticks to them as long as they remain – economically – the poorest of the poor, and orient their lives towards the forest.

Undoubtedly, Baka people have been aware all along that goods reflect status, as Congo Basin hunter-gatherers have been able to encompass the political system of their farmer neighbours since the inception of the big man tradition in the Congo Basin (as argued in the discussion of Moïse’s thesis in Chapter 1). The motivations and processes behind the gradual turn towards this type of political system on the part of the Baka is the topic of this thesis, especially its recent acceleration since the road was built.
The Baka have been told that they need to come into the light, but they do not, as yet, see the light. Despite being capable strategists, the Baka presently lack the means to accumulate wealth, and feel disempowered by their lack of integration into the ways that the outside, materialist communities work. They hope that education in the form of schooling may be the key, as this has been key to discriminatory narratives of Kaka, who have told the Baka that they are like animals in the forest because they can’t read. Missionaries have also placed a lot of emphasis on education and on converting the Baka to sedentary farming practices to support this (Hewlett 2000; also my own experience of the views of the nuns who provide religious, educational and medical services to a large community of Baka people at Le Bosquet during my short visits to this Catholic missionary near Lomié).

Implicit in this drive to educate the Baka is the assumption that the mobile hunter-gatherer way of life is an unacceptably primitive one - Neolithic prejudice (Sahlins 1972). Hence the Baka of Asoumondélé’s enthusiasm for, and commitment to, a community school in which their children can freely participate. It is clear that many Baka people in Asoumondélé feel inadequate as a result of their lack of literacy and numeracy, and they hope that schooling will secure their children a better future.

In February 2012, a small preparatory school was opened by a German NGO, Afrika Macht Schule, with some logistical support from Cam Iron and its personnel contractor, Onyx. The Baka people were extremely receptive to this project. Some Baka individuals later told me that the school was the only thing that the Mbúnge had given them.
Figure 2.6 a) & b) The school and my house still in use in 2015²⁴

²⁴ Photos courtesy of Téodyl Nkuintchua.
Apart from their strong desire to escape the stigma of primitivity, there is the uneasy sense among the Baka community that possibly they are being ruthlessly exploited. That they are not really being assisted into developing into a higher status community, nor are they being embraced by the outside communities. For this reason, they have gone beyond the stage of passive resistance and are becoming increasingly resentful of their neighbours and the newcomers as their feelings of self-esteem, both personally and communally, diminish.

This resentment sometimes takes the form of imitation or mimicry of some of the social and political practices of the Njem and other powerful outsiders. It is comparable with the mimesis that Rane Willerslev has recognized is an important principle of an animist type of cosmology through his study of the mimetic belief system of Yukaghir hunters of Siberia: “Yukaghirs imitate significant and powerful others not simply to represent them, but also to exercise power over them” (Willerslev 2007: 11). As Lewis (2014a: 115) recorded, BaYaka people explain that “…in order to be able to speak (pfofà) in the ‘language’ (djoki) or speech (pfofèdi) of others, whether neighbouring farmers, monkeys, or other camp members, one must mimic their sounds back to them”. Identity crisis and mimesis are the subjects of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively.

A very strong malevolent wild card has also been thrown into the mix, namely the intense craving the Baka of Asonondélé have for alcohol. Their labour is bought cheaply through the use of alcohol, which has the dual effect of locking them into exploitative labour relations, whilst at the same time incapacitating many of them from using their desire and skills to make the changes that they feel would be beneficial to their community.
Lewis (2002a) and Köhler & Lewis (2002) argue that Bilo farmers have used alcohol addiction as a deliberate strategy to secure Pygmy labour in a more reliable way, as a way of getting around the Pygmy tactic of disappearing into the forest, and in response to losing the labour force of their children. The bitter irony of this is that the very thing that drives Baka people to seek money on a day-to-day basis effectively prevents them from saving or investing any of it, as they now aspire to. Although alcohol is used as a levelling mechanism – a way for an individual to immediately share excess production and prevent the jealousy of others – it then takes on a life of its own as addiction kicks in and people start seeking alcohol for its own sake.

In the words of Mpako André:

*We can see that we’re in the forest. Although we have left, we are still in the forest. We have still not opened our eyes to the light. When we see cars and motorbikes, we see that we are in the forest. Clear away this forest for us so that we can live in the light. We do not see very well. We want the good on the earth that Komba [the Baka God] has created. We want the good so that we too can see. We want to see. We are still in the darkness. Come and remove the forest.*

*We are here in the forest. That’s all I want to say to you.*

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25 From an interview conducted in October 2011.
Figure 2.7. Doodles from a Baka child’s schoolbook, Asoumondélé
SECTION 2

Identity, Mimesis and Gender
CHAPTER THREE

Discrimination and Resistance

3.1. Vignette: Stolen Money

“Tok, tok, tok”, someone is rapping on my front door and shouting. “Cathy! Cathy! Come quickly!” I have been sleeping off a late night after last night’s house-warming party, and I grumble to myself as I quickly dress, and go to open the front door of the brand new wattle-and-daub house that the Baka community have built for me. It is Mengbwa, the Baka chief of Asoumondélé. He looks worried, and starts telling me that I need to come to a meeting, that there has been an incident of theft at Emmanuel’s house. This is distressing news, coming off the back of a party that was held to welcome me to my home, and which I thought had passed without any disturbing events caused by the mass consumption of alcohol.

Mengbwa leads me to the part of the village where his household is quartered. He has a wattle-and-daub house dedicated to storage, which has a roofed veranda, and some benches and tables. Assembled are Daniel, the Njem chief of Asoumondélé II; Norbert, the Njem chief of Asoumondélé III; and the immigrants Emmanuel and Tonta. Emmanuel is a man from near Kribi who now lives among the Baka of Asoumondélé with his wife. He claims to be a pastor, but I have never seen him conducting any religious activities. Tonta is the
Bamiléké trader who has his shop at the entrance to the Baka part of the village. There are small groups of Baka villagers gathered nearby, watching and murmuring conversations.

Chief Daniel clears a space for me next to him on the bench. “Cathy, there is a thief at work in this village”, he says solemnly in French. Emmanuel is holding his head in his hands. He looks up. “They entered my house and stole all my money, and other things”, he asserts angrily. Emmanuel and Tonta start talking excitedly. “The Baka are thieves, you cannot trust them.” Tonta agrees, and the two of them begin a heated tirade against the Baka that would sound shockingly prejudiced to my ears, except that I have heard such discriminatory talk about them all too often before. Both have worked themselves up into a state of sanctimonious outrage, which does not show them at their best.

Emmanuel threatens to go and call the police commissioner who is based at Ntam, about 7.5km from Asoumondélé. This causes some consternation among the three local chiefs present, who all agree that it is better to try and work out who the thief is among ourselves. Bringing the commissioner to the village might cause trouble for everybody. Emmanuel is not satisfied, and continues to rage about “Baka thieves”, who he says must pay him back.

I ask them what exactly happened, and Emmanuel tells me that he was away in Ntam for the night as his wife is ill at the clinic there. He had locked the door to his wattle-and-daub house and left his keys with Mengbwa for safekeeping, apparently leaving all of his savings of 15,000 CFA (about GBP17) in a tin can in his bedroom. “I arrived home this morning and found my money was gone!” he fumes. “During the night someone broke in through the window. The Baka
were having a party here in this village, and some of them just decided to enter
my house and steal from me”. I mention that there were both Baka and Njem
people present at the party, both in large numbers. Mengbwa nods emphatically,
and repeats that there were many Njem people present.

I ask to see where the alleged thief broke in. The entire party traipses over to
Emmanuel’s house, where we are to inspect the window. The Baka bystanders
troop after us. At the house, I see that the wooden shutters are standing ajar,
and the mosquito meshing underneath has been cut away. There is a jumble of
footprints leading up to the window. I ask Emmanuel how the shutters were
opened, and he tells me that they do not lock. We go inside, and Emmanuel points
out that there was a glass on the table next to the window that has been knocked
over. He shows us where he kept his money, in a tin inside a box underneath the
table. He says that in addition to the bank notes amounting to 15,000 CFA there
were some coins. A packet of biscuits and some tobacco are also missing.

As we emerge from the house, Mengbwa addresses the crowd, “Did anyone
see or hear anything happening at this house last night?” Nobody says anything.
The crowd is sombre, watchful. There are a few murmurs.

The three chiefs, Emmanuel and Tonta decide to withdraw from the crowd to
convene. They move round to the back of the house. I linger back, but Chief
Daniel calls me into the circle. We all quickly agree that it is unlikely that a
culprit will ever be found. A discussion ensues during which Emmanuel keeps
threatening to go to the police commissioner. The others dissuade him. I ask him
why he had left his money behind while he went to Ntam, and he says it was for
safekeeping.
After a protracted discussion, the three chiefs agree that Baka youths must have broken into the house to steal money for alcoholic drinks while everybody else was distracted with the party. Norbert proposes that Mengbwa should compensate Emmanuel for the missing cash with his own money. The others agree that Mengbwa is responsible for the Baka community, and that as he was also left in charge of Emmanuel’s house, it is only fair for him to pay this compensation. Mengbwa has not said much; he seems resigned. I ask him if he accepts the verdict of the others, and he says that he does, with a sick look on his face. I feel that an injustice has been done, but no solution presents itself to my mind. I keep my feelings to myself.

3.2. The Racist Stereotype of Pygmies

The ethnic discrimination that is described in this vignette is common. Discrimination is directed towards the Baka people as an ethnic group, both by locals and immigrants, on a daily basis. And in return, many Baka people respond with their own prejudices against other ethnic groups. In many cases, the discrimination is tantamount to racism, when the undesirable qualities of the Baka, or Pygmies, are framed as a sub-human essence that is manifest in their physical characteristics and mental qualities.

For example, the Njem schoolteacher from Ngoïla, Patrice, who was brought in to teach the children of Asoumondélé as part of Afrika Macht Schüle’s endeavour to provide schooling for the village, had the following to say to me about the Baka:
It is not just the body of the Pygmy that is small, their heads are also small. You can see how their heads are small by the way they build houses. Their houses are always small, and the windows and doors are always small. This is why Pygmy children are not capable of learning at the same pace as other children, because their heads are so small\cite{note26}.

Incidentally, this type of racism levelled at the intellect of the Pygmies because of their stature has a correlate within the discipline of anthropology itself, as is evident in the following blog posting by Gregory Cochran (2014), a research associate at the Anthropology Department, University of Utah, on a website called *West Hunter*, run by himself and his colleague Henry Harpending, a faculty member of the University of Utah. I reproduce some relevant sections from the full blog post here for analysis:

*The Wrong Path*

*Posted on August 26, 2014 by gcochran9*

*Turning Pygmy hasn’t turned out to be a very good long-run strategy. All such populations have big problems. First, they’re vastly outnumbered by peoples that adopted agriculture. Second, they’re short – shorter than their farmer neighbors – and generally that has been a disadvantage in disputes. Contemporary African pygmies are ‘hereditary servants’ of their Bantu neighbors: we have another word for that.*

....

\cite{note26} From an interview of April 2012.
Moreover, it seems that they may have incurred an intellectual disadvantage as well. They have small brains, probably the smallest of any existing human population. I found a reference claiming an average endocranial volume of 1,085 cm³ for the Aka: that’s the lowest number ever reported. Their reported IQ scores are very, very low. Their neighbors, who don’t score high themselves, think that the Pygmies have rocks in their head, don’t plan ahead, are irresponsible, etc. And of course they have trouble with alcohol.

....

All this should have been obvious when modern humans were wandering into the African rainforest tens of thousands of years ago. What were they thinking?

These are examples of comments left by readers of Cochran's blog:

Patrick L. Boyle says:
August 26, 2014 at 2:14 pm

.... Let’s save them. We could have the Bantu sell them to us and then have them declared non-human. If race is a social construct surely we can find an anthropologist who will testify the same about species. Then they could be used for drug testing. This would also help save the chimps and bonobos. ...

... They don’t even have the option of dying with their boots on because they don’t have boots. If they did the bantus would make them take them off before they cooked them. They have the option of getting help from someone, getting bred out of existence by ‘joining’ their slave masters through breeding, or getting eaten. ...
Setting aside Cochran’s unsubstantiated scientific claims about a hypothesized intellectual disadvantage of the Pygmies, his argument relies on racist slurs. These slurs allegedly originate from farmer neighbours. The family resemblance between these two racist statements, one from a Njem schoolteacher in South Cameroon, and the other from an American professor, indicates the existence of a reified international racist stereotype of the Pygmy. There is a common element of racism based on stature, alongside the fact that these schools of racism seem to have drawn upon one another because Cochran uses the claim that farmer neighbours think Pygmies have rocks in their heads to bolster his argument for intellectual deficiency among Pygmies.

Discrimination against people who are identified as hunter-gatherers is a widespread and indigenous phenomenon throughout rural Africa, as demonstrated by James Woodburn (1998). The processes of creating and maintaining differentiation along the lines of subsistence are so strong that they are often the basis of intercultural distinction. Peoples who are identified as hunter-gatherers by themselves and others have a distinctive hunter-gatherer identity, even if they are no longer doing much hunting and gathering. Those so identified are subjected to pervasive discrimination where: “hunter-gatherers are described by neighbouring agriculturalists and pastoralists as dirty, disgusting, gluttonous, ignorant, stupid, primitive, backward, incestuous, lacking a proper culture and a proper language and even as animal-like, not fully human” (1998: 349).

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27 There is scant scientific evidence in support of a genetic heritability explanation for differences in IQ between different geographic populations or socially-constructed racial groups, and larger brain size does not necessarily predict higher intelligence (Jencks & Phillips 1998, Devlin et al. 1997, Turkheimer et al. 2003, Turkheimer 2011, Sussman 2014, Plomin & Deary 2015).
Hunting and gathering, according to Woodburn (1998), has mostly negative connotations for neighbouring agriculturalists and pastoralists and also for modern African governments. This is because hunter-gatherers are politically weak (due to low population densities and egalitarian social organization), because they appear impoverished (due to the fact that they share resources instead of accumulating them), because they are identified with the bush or the forest (which is seen as alien and uncivilized), and because they are identified with animals (due to their mobile life in the bush / forest, their lack of property and their wild foods diet).

In this respect, Marshall Sahlins (1972) was perceptive in noticing a correlation between neolithic ethnocentrism and bourgeois ethnocentrism in the assumption that accumulation is the only sensible economic strategy. Recall also that Gregory Cochran expresses incredulity at the fact that modern humans ever wandered into the African rainforest. “What were they thinking?”

Furthermore, it is assumed by Cochran and some of his respondents that forest life is maladaptive and hence that the very existence of the Pygmies is threatened by neighbouring agricultural populations. This assumption is made with no reference to historical or contemporary ethnographic evidence. Assumptions of this kind rest on the status of the Pygmy as “a virtual poster child of natural selection theory”, as argued by historian Kairn A. Klieman (2003: 19). Klieman contends that Batwa or Pygmy people have figured prominently in scientific, but not historical, research due to largely untested assumptions that Pygmies form a primordial race. These assumptions began with 19th century social evolutionism, which was in turn influenced by the ancient role
played by the Pygmy trope – to mediate between the human and beastly levels of *Great Chain of Being* 28.

Although the ancient history of modern Congo Basin hunter-gatherers remains uncertain, they currently form the largest population of hunter-gatherers in the world numbering between 100,000 and 500,000 people. In addition, there is now genetic, historic, linguistic, cultural and musicological evidence that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and cultural forms date back at least as far as the period between 40,000 to 30,000 BP in the Congo Basin rainforest (Bahuchet 2012; Grauer 2007, 2009; Verdu et al. 2009, 2013; Lewis 2014a). Moreover, Congo Basin hunter-gatherers are genetically related to the San / Bushman hunter-gatherers of southern Africa with a population split that dates back up to 102,000 BP (Chen et al. 2000) and that is definitely older than 35,000 BP (Schlebusch & Soodyall 2012: 378) - the approximate period for the dispersal of these two groups into their current locations.

There is also evidence that the Western cosmopolitan stereotype 29 of the Pygmy has influenced the equatorial African one, as argued by Stephanie Rupp (2011). In my own fieldwork research, I noticed that there is a local discourse on both social improvement and hierarchy using the French verb *évoluer* (to evolve), which describes Pygmies as occupying the bottom level of society due to their incapacity to evolve as fast as others. It is a discourse that clearly fits into a pattern of thought influenced by imported racist elements of social evolutionism that existed during colonial times in Europe and America and informed colonial practices, as described by historians George W. Stocking (1968) and Mike Hawkins (1997).

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28 Ancient Greek neo-Platonist conception of the cosmological order
29 *Western cosmopolitan stereotype* is my term, not used by Rupp (2011).
Another common element to these two schools of racism is the assumption that an observed tendency towards alcoholism is due to some kind of innate mental deficiency or essence in Pygmies. In fact, there is little to no evidence of any genetic component that preferentially predisposes Congo Basin hunter-gatherers or any other population to alcoholism, as I detail in Section 8.7. However, there is ample evidence of social causes such as discrimination, political marginalization and economic exploitation.

In order to come to a clearer picture of the circular relationship between the indigenous Central African racist stereotype of Pygmies and the Western cosmopolitan version, as well as the relationship between these stereotypes and the way that Congo Basin hunter-gatherers are discriminated against today, the historical context of each is required.

3.3. The Western Cosmopolitan Racist Stereotype of Pygmies

Klieman (2003: 1-34) and Rupp (2011: 36-38) both trace the trajectory of the Pygmy stereotype in its Western instantiation in a brief history of the idea from the point when ancient Greek explorers first coined the term Pygmies\(^\text{30}\) to describe the short stature of peoples they encountered in far-off lands, drawing on an ancient Egyptian mythology of dwarves, through the liminal position of Pygmies between human and animal in the *Great Chain of Being* during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, and up until

\(^\text{30}\) The term Pygmy is derived from the Greek *pugme* (πυγμή), which denotes a unit of measurement equal to the distance measured from elbow to knuckle.
Baka Pygmies were displayed at a nature park in Belgium in 2002. Both Klieman and Rupp have a similar perspective:

*The idea of the Pygmy is an entirely Western construct, one that was applied to peoples of central Africa relatively late in the history of the idea* (Klieman 2003: 3).

*The notions of “pygmy”, “hunter-gatherer,” and “indigenous people” serve as conceptual containers whose parameters reflect abstract, condensed social realities of the people who “belong” in each category … Yet each of these categories- “pygmy”, “hunter-gatherer,” and “indigenous people” – is based on social qualities that external observers have deemed to be relevant, reflecting Euroamerican values and preoccupations more directly than social realities and relationships in southeastern Cameroon* (Rupp 2011: 35).

This similar perspective, despite considerable differences in approach between the two scholars, ultimately hinges on the argument, made by both Klieman (2003) and Rupp (2011), that ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology about an imaginary race of diminutive almost-humans has been a continuous trope in Western thought that informed 19th century scientific scholarship, and “has been one of the most enduring root metaphors of Western culture” (Klieman 2003: 3).

Conversely, the mythological Pygmy race of medieval Europe may have had some tenuous relationship with an actual Central African population encountered during the voyages of discovery and the Arab slave trade, according to literary historian John Block Friedman (2000: 188-196). He describes how Pygmies were considered to be one of the *monstrous races* and how they were often denied human status in medieval
European thought. Friedman’s account confirms that due to their small size, Pygmies were imagined to be at a stage between apes and humans in the Great Chain of Being. For example, Albert the Great argued that despite their apparently human speech and their social customs, Pygmies did not have true reason and their apparent speech was mere imitation devoid of any meaning.

Yet Friedman considers that “the Pygmies can be identified as aboriginal people who are far from imaginary” (2000: 24). Ancient Greek thought placed the Pygmies in Africa and India; for example Herodotus tells of an encounter with Pygmies during a voyage into the interior of Africa. Also, Friedman notes that Peter of Auvergne (a medieval French philosopher and theologian) denied that Pygmies had human status because they apparently deviated too far from the mean height of humans. Peter’s writings mention that Pygmies from Africa were sold as slaves; he dismisses reports that Pygmies cultivated plants as far-fetched tales told by slave sellers.

Partly as the legacy of social evolutionism and also extractive colonial practices and attitudes during the 19th century, by the turn of that century, “racial theories which constructed a hierarchy of races with the Nordic at the top were considered factual, free of prejudice and generally pertinent to social and political analysis” (Barkan 1992: 2).

Evidence that extreme racism towards Pygmies still existed into the 20th century is to be found in the harrowing and tragic biography of Ota Benga, written by Pamela Newkirk (2015a, 2015b). Ota Benga was a young Mbuti man who was abducted from the Congo in 1903 and taken to the USA, where he was exhibited, first at a trade fair, and then in a cage at the Bronx Zoo alongside an orangutan. There he was held captive
by the founding director of the zoo and prominent zoologist William Temple Hornaday. A placard outside of the cage at the zoo read:

The African Pygmy, Ota Benga  
Age, 23 years. Height, 4 feet 11 inches.  
Weight 103 pound. Brought from the Kasai River, Congo Free State, South Central Africa,  
By Dr Samuel P Verner.  
Exhibited each afternoon during September.31

The New York Times reported on the appearance of Ota Benga at the zoo, in an anonymous article dated 9 September 1906:

The exhibition was that of a human being in a monkey cage. The human being happened to be a Bushman, one of a race that scientists do not rate high on the human scale, but to the average non-scientific person in the crowd of sightseers there was something about the display that was unpleasant.

...

It is probably a good thing that Benga doesn’t think too deeply. If he did it isn’t likely that he was very prod of himself [sic] when he woke in the morning and found himself under the same roof with the ourang-outangs and monkeys, for that is where he really is.32

Hearing of the spectacle, a group of African-American ministers started a campaign for Ota Benga’s release. The tide of public opinion had begun to turn, and Benga was

himself putting up stronger resistance to his captivity. On 28 September 1906, he was released into the care of one of the campaigners, Reverend James H. Gordon, who placed Benga in an orphanage for African-American boys. While Ota Benga initially seemed to be thriving at the orphanage, as he grew older he became depressed and eventually shot himself through the heart on 19 March 1916.

The racist elements of social evolutionism and social Darwinism have persisted through the eugenics movement, and crop up in modern scientific discourse on race and IQ tests, as documented by physical anthropologist Robert Wald Sussman (2014). Moreover, social evolutionist views among the descendants of colonists in Africa, and also among white resource extraction personnel and Christian missionaries, may well be more alive than such views are in modern-day Europe and America, as I have found to be the case in my travels within sub-Saharan Africa. For example, during a recent visit to my country of origin, South Africa, my father and I ran into a business acquaintance of his in a Johannesburg coffee shop. My father introduced us, and explained that said acquaintance is a legal expert working in commerce, and that I (the author) am an anthropologist working with Central African Pygmies. The acquaintance proceeded to ask me, in all seriousness, whether I was looking for the missing link. In Yaoundé, I met an American temporary resident who asked me whether the Pygmies are cannibals.

Racist evolutionist ideology is still fairly widespread among economically powerful white Africans as it serves to justify their disproportionate ownership of land and resources. Accordingly, evolutionist racism from white people should not be discounted as a possible reinforcement of prejudice against Pygmies in the present-
day Central African context, although the presence of indigenised white people is small.

On the other hand, racism in Europe and America has been on the decline since the period inbetween the two World Wars, during which race as a scientific category was discredited, according to political historian Elazar Barkan (1992). Scientific advance in this regard was followed by a more generalized repudiation of racism in international politics and intellectual discourse following the horrors committed in the name of race during the Second World War, along with the rise of first-wave feminism and the American civil rights movement.

For Rupp, “the prevalent stereotypes that typify forest peoples in equatorial Africa are rooted in perceptions and policies of outside observers, they can and do take on local valences that are often emotionally cutting and socially divisive” (2011: 15). Rupp's view contrasts with the evidence presented in this chapter that Western and equatorial African prejudices against hunter-gatherers and former hunter-gatherers have been mutually influencing. It is likely that the Western racist stereotype was particularly influential during the early colonial period in the 19th century, when racist beliefs were very strong in Europe, but also that they have subsequently declined in ubiquity and thus their influence in Africa has also declined. In fact, the exact historical relationship between these two schools of prejudice is unknowable, and in the present they are not easily distinguishable.
3.4. The Central African Racist Stereotype of Pygmies

Historians Jan Vansina (1990: 65) and Robert Moïse (2014) argue that Pygmies gradually came to inhabit a socially inferior position in equatorial Africa when Bantu peoples became preoccupied with wealth, political power and warfare after the adoption of banana cultivation and iron production, probably in the years between 500 BCE and 1500 CE. There is likely much truth to this, as prior to such diffusion the lifestyle of both autochthons and Bantu-speaking newcomers was very similar. It involved close relations between autochthons and newcomers, both groups relying primarily on gathering, hunting and fishing for their subsistence.

In other words, there was no Neolithic Revolution in the Congo Basin rainforest with the arrival of the first phase of root-cropping proto-Bantu-speakers from the Grasslands Region of western Cameroon in 4500 to 4000 BCE. It took three further phases of Bantu expansion out into the rainforest before an entirely agriculturalist lifestyle had become widespread by 1500 BCE (Vansina 1990, Klieman 2003). At this point, many autochthonous groups began to disassociate themselves from the agriculturalist villagers, who had become sedentary and were accumulating wealth and status. Consequentially, a distinct economic niche and social organization opened up for autochthons, who became forest specialists, and the forest hunter-gatherer/villager farmer dichotomy was born (Klieman 2003).

The proto-Bantu ancestors of present-day Njem speakers were part of the second phase of proto-Bantu expansion from Cameroon, namely the proto-Nyong-Lomami. Descendent languages of the proto-Tanga-Bomwali branch (including Tanga, Douala, Fang, Pomo, Njem, Bekwil, Yambe, and Bomwali) are spoken in southern Cameroon,
northern Gabon, and the northwestern Republic of the Congo today (Klieman 2003: 47). Linguistic and archaeological data suggest that it took approximately 1,000 years from the time that the proto-Nyong-Lomami first arrived, in the late second millennium BCE, for their descendants to develop the full-fledged village and farming lifestyle (Klieman 2003: 59).

Vansina writes, “In stories about settlement, pygmies are the guides who taught the immigrants how to cope with various habitats within the rainforests, even in the great marsh” (1990: 56). Klieman investigates an oral history that “retains earlier layers of social discourse that are at a variance with the modern vision of the socially subordinate Batwa” (2003: 133). Furthermore, she argues that west-central Africans had formed their own *Ideology of the Primordial Batwa*, long before they had any contact with the *Western Pygmy Paradigm*. The Bantu and Ubangian newcomers were initially reliant on the Batwa as guides to the physical and spiritual domains of the forested landscape.

With the new villager political-cultural model that came into being after the introduction of bananas and iron, came the rise of territorial chiefs. The chiefs symbolically appropriated the status of Batwa as primordial first-comers in order to legitimize their ownership claims to the land. In summary, mythologized remembrances of ancient associations between Batwa and Bantu are cast in a positive light, which contrasts with the disdain levelled at modern populations of Batwa by the Bantu, according to Klieman (2003).

During the era between 1000 to 1900 CE, which saw the rise of hierarchical state systems, the pre-colonial Atlantic trade period, and the early colonial period, Bantu and Batwa associations underwent a transformation. The social and economic
autonomy of Batwa peoples was undermined to varying degrees in different areas (Klieman 2003: 169-218).

3.5. The Racist Stereotype of Pygmies in Asoumondélé

In the northern section of West-Central Africa, the ancestors of Aka, Baka, Mbendjele and Bambenga hunter-gatherers are likely to have been socially and economically autonomous from their Bantu and/or Ubangian neighbours until the 17th or 18th centuries (Klieman 2003: 183). In the early 19th century, the socioeconomic disruption caused by the Atlantic trade erupted in the regions to the north of the Cameroon/ Congo/ Gabon borderlands where Asoumondélé lies today. By 1911, the Njem had entered into both the trade in guns, slaves and ivory, and the resulting inter-ethnic violence.

According to Klieman (2003: 183-191), it is probably only during this latter period of the Atlantic Age that exclusive relations between agriculturalists and hunter-gatherers began to be formed, as the agriculturalists controlled access to the trade routes. Yet, because ivory and meat were in high demand, if the terms of an alliance with a particular group of agriculturalists did not suit the hunters they could leave and seek alliances elsewhere. Following this, further profound changes were set in motion during the early colonial period, when agriculturalists were forced by resource extraction companies to pay taxes consisting of rubber, ivory and tree resin. As a result, they began to use violence and intimidation against hunter-gatherers in order to force them to collect these on their behalf.
Thus Bantu and Ubangi speakers have a mythology of Pygmies as a civilizing influence, which coexists with varying degrees of discriminatory practices and ideology deployed against them. Klieman (2003: 191) reports that oral narratives that portrayed Pygmies as civilizers, teachers, and first-comers on the land were collected by ethnographers in the region during the 1940s to 1970s, whereas narratives collected later tend to portray Pygmies as initially lacking in civilization. Latter-day narratives tell how Pygmies were captured and brought into villages where they acquired fire, iron, agriculture and clothes. They are remarkable in that they adopt a social-evolutionist ideology, according to Klieman.

Initially cooperative, respectful and even egalitarian relationships between the Makaa-Njem Bantu speakers and the various Batwa they encountered are likely to have existed along the lines described by Klieman as the general pattern for the northern section of West-Central Africa up until the late 19th century when guns found their way into the region.

On the other hand, Vansina (1990) documents that the Sanaga-Ntem language group (Ntumu, Ewondo, Bulu, and Fang) had already taken up a patrilineal ideology and segmentary lineage organization with “a set of imbricated, hierarchical lineage units, from the household level to a large territorial level” (1990: 134) prior to their expansion outwards from a position further north-west from Njem territory. Vansina estimates that this occurred in the 14th to 15th centuries, and resulted in the Njem speakers adopting a patrilineal ideology, crossbows used for warfare, and a compact village settlement style from the newcomers. While such social hierarchy is unlikely to have been conducive to the maintenance of egalitarian relations between agriculturalists and forest specialists, in some respects raiding between agricultural
groups and warfare can increase solidarity between villagers who are under attack and the hunter-gatherers in their vicinity.

The “shared experience of fleeing” (Lewis 2000: 25) can cause a lessening of discrimination, as noted by Jerome Lewis in his report on the plight of Batwa hunter-gatherers of the Great Lakes Region during the horrific conflicts that engulfed the area during the 1990s. An analogous phenomenon was reported to me by Mbuti people near Epulu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who say that during recent times when the area was attacked by warring units, Bila farmers entered into the forest for refuge and were dependent on the Mbuti for survival. This led to a temporary equalising effect in inter-ethnic relations, because the Mbuti have more knowledge and expertise in the forest.

Historical anthropologist John Cinnamon (2005) has collected different versions of an emergence myth among the ethnically and linguistically related Fang, Kwélé and Chiwa Bantu-speakers. The myth tells of how these Bantu-speakers originated from the West. Pygmies helped guide them into the region, digging a tunnel through the trunk of a massive tree that blocked the path between two deep ravines at a place called Dzà Mbughà. Also, Bayaga Pygmies in Minvoul, Gabon, claim to have led Fang people through Udzambugha in Cinnamon’s account. The myth corresponds with other origins myths in which Batwa are remembered favourably, as described by Vansina (1990) and Klieman (2003).

When John Cinnamon came to Asoumondélé to conduct research with the Njem in February 2012, he came across a version of the same myth in an interview he

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33 Historical anthropologist John Cinnamon visited Asoumondélé and Ntam to work with the Njem as part of his ongoing research on a ritual expert of the 1950s, Emane
conducted with a Njem elder, Mane Pierre of Ntam. I was present at the interview as an observer, and Cinnamon has given me permission to reproduce a condensed version of his translation of Mane Pierre’s account.

**Njem Origins Myth**

Mane Pierre: *The Pygmies were a tribe (ŋyɔŋ) in the full sense of the term, but how do we account for this co-inhabitation? Everything comes from our origins. We were born in a far off region. To facilitate our exodus from this region to the one where we wanted to stay, these Pygmies were together with us in our displacements. We arrived at a place called Edjo’o Djamboka. As soon as we arrived in this place, we asked ourselves a pertinent question: How can we cross this place? See that it was a falaise (escarpment)... And that this edjo’o (moabi), a tree, barred the place that could serve as a passageway between the ravines of this falaise.

What are we going to do? How are we going to proceed to pass and cross this place? So they called one of the Pygmies who were with them. This Pygmy told them not to worry. “Remain calm, we’re going to cross this place.” The Njem asked him the question, “Are you sure we’re going to cross?” He answered, “Yes.” Then the Pygmy put his force into play by digging a hole with his axe*

Boncoeur. Boncoeur was a Njem man who was born in Asoumondélé but achieved fame widely among multiple ethnicities in Gabon and the Republic of the Congo due to his anti-fetish activities. John Cinnamon and I collaborated together, as his visit coincided with my fieldwork. We had many productive conversations and became good friends. He has kindly allowed me to view the translations of interviews he conducted with the Njem. For an example of Cinnamon’s ongoing research into this topic, see Cinnamon (2012).
that would serve as an exit and a tunnel in order to permit them to go to the other side of the escarpment without anyone falling into the ravines that were on each side. He dug this moabi (edjo’o) for years, assisted by other Pygmies. Finally they succeeded in piercing a grand hole to the other side.

.....

They pierced a door in the middle of this great tree. This place, they called it Djamboka. Those that allowed us to arrive here where we are until the present day, it was the Pygmies with whom we co-inhabited. We are still together. That’s the reason for our co-inhabitation.

There are two important elements to Mane Pierre’s narrative. The first of these is that the Pygmies are described in a positive way; their role casts them as helpful, loyal, resourceful, level-headed, knowledgeable, wise and extremely hardworking. The second is that the Pygmies are described as co-inhabiting with the Njem since time immemorial, before either group came to the region and going back to the origins of both groups. In other words, the mythical Pygmies of the past are associated with the Baka who inhabit the vicinity today.

The first element, an idealized representation of Njem-Pygmy relations, accommodates the widespread Kaka / Bilo ideology in which Pygmies are claimed to have fixed and enduring ties to the Kaka, according to Axel Köhler and Jerome Lewis (2002). It is an ideology that underpins the Kaka need for labour and forest produce from the Pygmies, as well as ritual alliances with them. Pygmy ritual knowledge protects Kaka from supernatural forces in the forest due to the Pygmies’ primordial mystical knowledge and power (Köhler & Lewis 2002).
The second element, the representation of the co-inhabitation of Baka and Njem as continuous since time immemorial, fits in with the ideological principle of precedence in sub-Saharan Africa (Kopytoff 1987), which Klieman describes as the phenomenon “whereby late-comers attempt to establish their exclusiveness as first-comers on the land” (2003: 74-5). It is a scenario in which the late-comers initially subscribe to the ideology of first-comers as civilizing agents but later seek to establish their own political, economic and religious primacy.

I found Mane Pierre to be a gentle, friendly, hospitable, intelligent and well-liked character, who also proved to have deep knowledge of historical matters. For example, he claimed that his ancestors originate from the vicinity of Kribi on the south coast of Cameroon, which is in fact the region that his proto-Tanga-Bomwali ancestors inhabited. His origins story fits into the older category of narratives that existed before social evolutionism became a theme used to denigrate Pygmies (Klieman 2003: 191), and his description of modern-day Njem relations with Pygmies is remarkably polite and circumspect:

*How do we live with the Pygmies? They are there in their natural and preferred environment in the forest. At present, they are beginning to come progressively to live near us, the Njem and the Bakwélé. We get along very well with them. However, when you are dépassé (overwhelmed) by a certain activity (such as felling or clearing a field (li pyém)34, you call them. They give you a hand in the felling and the clearing and in compensation, you take what you have and you give it to them (money, clothes, wine....). They help us and support us, and we also do the same for them. That’s how we live with the Pygmies.*

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34 Agricultural field: *pyém*, pl. *bipyém*. 
The Pygmies already enter into marriage with other tribes such as the Fang. For the moment, the Njem do not venture into this domain, except for certain illicit cases of clandestine nocturnal sexual relations.

Mane Pierre focuses on the elements of solidarity that exist between the two ethnic groups, elements that appear to be far more ancient than the elements of discrimination that are now so apparent.

Following on from Klieman’s insight about the paradox at the heart of the history of Central African ethnicity, Daou V. Joiris (2003) characterizes the framework of relations between Pygmies and villagers in the Congo Basin as highly flexible, and premised on the contradictory ideological elements of solidarity and subordination. The relations are flexible because they can be of at least three kinds: 1) pseudo kinship; 2) ritual friendship; and 3) solidarity through ritual initiations, a multiplicity of forms that are suited to mobile lifestyles and the absence of centralized political power.

The ideological elements of solidarity are invoked through pseudo-kinship relations and ritual, whereas the ideological elements of subordination are based on political and economic domination over Pygmies by villagers. Joiris thus argues for a fluid interethnic model that fits with the contingencies of a socio-political environment in which there is contact between Pygmies and those villager groups with high mobility and acephalous, non-hierarchical social organization. Relations between Pygmies and villager groups with high levels of hierarchy may not fit into this framework. The implication is that increasing levels of hierarchy among villagers may undermine solidarity between Pygmies and villagers.

How did such high levels of discrimination come into play in the Asoumondélé locale? As argued by Klieman (2003), the most profound changes in the northern
region of the western Congo Basin began during the colonial period as the result of resource extraction policies, although the Njem adopted a hierarchical segmentary system at a relatively early stage\(^ {35} \), which theoretically would have caused its own transformations in their relations with hunter-gatherers.

It is possible that the colonists introduced their own folk ideas about social and biological evolution and the inferior position of Pygmies within this hierarchy, which may have been superimposed onto pre-existing indigenous prejudices. However, the effects of colonialism on indigenous discriminatory discourse may have been less direct. Both the French and the Belgian colonial administrations in Central Africa used the term *évolué* to describe African individuals who had supposedly evolved by learning French, acquiring European-style education and assimilating French or Belgian cultural values and practices (Freund 1984; DeLancey, Mbuh & Delancey 2010).

Considering that the Kaka now use the same term to describe a status that the Pygmies have not yet risen to (as the result of their supposed shortcomings) it is quite possible that the Kaka have appropriated this paternalistic discursive tactic from their former colonial rulers and applied it to the hunter-gatherer peoples who they depend upon to work on their farms at critical points in the agricultural cycle. The development discourse of the state, NGOs, and resource extraction industries feeds into this same narrative, especially when linked with ethnocentric notions of social progress. The Kaka deploy development discourse as a tactic to exert dominance. For example, a typical reason given by a Njem person who wishes to exert his or her superiority over

\(^{35}\) This is determined through glottochronology.
the Baka is that he or she is better educated than they, better able to speak French, and/or able to read and write.

During my Masters degree fieldwork with Mbuti in the DRC, the managers of the Okapi Faunal Reserve, who gave me research permission, initially insisted that I take one of their armed wildlife guards along with me on my trips to meet Mbuti people in their forest camps. The guard who first accompanied me took himself a little bit too seriously, and the young Mbuti men taunted him mercilessly. One of their jibes was to ask him, “seeing as you BaBila claim to be so evolved, why can’t you make great camping equipment like this white woman has?” Yet such audacity is not characteristic of the way that Baka people interact with Njem, which probably reflects the relative mobility and hence autonomy of the Mbuti compared with the Baka.

It is important to recognize that relations between Baka and Kaka may differ from place to place, and that such relations may also be dependent on relative mobility and on the specific ethnic groups involved, their social organization and their stereotypical perceptions of one another. Axel Köhler (1998: 67-8) suggests that cash cropping in the form of cocoa harvests, an economic activity that began in the Souanké region of the northern Republic of the Congo from the early 1960s, had a marked effect upon Baka-Kaka relations, and is linked with Baka sedentarization.

Köhler notes that the Baka of the Souanké region do not report a difference in attitudes towards themselves by Kaka based on varying ethnicity (in this case Njem and Bakwélé), but that differences in attitude arise due to differences in individual personalities. A Bakwélé man is reported by Köhler as describing a cynical attitude towards relationships with Baka – claiming that treating the Baka generously would lead to disrespect and unreliability, whereas treating the Baka with contempt, and
physically abusing them, would lead to respect and loyalty on the part of the Baka. However this was not necessarily the attitude of all Bakwélé.

Resulting from her recent fieldwork in northern Gabon, Dörte Weig (2013) has documented both discriminatory relationships and some pockets of good relationships between Bakwélé and Baka, as well as discrimination and ill treatment of the Baka by the Fang. One of Weig’s Baka interlocutors who had migrated from near Ntam gave her a positive account of Baka/ Bakwélé/ Fang/ Njem inter-ethnic relationships in Ntam during the period of Congolese insurgency in the late 1960s. There are two small Baka communities that live in Ntam today, and they do complain of discrimination but they also choose to live in very close proximity to the diverse mixture of ethnic groups that is the hallmark of Ntam today.

According to my own enquiries with the Baka, and also the interviews that historical anthropologist John Cinnamon conducted with the Njem in the region, the period of insurgency was one of extreme brutality on the part of both Congolese insurgents and the Cameroonian military, and people were forced to flee into the forest together. The Baka feel that inter-ethnic discord was temporarily put aside during that period, as people united against a common adversary. This accords with the lessening of discrimination during times of refuge from war that has been observed (described above).

Robineau (1966, cited in Köhler 1998) and Köhler (1998) both suggest that the Njem are more authoritarian and more rigidly patrilineal than the ethnically and linguistically related Bakwélé. Thus it may be that their relationships with the Baka are generally both more conflicted and authoritarian than the range of positive to
negative relationships between Baka and Bakwélé that were observed by Köhler and Weig.

The Bakwélé, in turn, may be perceived by the Baka as less friendly, less kindly, more exploitative and more authoritarian than the Bangando. Rupp (2011: 106-8) has noticed that, in the areas of Ndongo and the Moloundou road in southeast Cameroon, relationships between Baka and Bakwélé are fraught with tension, and this has resulted in segregation. The Baka-Bakwélé situation contrasts with the integrated and cooperative situation Rupp observed between Baka and Bangando. Discrimination and hierarchy are nevertheless present in the relationships she describes, as the Baka have the least social power and while intermarriages between Baka and Bangando occur, those so married are subject to ostracism.

Be that as it may, my own observations of Baka-Njem relations are that while cooperation, solidarity and even friendships do exist, the Baka generally view the Njem with considerable distrust and ambivalence. Baka people are reluctant to talk about their misgivings in the presence of Njem people, probably in order to avoid unnecessary conflict. Baka people will thus give lip service to the preferred Njem ideology that the Njem are benevolent providers for the Baka and the protectors of Baka interests. Njem people claim to “look after” (garder bien) the Baka. When there are no Njem present, Baka people usually have a markedly different story to tell.

Marriage between Baka and Njem is virtually non-existent, to my knowledge, whereas it does occur among the equally patrilineal Fang, who live adjacent to the Njem from Lele westwards. Relations between Njem and Baka thus match what Vansina describes as the stereotype of Pygmies as “a despised, uncivilized, subhuman
race, unfit for sexual congress with any farming woman” (2003: 56), a stereotype which had come into existence by the 19th century.

Rupp (2011) rightly points out that the forest peoples of Cameroon exist in a society that is itself like the forest in that it is a dynamic interrelated system, and that inter-ethnic relationships and interactions of cooperation coexist with the competitive and discriminatory ones. She argues that opposing social categories used by researchers, such as Baka and Bantu, may only serve to reify differences and create further tensions between people, especially when these categories come to inform conservation and development policies in the region.

Rupp’s characterization of the forest communities of southeastern Cameroon as drawn together in “mutually engaged, supportive relations” (2011: 13) since colonization disrupted their lives is a carefully judged antidote to reified stereotypes. It is a counterbalance to the caricatured representations of Bantu-Pygmy relationships exemplified by the remarks of Cochran and his readership, in which mutually beneficial arrangements are omitted.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these oppositional categories are firstly indigenous categories, and as such they play a major role in informing the ideas and influencing the relationships of people in the Congo Basin. Conflict, competition and discrimination have in fact also shaped these relations.

Without these theoretical distinctions, conservationists and development workers could be misguided as to the true status of hunter-gatherers, which is that they are politically marginal due to the widespread discrimination that they encounter. This could have serious consequences because it could lead to conservationists disregarding the need to ensure equal representation for hunter-gatherers and for policies that permit
their forest lifestyle. Any approach that elides cultural differences between farmers and hunter-gatherers, or former hunter-gatherers, risks perpetuating inequalities in the way that social and environmental impact studies are conducted and acted upon by development agencies.

Even those hunter-gatherers who have now largely settled in villages are still partly oriented towards the forest, as the Baka community at Asoumondélé are. This involves hunting wildlife as their major source of protein and also as an important means of providing calories. Baka people have tremendous expertise in negotiating the forest and sustaining themselves by means of utilizing their knowledge and skills within it. It is an equally legitimate lifestyle as any other, and it is their human right to pursue it (Woodburn 1998). It is also a much less environmentally damaging lifestyle than other lifestyles, most notably that of mining magnates. Yet the Baka lifestyle depends on unrestricted access to intact forest, which is not generally central to the plans of conservationists or resource extraction companies.

These are examples of the way that some Njem and Baka people spoke about each other:

Example 1: Chef du Village Raymond, Njem chief:

CT: What kind of activities does everybody do together?

Chief Raymond: We have a good relationship with the Pygmies. To bring a Pygmy out of the forest and let him live the life in the village is difficult. We live together now. I brought them out of the forest to live in the village. That is why some of them have ID cards now. The houses they have now are not the first houses where they lived. They are not animals. We have worked a lot and
constructed many houses together, but we have not got anything back from them yet. You send a Baka to look for meat and you give him a few cigarettes or alcohol.

CT: Why?

Chief Raymond: They don’t have the idea of evolution, or ideas of developing themselves. They don’t have an idea of the important things in life. Alcohol, tobacco and food are enough for them. Give him 100,000 francs now and he won’t buy important things, only a radio. We used to exchange meat for alcohol. If ivory, you would give him some money. That was in those days, the old days, but now they have changed. Njem people live under the yoke of the Baka because the Baka do everything for the Njem but the Baka have become untrustworthy so you send them to do something, and they do otherwise.

As is apparent from this excerpt of an interview with one of the Njem chiefs within the vicinity of Asoumondélé, his attitude towards the Baka ethnicity is ambivalent and derogatory. The positive statement “the Baka do everything for the Njem” is negated by his underlying expectation of servitude from Baka people, as well as the justification for exploiting Baka workers in terms of a perceived deficiency that is intrinsic to the Baka. It is also indicative of the economic dependency of farmers on hunter-gatherers and their concomitant discriminatory attitudes towards them, which Lewis (2002b) and Köhler & Lewis (2002) posit is the result of the exodus of youth

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36 The chief’s real name and village have been withheld to protect his identity. This interview was conducted on 21 July 2011. There were Baka people present in the meetinghouse where I spoke to the chief.
from rural areas due to increased economic and education opportunities in urban centres from the 1960s onwards leading to a shortfall in farm labour.

Chef Raymond’s response is in some ways less derogatory than the attitudes expressed by some other Njem villagers I spoke to, who told me straight out that the Baka are dirty and disgusting, like the animals of the forest. Chief Raymond states that the Baka are not animals, but the fact that he feels the need to state this speaks volumes. The statement is also tied to an idea that I heard many times during my fieldwork, that the forest life, which the Baka led before they came under the civilizing influence of the sedentary village life of farmers, is unbefitting of a human being, and only fit for animals.

This contrast between forest and village, nature and culture, hunter-gatherer and farmer is not one that has been imposed from outside but is rather an indigenous ideology linking hunter-gatherers with the notion of first-comers to the forest as described by Klieman (2003) under the rubric the Ideology of the Primordial Batwa (see also Woodburn 1997; Köhler and Lewis 2002). The reference to evolution and development is Western rhetoric. It has been incorporated as a political tactic of domination, which helps to legitimise Kaka’s perceptions of themselves as the patrons of their Baka clients.

Example 2: Bito Jonas, self-described as kobo (elder man)\textsuperscript{37}

*We are crying out here for the Mbúngé [white people] to come with goods. They should come to give to the Baka. They should bring goods like clothes and knives. When they give these things, they should not remain with the Kaka. Because he*

\textsuperscript{37} Name changed to protect identity, extracts from an interview of June 2012.
has a big belly, the one who is called the chef de canton [minor administrative chief]. He has eaten all the donations that were meant for the Baka of Asoumondélé. The canton chief who has a big belly like a gorilla.

The above example shows that the Baka also stereotype other groups; Mbûnge are seen as necessarily the owners of vast amounts of wealth, and the Kaka are viewed as covetous; both groups are generally viewed as failing in their human duty to share with other people. Baka ethnic stereotypes of others are linked with specific issues of contention that Baka people have in regard to their relationships with these others, and the sense that Baka people have that they are treated with disrespect and economically exploited by them.

They are very similar to the forms that Mbendjele stereotypes take (Lewis 2002a). White people are called elephants or red river hogs by Mbendjele in reference to their potential as a source of immense wealth (animals that provide abundant meat and ivory). Bilo farmers are called gorillas because of their perceived tendency to make noisy and often violent claims over territory or false notions of property ownership. In this instance, the Baka elder expresses dissatisfaction with the way that Baka people have been excluded from employment at the mine, and also from the material benefits that are being provided.

Example 3: Namèke Marie, self-described as kobo na wose (elder woman)

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38 Frequently during my fieldwork I felt despair that I could not live up to the expectations of the Baka community with regard to the level of donations that they felt were appropriate from a Mbûnge. No doubt witnessing the extravagant lifestyle of the Mbûnge at the mine influenced these expectations.

39 Name changed to protect identity, from interview of November 2011.
This is a real problem. This is a real problem. The Kaka don’t like the Baka. The Kaka view of us is very bad. That, you see, is a big problem. My brother did some work over there, and a Kaka tried to kill him. The Kaka do not want us, they want to kill us.

Sadly, this example is probably not an exaggeration on the part of this woman. As Njem farmers rely intensively on the Baka as a source of labour, and because the Baka now have more options available due to their direct participation in the monetized market economy, Njem-Baka relations have worsened. The Njem perspective on this is evident in the first example. The Baka perspective is that the Njem exploit them, and use debt contrived through plying Baka with alcohol. Failure to repay debt is used as a means of justifying the use of violence in order to secure labour.

Figure 3.1. Njem woman selling alcohol sachets at a Baka meeting
In addition, Baka people complained to me that they have great trouble with conservationists, who have placed a range of restrictions on the types of wildlife that local people may hunt, and also the means by which they hunt. The primary means of hunting for household consumption by the Baka is through their use of wire snares, which are forbidden. The restriction causes difficulties for the Baka, as they depend on snare hunting for their livelihoods (Yasuoka 2014).

Unfortunately, more often than not local Kaka are given positions as state-controlled environmental enforcement staff (or ecoguards) whereas Baka are not, and this creates yet another layer of power imbalance. As the political context of Cameroon is one of an enormously corrupt state, in which corruption has filtered through to all levels of the economy, positions of authority and especially state-controlled authority are widely used to extort resources from subordinates.

Since I left Asoumondélé, things have taken a turn for the worse with regard to these conflicts with ecoguards. My colleague, Freddie Weyman, who works at the indigenous rights organization Survival International, has provided me with information regarding the physical abuse of Baka people in hamlets in the near vicinity of Asoumondélé. The violence seems to have increased since the creation of a new faunal reserve, called the Ngoyla Faunal Reserve, which was already in planning during my fieldwork.

There are three particular incidents that have been documented by Survival (they were in the process of collecting more during the summer of 2015):

1) Incident of April 2014:
A Baka couple in Seh were taken from their beds in the middle of the night and beaten. This is supported by medical reports, which Survival hold, including photographs and the testimony of a Baka activist who took the couple to hospital. He says it was in March but the medical records say April.

2) Incident of September/October 2014:

A Baka man and three Baka youths were beaten by ecoguards in Seh. Written statements were provided to Survival:

_I am a Baka, I was beaten by an ecoguard in my village called Seh. At sometime in the month of October 2014, a group of a squad, dressed in the uniforms of the ecoguards, came to meet me as soon as I returned from the forest, asking me what I had brought from the forest. Before I could answer, one of them gave me a heavy slap and I fell down, the others jumped onto me and started to hit me with their sticks till I had wounds and blood coming from me. One man hit me on my stomach with his shoes while the other man went to buy sachets of Fighter whisky to rub into my wounds. I cried for mercy but they did not stop until I stayed quiet, and they thought I was dead. I hereby ask of the big patron who sent them here to our village, why do these men come here to beat only the Baka people? They have asked all the Baka people to stop going to the forest: why?_

3) Incident of March 2015:

A Baka man was attacked by ecoguards in his village of Laté and his Achilles tendon was allegedly sliced, requiring medical attention. No hospital records available.
In the Ngoyla-Mintom area there are three conservation projects that sponsor the Cameroonian Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, and the Ministry of Environment and Protection of Nature:

1) EU-funded WWF (World Wildlife Fund) project. WWF is funding wildlife law enforcement in the area.\(^{40}\)

2) GEF (Global Environment Facility) / World Bank project (also funded by WWF). The execution agencies for this project are listed as the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment and Protection of Nature.\(^{41}\)

3) The GEF region-wide project covering the whole TRIDOM landscape.\(^{42}\)

All three of these projects claim to be addressing the needs and rights of local and indigenous peoples, but clearly there is something amiss in the Baka experience of these projects, which were set up to mitigate the damaging effects of the mine. Freddie Weyman informs me that allegations are emerging that all three incidents are related to the refusals on the part of the Baka victims to hunt on behalf of a local elite.

The binary metaphor of forest and village has endured into the present and is still a relevant factor in inter-ethnic relationships in southeast Cameroon despite the fact that most Baka now themselves live in villages along roadsides. The topic of the next chapter is how the hunter-gatherer habit of manipulating the ascribed identity given to them by others in the village context, and contrasting it with their own cultural identity in the forest environment, has come into competition with other identity-making processes for the Baka of Asoumondélé. They must negotiate the more pressing

\(^{40}\) Information from WWF website, accessed 23/06/2015.
\(^{41}\) Information from GEF website, accessed 23/06/2015.
\(^{42}\) TRIDOM: Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkebe cross-border conservation project.
conflicts between the slow-paced life of the village and the hurtling modernity of the wider world, and between their existing social position at the bottom of the hierarchy and their aspirations to achieve equality with other peoples.
CHAPTER FOUR

Ethnic Identity Crisis

4.1. The Hypothesis

It’s since the road (gbàà) opened that liquor (menyioku) came to destroy our lives. If the Baka did not drink liquor, they would be more like the Kaka. If the Baka don’t change, it is because of liquor. The money the Baka receive gets used up on drink. We cannot hold on to money, because of our drinking habits. We need to leave this liquor alone because it has come to destroy the village and to destroy our people. We have been crying because of the road. We live in deprivation (lì-so) here in the forest. We worked on the road with our own hands. We were controlled by gendarmes (sojao), who had whips. We want nothing but good in the village. We want the same thing that Baka (Biyêkê) living far away have found, a person who buys things for them. When one does not tell someone that they must help... (Pause) We are really living in poverty!

These are words spoken to me by a young Baka man, or èwanjo, Ndutu Janvier. Ndutu is clearly anxious about a cluster of related issues taking place within the environment of Asoumondélé. He begins by framing his concerns around the issue of the alcoholic disruption that he feels is unravelling the social fabric of the community due to dependence on hard liquor. Hard liquor (menyioku) comes in the form of ngolongolo
(moonshine made by the Njem) and manufactured sachets (Fighter\textsuperscript{43} or whisky) brought in for mass sale by entrepreneurs since the road was built.

In an interesting subversion of the standard development rhetoric that has been fed to locals by the government and Cam Iron, in which the road is portrayed as overwhelmingly positive, Ndutu describes the road’s role in bringing cheap alcohol to the community. In his words, it has led to nothing but tears, an idea he goes on to link with poverty and the marginal position of the Baka within the state (wherein they are coerced by gendarmes with whips). The road brings the undesirable elements of the state even closer to them, as the conflict with ecoguards, and the reluctance to get the police involved in an alleged theft that the Baka were blamed for also demonstrate (both described in the previous chapter). Ndutu’s insight offers a counter-narrative to dominant representations of development, for example that roads are positive and welcomed by local people. It runs counter to the more common claim by locals and elites from all over the world that roads improve life because they bring work, money and merchandise to an area.

\textsuperscript{43} A popular brand name.
Ndutu has the sense that Baka people are disenfranchised because of their relative poverty or deprivation compared with other groups, which is a concern that was mentioned more and more as time unfolded during my stay. When I first arrived, most of the Baka residents were still optimistic about the promises of goods, money and improved living standards that had been made to them, but they gradually became disillusioned as these promises were not fulfilled as expected. According to Ndutu, the Baka are being left behind in the rapidly changing world because of their dependence on alcohol. He says that they are not adapting well to the changes taking place because

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44 The presentation slides were sent out by the company to an email list for interested parties, 29/08/2013.
of the destruction to communal life caused by alcohol and because so much money is wasted on it, leaving them lower in wealth, health and socioeconomic status.

A sense that alcohol is at odds with Baka identity is also expressed by Ndutu. This comes through in his acute awareness that they were introduced to alcohol by Kaka people, and that they have been economically controlled through this dependency. Hence the remark implies that alcoholism is having a detrimental effect on the Baka way of doing things, or the way that they would approach the wider changes taking place if it were not for alcohol dependency.

Ndutu went on to explain that since the road opened his only motivation in life had been to try and accumulate more wealth in order that he could make home improvements and increase economic opportunities for his family. His aspirations indicate a moment of transformation in which poverty is emerging as a relative position within social relations with others. There is nothing more important to Ndutu than not to be left behind in poverty as the world changes around him, because accumulating property is evidently important in wider society.

On top of a recent history of stigmatization and political marginalization, the recent changes in the socio-economic environment imposed from outside have led to the self-esteem of many of the Baka residents of Asoumondélé being undermined. Ulf Hannerz (1987) reminds us that the world system does not necessarily replace and impoverish local culture but “may give people access to technological and symbolic resources for dealing with their own ideas, managing their own culture, in new ways” (1987: 55). Notwithstanding this distributive view of culture, the oral testimony from Baka people tells how intervention in the form of the Mbalam iron ore mining project has had a radical effect on Baka culture and society in Asoumondélé, incorporating them and
their Njem neighbours into the global capitalist market economy in a way that was unknown before. While new goods, technologies and opportunities are flooding into the region, the Baka feel that these are in scarce supply for them, and at the same time some of the older opportunities are closing as forest resources become increasingly restricted or depleted. Baka people have started to question what their role will be in the new order.

Many of the Baka villagers spoke to me of their concerns about the wave of alcoholism and related social problems that is sweeping their community, and of the persistent prejudices and disadvantages that they face. Many of them specifically mentioned that they had been exploited by the Mbünge at the mine, who had used Baka guides to find the iron ore deposits and to build their headquarters, but who now routinely exclude the Baka from employment. They told me that all the material benefits from the mine go to the Njem, and the Njem generally do not share with the Baka, nor do they pay Baka fairly for their labour.

The organizational hierarchy at the mine has fused with discordant and discriminatory elements of the pre-existing social structure, fixing the status of the Baka at the rock-bottom of the regional hierarchy. Many Baka people say they are poor – that they see others who have so much more than themselves – echoing what Manuel Castellas (2000) calls the misery of the Fourth World position where people are marginally incorporated into the global economy in situations of extreme income inequality, labour exploitation and social exclusion. Many members of the Baka community have expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration with the way they have been excluded from formal employment at the mine, and that the promised development initiatives, such as pump-operated wells, healthcare clinics and so on, have not been forthcoming as yet.
My hypothesis is that the Baka villagers are collectively experiencing a crisis in relating to the degraded ethnic identity allocated to them. This motivates social actions that change the way the community is organized. The types of social action performed include mimetic imitation of outsiders, such as their Njem neighbours and the range of cosmopolitan visitors to the region. There is also increased participation in the commercial practices of globalized modernity itself, such as selling goods and services to newcomers and to itinerant traders.

4.2. Baka Ethnic Identity

Social identity theory is a theory of the self which compares how behaviour and affiliation vary contextually based on people's fluid concepts of themselves as either individuals or as members of groups. In social psychology, social identity theory is related to identity theory with differences in emphasis rather than differences in kind, as both theories see the self as reflexive and able to categorize oneself in relation to other social categories (Stets and Burke 2000). Identity theory in social anthropology, which has been mostly focused on ethnicity, is related to social identity theory, with its emphasis on intergroup relations. Yet ethnic identity is only one kind of social identity.

There have been both criticism and advocacy for the use of the concept identity in social anthropology. Criticisms tend to hinge on the idea that the concept is restricted to self-identity as conceived in Western epistemological traditions, in which it purportedly refers to a bounded, singular and consistent individual self (Handler 1994,
Rouse 1995). Another criticism is that the concept is too broad to be a useful analytic concept (Brubaker & Cooper 2000). Advocates (Barth 1969; Cohen 1994, Sökefeld 1999, 2001; Golubović 2011) argue that the general meaning of the concept has changed over time to be less individualistic. In any case, the anthropological usage of the term has always included a fluid and relational conception of the person. The philosopher and anthropologist Zagorka Golubović writes of identity as “a product of change within different socio-cultural constellations” (2011: 38).

Social anthropologist Martin Sökefeld (1999, 2001) stipulates that it is crucial to differentiate between social identities and self-identity. Self-identity is a perception of the self, based on the principles of difference (the sense of self is constructed relationally), plurality (multiple differences encountered by the self), and intersectionality (the differences intersect each other). The self is endowed with both agency and reflexivity, in that every human is able to act, and every human has the capacity to reflect consciously. Identities are created through human agency. The usefulness of the concept identity is that it is a tool with which to think through the relationship between the self and the social.

The purpose of focusing on Baka social identities is to demonstrate that changing social identity, which is the result of different people responding to changing social conditions, can in turn impinge upon self-identity and the emotions of a person. This is true of both ethnic identity (discussed in this chapter), and gender identity (discussed in Chapter 5). When a person's self-identity is confronted by changing or new social identities relating to themselves, this leads to the experience of apperception.

45 Apperception is used here in the sense of self-reflectiveness, self-consciousness and self-identity; described by Louis Dumont in Homo Hierarchicus, e.g. “…the apperception of man as a social being comes about spontaneously through certain
Apperception causes the person to act in ways that can create even further discontinuity in social conditions. It is crucial to recognise, in addition to the difference between social and self-identity, the difference between *ascribed social identities* (the identity that outsiders attribute to a social group), and what I will call *cultural social identities*, or simply *cultural identities* (the way that members of a social group perceive their shared identity). Both ascribed social identities and cultural social identities are forms of social identity, and distinct from self-identity.

Proceeding from the observation that people have a tendency to attribute an *essence*\(^{46}\) to a particular social group, by which the members of that group are assumed to be intrinsically different to other people in terms of fixed characteristics (Verkuyten 2005; Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst 2000; Hirschfeld 1996, Rothbart and Taylor 1992), it is clear that an *ascribed ethnic identity* always carries certain social constraints when dealing with others who may have preconceived stereotypical ideas about one due to one's membership of a particular ethnic group.

As Rita Astuti (1995) observed during her work with seafaring Vezo people of Madagascar, there were two interlocked forms of ethnic identity at play for the Vezo, “one which is achieved through activities performed in the present, the other which is given as an essence inherited from the past” (1995: 1). Vezo people generally did not determine their Vezo ethnic identity by birth, descent or inherited essence, but rather created it in the present based on continuous interaction with the sea, whereas neighbouring Masikoro cultivators and cattle herders emphasized an ethnic identity fixed by descent. The Vezo denied that the past was relevant to being experiences…” (1966: 7). The term was originally introduced by Leibnitz, as “*consciousness, or the reflective knowledge of this internal state*” (1714: par. 4).

\(^{46}\) Used in the philosophical sense, properties that make a thing what it is.
Vezo, except for during mortuary and internment rituals when the descent patterns of neighbouring peoples were used. After death, the non-Vezo inherited ethnic identity accorded at birth was reinstated.

There are parallels between these co-existing modes of identity for the Vezo, and the coexisting forest and village identities that Baka people inhabit. Both the forest and village identities are social identities that carry particular constraints. They each have a cultural form, which the Baka themselves subscribe to, and an ascribed form, which are imposed upon Baka people in the form of stereotypes.

Cognitive anthropologists Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn (1997) see identity as tied to *schema satisfaction*. A schema is a relatively stable cognitive network based on learnt meanings that is nonetheless subject to alteration as new experiences are encountered. An example of a schema is a stereotype. Schemas may be similar from person to person, context to context, and era to era but they are also susceptible to change. As they are subject to change under differing circumstances, different people will build up different cognitive schemas resulting from their different experiences in life.

These differences may be geographic in origin or they may result from barriers to interaction between people even when they live in close proximity with one another. The segregation of groups is reinforced by group identities that stress discontinuities between one’s own group understandings and those of other groups, and even further

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47 Strauss and Quinn’s connectionist approach is linked with recent developments in cognitive science, and is an improvement on constructionist approaches to identity, the extreme versions of which portray it as something that is plucked out of the air and put on or discarded at will by a person according to self-interest.
compounded by beliefs of group superiority, negative stereotypes and exclusionary practices.

Barriers between Baka and Njem occur at a cosmological level. Baka cosmology is centred on a cosmic economy of sharing, a metaphorical model in which the environment is related to in terms of the type of human-to-human sharing that applies within an immediate-return economy (Bird-David 1990, 1992, 1999; Köhler 1998). Local Njem people, incoming entrepreneurs, and the Mbünge at the mine have all failed in their cosmic and human duty to share properly. It is this identification with the forest and with sharing, more than language or inheritance, which creates a boundary between Baka and Njem.

The Njem cosmology is, by contrast, centred on an accumulative approach to the world and upon birth into a patrilineage of veneered ancestors. Despite the importance of descent, it is the ancestral spirits of big men who are most influential, and big men acquire their wealth and status through their own supernatural power. A wealthy and high-status person can expect to be assailed by the witchcraft of jealous people, who resent their success.

Baka people have come to expect that Kaka people and other outsiders deal in reciprocal economic transactions rather than sharing, and thus they have different ways of interacting with them. Whereas Baka people still apply a fair degree of demand sharing with each other (especially during trips into the forest), reciprocity is rigorously applied in their dealings with outsiders – such as payment or exchange for labour, services provided and goods. Thus Baka identity is largely created by what people do, like that of the Vezo, whereas Njem identity is centred on birth, descent and essential personal qualities or supernatural powers.
Taking account of research into the biological constraints to human behaviour can aid anthropological methodology (see Spiro 1999, Boehm 1999: 41-42). However great care should be taken to avoid the reductionist type of science that biological anthropologist and neuroscientist Terrence Deacon cautions against when he concludes that human subjectivity or consciousness has been seen as a hard problem in science because “we have stubbornly insisted on looking for it where it could not be, in the stuff of the world” (Deacon 2012: 534-5).

Consciousness is not in the brain nor made of neural signals; emotion is not some special feature of the brain that is opposed to cognition. Instead the mind is the product of entanglement between the hierarchical levels of neurons, the brain, virtual-self and semiotics. Deacon’s approach thus recalls Gregory Bateson’s description of mind as being interconnected with a web of other natural systems, including societies and ecosystems (Bateson 1972b).

Baka people experience their forest world as a manifestation of the consciousness of Komba (God). Komba has great influence over the lives of all beings in the forest, and some act as his direct emissaries (see Chapter 5 for vivid examples of this occurring in Baka likànò (fables)). Baka people communicate with forest spirits by means of polyphonic song, which mimics the philharmonic sounds of the forest, and with animals by mimicking their vocal signals, usually in order to hunt them. They are thus entangled in a social world that is continuous with the ecosystem in which they live.

The forest identity, according to the prevailing stereotype, is understood by outsiders as a more authentic identity for Baka people, whereas the village identity is understood to be both a realm in which the Kaka and Mbùnge are authoritative, and a
realm more befitting for modern human beings who are participating in civilisation. This is the paradox, and the source of the crisis, in Baka ethnic identity.

In the context of their new roadside home, when they emphasise their forest identity, Baka people are more vulnerable to the racist stereotype that they are primitive, bestial and lacking in culture. When they emphasize their village identity, or emulate practices of modernity in a broader way, they simultaneously make a break with the forest, with their cosmology of sharing, and with what was once a source of positive self-affirmation. The reason that the forest identity is itself no longer a steady and untroubled source of self-esteem is because, as the elder Mpako observes (Section 1.1), the Baka have already left the forest. In doing so, they have also left behind the avoidance strategy that previously would have allowed them to encompass the ideologies of other peoples and to simultaneously disregard their negative stereotypes, the techniques of *encompassment* discussed in Chapter 1 (Bird-David 1988).

The constraints of a social identity may be particularly limiting or damaging where stigmatization or negative stereotyping is involved. This is how discrimination works in practice. For example, as the schoolteacher thinks that a Baka child is incapable of learning at the same pace as Kaka children (Section 3.2.), he is likely to treat them differently, perhaps not allowing for different styles of learning that would benefit Baka children, or not providing equal opportunities to Baka and Kaka children.
4.3. Ethnic Identity Crisis

A question for consideration is whether the term *ethnic identity crisis*\(^\text{48}\) has value in describing the situation that Baka people of Asoumondélé have found themselves in, and if so, what features define it.

Consider again the words spoken by the Baka elder Mpako in his speech about the forest and the light (Section 2.2.) For example, he portrays the attitude of the younger generations as follows:

*We can see that we’re in the forest. Although we have left, we are still in the forest. We have still not opened our eyes to the light.*

Depreciation of culture and low self-esteem are very real issues for many Baka people. Some Baka youngsters in more developed locales have even begun to deny their Baka ethnicity and reject the Baka language\(^\text{49}\). A reaction that I noticed in the Asoumondélé locale is that many Baka individuals, particularly among the younger generation, assert and subscribe to a modernized version of Baka ethnic identity, in which having left the forest is a central trope and in which specifically Baka traditions are at least temporarily rejected.

For example, I spent a few weeks in an isolated hamlet called Quartier Didjua on the impassable road to Ngoyla, where a small group of Baka people had relocated from the hamlet that they had shared with a group of Njem a few days walk into the forest.

\(^{48}\) My own term, following Verkuyten's (2005: 11) usage of *identity crisis* in relation to social change.

\(^{49}\) Personal communication from Messe Venant, Cameroon Programme Coordinator for the indigenous rights organization *Forest People’s Programme*, and member of the Baka ethnic group.
They were in the process of building new wattle-and-daub houses by the roadside. There were a handful of young men in Quartier Didjua, who spent a great deal of time listening to Cameroonian pop music on a radio with a memory card. When the older generations tried to arrange a polyphonic music-making session, the young men expressed their lack of interest by saying that this style of music is not modern enough for them, and fit only for old people.

While of course a rejection of the old in favour of the new is by no means unusual (especially for teenagers), members of an egalitarian society rejecting traditional practices and ideology may have the more radical consequence of allowing inequalities to gain anchorage, especially considering that polyphonic music-making is an equality enhancing ritual (Turnbull 1978; Kisluik 1998; Lewis 2008, 2013; Fürniss 2006, Finnegan 2013).

Baka resentment of the negative stereotyping of their ethnic identity may be expressed by some people in certain contexts through the reciprocal negative stereotyping of others. In other cases, it may be expressed as direct appeals to outsiders to help out or to accord Baka people more respect, and in yet other circumstances, or by different individuals, it may take the form of mimicry of others in order to equalise power relations with them. The deep ambivalence and uncertainty that many Baka people feel about their place in the new world may also be manifest in paradoxical situations or behaviour. For example, an elder Baka man who I consider to be a friend sat drinking tea with me in my house one morning, while complaining bitterly that the Mbúnge are bad people, and cheats.

In the classroom, Baka children get into fisticuffs with Njem children due to taunts from the Njem children about their ragged clothes. There were several Baka mothers
who laboured relentlessly on Njem farms despite their resentment at the low pay provided. When I asked mothers of younger children why they bother working on Njem farms when they could be working on their own farms, they said that they need the money for their children.\textsuperscript{50}

Sociologist Rob Wentholt (1991) argues that the importance of identity to a person depends upon both the contextual moment and the relations between and within the social groups that are classified on the basis of these identities. When there is political and economic discrimination, as is the case for the Baka, the ascribed ethnic identity that is at the root of such discrimination may be expected to be a matter of great importance for those concerned, and indeed many of the conversations I had with my interlocutors in Asoumondélé had an underlying concern with what it means to be Baka in the new world.

This is unsurprising considering that the fact that they are delineated as inferior by others creates unfavourable social and economic circumstances for them. Baka people in Asoumondélé say that they are frustrated that the government and the Mbûnge at the mine are excluding them and not addressing their needs, and that the Kaka treat them like animals and cheat them in economic transactions.

\textsuperscript{50} Apart from the clothing, food, and healthcare costs of raising a child, the new school requires that families provide their own exercise books and stationery. While it is theoretically possible that Baka women could make more money from selling surplus produce from their own farms, and some do sell surplus produce opportunistically, in general Baka women have too little experience of delayed return entrepreneurial practices to make this their main economic focus, and for many, when paid work is offered, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
The anxiety such discrimination creates may be an added cause of the alcoholism sweeping the Baka community. A Baka friend confided in me that he drinks because he has bad feelings that make him weak. Drinking alcohol makes him feel stronger.

Social psychologists Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) demonstrated the existence in various social identity groups of what has subsequently become known in social psychology as stereotype threat. This occurs when stereotypes suggesting poor performance have the effect of disrupting performance, producing doubt about one's abilities, and even causing a person to dis-identify with one’s ethnic group as is the case with some Baka youngsters. With repeated exposure to a stereotype, the stereotype threat can also negatively influence identification with the relevant performance domain for members of the stereotyped group, including their confidence, performance and interest in that domain (Aronson et al. 2002; Osborne 1995; Steele 1997; Schmader, Johns, & Barquissau 2004).

Social anthropologist Richard Jenkins (2008) differentiates primary identities from other processes of self-identity formation, arguing that these are more resilient and psychologically authoritative because they are learnt at a young age, and become definitively embodied, or “part of the individual’s axiomatic cognitive furniture” (2008: 84). Although not immutable, they become central categorizations in how people relate to others. The impact of authoritative external definitions of identity places issues of power at the centre of identity-making experiences. The phenomena Jenkins calls selfhood, humanness and gender are always primary identities, whereas ethnicity and kinship may be primary in some local contexts. Where ethnic identity is of great importance to people, it can be highly consequential, and “…depends on similarity and difference rubbing up against each other collectively…” (2008: 87).
Baka people have sufficient shared negative experience and motivation to feel, think and act in ways that have many common reactive characteristics, despite personal differences. It is said that the Mbúngé at the mine betrayed the Baka guides who helped them to find the iron ore deposits, and that the Njem have also benefitted at Baka expense.

The term crisis\(^{51}\) denotes a liminal period, in the sense that an ongoing negative or untenable situation reaches a point of climax that must be resolved. The ethnic identity crisis originates from a changing social environment where being Baka has become a limitation that Baka people find untenable. Messoula Antoine\(^{52}\), an elder man (kobo), described how he has experienced this change:

*Ndimayo, that place where they do mining work: the people over here do not know Ndimayo. It is I who knew Ndimayo. The hill that is called Mbarga, it is I who showed them the way there. The people who do that work do not give me anything, not even 100 CFA or 200 CFA. I don’t know what work they are doing there. It was me, Messoula Antoine, who showed them the way there.*

*I examined my serval skin\(^{53}\). I said to Assémbé, the Baka man who walked in front - go ahead. I was in my village Atimila. That was my village as well. During the days when we went on big hunts, we would come to that hill there that is called Mbarga. The hill that the Baka call the hill of the bat. I said to Assémbé: “You are here. You come to the river Seh. When you come to the river Seh, do not go to the right but to the left. You will go a long way. When*

\(^{51}\) Author's own definition.
\(^{52}\) Name changed, from a conversation of August 2012.
\(^{53}\) A serval skin is used as a means of divination by Baka nganga (healers / people of vision).
you hear the rushing of a waterfall, if you pass this fall, you will come to the hill there.” Assémbé followed my directions. He came to the hill there. They passed Ndimayo, they got to Mbarga. And the work they now do there, the Baka get nothing of it, nothing at all. We have nothing. It is the Kaka who walk with heavy bags of money. Like chimpanzees, like chimpanzees.

CT: Does that not create problems for you?

Yes, there are problems. It was the Baka who were the owners of this wealth. The Baka have none of the work they do there. They who are chimpanzees, they have done much better out of this than the Baka have.

Messoula’s claim to Baka ownership of the wealth at the mine, and his clear sense of being cheated out of the profits being made there, is worthy of some brief contextualisation. The government of Cameroon has adopted a tokenistic acceptance of the international indigenous rights movement, which is also the official policy of various NGOs and other local stakeholders, lending legitimacy to the hopes and aspirations of Baka people, but providing little in the way of concrete support for them.

As Shalina Randeria (2003) has shown, cunning states capitalize on their own perceived weaknesses in order to render themselves unaccountable both to their citizens and to international institutions, and often shift their responsibilities onto NGOs. They grant licences to multinational corporations to exploit natural resources that are inhabited by indigenous and poor communities for private profit, which comes into conflict with the interests of the people who are dependent on common property resources for their survival:
Paradoxically, the proliferation of national and supranational environmental and human rights law, and an expansion of its scope, goes hand in hand with the erosion of the collective rights of communities, their traditional access to the commons and their right to determine for themselves a vision of the good life (Randeria: 2003)

If the Baka feel that the deck is stacked against them, it’s because it is. There are no laws or government programmes to protect the indigenous rights of Baka people in Cameroon despite the existence of various international conventions and declarations on indigenous rights. This has been thoroughly documented in Aili Pyhälä’s report for the IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs), in which she states:

The Baka of this region [southeast Cameroon] are facing an increasingly uncertain future as their traditional lands have been almost entirely taken away from them, mainly to allocate to international logging and mining companies and as parts of Protected Areas. As a result, many Baka communities have been forced to leave their traditional lands and very few are now living a purely traditional nomadic lifestyle. Many live in settlements along the roadsides where they are the victims of widespread discrimination and human rights abuses on the part of the dominant society and where they face immense problems in terms of poverty and access to sufficient food and basic services. (Pyhälä 2012: 1).

The difficulties, discrimination and uncertainty that are documented by Pyhälä are all apparent in Asoumondélé. They are the causes of the negative emotions related to the political position of Baka people that have created the ethnic identity crisis the Baka of Asoumondélé are experiencing. As another Baka man, self-described as mbotàki (middle-aged), Edokou Paul, put it:
So we are talking about the problem of the hill known as Mbarga. If it wasn’t for one Baka... His name was Assembé Pierre. As the elder Messoula Antoine just mentioned, it is thanks to him that these people got there. This should not be a problem between the Baka and the Kaka but it is. They want the Baka only to do work on their farms, and only for they themselves to work at Ndimayo. This is why there is the problem that there is.

The hallmarks of the Baka ethnic identity crisis are: rejection of old traditions and culture in favour of everything and anything new; reciprocal negative stereotyping of outsiders; appeals to outsiders for help, respect or inclusion; mimetic imitation of outsiders to equalise with them; paradoxical situations and behaviour; dis-identification with the Baka ethnicity or elements of it (those related to the forest); and sometimes alcoholism and alcohol-related violence. Not all of these factors are necessarily negative, but they are factors that can propel social change, hence usage of the term crisis is appropriate.

### 4.4. Reactions to Identity Crisis

The Baka people are under extreme pressure due to their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The workings of identity in this political context seem to be related to the way that humans find extreme inequality psychologically intolerable. Working on group politics, evolutionary anthropologist Christopher Boehm (1999) has noticed how despotic human tendencies are always counterbalanced by resentment of subordination. Boehm argues that humans have been egalitarian for tens of thousands
of years because of an inherited disposition to resent both being dominated and being placed in a disadvantageously unequal position.

*Inequality aversion* or *inequity aversion* is thus an innate human tendency. For example, inequality aversion has also been demonstrated to develop from the age of four years in a study of Swiss children (Fehr et al. 2008). Psychological and game theory experiments demonstrate the existence of inequity aversion among both human and nonhuman primates, and the specifically human tendency to punish those who behave inequitably even if administering the punishment incurs a cost to the punisher. Sergey Gavrilets (2012) has used agent-based modelling to show that each individual benefits if within-group competition is reduced, and that strong coalitionary action against bullies could have reduced within-group competition in prehistoric hunter-gatherer bands to the extent that conditions would have favoured selection for a psychological disposition called the *egalitarian syndrome*, which incorporates empathy, altruism, and egalitarian morals.

A recent study in neuroscience shows that economic inequity is evaluated in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The study demonstrated that manipulating the brain chemistry of participants in an economic game resulted in altered sensitivity to inequity aversion of participants in economic games (Sáez et al. 2015). The prefrontal cortex controls executive functions of the brain, which suggests that inequity aversion is related to a phylogenetically recent reorganization of frontal cortical circuitry in the human lineage.

There may also be a further dimension to the inequality aversion motivating Baka people to try to alter their ascribed ethnic identity. As argued by cognitive psychologists David Erdal and Andrew Whiten (1996), the egalitarian ethos of many
hunter-gatherer peoples orients its members to feel anger and indignation towards those who exhibit dominant behaviour and attempts by others to assert authority over themselves. They are consciously predisposed towards counter-dominance (see Boehm 2012 for a related argument).

Counter-dominance and egalitarianism are thus culturally influenced behaviours founded on the psychological dispositions that create and support them (Erdal and Whiten 1994, 1996). Baka people have double reason to resent being accorded an ethnic or racial identity that is treated as inferior: an innate and universal inequality aversion, and a culturally egalitarian orientation.

Due to the fact that a racist stereotype of the Pygmy is ascribed to the Baka as an ethnic group, Baka people find themselves constantly facing discrimination, inequality and injustice, a state of affairs that has been amplified by sedentarization. Here in this marginal position, they are bound to experience resentment that is inextricably entangled with their feelings about their own ethnic identity. Social anthropologists John R. Campbell and Alan Rew predict that “…work on the experience of racism would need to explore the impact on the individual of so comprehensive a rejection of personal worth as to result in an internalisation of the negative evaluations of others resulting in the deprecation of one’s culture and person.” (1999: 12).

The problem Baka people discuss is that many now feel that in order to achieve equality with the Njem, they have no option but to become just like them, especially in the economic and political realms of life. Many Baka people are experiencing a personal conflict between adopting some of the new aspirational behaviours that signal sophistication and modernity, or retaining the traditions and values that have contributed to a legitimate self-ascribed cultural identity for the Baka in the past. A
strong opposition between forest and village has been an enduring social dichotomy in the Congo Basin, along with the strategy of many hunter-gatherer peoples to manipulate the inferior identity allocated to them in the village context in order to metaphorically hunt those who so categorize them.

In Chapter 1, I argued that this dichotomy is, in part, a manifestation of the hunter-gatherer strategy to encompass non-hunter-gatherers in the manner described by Nurit Bird-David (1988). Now that Baka people have adopted village life in Asoumondélé, the forest identity is no longer always a source of self-esteem or social legitimation for them. It is, instead, a source of ambivalence and consternation as the Baka come into sustained contact with other social groups who discriminate against the Baka on the basis of their forest identity. Outsiders deride the forest lifestyle because it lacks the accumulated resources that are so highly valued by others. Hence the Baka ethnic identity itself presents a paradox for Baka people, and results in paradoxical situations and behaviours.

The following statements are accounts from Baka people of how alcohol was introduced to the Baka, and how they have become locked into exploitative labour relations with the Kaka as a result. Alcoholism is seen as being at odds with traditional Baka life. Their resentment of this state of affairs is clear, as is their sense of being in a quandary about how they, as a cohesive ethnic group, are to work their way out of the low-status position of poverty they now find themselves in.

Mbea Germaine, self-described as mbotåki (middle-aged woman):

_Our people did not know that which they call liquor (menyioku), we did not know it. The Kaka wanted life to go badly for us (literal: “wanted our land to go bad”). If they didn’t produce liquor, then our people here wouldn’t know it today. Those_
things we ask for, we don’t see. We suffer working for nothing. We don’t get any of the goods that come here, but we suffer working. We receive nothing for working.

Ndama Rémi, self-described as an èwanjo (young man):

About that devil’s water (ngo a Satani) you are talking about. The Baka didn’t know this water. Those Kaka who live close to us, without them, we wouldn’t be able to drink. The Baka used to know stingless bee honey\(^{54}\) (molengi), honey (poki), wild yams (ndondo), and all those things of old. All the things that are arriving now… (Pause) The Baka have taken up drinking the water of suffering and of Satan (ngo na këke na Satani). The Mbûnge have deceived us all. The Baka didn’t make any kind of liquor. These things come from the Mbûnge and the Kaka. If not for them, the Baka wouldn’t have the taste for it.

Inequalities of status and opportunity are hidden in the normative role of majority identities, the attributes of which come to be seen as the self-evident criteria against which minorities are judged (Verkuyten 2005, Mummendy and Wenzel 1999). For example, the normative role of majority identities in Cameroon is that one should aim to accumulate wealth in order to achieve high status.

Previously established internal definitions can cause resistance to definitions imposed from outside (Jenkins 2008), a point that is crucial to understanding what is afoot with identity-making processes for the Baka of Asoumondélé, some of whom have not been thoroughly acculturated to the acquisitive and hierarchical values that constitute a

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\(^{54}\) Stingless bee honey is more liquid than ordinary honey. It is apt to ferment very quickly once removed from the hive, producing a mildly alcoholic sour-sweet beverage. It is a relatively scarce foodstuff enjoyed by Baka people in the small quantities in which it is naturally found.
socially-acceptable identity in wider society. The personal conflicts that many Baka people are currently experiencing between the forest and village identities map onto the relationships of inequality that the Baka have with other social groups because the respect Baka people desire from others is dependent on conforming to the acquisitive and patrilineal village-type identity.

The conflict between internalization and resistance to stereotypes manifests in clashes of values between different people in the Baka community, and by one and the same person at different times. For example, some people are actively pursuing an accumulative strategy and focusing all their attention on building up wealth in their household so that they can achieve a higher status, and provide better opportunities for their children. Others tend to live for the present, spending any money they earn immediately on alcohol and tobacco as a form of sharing the fruits of their labour by doing something that feels good. These people demand that other earners should share their income in the form of group drinking sessions.

Between these two extremes lie the vast majority of people, whose behaviours range from accumulative to demanding, depending on the context and a spectrum of personal and emotional motivating factors. Sharing is still much in evidence, but is seriously curtailed, leading to resentment. On the other hand, group drinking is a levelling mechanism that creates a sense of equality between people (but only when drinking is moderate or in its early stages). Drinking results in disinhibition, encouraging those who have earned money to immediately spend it on other people. Nonetheless, differences in the rate at which households are accumulating wealth has created tension.
As one Baka woman (mbotàkì), Bibi Jacquette\textsuperscript{55}, described the emergence of economic inequality to me:

\begin{quote}
You do not talk about some being rich, and others poor. You always stay together and united. Do you understand? We are still united, but look at them [the rich] with contempt.
\end{quote}

An example of the kinds of conflict that can arise due to differing approaches to money is the case of two young brothers who had an argument. They shared a gold-mining site, and had – according to one of the brothers, Bèbè – agreed to work together and also to pool the profits made. The disagreement resulted when Bèbè’s brother, Lekom, found a small nugget of gold, and pocketed all of the proceeds. Bèbè became suspicious when he found that Lekom had acquired a new radio, and confronted him. Lekom admitted that he had found a nugget, and insisted that it was his for the keeping.

Bèbè then went about telling people that his brother had cheated him, seeking recompense. Although many people gossiped that Lekom had indeed wronged his brother, nobody was willing to get involved in the matter. Bèbè was terribly aggrieved by the argument, and left the village shortly afterwards. Apart from the avaricious actions of brother Lekom, this example illustrates egalitarian values and practices, such as expectations of sharing, gossiping about those who do not share, and the avoidance of conflict through mobility.

The self-same individual who criticizes others for acquiring too much wealth may themselves be intent on conducting competitive activities in order to try and accumulate their own personal wealth. While different life histories, personalities and

\textsuperscript{55} Name changed, comment recorded on 2/08/2011.
genders create differences in attitude between people, personal inconsistencies may be due to internal conflicts and uncertainty about how to respond to a rapidly changing social world.

The outcome of all of these non-unified and contradictory approaches to the ways that Baka people are reconfiguring their identity is ambivalence and uncertainty about who the Baka really are. This is accompanied by a series of maladaptive actions, for example binge drinking, conflicts, brawls and domestic violence within the Baka community, creating a sense of disorientation, conflicting interest and social instability. For example, there have been instances where an alcoholic person sells a shared household item, such as a paraffin lamp, without the permission of other householders leading to family members feeling betrayed and losing trust in one another. Women also sometimes accuse each other of stealing produce from each other’s farms, especially when there are seasonal crop shortages.

4.5. Ethnic Identity Crisis and Social Change

Social psychologist Maykel Verkuyten (2005: 11) argues that “in a period of important societal changes, issues of identity are in the spotlight… and concepts such as identity crisis and the search for one’s own identity are frequently brought up”. Political, economic, cultural and demographic transformations are mediated between the individual and society through processes of identity negotiation (Verkuyten 2005: 42).

In his work on ethnic conflict, political scientist Donald L. Horowitz (1985) claims that the global spread of the ideological system of democratic equality has caused
subordinate ethnic groups everywhere to compare their status with those of neighbouring groups, and that the increased valuation of achievement in the world has caused self-doubt among groups whose achievements are questionable according to dominant ideological standards. He notes that such groups often exhibit intense anxiety about the diffuse threats that other groups are perceived to pose, leading to extreme collective reactions.

It is questionable to what extent an ideology of democratic equality has permeated the local scene, as the Cameroonian state falls short of most democratic ideals (Dicklitch 2002). Rather, the Baka have their own egalitarian orientation to motivate them to seek equality with others, and to avoid domination. A competitive, achievement-oriented economic climate has created self-doubt among some Baka residents of Asoumondélé. In some cases this has caused alcoholism, and in others, the motivation to mimic or adopt the dominant and competitive values that are so at odds with the values of a non-competitive egalitarian society.

Since the road opened, exposure to new kinds of people and technologies has increased the anxiety some Baka people feel about their own non-compliance with cosmopolitan values and standards. For example, they are preoccupied with the need to provide schooling for their children, which they hope will allow the Baka of the future to compete and achieve within a wider social arena in the state of Cameroon. Some of the adults even stated their desire for one of their children to become the next president of Cameroon.

The children of Asoumondélé are frequently engaged in paid labour by Kaka patrons (bosses). Their earnings are normally used to buy plates of food, doughnuts
and sweets, although there have also been incidents of children buying alcohol. Attending school regularly means fewer opportunities to earn cash.

Many Baka parents have aspirational desires for their children to become economically competitive with the Njem. This was exemplified by a celebration of Cameroon National Day in Ntam, on 20th May 2012, during which schoolchildren from Ntam, Mbalam and Asoumondélé had put together pageants to celebrate.

The Baka children of Asoumondélé created their own pageant, which was well performed and enthusiastically applauded by the crowd. In Cameroon, a member of an audience can show appreciation for a singer or performer, for example in urban cabaret clubs, by going up to the stage and rubbing the performer’s body (normally the upper body) with a bill of CFA cash and then leaving the bill tucked into the performer’s clothing. The cash amount of the bill is usually ostentatiously displayed by the donor. A handful of Njem parents had given coins or a 500 CFA bill to their children during the pageants at Ntam. When it came to the Baka performance, several Baka parents rushed to give their children 1,000 CFA bills of money. One Baka woman even proudly displayed a 2,000 CFA (approximately GBP2.20) donation to her child.
Consider also the following remarks from a middle-aged woman, Mendom Lisette, a woman I got to know fairly well because she was my next-door neighbour in the village. Mendom went through a personal crisis during my stay, caused by the death of her husband in a hunting accident in December 2011. After this, Mendom developed a more intense and somewhat anxious relationship with her youngest child, Amane. Mendom is convinced that Amane's future success depends upon him attending school regularly:

*Amane must attend school regularly now. His older brothers are already married... I want Amane to attend school regularly. He should become a strong man. I want him to attend regularly, because I'm his mother. It is necessary that the sorrow I felt at my husband's death should stay with me. I want that for
myself. But with Amane's father dead, it has left him with little desire to attend.

His father died, and I, his mother, have been left with him. My child is going to do something for me. I'm not trying for myself anymore.

Some Baka people are deeply uneasy about their perception that the Njem and entrepreneurs from outside of the community are accumulating personal wealth from the natural resources regarded as common property. They are accumulating at a much faster pace than the Baka themselves are, and there are an increasing number of prohibitions imposed by outsiders as to how they may now use common resources, for example hunting restrictions and exclusions on privately-owned land (especially at Ndimayo). Furthermore, the Baka resent their general exclusion from receiving shares (provided as employment) at the mine’s headquarters.

The kinds of ethnic groupings that may be found in a given society can be divided into two ideal types according to Horowitz (1985); ranked and unranked. In ranked groupings, stratification is synonymous with ethnicity, and relationships between members of the different groups are marked by conceptions of superordinate or subordinate status; in unranked societies status is not related to ethnicity. Horowitz compares this distinction to that made by Max Weber (1955: 189).

Economic dissonance between members of a group and between groups in a ranked society can be a destabilizing factor causing change, as “inferior members of a superordinate group threaten the myth of its superiority, and the growth of an elite among a subordinate group sooner or later creates aspirations for mobility and recognition incompatible with strictly ascriptive hierarchy” (Horowitz 1985: 25-26). Change in a ranked society is likely to be caused by an upsurge in elite members within a subordinate ethnic group who acquire prestige and begin to compete with their
former masters (1985: 34-35). Rachel M. Gisselquist has empirically verified Horowitz’s hypotheses in seven case studies in South America and Southern Africa: “ethnic politics in societies with ranked ethnic systems are fundamentally different than ethnic politics in societies with unranked ethnic systems” (2013: 397-8).

The political context in Asoumondélé and surrounds is ranked, whereas the former mobile forest lifestyle of the Baka was unranked. In the past, the Baka could effectively nullify the hierarchical ideology of villager life by means of encompassing the Kaka political system into the Baka egalitarian ideology in ways that allowed Baka people to resist domination.

In the past it was legitimate to avoid overbearing Kaka persons, ridicule their attempts to assert authority, and trick the tight-fisted ones out of hoarding the goods that they should have been sharing. The Baka have been exposed to discrimination and exploitation on a regular basis since their sedentarization because it is no longer possible to use the avoidance strategy of disappearing into the forest, and no longer effective to use ridicule and trickery as counter-measures because these tactics now create unavoidable conflicts.

Conflicts generally do not end well for the Baka because they have far fewer connections to state-derived authority than the Njem. For example, there is only one official Baka administrative chieftanship in the entire Ntam-Asoumondélé-Mbalam nexus as opposed to several Njem administrative chieftainships. Furthermore, metropolitan newcomers have a higher status than the local Njem. Notice, for example,

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how both myself and the Bamiléké trader Samuel were called to participate in the local system of justice in the *Stolen Money* vignette (Section 3.1.).

Government officials and state-ascribed chiefs hold paramount power over all other local residents, with the possible exception of executive staff at Cam Iron headquarters in Mbalam (who are removed from the day-to-day interactions of local society). For example, holding public office is sometimes – although by no means always – used as a license to intimidate others and to extort bribes from them. This applies, in my experience, to the police, militarized police, forestry officials and ecoguards, minor administrative chiefs, healthcare officials and teaching inspectors. In the *Stolen Money* vignette, the council of village chiefs and outsiders avoided going to the police commissioner because of a generalized distrust of the police and their abuse of authority in Cameroon.\(^{57}\)

In terms of Horowitz’s theory, the context is ripe for the development of an elite group within the most subordinate rank, which is occupied by the Baka. As I will come to demonstrate, the Baka community is well on its way to becoming economically, and hence politically, differentiated. Wealth and male gender are increasingly becoming status markers. Although big men do not as yet hold sway within the Baka micro-society, this type of political system has begun to infiltrate from outside. Most, if not all, Baka individuals aspire to accumulate wealth, and there is also competition for

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\(^{57}\) The police commissioner at Ntam in fact seemed to me to be an honest person with a high level of integrity. I had many productive conversations with him, during which he expressed awareness of, and sympathy towards, the plight of the Baka people, and local people more generally. I cannot say the same for the various other minor police and militarized police (BIR – rapid intervention battalion) officials I came into contact with. The schoolmaster at Ntam also impressed me with his interest in Baka education and his self-initiated research into a better schooling programme for the Baka. Both of these more empathetic officials hail from urban centres in Cameroon, are educated at university level, and only temporarily stationed in Ntam.
status. There are prominent and influential males in the community, most notably the chief, Mengbwa Samson.

The pursuit of these new aspirations are, at the same time, at odds with persistent elements of the old egalitarian ethos, for example the pressure exerted on individuals to share any newly-acquired wealth on demand. These competing impulses create dilemmas for individuals, who may feel torn between identifying with what is perceived as an authentic Baka identity, which was previously based on egalitarian values, on the one hand, and improving their personal status within a wider context on the other. As Boehm (1999: 9-10) argues, human beings have the capacity to simultaneously incorporate the contradictory political tendencies of the will to dominate and the will to submit, and they experience ambivalence as a result.

While Verkuyten (2005) suggests that social change comes about through the configuration of social identity in day-to-day interactions, he also notes that discourses and institutions relating to racial or ethnic identity do not change all that easily. The ways in which Baka people try to assert themselves within the new world they have been propelled into is limited by the extremely low status accorded to them by others throughout their own life histories and the limited access they have to new opportunities. Many worry that they may be destined to remain the underclass of society, as their day-to-day lives have become increasingly connected with other ethnic groups since sedentarization. They are searching for ways to escape this assignation, albeit in heterogeneous and often tumultuous ways.

Verkuyten (2005) notes the difference between identification as – the cognitive process of categorizing oneself as a member of an ethnic group – and identification with – the affective process whereby group membership is introjected to become an
integral part of the self. People tend to derive a sense of involvement, belonging, concern and pride from their involvement with an ethnic or national group, thus the successes and failures of other members of the group become one’s own, bound with one’s own sense of self-esteem. Negative self-esteem as a result of group membership may lead to dis-identification with that group or the search for more complimentary intergroup differentiation. Ethnic minority groups may cope psychologically with discrimination through the partial compensation they gain from solidarity within the group. However, this sense of belonging can also become a source of emotional conflict, as striving to acquire a higher status in society can result in alienation from one’s own ethnic group.

Difficulties related to the introjection of a stigmatized ascribed identity have arisen in Asoumondélé. Mpako’s impassioned speech about the forest and the light indicates that the younger generation of Baka want the forest “cleared away” so that the Baka can see the light, which I interpret to be mainly a metaphor that describes the younger generation’s current dissatisfaction with the old Baka ascribed identity, and the stigmatization that it brings. Mpako is not asking for the forest to be cleared away in the literal sense. He is referring to the ideology and practices that were so successful in the forest life – but which are now considered to be a disadvantage by some. There are those who do not want to be forest people anymore, but rather village people.

I have argued that fluctuation between resistance to and internalization of a socially-ascribed ethnic identity replete with racist stereotypes is the hallmark of the identity crisis in Asoumondélé. A new social plane began to emerge for the Baka when they settled in the village and adopted farming, which brought them into closer relationships of interdependence with their Njem neighbours. This new social plane began rapidly expanding with the arrival of the mine, inflation of the local population with outsiders,
plus heightened state and institutional intervention in local affairs. Consequently, identity-forming processes are shifting for the Baka. Competition for status is becoming more salient for positive identity-formation, and the Baka are starting to compete on the same terms as the other peoples with whom they now have daily interactions. The clash between status-seeking and egalitarian humility is likely itself a cause of inner conflict for many Baka individuals.

The ethnography suggests that another part of what is happening to people in the Baka community as a result of the changing dialectic between publicly-ascribed and self-defined identity is that they are to some extent internalizing the assignations of inferior identity accorded to them by outsiders – as Mpako’s speech about the forest and the light demonstrates.

As new categories of people echo the demeaning stereotypes used by the Njem, for many Baka people some considerable self-doubt has crept in. For example, condescending attitudes on the part of institutional figures, who may have good intentions in wanting to help the Baka but who do not pay attention to the many positive cultural resources the Baka already have, may have an insidious effect on Baka self-identity. This can contribute to their sense of vulnerability and disorientation in the wider world, consequently intensifying their reliance on a traditional strategy for the acquisition of goods from those others who claim to be superior, which is to demand help.

Through the course of my fieldwork I met with a number of European and American researchers and NGO workers who expressed somewhat imperious ideas about the future of Baka people, particularly with regard to their education and employment prospects. These proposals typically did not give much consideration to the rich cultural heritage of Baka people, for example their beautiful polyphonic music,
rich narrative traditions, detailed knowledge of forest ecosystems and egalitarian social values, instead framing Baka culture as backward and in desperate need of modernization. However well-meaning those who express this type of view may be, glossing over the positive aspects of Baka cultural heritage is a form of negative stereotyping that does nothing to alleviate the decaying self-esteem of Baka people, as evidenced by Mpako's speech about clearing away the forest.

Disparity between an authoritatively assigned categorization and a previously internalized self-identity can inspire resistance to the ascribed categorizations, according to Jenkins (2008). This is also part of what is happening to the Baka community, as their cultural ethos, focused on egalitarian values, is confronted by a radically oppositional political system in which the Baka are assigned to a category at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The fact that there are now differences in household wealth indicates that some Baka people are seduced (to varying degrees) by the possibility of experimenting with a new elevated identity based on economic wealth. They may also expect to adopt this identity by accepting the encroaching patriarchal political hierarchy, trying to ascend within it, and appropriating exogenous status markers and paternalistic attitudes towards women.

On the one hand, resentment from other Baka people is inevitable. On the other hand, the formation of an elite Baka subgroup challenges the lowly position of the Baka ethnicity as a whole in the regional hierarchy, and all members of the Baka community are able to identify with the successes of elite individuals by proxy (Verkuyten’s identification with). But neither are the competitively successful individuals spared the resulting disorientation, as they may become both alienated
from their community and the target of resentment. This is true of both the Baka chief of Asoumondélé, Mengbwa, and another individual from a nearby village who was the only Baka person employed by the mine during my fieldwork period. Both of these men were embroiled in petty conflicts on a regular basis, and they were sometimes gossiped about and portrayed as being arrogant and self-important.

Anthropologist Eric Wolf (2001) links processes of identity formation with processes where people are incorporated into labour practices:

*By processes of incorporation I mean the recruitment of people into particular modes of mobilizing and deploying social labor; processes of identity-making and -unmaking refer to the creation and abrogation of the cultural markers and culturally informed activities by which populations define themselves and are defined by others in the process of incorporation. I see the two sets of processes as relational and interdependent. The processes of incorporation arrange and rearrange people in terms of the governing social relations of production; the processes of identity-making and -unmaking represent responses on the part of particular populations to such arrangements.* (2001: 353-354).

It is at least partially the desire to adopt a new modern and village identity as a result of the feelings of inadequacy that have caused Baka people to engage with, and to try to incorporate themselves into, the capitalist economy and its social relations of production. To be sure, the pressures from an expanding global economy have also precipitated some of the feelings of insecurity Baka people are experiencing, and thus their strong desire for positive change to come about, but it would be a mistake to ignore Baka agency and decision-making as strong causal factors in their own right.
I do not necessarily agree with the Marxist axiom of Wolf’s theory – that the processes of incorporation are definitive and the processes of identity-making and -unmaking responsive, as this assumes a unidirectional relationship of causality between the material and the ideological dimensions of society, even though Wolf says the two processes are interdependent.

However, Wolf’s recognition that the dynamic and historically unfolding character of identity is interlinked with processes of labour deployment is certainly apposite to the context of Asoumondélé, with the caveat that the relationship is better understood as one of mutual causality. This is true of both the impact of sedentarization in which Baka labour on Njem farms was required, and the arrival of the mine with concomitant incorporation into the capitalist economy and pressures on forest resources.

Moreover, Wolf’s (2001: 355) emphasis on the powerful influence that capitalism has in processes of identity formation, and his observation that there can be no clear distinction between resistance and delinquency, are useful ideas when considering what the Baka communicate to the outside world through their day-to-day activities and their contentions with their place in wider society. This is especially the case when considering how alcoholism has gained a stranglehold over the Baka community. Baka people say they drink in order to overcome anxieties about their role in the changing world or the suffering they experience in their state of poverty. This is what the Baka chief of Asoumondélé II, Mengbwa Samson, had to say:

*We the Baka didn’t know liquor (vin)*\(^{58}\) before. *Liquor has come to break up the family. Why am I going to have problems with my wife? Because of liquor. So my wives and I have problems because of liquor. My family and I have problems*

\(^{58}\) Manufactured liquor is sometimes referred to locally using the French word *vin.*
because of it. That's why I say: liquor is good and bad. It breaks up families. Alcohol was a thing of the Kaka. It was the water of the Kaka. It wasn't the water of the Baka. That's why we must not break up our families because of that water.

Yes, the Baka should stop drinking, but the Kaka also don’t stop. In Cameroon, we’ll never stop drinking. If the people of Asoumondélé should quit, still the whole of Cameroon will never quit. You arrive somewhere, and the first thing you do is to drink. Any person who tells himself to stop drinking should stop. I never try to give up drinking because I go to meetings. In those meetings, there are many people. When I haven’t yet drunk anything, I'm not clear. It's liquor that gives me the courage to speak to the authorities. It’s for that reason that I drink liquor because I can speak in front of people without being afraid. Because I speak publicly. I can see their people without fear, that’s why I can never stop drinking.

Figure 4.3. Baka woman drinking a sachet
5.1. Likànò: Wayito Collects Honey

The following is a likànò, a fable in the tradition of Baka storytelling, in which human-animal-spirit relationships abound. This likànò was told as a fireside story one evening.

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59 Courtesy and copyright of Eric Tourneret, see http://www.j-aime-les-abeilles.fr/
by a young man named Zoa Samuel. In it the Baka culture hero, Wayito, mimics a swallow’s flight in order to obtain honey from up high in a tree.

The swallow [ndépélépé] and its children are out hunting, and they find honey.

Wayito is on his way out. Wayito says: “I’m going hunting on this side of the forest today.” Wayito walks, and walks, and walks. Wayito hears something. The sound of someone smashing open a wild beehive with an axe. There is no mistaking it, it sounds like this: ëëëëëëë ke!

“Who are these strong people? What kind of difficult honey do you find near the river like this?” He walks, he walks. He approaches carefully. He says: “I must enter the river to get there. He says, “Who are these people who have climbed up there?”

He sees a swallow nearby on the ground. “Ah! Hello uncle”. I don’t have time for this uncle, he says to himself. “How did your children get up there?” The swallow responds, “Ah! Ah! Ah! Sit down first. Rest a bit, you are old. You’re asking questions before you’ve even sat down? The children have something to climb with. The children collect the honey.”

When Wayito looks, he sees a swallow flying past on its way to untie a honey basket [pendi] full of honey. He has something.... a large blob of magic gum!

The children collect the honey. He says, “Show me how! Collect the honey. Is it finished yet? Come on, tie on another.”

The swallow launches its body. Like this: pù-pù-ù-ù! It reaches the honey. It ties on the honey basket. The swallows carry the honey.
He takes a blob of gum and tucks it under his arm. Wayito keeps a cool head. Wayito says to himself: You have met your match. Têêêêê... He keeps watching for a long time until the honey has all been collected. Meanwhile, he helps himself to some more blobs of magic gum.

They say to him, “here is a parcel of honey for you and your family”. Wayito ties up his parcel of honey. Wayito ties up his parcel of honey, and then starts walking and walking. We also look for honey here on this side, downstream of the river, he muses.

Wayito goes in search of honey. He finds a mongombé tree. He sees honey, he says: “This is not the same honey”. He continues his search. He finds honey, he says: “Not this one. I have not yet arrived at the right place.”

So Wayito walks further. Wayito whistles, he whistles, he whistles.

[# Whistles a tune]

The honeyguide bird [mbêlêkà] comes to him. Chirr-chirr-chirr-chirrr! Chirr-chirr-chirr! Chirr-chirr-chirr! The honeyguide says, “Follow me”. Wayito follows the honeyguide. He hears a ferocious buzzing of bees. Bzzzzzzzzzzzzz! This is the honey that Wayito will return to collect.

“I’ll return to collect this honey later”. Wayito clears a space around the tree. He returns home for the night. He arrives back at camp and he tells his wife, “You will all wait here. You all know nothing. The other children collect the best honey there by the big river.”

[Everyone listening to the story around the fire laughs].
“What have we done to anger you? Please can we come with?”

Figure 5.2. Baka boy climbing tree

Wayito is so busy preparing for his journey, the night passes quickly and the day dawns. In the morning, the sun rises. Wayito takes his children. They walk for a long time. They arrive at the tree. “Dad, how are we going to collect this honey?”

“Never fear, I Wayito am here. Are you afraid?”

Wayito pauses... ti iiiii to contemplate the situation. They make fire. He tells the children: “Cut the liana. I myself will try it, because I'm the one who has the magic.”
He sprinkles the magic gum. “This is just a thing from my uncle. Just a little bit of magic from my uncle.” Wayito goes into the river. The tree where he found the honey is called békési.

[More laughter from the audience].

“Isn’t it good to have a father like this?”

“Ah! Yes, it is very good.”

Wayito gets out on the other side. He says to a child, “Look here is your blob of magic gum. Over here!” [Laughter].

They lance the beehive that is on a branch of the békési tree. So that the honey rises up and the honey trickles down. “Come on, tie on the honey basket! Tééééé” Wayito flies through the air là- âàààà! [Laughter]. Wayito quickly descends to the ground. The children say: “What great miracle is this?” [Laughter]. Wayito gets the hang of it. [Interjection from the audience: “Slowly Wayito! ”] [Laughter]. The children say: “Dad is great!” The basket of honey is full to the brim. [Interjection from the audience: “He should keep some of his magic gum.”]

But that which is tied - tèéééé - must be untied. [Interjection from one of the audience “Do it gently!”]. He launches his body into the air. As he unties the basket of honey.... He makes the mistake of looking down. He tumbles headlong into the river with his basket of honey! [Laughter from everyone]. Together with the basket of honey! In the water! In the water! He has arrived on the path of Komba (God). Wayito has fallen into the net of Komba with his basket of honey. [Laughter from everyone].
Komba hears his cries of woe. Komba says, “What big fish have I trapped?” Komba says, “Oh it’s Wayito and his silly tricks again!” He goes to pull out the net. [Laughter from everyone]. “Wayito, why are you so greedy?” [Laughter]. “Why did you come in here with your basket of honey? You and the basket of honey fell into my net.”

This likànò epitomizes the mimetic traditions of Baka people for a number of reasons. Firstly, the storyteller uses many instances of phonaesthesia to bring the sounds of the forest to life for his audience: his sonic mimicry of the sound an axe makes chopping, èèèèèèè-ke!, the bzzzzzzzzzzzz of the bees, the Chirr-chirr-chirr-chirrr! Chirr-chirr-chirr! Chirr-chirr-chirr! call of the honeyguide bird. Even the Baka name for the swallow is onomatopoeic, reminiscent of the swallow’s chattering: ndépélepé. The narrator also pauses to recreate the special whistling tune that Baka men use to call honeyguide birds.

There are other sounds used in the story to describe actions that have no sound in reality such as ti iiii for thinking and the pù-pùùùùù! of the swallow launching into flight, however notice that the latter sound is rather like the sound of an arrow or a javelin shooting its trajectory through the air: pù-pùùùùù!. Swallows feed on flying insects including bees. They fly with great speed and dexterity, and form intricate flying patterns in the sky in order to catch their prey. In particular, their aerial displays often involve a sharp ascent, a twist, and then a dive. It is this action that Wayito seeks to mimic in order to reach honey from up high in the forest canopy.

The storyteller not only re-enacted sounds during the telling of this likànò, but he also mimed actions, such as the tying of the honey basket onto the tree. Soaring up into the air was indicated by the storyteller lifting his arms up above his head in a sharp
motion and jumping up from his chair. Likânò are always told with plenty of body gestures, facial expressions and sound effects, and often the miming of actions. They sometimes also include snippets of polyphonic song, which include the audience.

The content and themes of the likânò reflect on the nature of mimesis. They also reflect on the multispecies, multi-being types of communication that the Baka and other forest hunter-gatherers have traditionally engaged in (Bird-David 1990, 1992, 1999; Tsuru 1998, 2001; Köhler 1999, 2000; Oishi 2013; Lewis 2002a, 2008a, 2009, 2014a). In this particular likânò, the culture hero Wayito talks to the swallow, to the honeyguide and to Komba (God). In other likânò, creatures as diverse as Leopard, Duiker, Elephant, Python, Mosquito, Millipede and the forest spirit named Ejengi interact with one another. Even Thunder is able to come down from the sky and befriend a tortoise in his home (though Thunder becomes so disillusioned with Tortoise’s poor show of friendship that he eventually burns Tortoise to a crisp).

The tortoise is a favourite trickster character, but so is Wayito, the Baka culture hero. In this likânò, he teases and jokes with his children. He tells them they cannot accompany him on the honey collecting trip because other children are better honey collectors, and he taunts them to fetch the magic gum from him after he has crossed a big river. He is full of playfulness, and he has a few tricks up his sleeve. At the end of the story, he gets taken down a peg or two for going too far and stealing the magic gum from the swallow who has been kind and generous to him but he comes to no serious harm; he gets a bit of a fright, makes a clown of himself in front of his admiring children, loses his booty, and gets admonished by Komba for being too greedy.

Baka communicative traditions, like those of other hunter-gatherers, are typically playful, highly imaginative, and non-authoritative. Pedagogy is usually self-directed,
involving observation and imitation. Child-parent relationships are intimate and informal. Bossiness, bragging and self-aggrandisement are generally unrewarding styles of communication, which is also why Wayito gets his comeuppance at the end of the fable. It is considered to be extremely rude to tell an adult what to do in Baka society, and although Baka adults are now starting to discipline their children in accordance with their aspirations for them to have a formal education, Baka children are still allowed a great deal of freedom compared to their Kaka neighbours.

Social norms are acquired and reinforced through play and ritual, and when somebody steps out of line problems are resolved most often through good-natured teasing. Most likānò contain useful information and moral lessons packaged in metaphorical form; these are mnemonic devices that transmit the egalitarian rules of society from generation to generation.

In order to mimic the swallow’s flight, Wayito steals magic gum from the swallow. However, that is not enough to enable his flight. He also spends a long time observing the swallow children flying up, tying on the honey basket, flying down again, and then repeating the process to untie the basket once filled up with honey. He pauses to contemplate the situation before he tries it for himself in a different context. This is how skills are generally learned among Central African hunter-gatherers, by watching and then doing. It is a trial and error process during which knowledge becomes embodied without much spoken instruction; in fact much learning takes place during play (Lewis 2008a, 2014a; Hewlett et al. 2011, Boyette 2013).
5.2. What Is Mimesis?

Mimesis is a style of communication that employs the whole body as an expressive device, according to cognitive neuroscientist Merlin Donald (2001). It involves conscious control over action, including activities of gesture, mime, imitation and skill, as well as imaginative role playing and emotional regulation. These activities are all the kinds of behaviour that make communicative social rituals possible. The human capacity to develop skills is creative because it can generate variation, and thus contribute to the range of actions known and performed by a social group.

Donald also argues that social institutions rely on the mimetic transmission of customs and that our narrative and mythical capacities are premised on it. Evolving the capacity for mimesis was the first stage in the development of human cultural behaviour, and as such it is the precursor to language and symbolic culture. Mimetic skill is all about self-representation and self-definition according to Donald, but it is also the basis of communication between people, and the connection between brains and culture.

In terms of tracing the evolution of this capacity, Whiten et al. (2009) have established that there are points of similarity between chimpanzee and human cultural transmission that indicate the characteristics likely to have existed in our common ancestor of approximately six million years ago. These include the capacities: 1) to sustain local cultures with multiple traditions; 2) to copy others with sufficient fidelity to transmit culturally variant behavioural techniques within and between communities; and 3) to call on both imitative and emulative forms of social learning. Subsequent to the emergence of mimesis, the human lineage went on to acquire more refined
capacities for imitation and cumulative cultural learning following divergence from the common ancestor of chimpanzees and humans.

Drawing on these insights from cognitive science, it is clear that mimesis is in fact the basis of the social and ethnic identity-making processes described in Chapter 4. Shared language reinforces the mimetic ability of a group of people to conform to certain identity norms and to thus become a cohesive culture in which members imitate one another and create new cultural praxis. Mimesis is the basis for the ritualized activities that make a group of people productive together, for example in music-making and dance, or in imitating useful skills like weaving baskets or tracking an animal.
Donald (2001) theorizes that mimesis was the cognitive and cultural preadaptation in human evolution that allowed language and other externalised cultural forms to emerge, and also that it is the first developmental process learned by small children to equip them for culture. Similarly, Whiten et al. (2009) have found that during the process of development children are highly susceptible to imitating others, and that copying increases with age in children.
In a manner that is analogous to the way that children learn to engage with culture through the practice of mimesis, mimesis is the method that anthropologists use to gain a grapple-hold in an unfamiliar setting - participant-observation. Social anthropologist Roy Dilley (1999) has situated mimesis at the centre of the participatory method of fieldwork enculturation used by anthropologists. He argues that the experiences and understandings gained from these practices can provide valuable insights into indigenous theories of learning:

*Mimesis is... far from a passive, empty form of copying or repetition. Imaginative engagement and a sense of empathy are the basis of creative acts of connection that allow mimesis to be entered into as an engaged and committed activity of reproduction that plays on the boundaries of self and other.* (1999: 37-8).

In my own experience, mimesis was the primary means through which I could learn about Baka culture before I developed some proficiency in the Baka language. Much information was conveyed through body language and the careful observation and imitation of others. Daunting as it was, participating in singing and dancing rituals was crucial for me to gain a feeling of acceptance and solidarity within the Baka community. In the beginning I felt foolish copying the rhythmic dance movements, elaborate hand-clapping, and yodelling vocals that Baka women are so comfortable with. Yet my attempts clearly entertained the community, and prompted them to engage with me.

One of the skills that Baka women have mastered by the time they reach adulthood is scrabbling little fish from the riverbed of a collectively constructed dam, which has been emptied of water. This skilful task, performed during the two dry seasons per
year when the little streams are low, is a lot more difficult than it sounds. Imagine trying to hold onto a slippery bar of soap that has its own volition and is trying to flee for its life, disappearing into a muddy bath. Even building the dam walls requires an efficient technique to minimize backache. These were skills that were hard-won by myself through a process of participant-observation, or mimesis. On my first fishing trip, I was eager to prove myself a hard worker who is not afraid to get my hands dirty. I did not take enough time to stand back and observe how the task should be done. It was only once I began to watch the other women more closely that I realized that I had been stomping around chasing all the fish away, and that I was probably more hindrance than help, though my companions were initially too polite to tell me so.

![Figure 5.4. Dam fishing](image-url)

One of the things that struck me in this process of learning unfamiliar skills is that the more that I became competent, the more I came to be identified with, and to identify
myself with, the Baka. When I had finally learnt how to walk in the forest for hours without tiring and with a bit more grace than I had at the start, people would joke with me that I was becoming a “real” Baka. They made the same kinds of friendly jokes when I learnt other routine tasks that the Baka perform in their daily lives.

Learning to speak the Baka language was very important in the process of being included in the Baka community. Yet other, mimetically acquired and embodied forms of knowledge, were equally important. Accepting people into my home at times when I would have preferred solitude was a part of this, as was learning how to share around the leftover food from my cooking without awkwardness. Learning how to ask people to share with me when I needed something was difficult, especially not offering anything in return. There was an emotional and moral component to the skills that I was learning, and also the creation of a shared social identity, however fleeting.

These examples of my experiences of participant-observation are all replete with the characteristics of mimesis identified by Donald (2001) – the gesture, mime, imitation and skill-building, but also the emotional regulation required to bring myself in line with Baka customs and the imaginative role-playing involved in “becoming Baka”. Imaginative role-playing as a means of borrowing the social identity of others is especially important. As noted by Dilley, “the apprehension of the character of the ‘other’ is somehow captured and internalized in mimesis” (1999: 37).
5.3. Social Identity and Mimesis

From the preceding review of mimesis as understood in cognitive science, it is clear that it is the basis of social identity creation as well as the foundational skill for culture itself. In order to expand on some of the ideas about social identity introduced in Chapter 2, which I discussed with specific reference to ethnic identity, it is illuminating to recall Strauss and Quinn’s (1997) conception of culturally variable internalized schemas, and their role in shaping the identities of individuals by means of out-of-awareness knowledge and feelings.

But cultural schemas are not complete, high fidelity copies that are endlessly perpetuated. If they were, there would never be any innovations or any social or cultural transformations. As pointed out by cognitive anthropologist Norbert Ross, “the final stage in the process of meaning creation is necessarily individual, allowing for the creation of new meaning and the challenge of old interpretations” (2004: 66). Mimesis is the primary means through which both identity formation and all shared cultural meanings come about. It is a creative process in which differences between individuals shape each instance of imitation, allowing changing identities to come about.

Congo Basin hunter-gatherers have a very particular style of music-making that is a key marker of their ethnic identity, namely polyphonic music and dance. Polyphonic music serves to reproduce the foundational cultural schemas of these peoples by appealing to their aesthetic senses and their desire to cooperate with one another playfully (Lewis 2013). Polyphonic music-making traditions resonate with multiple meanings that are of crucial relevance to the social, economic, political and aesthetic
culture of these egalitarian societies. Lewis suggests that the reason that musically transmitted foundational cultural schemas are so resilient is that they combine structure and style with creativity and flexibility, allowing each generation to adapt the basic format to their own specific needs. In Chapter 7, I will examine how radical social transformation and ritual change among the Baka has led to the adoption of new non-polyphonic and non-egalitarian musical and ritual repertoires. These new repertoires are likely to result in the creation of altered foundational cultural schema.

5.4. Mimesis in the Appropriation of Modernity

Rane Willerslev’s (2007) ethnography of the Yukaghir hunters of Upper Kolyma, Siberia, describes how they see persons as capable of assuming a variety of forms through a process of mimesis. A person may be a human, spirit, animal or even a river, and it is possible for one form to become another by adopting the other’s perspective. When a hunter is able to kill his prey, his actions are also performed by means of mimesis. As the hunter’s awareness meets that of the animal, the hunter adopts the perspective of the animal. For the Yukaghir, mimesis is an activity which people do, especially during their dreams, in order to gain transformative power. It would seem that the Yukaghir actively seek to appropriate elements of the identities of other beings in order to live their lives effectively; becoming other is a normal part of existence.

In his influential book *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993), Michael Taussig describes mimesis as follows:
The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power. In an older language, this is "sympathetic magic", and I believe it is as necessary to the very process of knowing as it is to the construction and subsequent naturalisation of identities. (1993: xii-xiv)

Setting aside Taussig’s contention that modernity alienates people from their mimetic faculty, his main insight is that mimesis is the root of sympathetic magic; that it is perceived as a portal to another being or object, enabling the appropriation of powerful and useful elements of their nature and/or culture. Mimesis is a visceral form of contact with an object or another that creates a recognition of similarities and an understanding of differences. It thus facilitates the adoption of that which is desired.

Taussig’s analysis of how the Cuna of Panama fetishize Western commodities is reminiscent of the Baka of Asoumondé’s newfound fascination with the goods that are now flowing into the community, and their frustration with being unable to acquire these goods on an equal footing with others. This is how Sébouti Jean, an elder man (kobo), put it:

If only the voice of people over here was like thunder to say that the authorities should come and do us good here. Komba has reduced our voice, but know that I speak here so that everybody hears. All that talk that people do on the other side, people do not listen to us. Know that they should listen to what I say today. Those who have wisdom will analyse the words I say today. We do not seek evil. We seek good. We do not invoke the name of money this afternoon for nothing.

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60 Name changed, extract from a focus group of July 2012.
but for the things that we do on earth. The Kaka live in the light. You can see that each person has their group. Some people have houses with aluminium sheeting.

And now the words here are sufficiently clear. We Baka are here without a voice. We admire everything that the Kaka are doing. Like those who travel with motorbikes. Why can't we also get those things here? We also want to receive what the Mbùnge make. Why do we not have motorcycles? Did Komba make it so that we cannot receive these things on Earth? Those who have it good are the Kaka. You Whites, you don’t do anything except with the Kaka. You don’t think of us the Baka. Do not confuse the two.

I think that you Mbùnge mock us. But even with this mockery, we do not wish you ill. I want good to happen to us because of the words I've said now. Bring us these possessions.

We have done everything, meetings each day. So that the things that we demand from you Mbùnge should arrive. Because you send these good things to the Kaka. The wealth that we ask of you, you send to the Kaka. You have not come to help advance us. Come share it out house to house for each family. This house here is where stuff arrives for families. We are a people over here with many clans (Ye Njembe, Ye Mombito, Ye Likemba, and all of the clans). We ask for many things. Bring goods to us. Come and bring us the goods in the courtyard of Bissoubilam, in the courtyard of Bissoubilam.

Sébouti’s speech exemplifies another side of the attitude that many Baka people hold towards Kaka people, a grudging admiration and desire to emulate some of the aspects of modernity that the Kaka have embraced. He is certainly not the only person to have
spoken of the enormous frustration that Baka people feel about issues such as the fact that they are not well-represented in Cameroonian society; that they are poorer and disrespected because of their low status; and that they are marginalized in terms of employment at the mine and provisioning from NGOs.

Sometimes these feelings of resentment and desire become manifest in an intense interest in consumer goods on the part of Baka people that is comparable to the cargo-cult millenarianism of postcolonial Melanesians (Worsley 1957). For example, one Baka woman told me that it is her utmost desire that her children could be clothed in smart garments so that the children would be “just as good as” Kaka children. It is as if by mimicking visual aspects of the identity of the Kaka and acquiring the modern goods that the Kaka have accumulated, the Baka might also appropriate some of their social power and the power of modernity itself.

5.5. Sexual Identity, Gender Identity and Gender Roles

In Chapter 4, I mentioned Richard Jenkins’ internal-external dialectic of identification, and his distinction between the more enduring primary social identities, such as selfhood, humanness and gender, and the less enduring processes of individual identity-making (2008). There is also a clear correspondence between Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (1977: 72) and the concept identity. Bourdieu conceived of habitus as both at once structured by, and structuring of, social groups. Moreover, he distinguished between an enduring primary habitus, acquired through processes of socialization in early childhood, and subsequent layers of habitus acquired later in life.
through contact with social institutions other than the immediate family. Bourdieu described primary habitus as: “embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history”, and “the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (1990: 56). Habitus thus has a dynamic quality; it emphasizes that social identity is on the one hand subconscious and embodied, and on the other shaped by experiences and the social environment.

The term gender has been used in the social sciences to distinguish between socially-constructed gender identity, which is related to a sense of belonging to a biologically-determined sex group, from the biologically-determined characteristics of sex groups themselves. This distinction came about at least since Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, where she wrote: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1949: 301).

Biological sex and gender identity do not always coincide, as is the case in transgender persons and people with gender dysphoria, or those who identify with both or neither of the sexes. New research in neuroscience (Kranz et al. 2014) indicates that what the authors call gender identity has correlates in the neural structure of the brain. Biological sex and gender identity both contribute to observed differences in white matter microstructure in different groups of people (male, female, male-to-female transsexual, female-to-male transsexual). The authors of this study say that their findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the neural correlates related to gender identity develop both in the womb and in early postnatal life due to hormonal influences. In other words, it is likely that there is a biological basis that determines which, if any, gender group a person identifies with.
Gender identity is also shaped continuously by experience and the cultural environment in which the gender role related to a particular gender identity is constructed. It is roughly this divergence between the biologically and culturally determined aspects of gender identity that has led reproductive biologist Milton Diamond (2000, 2002) to distinguish between sexual identity and gender identity. This distinction is useful when considering Baka gender identities and their implications.

Diamond’s (2002) typology of terms runs as follows:

1. **Sexual identity** is the inner conviction that leads an individual to identify him- or herself as male or female. It usually, but not always, corresponds with the individual’s anatomical sex.

2. **Gender identity** is individual recognition of the perceived social gender attributed to a person, with all the cultural expectations which that entails.

3. **Gender and gender role** refer to social expectations of how boys and girls or men and women should behave and be treated. They are also the public manifestations of gender identity.

According to Diamond (2000), every human being (whether they be cisgendered, transgendered, transsexual or intersex) has to integrate society’s gender constructs and gender roles with their own inner feelings of self. Brain templates are more crucial to the sense of self than both anatomy and familial rearing. In other words, the brain templates of sexual identity are forged in the womb by genetic-endocrine factors which are more significant than the later factors and influences activated by rearing after birth. A person comes to identify with the gender group with which they feel most similar:
Fortunately, for most of us, these factors of brain template and the sex-typical biases and inclinations it imparts, are usually in concert with anatomy and cultural construction of gender. When they are not, the mind will usually rule even when in conflict with societal expectations (Diamond 2000: 53).

Sexual identity is a powerful force, which becomes set during the prenatal period and early infancy, and is immutable later in life. Thus, in the cases of various intersex and transsexual people, they have rebelled against any anatomical surgery or gender identity imposed on them (usually at birth) that did not fit with their sexual identity. Sexual identity may well be immutable, but there is also a related aspect of identity that is mutable and responsive to culture, namely gender identity. Studies on the identities of transsexual people show that it causes people immense psychological discomfort when there is a mismatch between sexual identity and gender identity.

5.6. Changing Gender Relations in Asoumondélé

The BaYaka ethnography shows how gendered mimicry can drive both lexicon and normativity; from men that mimic animals or farmers' languages, to women who use mimicry to humble antagonists and enforce social norms. (Lewis 2014b: 134)

Jerome Lewis (2002a, 2008a, 2009, 2014b) has written extensively on the importance of mimesis in BaYaka cultures (including Baka and Aka peoples), and on how BaYaka people actively cultivate their skills as mimics. He has recently outlined some of the
differences between the communicative and mimetic styles of each gender in the BaYaka cultural repertoire (2009, 2014a). These are summed up in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Communication</th>
<th>Male Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Communalism in daily activities highly valued; solidarity of women’s coalitionary power used to influence the social order.</td>
<td>- Silence, whispers and keeping secrets valued; disguised modes of communication such as hand signals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Songlike speech; chatter; singing loudly in the forest during gathering expeditions in order to scare off attack from wild animals.</td>
<td>- Secret areas used to re-enact sounds and movements made by hunters and their prey during hunting apprenticeships; emulation of the cautionary approach adopted by hunting parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comical mimicry of poor human behaviour, for example hoarding or violence, thus the sharing of key values is emphasized. Social shaming is the preserve of elderly women only.</td>
<td>- Valuable goods are extracted from Bilo neighbours by speaking their languages, and playing up to Bilo people’s claims to “own” BaYaka people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The cultural value of women is their ability to bear life, the communalism and sharing of their daily activities, and using mimicry to mock those who do not follow social norms.

The cultural value of men is to take life in the hunt and thereby feed people, physical strength and toughness. Using mimicry to ensure safe access to dangerous goods such as meat, honey, forest spirits, and farmers’ goods.

### Table 5.1. Mimetic Style in BaYaka Gender Roles

As apparent in the above sketch, each gender group in BaYaka societies has well-defined gender roles that permeate daily life, form the basis of the sexual division of labour and communicative styles, and help to perpetuate egalitarian relations between the genders by stressing their separate but interdependent natures.

The issue for the Baka men of Asoumondélé is that their gender role has become increasingly devalued since the adoption of village life, and perhaps even more so since the arrival of the mine and road. As a Baka woman, self-described as *mbotàki* (middle-aged) put it to me:

*During the time when our husbands worked, money created problems. When a husband gets money from the Kaka, they deceive you and drink alcohol. They take the money. At that time they were so confused...or are they now?*

This woman is referring to the situation when *Mbùnge* from Sundance first came to do their prospecting and then to build their headquarters at Ndimayo and Mbarga, when Baka men were employed readily as guides, porters and then labourers. Since the mine
stopped employing Baka men, the men are uncertain about their place in the new world the mine has brought about. The days of forest living, when Baka masculinity was continually reaffirmed by men’s culturally important gender role as hunters and honey gatherers are firmly in the past.

Hunting is a difficult and dangerous activity that requires knowledge, skill, confidence and many years of mimetic physical training. In particular, the hunting of large game such as elephant, buffalo, crocodiles, gorillas and leopards is challenging and dangerous work. Although there are still a handful of Baka men in Asoumondélé who make a living primarily from hunting with rifles borrowed from Njem men, most meat is acquired by setting snares, a much less dangerous and therefore less impressive and distinguishing activity. In fact, most Njem men do exactly the same types of trapping. Due to population pressure and the bushmeat trade, game has become scarce – a matter which is of great concern to the Baka. It means that the Baka rely much more on both farming and the fish and wild vegetable foods collected by women.

Honey collection is still a very important source of male self-esteem for Baka men, and men who are good at this task are as alluring to women as are the most skilled hunters. This is because honey is a highly desired foodstuff and because the collection of it is dangerous and difficult. It requires great strength in order to climb the tallest trees, and it requires the physical and psychological toughness with which to withstand being stung by bees.

It is important for a Baka man to be brave and stoic about physical hardship. An adjective that is frequently used by Baka men to describe themselves, and by Baka women to describe the type of man they find attractive and desirable, is kpéké, which has the meaning of being both strong and hard. In this respect, the Baka of
Asoumondélé conform to the masculine gender role of BaYaka culture described by Lewis (2002a, 2008a, 2014b) in a fairly straightforward manner. In other respects, conforming to an ideal male gender role is more difficult for Baka men nowadays.

These difficulties are related to the general decline of the importance of hunting and the need that Baka men increasingly have to conform to the male gender roles of broader Cameroonian society in order to secure the respect of the non-Baka men with whom they interact on a daily basis. The decline of the importance of hunting is in part due to the switch from the forest to the village way of life that has come about as a result of the process of sedentarization, and it is in part due to the decimation of game animals mentioned previously.

The need that Baka men feel to conform to a male gender identity that is respected by others is bound up with their need for equality, their desire for modernity and integration into Cameroonian society, and with the very concrete problems of marginalization that they face, such as attempts by non-Baka men to exploit their labour without adequate remuneration. In cases of physical contests and fights between Baka men and non-Baka men, it is a matter of pride for Baka men to be regarded as at least as strong and tough as non-Baka men in spite of their generally shorter stature. This leads to a fair bit of macho posturing on the part of Baka men, and may be related to the phenomena of alcoholic binge drinking, brawling, and violence against women that I observed.

Farming in Southern Cameroon is a unisex activity, but the bulk of the activity is considered women’s work (tilling, sewing, harvesting). Men are primarily involved in clearing the farms of forest vegetation, which requires upper-body strength to chop
down trees and dense undergrowth. The doubled-over labour that is required for sowing, tilling and harvesting (and also for dam fishing) is women’s work.

Jane Guyer (1984) described this same distinction in the precolonial tradition of Beti, Bulu and Fang ethnicities of farmers in the region. The Njem are in a related language grouping called Makaa-Njem (Guthrie 1953). Men were associated with the forest, and male activities were thought of in terms of warfare, hunting and tree-felling, while women were associated with the earth itself and open clearings. Female activities were thought of as bending over to work the fields with a short-handled hoe, bending over the fire to cook, and bending over streams to create dams and catch fish. These activities were also associated with the bending and submissive role ascribed to women in Beti-Bulu-Fang patrilineal segmentary clans in which male domination and polygyny held sway. In such societies, women are subordinate to men and have few rights. The rights that they do have, such as the right to work on a piece of land, are only accorded to them through association with a man, such as a husband, father or brother.

Male domination and the ideology of patrilineal authority is prevalent among the Njem living in the vicinity of Asoumondélé today, where men rely heavily on their wives to work the fields. The wealthiest men acquire more wives in order to maximise the accumulation of farm produce. All proceeds from the sale of farm produce belong to the man who is head of the household. I have witnessed Njem women handing over money they have earned to their husbands without question or protest. Polygyny also allows a man to father more children, which means even more labour is available. As the chef de canton of Asoumondélé I told me, he has five wives because he likes to eat, and his wives feed him by working on his farms and cooking for him.
Baka women are not as subservient as Njem women. They are entitled to both inherit and bequeath property, and they generally keep any money they earn, although it is often spent on items for the household or clothing for children. They generally determine for themselves who they marry, and are entitled to leave a man (although the inflation of bridewealth seems to have caused some problems for women seeking a divorce as the husband can demand the return of his bridewealth payments). One of the Baka communities at Ntam was recently represented, or led, by a charismatic woman for a few years until her eldest son claimed the role of nkukuma (headman or chief). The role of women as arbiters of morality and social norms is still very much in evidence among the Baka of Asoumondélé. Middle-aged to elder women (mbotàki and kobo na wose) exert considerable social influence through gossip, jokes, teasing and mockery.

The problem for the Baka is that their more egalitarian gender relations clash with the patriarchal political style of the Njem. This can cause the Njem to express contempt for Baka men. Another issue that causes Baka men to be disrespected is that they sometimes engage in the farming activities that are performed by women in Njem society. As Njem women have a subordinate status in relation to men, and their farming activities are associated with bending and submissiveness, this gives Njem men further reason to express disdain for Baka men. The fact that Baka men usually labour on Njem farms when they are doing this type of activity exacerbates the problem.

The conflicted relationships that Baka and non-Baka men hold in the present are related to patterns that existed during the time of the Baka’s mobile forest existence. In particular, the mimetic playing up to farmer expectations to “own” BaYaka was a strategy used to obtain farm produce from farmers by BaYaka men (Köhler and Lewis
2002), a strategy common among hunter-gatherers according to Bird-David’s theory of encompassment (1988).

The sedentary village life brings Baka men into a state of continual proximity with non-Baka men, to the extent that the constant expectations from non-Baka men of servitude towards them from Baka men is extremely vexing to the Baka men. The humorous mimicry aping of the servile role expected of them is no longer a sustainable or amusing strategy in this context. However, avoiding interactions such as labouring on the farms of Kaka men would mean that yet another task crucial to the Baka male gender role, namely obtaining goods from outsiders, would become severely restricted. Occasional food shortages in the village, for example when Baka crops fail due to the wet season not arriving at the time expected, means that such avoidance is something that Baka men can ill afford.

The current situation is such that the Baka hold a feminized identity with respect to the Njem, as was the case between Lese farmers and Efe foragers in the Ituri forest, Democratic Republic of Congo, described by Richard Roy Grinker (1993). Baka men find this irksome, tedious and sometimes emotionally cutting. I have witnessed Baka men who come back to the Baka village irate after a demeaning encounter or an argument with a Kaka. In their anger, they may take to drinking heavily, and/or lashing out at others, in particular their wives and their dogs.

In addition to the uncertainty created by the changing social milieu, Baka men are facing a crisis of both their ethnic and their gender identities. Baka men feel as if they are being rejected from the types of roles other men play in the modern world, and young Baka men in particular speak of a desire to be, above all things, modern.
However, the fact that the mine no longer employs Baka men compounds the sense of rejection and exclusion that they feel.

As a result it can be stated – using Milton Diamond’s terms (2000, 2002) – that the gender role for Baka men is in a state of transition, teetering between the ingrained habitus of egalitarian social values and the patriarchal norms that are more prevalent in the broader context of Central Africa. For example, Baka men now aspire to adopt the polygynous marriage practices of the Njem. The changing male gender role for the Baka of Asoumondélé is likely causing many Baka men to feel torn between the gender identity that is an established part of their habitus, due to enduring patterns of egalitarian gender relations and child-rearing in Baka society, and the macho and patriarchal gender identity that men are generally expected to conform to in Cameroonian and Congolese society.

In addition, while gender identity can change in line with experience and social expectations, it is a particularly enduring primary form of identity (Jenkins 2008). Gender identity is formed mostly in the early stages of child development as the product of interaction between the pre-existing sexual identity of the foetus and the social experiences the infant has with close associates such as family members, becoming relatively fixed by late adolescence (Diamond 1976, 2000, 2002). In the case of Baka children, early childhood associates are mostly parents, grandparents, siblings and sometimes other Baka care-givers such as aunts. Baka and Njem children do not play together, even though they now attend the school in Asoumondélé II together.

Baka and Njem men thus have distinct gender roles, however Baka men are under pressure to conform to the same gender role of non-Baka men, causing individual Baka
men to feel insecure about their gender identity. It is likely that this is what leads to exaggerated machismo displays on the part of Baka men on occasion. The feminized nature of the ethnic identity ascribed to them by non-Baka people is problematic in relation to the biologically-determined male sexual identity of the Baka men of Asoumondélé. Milton Diamond’s work on the experiences of transgender people, although different in context, indicates how psychologically traumatic it can be for humans when there is a mismatch between sexual and gender identity. Of course, Baka men are still recognized nominally as men by all other members of society, and in that respect their unease or anxiety about their perceived emasculation cannot be as severe as people experiencing gender dysphoria but I suggest that it is a comparable and profoundly distressing experience.

It is not surprising then that Baka men in particular seem to be “confused”, as the Baka woman put it, and that many have turned to heavy drinking as a result. This is likely a common experience for many men of indigenous populations who experience dramatic social transformation, for example as described of the experiences of Aboriginal Australians in David McKnight’s ethnography, *From Hunting to Drinking* (2002). Baka men have been reported to have sold their identity cards for two sachets of liquor (worth 200 CFA - 400 CFA, or less than 50 pence) to bartenders who subsequently sold them on to corrupt politicians in order to obtain fraudulent votes during the September 2013 legislative and municipal elections in Cameroon (Chimtom 2013). It is in the context of the Baka men’s experience of emasculated identity that the subsequent chapters of this thesis, with their themes of alcohol addiction, mimetic emulation of big man behaviours and violence against women, should be understood.
5.7. Changing Gender Relations in BaYaka Mythology

The nature of changing gender relations away from that of an equal balance of power can be interpreted from a comparison of the BaYaka creation myths, as told among the Mbendjele during Jerome Lewis’s PhD fieldwork period of 1996-2001 in the northern Republic of the Congo, and a single version told to me by a Baka man on 5 February 2012. The latter was told during a likànò storytelling session, which involved Baka guests sitting around the hearth of my house in Asoumondélé, a convivial habit which I encouraged by providing some refreshments. The Mbendjele version, which appears in Lewis’s PhD thesis (2002a: 175-177), is a synthesis of numerous repeated tellings and includes an alternative female version. According to Lewis (2002a: 174), the creation myth is rarely told in its entirety and is treated as secret knowledge by the Mbendjele.

The Mbendjele version represents the equality of relations between the genders that prevailed at the time of Lewis’s initial fieldwork, and which is still prevalent among the Mbendjele today (Lewis 2014b). Lewis reports that the myth usually begins with Komba (God) creating the forest and everything in it, then placing men and women in separate parts of the forest.

The men lived by hunting and copulating with large calabash-like fruits called mapombe in order to reproduce. The women lived by fishing and collecting vegetable foods, and they had the forest spirit called Ejengi to dance with and make babies with. According to Lewis: “The different interpretations of this myth are characteristic of the way the men’s and women’s groups vie for respect and undermine each other’s claims to be more important” (2002a). It is this dynamic that maintains the balance of
power over time, and it is the same dynamic and imagery which informs the major 
spirit play rituals associated with each gender group (Ejengi for men, Ngoku for 
women; the correlate spirit play rituals among the Baka are Ejengi for men and Yeli 
for women).

What follows is the Mbendjele version as described by Lewis (2002a: 175-176):

**Mbendjele Creation Myths as recounted by Jerome Lewis**

*The men's version of the creation myth*

The kombeti (spokesperson, elder) of the men's group was called Toli [Ndjeka in some areas]. Normally the men hunted together but one day Toli decided to go hunting alone. He walked far in the forest. After much walking he found himself walking up a forest stream when suddenly he saw a broken piece of mea (wild yam) floating on the water.

*Aaa, people must be up there!* Toli said to himself. [Mea yams are slender and easily broken during extraction from the ground. Women wash mea yams in a stream before cooking them.] He decided to walk upstream and retrace the yam's journey.

He walked up many streams, up, up and up. Finally, as he approached the headwaters of a stream, he heard voices. Stealthily he approached the women who were washing mea yams. He observed this new type of people for several hours. He saw their camp, he even watched them dancing Ejengi, and saw the babies falling out of Ejengi’s raffia. [This section is often elaborated to varying degrees... ]
He was amazed and rushed back to the men's camp. He recounted all he had seen. They did not believe him and insisted he take them to see for themselves. The next morning the men prepared themselves. Each took a leaf parcel of honey.

As they approached the women, they heard singing. Employing the encirclement technique used when group hunting herds of wild pigs, they surrounded the women [bofienga bangwia — to encircle the pigs], then send one hunter in to make the first attack thus scattering the remaining pigs towards the other hunters]. Toli led the attack and took hold of the kombeti of the women. He beat her with honeycomb on the shoulders. Each man grabbed a woman and beat her with honeycomb. At first the women fought but when they tasted the honey they stopped.

'Tasty, ooo so tasty! Who are these people with such sweet things? Such sweetness, wonderful sweetness. I will follow them to get such sweetness!" exclaimed the women and started making friends with the men. Each man found a woman and they went back to the women's camp. The men threw away their mapombe fruit.

Later the women told the men to stay in camp while they went off to do something. The women started dancing Ejengi. The men found them and demanded to have Ejengi for themselves. The women were forced to give the men Ejengi. By taking Ejengi men obliged women to make love to them in order to have children.
The women's version of the creation myth

The women's version of this myth begins in the same way as that of the men's with men and women living in different parts of the forest and ignorant of each other. The women's version parallels the men's in basic narrative. However, in the women's version Toli is not a man but a woman, and the kombetí (elder, spokesperson) of the women's group...

Toli was the person who led men to the women. Toli had a dream in which Komba (God) told her about the men. When all the women were out fishing, Toli left them to walk alone in the forest. She went to find the men. There is a song the women sing at this stage of narration ‘a dua kewa batopai, Toli a to ko, Toli a to ko’ (She went out to find men, there's Toli there she is). Eventually, after much walking, she came across their tracks. The men were hunting. She followed them.

The men were copulating with mapombe (the large, hard forest fruit). That evening she entered their camp. Upon setting their eyes on her, the men all got erect penises. [Another song celebrates this — something like 'When Toli came they all stood up'.] She had sex with them and told them about all her friends back at her camp. The next morning they left early and Toli led them back to the women's camp. Each man took a parcel of honey with him

Upon arrival the women were difficult to convince that the men were nice until they had tasted the honey. Each woman took a man for herself. The men threw away their mapombe fruit. Then the women told the men to stay at camp while they went to dig mea roots.
One of the men followed the women into the forest. To his surprise he saw the women dancing Ejengi and babies fell out of the leaves. He was impressed. He ran back to camp and told the men. They said to themselves — 'that's something for us men'. They went to the women and demanded that they be given Ejengi. The women gave it to them.

According to Lewis (2002a: 177) Mbendjele women interpret their gift of Ejengi to the men as demonstrating their power because if they were willing to give away Ejengi, they must have kept even more powerful secrets. Men emphasize that they took Ejengi by force. They mimic the use of such force against women in the Ejengi spirit plays, particularly during the initiation of neophytes whose role it is to intimidate women and children during the course of their initiation (Lewis 2002a: 182). However, physical domination over women is never allowed outside of the spirit play context because it is constrained by women’s counter-culture, which does not tolerate male dominance (Lewis 2002a: 196).

The Baka likànò version of this BaYaka creation myth has many structural and thematic similarities with the Mbendjele versions, but also some important differences. It was only told to me on this one occasion, and is clearly a male-oriented version told by a young man, namely Zoa Samuel. Perhaps Baka women do have their own version which would have emerged had I stayed in the field for many years. It is difficult to say whether a women’s version exists, however the impression I formed is that Baka women tell likànò and control spirit play rituals much less frequently than the men do. What follows is Zoa Samuel’s version of the Baka myth:
Once upon a time, Wayito was in his village. It was the era of the girls we call bûku. [Laughter from everyone]. The women are there Wayito! They are there! They are there! Wayito says, “Hèèè ke! Wuo! I’m going over to the other side of the forest. Seeing as you stay in the village every day. I’m going to hunt over there.”

Wayito walks, and he walks, and walks. Wayito follows a little river downstream. He hears something: a noise. He says, “Ah! Who's there?” He says: “Eh! Are those the voices of women?” Wayito walks and walks. He follows the voices, he follows them. Eventually he comes to them.

The women are preparing to leave the river. Wayito says, “Are those the voices of women I hear?” He runs after them. He catches up to them. A young woman looks at him. She says, “Iéééé Wayito! Ééééé...” [Laughter from everyone, interjection from one of the audience: And how did she know him?] She recognizes him, and she says, “Ièèè Wayito is here.” Wayito jumps, and he says, “These people know me already!” Wayito thinks hard. Pi-iii. He says, “Weè! These women know me but I don’t know them”. Wayito wracks his brains, ti iii! He says, “Ah! You women, where do you come from?”

“Ièèè Wayito, you are here. First go and hunt a pamè (red river hog) for us. We're leaving now. ”
Wayito goes off. He goes along down the river. The women hear him leave. They get out and they wash the fish they have caught. Next the women take the path to their home. They go down this path.

And then Wayito returns. He sees the sprinkling of water the women have left on the path from the water on their feet. He says, “Hey! The women are gone.” Wayito searches and searches. He comes to the end of the tracks left by their feet. Wayito leaves for home.

Eventually, he arrives back at home with his brothers. Wayito says: “Wèèe!” Bedtime comes. The others say: “Wayito found something, he found something, he found something.”

Wayito says: “The day dawns.” The day dawns. Wayito departs. He calculates the time... the time at which they come. Wayito waits for a long time. He waits, he waits, he hears them now. They appear. He says, “I will finish this thing with you”. Wayito goes forward. He comes forward, like this [story teller imitates stalking prey action].

And one of the women sees him, “lêêê Wayito! Êêêêê!”

“How do these women notice me from so far away? I myself don’t know them.” [Interjection from audience: They recognize him from afar.]

Wayito sees a red river hog, and then another. “My genitals have become erect”, he notices. When Wayito approaches them, the women's hearts are not with him. The women leave the water. “Wayito is coming! Yiiiiii!” The women run off in the direction they came from.
Wayito goes back to the others feeling very downcast. As he goes to sleep, he says to himself, “Wèeee. Why is it that these women avoid me like this?” Wayito wakes the next morning. Wayito goes back to try again. Wayito tries again and gets the same treatment as before. Wayito tries again and gets the same treatment as before. Wayito leaves that place.

He goes to see Sese (the sunbird). He arrives there, bom! He arrives at the sunbird’s place and the sunbird already knows. Sunbird says, “Wayito has seen another place over there.” Wayito arrives. Sunbird says, “I know you. I know how you have been among those people over there. I, the Sunbird, will instruct you. Listen without interrupting. Sit down.”

Figure 5.5. The Splendid Sunbird

Wayito sits. Wayito reflects, pi iii... Sunbird gives him a rope. Next, the sunbird brings out some magic gum. Sunbird says to Wayito: “Do you see this?” Sunbird says to Wayito, “They are deceiving you with red river hogs, is that right?”

Wayito says, “Yes, it is so”.

Then he says to him, “If they still deceive you with red river hogs... Go and hide yourself at the entrance to their place. You will find a huge termite mound. When you get there, you will smear on the magic gum. And you will see that a path opens up”.

Wayito returns home. [Laughter from everyone]. Wayito arrives back with the other men. This time they listen to what he has to say. He speaks in a high-pitched voice. Wayito retells his story. His brothers say: “Eèèè! What is this? How can it be? What is it that Wayito has been trying to tell us? Why won’t he tell us anymore? And now he is talking much louder. We don’t know when he will do these things he talks about.”

He is just biding his time before he approaches them. Wayito reflects, ti iii. The time has arrived. Wayito takes up his spear. He walks and he walks and walks. He finally hears the women arrive. He says to himself, “He! They are here, not so? It is finished for you.” They are there. “Hehehehe!” They come and they wash the fish. The women say, “Go and look for red river hog over there”. He approaches, sà sà sà. He hears the women get up and leave. Wayito follows. The women go up. This is what the women always do. They leave a trail of footprints. [Laughter from audience].
Wayito arrives and starts laughing. Wayito says: “I know that the portal opens like this – pep! Do you see?” Wayito enters. He says, “Now close”. Kpum! Wayito goes forward.

[Laughter] Nyà, nyà, nyà. Wayito approaches. [Laughter] Wayito says, “What is this big village?” He hears something. He listens to the ambient noise and says: “Wúóóó!” The village has changed. He hears something from up above. It is a frightening place. Wayito says, “Oh it is terrifying here!”

It is the elder who is called Éé (Ejengi). Wayito stays low until the evening, and then he leaves. Wa, wa, wa. Wayito sees an entrance to a path leading up to the house of an old woman. [Laughter] Wayito creeps up quietly to the front of the old woman’s house. He arrives close to the old woman. When the old woman sees him she says, “Yieee! It’s Wayito éééé”. He says to the old woman, “I have followed the people who were fishing nearby. I was with them several times. Then God told me to come here. I have come to discover their doors.” The old woman says, “Come, come”. The old woman says to him, “What you hear over there is something terrible. A terrible thing that kills people. She takes Wayito and keeps him in her room.

Yi e e! A dance begins in the evening. The women play the drums hard. Then Ejengi says, “The smell of the village has changed. The smell of the village has changed.” They say to him, “Oh! How could the smell of the village have changed?” He says, “Oh no no no, the smell of this village has changed”. Wayito says, “Wúóóó! What is this thing that is so strong?” He reflects ti iiiiiii. [Laughter].
The old woman says to the women outside, “Do you know someone called Wayito?” They say, “We know him”. “He is in my house”. [Interjection from audience: èèè Komba aaaaa!] Wayito is ready. He says to them, “We will dance until daybreak”. Then Wayito says, “They are all my women”. He is with these women. He is with these women. He is with these women. When morning arrives, Wayito hears that Ejengi had been there.

Wayito runs away. [Laughter]. Wayito crosses a great river. Wayito arrives at the portal. Kpem! He takes the magic gum and puts it on the portal. He says, “Here’s the portal”. Kpop, the portal opens. The portal opens. The portal must close. Kpem! The portal closes. Wayito leaves that place.

Wayito returns to the others. Like that: kpim, kpim, kpim. Wayito arrives at his brothers, he arrives. He does not sit. He tells them, “We must break all the bâku, break them all.” [Laughter]. “We must go and break all of these things everywhere in the forest.”[Laughter]. “And including those who have two or three.”[Laughter].

Wayito arrives at his home and he says, “How could you do for me?”[Laughter]. Wayito breaks all of his. [Laughter]. He breaks them all. One of the others says, “As I saw nothing, I have not yet broken mine”. [Laughter]. “You, you are ignorant!” Wayito's voice gets shrill. He says to his younger brothers, “The women are numerous.”

Wayito calls the sunbird and all his brothers together. He says, “Elders, I have seen many women”. Sunbird says: “this is true”. “Tomorrow the young men must come together.” They say, “Ah, Ah, tomorrow.” “When we arrive, the
women will be there fishing again.” [Laughter]. Wayito was with the women, he was with them. He brings several people behind him. [Laughter].

It sounds like this: Kpu u u u ... They go. The young people listen. Time passes. The people return for their fishing. Wayito says, “Now do you understand what it is you were denying?” So they embrace Wayito. They embrace him. They embrace him. Wayito says, “I am the owner of the path”. They hear this and say: “Héè ke”.

The evening falls. Wayito arrives at the portal. He tells them, “Form a line”. This is how: tôôôô. He takes out the magic gum. And also a magic gum for Ejengi. At the portal Wayito says, “Open up,” and the portal opens. The people say: “leeeee! What a wonderful thing for us!” Everybody goes through. Wayito is at the back. [Laughter from everyone]. Tôôô. “I want to see that the portal closes”. The portal closes.

They arrive suddenly. They arrive at the great river. They hear it with their own ears. Wayito says to them, “Do you hear? It is dangerous out there. Do you understand?” They set out. They go to the home of the old woman. Wayito says, “Wait for me here”. Wayito goes inside. The old woman says, “There is a band of people out there. There are many young girls out at the back.” “Is that true?” She answers, “It's true”.

The music starts getting louder. The music gets louder and louder and louder. Héééé ke! Ejengi dances. It’s terrifying. He says, “The smell of the village has changed”. This is how Ejengi comes out. The young men wait. [Laughter]. The old woman has hidden them away. “What will we do?” “Wait until the sun rises.”
Ejengi returns to his home. Now the young men take two or three each and there are those who have four. Wayito had his share in advance. [Interjection from the audience: He was the one who had five!] The people help themselves. One person sends for his children. [Interjection from the audience: What is the shame in that?] “Leave some for those who are absent.” [Interjection from the audience: Look at Wayito’s cross face!] His children come to him, seeking a share of the women. So there they are.

The rooster crows. Wayito says, “Let’s go”. Then many of the women walk up with things. Many things, many things, many things. So they leave in the morning. Wayito walks at the back with another elder.

Ièèè! Ejengi arrives, he has heard how silent the village has been left. He can hear how quiet the village is. The other men that stayed behind have arrived at the village. They ask, “Where are the others?” He says, “Look they have already begun to share”. [Laughter from everyone]. That is when Ejengi arrives. When Wayito turns to look, he says, “Are we finished?” [Laughter from everyone].

They all run off. Then Ejengi gets up to full speed. Wayito says, “Ièèè, we're finished with death”. Wayito starts using the magic gum. Wayito tames Ejengi with the magic gum. [Interjection from audience: He gets tired there].

Then they come to the great portal. Another person is ready with the magic gum. This is how it is done, with the magic gum. “Open portal!” The portal opens. The people pour out. They set off. Everybody is out.
Wayito and Ejenji are at the back. Ejenji tries to rouse up the termite mound. Wayito sprinkles him with magic gum. Ejengi is already too weak. Kpu u u u ... they leave.

Then when Ejengi arrives at the men's village, he looks around him. “Iiiiiiiiiii!” [Laughter]. He is going to break everything in an eyeblink. [Laughter]. They all start running fast. They say to him, “There are your two wives.”

That's how they set up a home for Ejengi. So that's it. [Laughter]. The women arrange his house for him. He goes among the men. He bonds with the men. He is there for them. That is the end.

Figure 5.6. Baka man with Ejengi
There are a number of similarities and differences between the Mbendjele and Baka versions of this creation myth. The Mbendjele have both a men’s and a women’s version, and it is unclear whether the Baka also have a women’s version or not. In both versions, the culture hero Toli / Wayito goes hunting far away in the forest on his own, and he follows a stream along its course before he comes across the women. In the Mbendjele men’s version, the women are washing wild yams when the culture hero Toli finds them. In the Baka version, the women are fishing and washing the fish when the culture hero Wayito finds them.

In the Mbendjele version, the men and women live in different parts of the forest, in camps, and are completely ignorant of each other’s existence. In the Baka version, the men and women live in different parts of the forest, but reference is also made to separate villages, reflecting the greater focus that Baka people have on the village life, and the village as a unit of social organization. There is also the suggestion that the men and the women were not completely ignorant of each other’s existence at the time of Wayito’s encounter with the women in the Baka version. Rather, the women already knew Wayito’s name, and although he was unfamiliar with them, he already recognized the sound of women’s voices. In both the Baka version and the Mbendjele men’s version, the other men are initially sceptical about Wayito / Toli’s tales of having encountered women.

In the Mbendjele version, women produce babies by dancing with Ejengi, and men produce babies by copulating with *mapombe* fruit. In the Baka version, there is no reference to reproduction, only to marriage and to having sex, first with *buku* fruit and then with multiple female partners. Although the details are slightly different, in both versions the men either throw away or break the fruit when they discover the possibility of sex with women. In the Mbendjele version, when men and women
encounter each other it ultimately results in monogamous unions, although in the female version Toli does initially have all the men to herself. In the Baka version, “the women are numerous”, numerous enough that they can be “shared” out with two, three or even four women to one man. Wayito has sex with all the young women when he meets them in the village.

Finally, in the Mbendjele men’s and women’s versions, the men use honey to persuade and seduce the women, whereas in the Baka version there is no mention of honey. Instead Wayito gets help from the sunbird, who is Komba’s omnipotent emissary with powers of divination. Later, he and the other men also get help from an old woman who lives with the younger women. It is not explained why the women initially refuse Wayito but then accept him when he eventually creeps his way into their village. There is no mention of whether he ever delivers the red river hog that they asked for at the beginning of the likànò. Nor is it clear why the old woman decides to help the men, and to shelter them from Ejengi.

Ultimately, although there are many similarities between the Mbendjele and Baka versions of this myth, and it is clear that the two versions have homologous roots, they are also fundamentally different in the types of gender relations that each describes. For the Mbendjele, the story is an origins myth that explains how the two genders came together to reproduce and to create society in the process. Their union enables them to make babies together and as a result the men can throw away their mapombe fruit, while the women get to enjoy the delicious honey the men can provide. There is a clear sense that the union of women and men is mutually beneficial to both genders. In the Baka version, although it is clear that the story has the significance of an origins myth with its themes of Baka men and women coming together and the origins of the Baka men’s special relationship with Ejengi, the reproductive union of men and
women found in the Mbendjele version is absent. Neither is the complementary nature of the gathering and hunting roles of women and men much in evidence.

Instead, the Baka version has an aspirational quality. It comes across as a bawdy male fantasy in which there is a superabundance of nubile women for virile Baka men to marry polygynously. It is not at all clear what the women get out of the arrangement nor why they suddenly acquiesce to Wayito and his companions’ vociferous appetites after their initial avoidance of him. The manner in which the men share out the women among themselves is rather as if the women had become the property of the men. They give two women to Ejengi to keep as his wives in order to appease him.

Finally, in the Mbendjele versions, men and women decide to live together and go to the women’s camp. In the Baka version, the men take the women back to their village after wresting them away from Ejengi and then taking Ejengi himself captive. These elements of the Baka version of the origin myth are indicative of fundamental differences in the marriage practices of Baka people and those of the Mbendjele people that Jerome Lewis has worked with, including the prevalence of bridewealth versus bride-service and differing postmarital residence practices.

In Chapter 6, changes in kinship patterns are discussed, as well as the way that Baka people have come to emulate the big man patrilineal ideology of the Njem. While many Baka men aspire to having more than one wife as a result, the overwhelming majority of marriages are monogamous, with only one instance of polygyny in both the Baka quarter of Asoumondelé (a community of 62 adult men and 67 adult women) and the hamlet of Quartier Didjua (a community of six adult men and seven adult women) combined. In other words, the number of men married polygynously in the sample is one in 68 or 1.48%.
SECTION 3

STRUCTURAL CHANGES
CHAPTER SIX

Kinship and Marriage

6.1. Emerging Competition between Households and Clans

Mendom Lisette, a middle-aged woman (mbotâki), told me\textsuperscript{62} that the life of her childhood and the life of today are not the same, and that the life of today is one in which people have less concern for others who are not one’s own family. Nowadays, people are more individualistic, and less concerned about other people. Households and clans are also more competitive. The kin of one clan are bound tightly together and have meetings together to make decisions on how to live. She explained that you have to make sure you look out for the people closest to you, your family or the people of your own clan, who are considered to be your closest relatives. But in the past, people of different clans would meet together in the forest and decide things together. The fixed and enduring interpersonal bonds, which are drawn according to formal clan and household affiliation, were not as rigid or as tightly-knit in her childhood days.

\textit{The life of before and the life of today are not the same. Today, a person does as they wish without regard for others. You live with a person, and they live with}

\textsuperscript{62} Interview, March 2012.
you. You look after your own visitors very well. You know, I keep my family [famille\textsuperscript{63}] together very well.

Have you understood? That’s the life of today. You look after your family like that. You gather them around yourself. That’s how we live over here. This is not the life of old. At the time when we walked in the forest, there was fishing, shooting animals from above, and everything of the forest. In the forest, we would convene our families together.

...

We were there, we met together as families. We were like that, that older generation of people was like that. You keep your own close to you in the type of family that the road has brought to us here. We were like that, and then this new era arrived, from the time of the death of Diwono [Mendom’s childhood friend]. I no longer consult with other families. I rather say that this is my family here. A the clan of Makombo. I meet with all members of the Makombo clan. We discuss many things.

Mendom is expressing a sense that separate households have become increasingly atomized and competitive since sedentarization, as have separate clans. While ethnic

\textsuperscript{63} Mendom uses the French word for family, famille here. The Baka of Asoumondélé often incorporate words from French and Njem into their speech. The Baka term for family (a group of relatives who live together) is bi, or bo na nda (people of the house). I use the term household to incorporate this concept and compare it with the Njem unit of organization, the house. The household is also equivalent to Moïse’s term segment (2014). The term famille is used in the same way as the French use it, or the English translation family, referring to either immediate family who occupy the same household or family/relatives who may live in another household. In her speech, Mendom equates famille with her own clan of birth rather than the clan of her deceased husband and children and therefore the household she lives in. Her clan, YeMakombo, is a prominent clan in the village and the one that Mengbwa, the Baka chief, also belongs to. Mendom and Mengbwa called each other brother and sister as they share the same clan, even though they have no known consanguine relationship.
solidarity is still important to the Baka of Asoumondélé, each household is now a separate economic unit and each household also makes decisions about the future independently. Clan allegiance is becoming more important than in the past.

I will argue in this chapter that since the adoption of the relatively sedentary village life, the Baka have increasingly begun to emulate the kinship patterns and political organization of their Njem neighbours, who fit into a broader tradition among equatorial African farmers that involves the rise and fall of big men through the expansion of a household, and an ideology that places importance on patrilineal clans with genealogies that can be traced back to a common ancestor.

The description of how things were in Mendom’s childhood indicates that there was more flexibility in movement and choice of residence partners prior to sedentarization – the classic fission and fusion noticed in mobile hunter-gatherer bands, or camping groups (Leacock and Lee 1982). Different families belonging to different clans could come together and split apart again. As Woodburn remarked of the immediate-return society as an ideal type “[C]lans, lineages and other similar kinship groupings are either absent or else exist only in nominal shadowy form, apparently borrowed from outsiders and used for little more than to establish a measure of respectability in dealings with outsiders” (2005: 24). According to Mendom’s account, people were less rigidly divided into clans: a) when life involved more mobility (“at the time when we walked in the forest”), and b) before the road was built, (“the type of family that the road has brought to us here”).
6.2. Kinship Traditions

Asoumondélé is located in the Sanaga-Ntem area, which has a long tradition of big man politics among the horticultural Kaka. The ethnohistorian Jan Vansina (1990) notes that in the area of Sanaga-Ntem the patrilineal segmentary ideology was invented in the 13th or 14th century CE due to an increase in population size at that time, and the need to defend territory. Subsequent to this, inhabitants of the Sanaga-Ntem area developed “a set of imbricated, hierarchical lineage units, from the household level to a large territorial level”, and “the ideology of segmentary patrilinearity reached a fuller expression among them than among any of the other groups around them” (1990: 134). They constructed genealogies of up to 30 generations and kept the skulls of supposed patriclan founders to venerate.

The Sanaga-Ntem area was replete with the House64, village and district form of political organization that characterized the tradition of equatorial Africa more generally. The territorial units involved in this are the House (established by a big man who acquires dependants such as wives, children and clients), the village (made up of one or more Houses), and the district (composed of an alliance of Houses, roughly coterminous with clan). Vansina says the following about clans: “Clan brothers were welcome in the Houses of the same clan in a different village, but in most cases clanship was limited to this general sense of hospitality and alliance only. Clans were

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64 Vansina capitalizes House to distinguish it as a social and political unit, distinct from house.
seen as unalterable and permanent, given by nature, because all of a clan’s members were thought to be the progeny of a single person” (1990: 82).

John Cinnamon (2005), while remaining agnostic as to whether segmentary patrilineages organize society in the structural-functionalist sense, argues that in northern Gabon and southern Cameroon Sanaga-Ntem area, genealogies and clan migration stories are the central means by which elders remember the past; “the extraordinary adaptability of the genealogical idiom has made it highly useful to actors as they cooperate and compete in ever-shifting economic, social, political and spatial contexts” (2005: 184).

Cinnamon presents oral narratives of clan traditions that show how big men could rise to a state of chieftanship by acquiring wealth, controlling trade and the creative application of genealogical knowledge to consolidate useful social connections and alliances in the form of clans and subclans. Cinnamon explains the idiom as follows: “Common district/clan membership supported by the belief in descent from a common ancestor facilitated mutual hospitality, defense and security, and the circulation of goods, knowledge and people” (2005: 187). Big men have created new groups and identities over the course of history, and oral narratives that incorporate the genealogical idiom are a window into these social transformations.

Robert E. Moïse (2014) has argued that, in addition to the equatorial tradition that Vansina (1990) has identified for Bantu peoples of equatorial Africa, there has been a distinctive set of principles, practices, and institutions in the political domain of Pygmy peoples in equatorial Africa, which Moïse (2014) refers to as an autochthonous tradition (see Chapter 1). Moïse identifies what he calls a segment as the smallest social unit for Pygmies. The segment is the Pygmy correlate with the Bantu House but
does not attract dependents in the same way. Its core adult members refer to each other as siblings, and a number of segments make up a residential group or camp.

The segment acts as a unit of residence (its members normally reside together), of intimate exchange (its members share meals, domestic labour, etc.), and of politics (it acts as a unit of fission when residential groups split up) (2014: 89).

The autochthonous tradition differs from the Bantu equatorial tradition in that a) the competition between big men characteristic of the Bantu tradition is absent in the Pygmy one; and b) this prevents hierarchies from forming. Many of the Baka segments in Asoumondélé are coming to resemble the Houses of the Njem, controlled by a (usually) male leader who is known as elder of the household (kobo na nda).

The Baka language is primarily Ubangian, of the Gbanzili subgroup, but is a language isolate in the sense that the Baka people are now geographically removed from peoples speaking other languages in the same Gbanzili group. It is thought to have been borrowed during an earlier phase of relations between BaYaka (Baakaa) hunter-gatherers and Ubangian farmers, which has not as yet been historically or geographically pinpointed, but dates back as far as the 15th century CE according to Serge Bahuchet (1993b). Bahuchet (2012) additionally argues that a common lexicon of over 20% in the Baka and Aka languages originates from a Baakaa substrate that existed prior to the borrowing of Ubangian and Bantu languages respectively.

The Sanaga-Ntem area houses two Bantu language groups characterized as A70 (Beti-Bulu-Fang) and A80 (Maka-Njem) according to Malcolm Guthrie’s taxonomy (1953: 45-48). Njem is related closely to Nzime, Bakwélé and Konabem. There has been constant cultural and linguistic interchange and assimilation between all of these ethnic groups. The kinship terminology system of the Njem (and of the Bakwélé) is
broadly speaking of the Omaha-type classification (Siroto 1969: 97). The Omaha system is a patrilineal form of kinship classification, which distinguishes between relatives according to gender, including a differentiation between cross and parallel cousins. Parallel cousins are referred to by the same gendered terms as ego’s siblings. Cross cousins, on the other hand, are differentiated according to generation (Barnard and Good 1984).

The classificatory kinship practices of the Baka are related, but separate from, those of their Kaka neighbours. Barry Hewlett (2006) compares cultural traits of four Central African hunter-gatherer groups, namely Baka, Aka, Efe and Mbuti, noting that the Baka and the Efe are both traditionally archers and spear hunters rather than net hunters, and that this involves less intensive forest excursions. Both the Baka and the Efe ethnic groups have thus been noted to spend more time in the village than the forest, to depend more on cultivated foods exchanged with villagers for labour, and to share more socio-economic similarities with villagers than the Aka and Mbuti do. The similarities shared with villagers include a lineage system, greater hierarchy, and less egalitarianism. Hewlett also notes that the Aka and Mbuti rely less on women to provide starch for caloric intake, they spend less time in the village, and they have closer husband-wife relations with less violence against women than the Efe and the Baka do.

The kinship, marriage and descent patterns of the Baka can be described as a Hawaiian-type kinship terminology with patrilineal descent, according to Hewlett (2006). A combination of bride-service and small gifts is observed, along with a patrilocal but flexible system of post-marital residence, and a polygyny rate of 18.5%. However, Hewlett notes that the forager approach to kinship terminology is more
classificatory or generalized than that of farmers, and that their ideology of patrilineage is less strong.

Hewlett also cites data from Dodd (1979) and Vallois and Marquer (1976) that indicate that while forager-farmer intermarriage for the Baka was very rare in the 1940s, by the 1970s those Baka communities who lived in the most densely populated areas, and who were also more likely to have begun farming themselves, were more likely to participate in farmer-forager intermarriages. The lowest rate recorded by Robert Dodd (1979), at 4.5%, was in Lomié. At that time the Lomié vicinity was still a remote part of the southeast of Cameroon. Today, it is much more densely populated, and it has a large town (also called Lomié). There is now also a large cobalt mine owned by Geovic Mining Corp in the Lomié vicinity.

While the Baka ideology of patrilineage may be less strong than that of neighbouring farming groups, Axel Köhler (1998) claims that some of the Baka he met (around Souanké in the Republic of the Congo) could name patrilineal ancestors going back five generations. He also says that “clan membership is an indispensable part of a [Baka] person’s identity” (1998: 85). However, the type of clan identity that he describes corresponds less with the type of patrilineal clans organized for intergroup raids and big man prestige described by Vansina (1990) and Cinnamon (2005), and more with the universal kinship described by Barnard and Good (1984: 43). Universal kinship is common in egalitarian band societies, where we can expect that either kinship ties are minimized or that universal kinship terminology applies:

Through a very inclusive system of classificatory kinship reckoning most Baka are able to trace either a consanguineal, affinal or clan relation to any other

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65 Personal communication, Su Braden (Robert Dodd's widow).
Baka person they will ever meet. This is particularly important in the context of present-day male migration for temporary jobs, but it likewise facilitated individual mobility in the past. In a new place and unless one is not already heading for an acquaintance, a friend or a relative, clan membership will allow a newcomer to access a potentially very extensive network of classificatory relatives and affines: same-age ‘clan siblings’, elder ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers’, ‘paternal aunts’ and ‘maternal uncles’, and, last but not least, those belonging to the clan of one’s spouse. (Köhler 1998: 86-7).

Alan Barnard (1979) defines the universal system of kin categorization as one “where all members of society are termed and treated as kin”. He distinguishes empirical and ideological types of universal kin categorization, the former being a type that lacks the means to extend a kinship term to every member of society although a given individual only associates with others who are classified as kin. The Baka kinship system fits this definition of an empirically universal system.

Universal kinship is associated with egalitarianism and immediate-return attitudes towards property and sharing (Barnard 1992: 243, 245; Barnard and Good 1984: 158-159). For example, Barnard (1992: 5) suggested that kinship terminology is the means through which either hierarchy or equality is defined in herder and hunter-gatherer Khoisan societies of southern Africa. However, sedentarized hunter-gatherers are likely to be incorporated into the lowest stratum of broader social and kinship structures, such as those of the village (Kuper 1970).

Village kinship structures may involve individuals or groups in syncretic kinship systems that tie them to other ethnic groups, as is the case with the Hai//om San (Widlok 2000). The Baka of Asoumondélé are involved in such syncretic kinship systems to a limited degree, in that particular individuals may be attached to particular
Njem households, and are often referred to as the “children” of that household, regardless of the age of the Baka individual concerned. Also some Baka clans are associated with Njem clans, and the Baka extend marriage prohibitions to these related Njem clans, although this seems to be largely a matter of principle because Baka-Njem intermarriages are almost unheard of. Intermarriages are more common between the Baka and the Fang, who live nearby in northern Gabon and the southern edge of Cameroon further west of Asoumondélé (the easternmost point of which is Alati, a village where the borders of Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo come together).

6.3. The Filiation Practices of Asoumondélé Baka

The Hawaiian kinship terminology system (that of the Baka) differs from an Omaha kinship terminology system (that of the Njem) in that the classificatory terms for maternal and paternal kin are equivalent in the former, whereas they are distinguished in the latter. Omaha kinship terminologies are associated with a strong patrilineal emphasis in social organization (Schusky 1974), whereas Hawaiian kinship terminologies are associated with ambilineal descent, a type of cognatic descent in which individuals can select either the male or the female line through which to trace descent. In ambilineal descent, a decision may be made as to which line to follow by each generation based on the relative wealth of, importance of, or personal affiliations with either the father's or the mother's family lines. Hawaiian classification is where all cousins are termed as siblings, and there is no parallel/cross distinction.

66 According to Scheffler (2001), cognatic systems register filiation but not descent.
As such, it is a relatively simple genealogical form of kinship reckoning of the type that is likely to have characterized the system of the earliest kin-term-using hominids, according to Alan Barnard (2008). Barnard also argues that this was subsequently replaced with classificatory kinship terminologies that do distinguish between cross and parallel relatives with the emergence of full or universal kinship (2011).

The term classificatory, as used by Köhler (in the 1998 quotation above), is somewhat different from this, in that it relies on a classification scheme based on terms in the zero generation (ego’s generation) rather than the first ascending generation (see Barnard 2011: 124). A Hawaiian system is not classificatory in the latter sense because it does not distinguish parallel and cross cousins but it is classificatory in the former sense because cousins are called by the same kin terms as siblings.

Harold Scheffler (2001) has a distinct perspective on what is often called descent in a cognatic system, arguing that it is more logically termed filiation, following Meyer Fortes (1959). According to this classification, filiation is the relation of child to parent and descent is the relation of a person to his or her ancestors. The reason for this distinction is that separating the rules of filiation and affiliation may lead to greater insights about the structural and functional similarities and differences between different types of social organization.

As Scheffler (2001) argues, the necessary condition for being included in a group in a cognatic system is filiation not descent, and, as first observed by Fortes (1959), in such a system, “relations of descent can have no distinctive jural values or structural significance: However much they may be implicated de facto, they cannot be implicated de jure” (1991: 170). For this reason, and because I argue that the Baka have a primarily cognatic system, I use the term filiation rather than descent to describe
this system. On the surface it may resemble patrilineal descent, but patrilineal descent is in fact practiced neither systematically nor predominantly.

Logically, the Hawaiian ambilineal system corresponds with the fact that the Baka do not practice the strict patrilocal post-marital residence practices of their Njem neighbours (for specific examples of uxorilocal post-marital residence practices in Asoumondélé, see Section 6.4.). My data on Baka clan membership and inheritance practices indicate a strong inclination towards either ambilineal filiation or cognatic filiation understood more broadly.

I am thus not entirely in agreement with Hewlett (2006) that the kinship system of the Baka can be characterized as Hawaiian with patrilineal descent but rather that it involves cognatic filiation with a patrifileal bias (likely this patrifileal bias – and perhaps the clan system in general – was adopted to accord with the patrilineal clan systems of neighbouring Ubangian- or Bantu-speaking groups, perhaps as an extension of language borrowing events). It is a question of the relative emphasis placed on the type of filiation and/or descent, and my hypothesis is that the cognatic aspect seems to have been the baseline emphasis in the recent past although now that life is changing and there is more acculturation, the patrilineal ideology is gaining greater importance. Further research is needed to measure the proportion of married couples living in the wife’s natal community versus those living in the husband’s natal community in a large sample of the Baka population in order to shed further light on this topic.

The substratum of cognatic practices of the Baka in the Asoumondélé region are more in accordance with Alan Barnard’s (1992) classification of empirical universal kinship than the patrilineal and patrilocal residence patterns of the neighbouring Njem.
They are also more in line with the dominant tendency of hunter-gatherers to have
cognatic *bilateral descent* with *multilocality* post-marital residence, as demonstrated by
Robert L. Kelly (2013) using the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS) developed
by Murdock and White (1969). Kelly also notices that even when a society is recorded
as having *patrilocality* post-marital residence, their actual practices may be a lot more
flexible.

The kinship survey\(^{67}\) that I conducted with Baka participants took place in two
villages in the Asoumondélé region. The first village is the Baka component of
Asoumondélé II, where I did most of my participant-observation work. The second
location was a tiny village that has emerged along the brand new road between Mbalam
and Ngoïla, which consists of just two households or segments. I spent two weeks
visiting this hamlet, which is called Quartier Didjua. In total, there were 31
respondents from both villages combined.

It was difficult to get the cooperation of individuals for the length of time required
to complete the survey, which took approximately an hour per individual, even when
a small reward was offered (1,000 CFA or about GBP1.15). Many people expressed a
strong antipathy to answering lots of questions, and they were more willing to do
laborious tasks like collect firewood or spring water for the same amount. There were
11 respondents from Quartier Didjua and 20 from Asoumondélé. It was easier to get
women to participate than men, primarily because men are more mobile than women,
but also because as a female researcher my relationships with women were better.
Female respondents (71%) thus outnumber male respondents by 22 to 9.

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\(^{67}\) April-May 2012, names changed
Clan Membership

Respondents said they were connected in some way with the following clans: Makoumbo, Ndonga, Djembe, Ndumu, Kpotolo, Mopandje, Mobito, Essolo, Mbongo, Likemba, Yandji, Ngoto, Kakandja, and Ndounga (the clan name is prefixed with Ye-in order to denote that it is a clan e.g. YeMakoumbo). All participants, both male and female, reckon their clan membership along the patrilineal line. However, it is forbidden to marry individuals from both ego’s father’s clan and from ego’s mother’s clan, according to almost all of the participants, apart from one female participant who stated only that it was impermissible to marry into her father’s clan. Many of the participants added that it is impermissible for them to marry into other clans that they are related to through their grandmothers. A few said that it is permissible to marry into their paternal grandmother’s clan, and even desirable to do so, but impermissible to marry into their maternal grandmother’s clan. Clearly then, an individual is considered to be connected to both the mother’s and the father’s patriclan.

These marriage prohibitions are not radically different to an Omaha type classification and patrilineal kinship organization, where there may be a prohibition against marrying into the mother’s patriclan and sometimes also into the paternal grandmother’s patriclan (Fox 1967: 224), although the Baka have the grandmothers reversed. However, it is clear that for my Baka respondents, the rules pertaining to marriage prohibitions are not that strict, and a couple of examples of young people who have broken with convention and married into either each other’s father’s or mother’s patriclans were given. Also, although many of the respondents claimed that it is prohibited to marry into the clans of their grandmothers this seemed more like an abstract concept than a rigorously observed practice. For example, one respondent said
that he does not know the clans of his grandmothers, but if he did know them, it would be forbidden to marry into them.

The following pie chart shows the proportion of individuals in both Asoumondélé II and Quartier Didjua that belong to the different clans listed, in other words their father’s clan:

![Pie chart showing clan membership]

**Figure 6.1. Paternal Clans: Asoumondélé & Quartier Didjua**

The following pie chart shows the proportion of individuals of both villages, Asoumondélé and Quartier Didjua, who are connected with the listed clans through their mother:
From the above two pie charts, it is clear that the clan that has the highest number of individuals closely related to it is YeMakoumbo, with 12 individuals (via either their father or their mother). These results apply to all the respondents from both Asoumondélé and Quartier Didju, indicating that YeMakoumba has a strong presence of members in the locale. The second highest are YeMobito and YeNdonga, with nine individuals each. YeNdumu is in fourth place with eight individuals.

**Clan Connections in Asoumondélé**

The following pie chart shows the proportion of individuals who belong to each of the different clans listed, in Asoumondélé alone. It is followed by a pie chart that shows the proportion of individuals that are connected to the different clans listed through their mother’s membership to that clan in Asoumondélé alone.
Figure 6.3. Paternal clans: Asoumondélé

Figure 6.4. Maternal clans: Asoumondélé
The clans that the respondents are most related to in Asoumondélé are: *YeMakoumbo* (eight participants), *YeNdonga* (eight participants), and *YeDjemba* (five participants). *YeMakoumbo* is also the clan of the Baka nkukuma (chief), Mengbwa Sampson.

The following pie chart shows the proportion of individuals who belong to each of the different clans listed at Quartier Didjua. It is followed by a pie chart that shows the proportion of individuals that are connected to the different clans listed through their mother’s membership to that clan.

**Clan Connections in Quartier Didjua**

![Pie chart showing clan connections in Quartier Didjua.](image)

*Figure 6.5. Paternal clans: Quartier Didjua*
The clans that the respondents are most related to in Quartier Didjua are: YeNdumu (five participants), YeMobito (five participants) and YeMakoumbo (four participants). YeNdumu is also the clan of the nkukuma of Quartier Didjua, Djambane Félix. Two of the five members of YeNdumu are his two sons. The other two members of YeNdumu are a young man called Sobo Pierre, who has no close relatives to Djambane, and a teen-aged girl Abah Nathalie, who is from Asoumondélé. She is unrelated to Djambane. She ended up in Quartier Didjua because she stopped over while travelling to live with relatives in a village called Mbembé, (near Messok, 80 km northeast) after her relationship with the father of her child ended and she subsequently entered into a new relationship with one of the young men in the hamlet. An elder woman (kobo) in the hamlet, namely Djossi Marie (in her late 50s or early 60s) also claimed to be the
leader. She is of YeMakoumbo, with a middle-aged daughter who lives in Asoumondélé.

**Emotional Closeness to Patrilineal and Matrilineal Kin**

Apart from the fact that the Baka indicate that they are related to both their father’s and their mother’s clans, expressed through marriage prohibitions with both, they also have idiosyncratic emotional attachments to either side. I tested this through a question in the survey asking: “Are you closer (mesé⁶⁸) to your mother’s family or your father’s family?” This question on emotional closeness helps to illuminate the extent to which Baka filiation/descent rules should be considered patrilineal. As the pie chart shows, the majority of respondents (61% or 19 respondents out of 31) said that they are equally close to both their mother’s and father’s relatives. This majority tendency was followed by 32.26% of respondents (10 respondents out of 31) who said they are closer to their father’s side of the family, reflecting the patrilineal tendencies of Baka society. The remaining two individuals – one man and one woman – said that they are closer to their mother’s side of the family.

⁶⁸ *Mesé* means emotional closeness or familiarity in Baka.
Figure 6.7. Emotional Closeness to Matrifilial and Patrifilial Kin

Dividing the subset of participants who reported closer patrifileal ties into male and female showed that seven out of ten were female (70%), however female participants in the survey outnumber male respondents 9 to 22 (71%). Thus it would seem that a preference for patrifilial kin is independent of gender; a woman is just as likely as a man to report that she is closer to her father’s side of the family.
To sum up, the majority of respondents (61.29% or 19 respondents out of 31) said that they are equally close to both matrifilial and patrifilial kin. Following this, 32.26% of respondents said that they are closer to their father’s side of the family. The proportion of male and female preference for patrilineal kin is roughly equal. Thus, in terms of emotional closeness, these two communities appear to be largely cognatic with a patrifilial bias.

**Property Inheritance**

Another question I asked participants in both Asoumondélé and Quartier Didjua is who they had inherited (or would inherit) property from, with four possible responses: 1) their mother, 2) their father, 3) both parents, or 4) neither parent.
Figure 6.9. Who females inherit from

Figure 6.10. Who males inherit from
As is clear from the above pie charts, the overwhelming majority of participants of both genders said that they would inherit from both their mother and their father, a case of bilateral inheritance, which is a type of cognatic inheritance. However, those who said they had only inherited from, or thought they would only inherit from one parent were divided into one of two patterns.

Two female respondents said they would only inherit from their mothers, and a male respondent said he would only inherit from his father, cases that possibly indicate parallel inheritance (a form of cognatic inheritance where males inherit from the male line, and females inherit from the female line). One female respondent said that she had not received anything from either parent because her brother had inherited everything. Another female respondent said that she had not inherited because both her parents died when she was just a baby, allowing her siblings (of both genders) to inherit everything. I coded the second case as bilateral.

The interesting divergences from the bilateral norm led me to analyse more closely the detailed explanations of respondents who did fall into the bilateral category (if they provided it). What many of them said is that they would inherit from both parents, but that the siblings of the parent of the opposite sex to the respondent would take precedence in inheriting, and/or that the respondent’s own siblings of the opposite sex would take precedence in inheriting from their parent of the opposite sex, which also indicates a tendency towards parallel inheritance.

The following pie charts show how these inheritance tendencies are skewed according to gender group:
Figure 6.11. How bilateral inheritance is skewed for women

Figure 6.12. How bilateral inheritance is skewed for men
In the above pie charts, the data are organized according to the extended responses given by participants who fell into the bilateral category. If the participant said clearly and succinctly that they inherit from both parents, or that they inherit only from one parent, or from neither parent, that participant was coded as “not applicable”. However, some respondents said that they inherited from both parents but their extended responses indicated that there was an emphasis on inheritance from one parent or the other. There seems to be a pattern that indicates two tendencies in the bilateral inheritance reported: either cognatic inheritance with a patrililial bias, or cognatic inheritance of the parallel kind.

The overall data seems to show a fusion of both of these tendencies. Cognatic inheritance patterns are idiosyncratic, but where they differ from straightforward bilateral inheritance, these two patterns emerge:

**Pattern 1: Cognatic inheritance with a patrililial bias**

A woman: “I will inherit from my father. But I can inherit from my mother if she doesn’t have brothers and sisters. These uncles and aunts are the ones to decide what they are going to give me”.

A man: “I will inherit from my father and my mother. But from my mother, I will have to wait for her brothers to give me what she left. From my father, I’ll be the one to share out his property.”

A woman: “I will inherit from my father. If my brother is not there, I should wait for him because he is the one who must share the things that my father leaves. When my mother dies, I will wait for her brothers and sisters to come and share out what she left.”
A man: “I’ll inherit from my father. From my mother, I’ll wait for her brothers to collect what she left and give me something if they want to.”

A man: “From my mother, I have to wait for my uncles to share what she left. From my father, my brothers, sisters and I will share his property.”

These responses indicate that for these particular individuals inheritance is working through patrifiliation, property passing from a father to his children. There is also the possibility of inheritance from the mother, though the mother’s siblings take precedence (this has an interesting parallel with matrilineal inheritance where the mother’s brother is often an important figure for males, however in this case the mother’s siblings of both genders may figure).

**Pattern 2: Cognatic Inheritance of the Parallel Kind**

A woman: “From my mother, if my sisters want to give me something, I’ll take it. But from my father, it is my paternal uncles who will inherit.”

A woman: “I will inherit along with my brothers and sisters whatever my father leaves. From my mother, I will be the one to inherit everything that she leaves.”

A woman: “I’ll inherit from my mother all the things that she leaves, and share the things that my father leaves with my brothers and sisters.”

A woman: “I have inherited with my brothers and sisters the things that my father left. From my mother, I have inherited everything that she left because all my sisters were dead already.”

A man: “I’ll inherit from my father. From my mother, I will share what she leaves with my sisters and brothers.”
A woman: “I will inherit from my father but my brothers have to share out what he left, and give me something. From my mother, I will inherit directly.”

A man: “My father’s brothers and sisters will inherit together and give me something. When my mother dies, my sisters will inherit along with my mother’s brothers and sisters”.

A woman: “My father’s brothers took everything that my father left. From my mother, I inherited everything alone because my brothers and sisters were already dead”.

A man: “I, along with my brothers, inherited from my father. He had four wives, so all the boys, 12 of us, shared what my father left. From my mother, we the boys have to share what she left with our sisters. The boys inherit from the father. And from the mother, the boys and the girls inherit.”

The above responses indicate that a man has, in some way, a greater right to inherit from his father, whereas a woman has a greater right to inherit from her mother, a case of parallel inheritance. It should be noted that the final response is perhaps an outlier connected to the fact that polygyny is involved and thus seems to be a case of a household following an approximately patrilineal tradition, where women are excluded from property inheritance. The response came from a young man at Quartier Didjua, who indicated that his father had four wives (I do not know whether his father is Baka or Njem).

To summarize, overwhelmingly bilateral inheritance was reported, with a few exceptions where cases of bona fide parallel or patrificial inheritance were recorded. Among the cases of prima facie bilateral inheritance recorded, where there was a skewing of some kind towards inheriting more from one parent, one of two basic
patterns was noted; bilateral inheritance with a patrilinial bias or bilateral inheritance with a parallel tendency. Inheritance is thus idiosyncratic, but overwhelmingly cognatic rather than simply patrilineal. Both women and men usually have at least some right to inherit, and to leave an inheritance to children, which is indicative of the fact that both women and men have the right to own property.

6.4. Emergence of Formalized Roles of Leadership

The Baka of Asoumondélé have a formalized leader or chief, Mengbwa Samson, a middle-aged man of around 40 years. Mengbwa was nominated for the position by his uncle, an elder of the community, despite the fact that Mengbwa was not born in Asoumondélé, although he was partially raised in Asoumondélé. He was deemed to be fit for the role because of his literacy, as he was schooled at a Catholic Mission near Lomié.

The position of chief was created in response to a governmental decree in 2010 that the Baka section of the village should have their own village chief or chef de village. The chef de village, a minor envoy in the administrative hierarchy of the Cameroonian state, is nominated by notable families in the community and appointed by the relevant administrative authority, a state of affairs formalized by the Cameroon Chieftancy Law enacted on July 15, 1977, served with Decree No 77/245. This decree requires that traditional chiefs should be chosen from families that are customarily called upon to carry out a traditional leadership role, a situation that is clearly not designed to match the social organization of an egalitarian society in which a) status-seeking is
discouraged, and b) there is no hereditary leadership. A candidate who is able to read and write is also preferred by the state.

Mengbwa and others in the Baka community affirmed that there was no formal chef in the village before his time. Both Baka and Njem villagers referred to Mengbwa as nkukuma rather than either of the terms for chief specified in the Brisson-Boursier missionary Baka lexicon (1979). The first of these terms is kobo, which translates literally as “elder”, and according to the lexicon relates to an older usage when the Baka were loosely organized into small bands moving frequently from one forest camp to another. The term kobo is still used in Asoumondélé to refer to the eldest generation of people, both male and female, thus it seems unlikely that it was used to refer to a particular individual invested with particular authority at any time in the past. That said kobo na nda, which means elder of the house, is now used to describe the head of a house, who is not necessarily the eldest person but rather the most authoritative, and inevitably male.

The second term for chief in the lexicon is mó-gba, which translates literally as "proprietor of the village". This may have been a term adopted in Baka villages in other regions during the process of sedentarization in order to conform to the national practice of having a chef de village. It is not used in Asoumondélé, although when I asked Mengbwa he expressed preference for it because it is logically descriptive of his position in Baka terms rather than relying on the Kaka term nkukuma.

Nkukuma means “owner of wealth” and “leader” in the Beti-Bulu-Fang tradition according to Guyer and Belinga (1995), who note that the term “wealth in people” is broadly applicable to Equatorial Africa. It is clear that the title nkukuma thus fits with the role of big man.
In terms of Guyer and Belinga’s account of the farmer culture in Equatorial Africa, the hero of a Bulu folk tale\textsuperscript{69} has the character trait of personal strength, which validates his challenge to the authority of his father because he is impatient with waiting upon his father to arrange his marriage. In the story, the hero gains the respect of senior kinsmen for insubordination to his father, who is vilified for being poor and trying to avoid paying bridewealth. This element of the folk tale shows tension in a model in which elders control juniors through bridewealth payments.

The tension of the story lies in the fact that the real authority over the hero is not his father but the wealthy nkukuma of the clan, who the hero seeks to emulate. The hero has a chance of also becoming a big man because he has a strong character. He represents personal power, although the story as a whole also emphasizes other sources of power. During the course of the storyline, the hero is celebrated for taking actions such as defying his father, making a long journey, and capturing his bride in a sack. He epitomizes the sort of man who is capable of becoming nkukuma, juxtaposed against the ineffectual and impoverished figure of the hero’s father, who is derided by all. Thus, while patriarchal authority can be hereditary, passed down from one big man to his son, the status can also be achieved through the personal endeavour and status-seeking behaviour of an individual man with strong character.

The Baka chief, Mengbwa Samson, has taken on some of the status of a big man, partly through his own personal endeavours and qualities as well as the authority vested in him by the state. His charismatic attributes include the fact that he has excelled at acquiring an education, that he displays leadership qualities such as his

\textsuperscript{69} This Bulu folk story was performed in southern Cameroon in 1967 by Daniel Osomo.
strong capacity for oration, and also in his talent for acquiring material wealth (see Section 8.6.). Thus Mengbwa’s power is largely achieved, but also somewhat ascribed.

In this sense, it fits with the pattern described by Cinnamon (2005), and Guyer and Belinga (1995), where a nkukuma may achieve his power through his own actions. While in Guyer and Belinga’s account the ability to demonstrate the correct patrilineal heritage is also vitally important, the leadership status bestowed on Mengbwa has nothing to do with patrilineal inheritance.

As Mengbwa’s father is long deceased, it was not his father who nominated him for the role of chef de village but, rather, Mengbwa’s mother’s elder brother, Mpako André. This is an example of how ties with the maternal lineage are very important to the Baka; more important than a strict classification as a patrilineal society would suggest, and not congruent with the strict practice of patrilocality.

Mengbwa’s mother is Andjuoum Bernadette, who lives in Mengbwa’s house with him. In fact, the Asoumondélé community is Andjuoum’s natal community, rather than Menbgbwa’s father’s natal community. Mengbwa was born in Mintoum into his father’s natal community following the common patrilocal post-marital residence pattern. During Mengbwa's childhood, his father Megnom fell into conflict with his own family and decided to move to his wife’s community of Bissoubilam.\footnote{The Bissoubilam community became the core community of the Baka component of Asoumondélé.}

Mengbwa has become the chief of a village that is not his natal village and a community that are not his patrilineal relatives. Nonetheless, Mengbwa’s patriclan, YeMakoumbo, is one of the larger clans in Asoumondélé, as shown in the pie charts
above. Most of the YeMakoumbo respondents to the survey were Mengbwa’s own family (maternal uncle, mother, siblings).

Moïse (2014) describes the segment as a unit in which the core adult members refer to each other as siblings. In the past, a number of segments would have made up a residential group or camp. The segment is distinguishable from the House because it lacks dependents. In his study of Lese farmers and Efe hunter-gatherers of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Roy Richard Grinker (1994) argues that the Lese House is characterized by dependency and relations of inequality.

As mentioned above, the Baka of Asoumondélé now identify a household authority or kobo na nda. In one case, a middle-aged widow, whose husband had recently died, described herself as kobo na nda, although this was disputed by her brother-in-law when it was mentioned to him. During the property survey that I conducted (Section 8.6.), I discovered that most households claim that men have more decision-making power than women in household matters.

I have described how the Baka chief Mengbwa is represented as nkukuma, a title which is associated with big men. Apart from the extra goods that Mengbwa’s household has accrued, as kobo na nda, Mengbwa has also accrued wealth in people. His is the largest household of the village, consisting not just of the house of his own immediate family, but also various satellite houses. He is the only man in the village to have two wives. He is emotionally closer to his second wife, whom he lives with, while his first wife lives in a separate house with her mother. During my stay in Asoumondélé, Mengbwa expressed interest in acquiring a third wife.

Wives mean status and power as well as children, and a greater number of children also confers status in a wealth in people system. Only a rich man can afford to pay the
bridewealth for more than one wife. In the story retold by Guyer and Belinga (1995), mentioned above, a man who is poor and cannot afford to pay bridewealth is contemptible. Clearly the capacity to pay bridewealth is a marker of status. The conglomeration of people who make up Mengbwa’s household give him more power in the village than if it were simply the product of formal endowment of the role of *chef de village*.

Mengbwa’s sister, Yaye Melanie, also lives in Mengbwa’s household along with her husband, Dindo Daniel. Dindo and Yaye are another example of a couple who have decided not to follow the pattern of patrilocal post-marital residence that is generally observed of the Baka.

Dindo moved to Asoumondélé to marry with Yaye and to perform the customary bride-service for Yaye’s family, and subsequently decided to stay permanently. This may be due to the fact that Yaye and Mengbwa have a particularly close sibling bond. It may also be due to Dindo’s affable, easy-going personality, and lack of concern for gender roles more broadly, making him an unlikely candidate for concern with patrilineal conventions. Dindo spends a lot of time in the company of his wife and her friends, and happily takes on tasks that are more conventionally allocated to women, such as laundry and basket-weaving. This is in addition to the male-oriented tasks that he also performs capably, such as trapping animals, collecting honey and artisanal gold mining. He himself describes his decision to stay in Asoumondélé with his wife’s kin in terms of his love for his wife and the awe that her beauty inspires in him.
Another man who is part of Mengbwa’s household is Meke Raymond, who is the son of Mengbwa’s elder sister, Akouma. His father is deceased. Meke lives in a separate house, near Mengbwa’s house, and Meke’s house is counted as part of Mengbwa’s household, which I discovered when I conducted the property survey. Meke is yet another example of how a man may be incorporated into a household that is not associated with his own patrilineal clan. Rather, Meke has decided to remain closely attached to his mother’s household lineage.

The third example, Awouba Samuel, is not an agnatic relation of Mengbwa’s. He originates from a village near Ngoyla, and married Mengbwa’s niece, Mafê, the daughter of his deceased brother, Elenga. The young couple already had two children,
and Mafê gave birth to a third child during my stay in Asoumondélé. They showed no sign of planning to leave for Ngoya to return to Awouba’s natal community.

There was also another man who was linked with Mengbwa’s household when I first arrived in Asoumondélé, Assembe Pierre, who is the second husband of Mengbwa’s elder sister, Akouma, her first husband being deceased. He is not Meke’s father. Assembe and Mengbwa quarrelled over the money I gave to Mengbwa to commission the building of my house, saying that Mengbwa had cheated him. I refused to get involved in this argument, and shortly afterwards Assembe left for a forest camp where artisanal gold mining occurs. He did not return to stay in the village during the entire duration of my fieldwork. The argument exemplifies that there is still an expectation of sharing among the Baka community, and thus Mengbwa’s near-big-man status is precariously balanced between accumulating wealth and satisfying his associates’ expectations that they will benefit economically from his success.

John Cinnamon (2005), recounts a Fang narrative in which a man does not want his sister to leave in marriage. He thus prevails upon her husband to stay with his wife’s family, acquiring a new client in his brother-in-law. Cinnamon cites this narrative as an example of how, in the genealogical idiom of patriclans, clientship can involve a shifting identity, which may over time lead to affinal ties becoming agnatic. Over time, according to the Fang narrative, the nkukuma also prevails upon his brother-in-law to adopt his own clan identity. As an origins story about the emergence of two related patriclans, this narrative suggests that despite the subordinate status of clients, even a client has the possibility of establishing his own House, becoming a nkukuma, and begetting his own patriclan of descendants.
Cinnamon then discusses the case of Dynamique, a Fang man who is a client of his mother’s brothers, but goes on to become economically successful and an administrative chief with a House, wives and clients, although he falls short of the personal qualities required to establish himself as a truly influential big man, and his position is also weakened by his lack of patrilineal ties.

In the cases of Dindo, Meke and Awouba, it is perhaps no accident that these three men are all connected with the household of the new Baka chef de village, which incorporates a large and influential family and a household that is accumulating property more rapidly than any of the other Baka households in Asoumondélé. They are not clients to the extent that they are obliged to work for Mengbwa, or to take orders from him. Mengbwa’s power has not as yet been consolidated to that extent. However, the association between these men has become a matter of economic advantage (Section 8.6.). The foremost beneficiary of this economic arrangement is Mengbwa, who gains prestige and influence from having such a large household.

How is it that a formerly egalitarian society that still values demand sharing (to some extent) came to tolerate the rise of someone approaching the status of a big man? It is understood that an immediate-return society deplores status seeking, arrogance, authority and any elites who may seek to control access to resources (Lee 1969, Woodburn 1982a, Lewis 2014b). Such behaviour is likely to provoke levelling mechanisms such as ridicule and mockery. The perceived upstart may even be shunned completely, an example of which occurs in Jerome Lewis’s teaching film The Hunter’s Curse, where an overly successful and boastful Mbendjele hunter is socially ostracized (2003).
The explanation for the newfound tolerance for leadership among the Baka may well originate from the issue of ethnic identity crisis. The Baka ethnic identity is still bound up with relationships of equality between individuals, however this ethnic identity - along with the egalitarian ethos - is in crisis and shifting dramatically. As social psychologist Maykel Verkuyten (2005) observes, there is a difference between identification as a social process and a particular social or ethnic identity itself. The process of identification is a highly emotional one, where the group one identifies with is experienced as inseparable from the self:

*Identification is more than placing oneself in the same category as others with whom one is identifying. It is about wanting to be and feel at one with an other; it is a kind of emotional fusion or mergence in which the self and this other are experienced as inextricably intertwined. The success of the other person or the group becomes one’s own success and increases positive self-feelings, whereas failures become one’s own failures that diminish positive self-feelings.*

(Verkuyten 2005: 67).

In the situation of ethnic identity crisis that the Baka of Asoumondélé find themselves, their degraded ethnic identity is somewhat ameliorated by instances where a particular Baka individual defies expectations and makes a success of himself in terms of the expectations of outsiders, e.g. by acquiring wealth and/or education. Mengbwa’s high status thus fits with the idealized kind of identity that many Baka individuals now wish to be associated with, which sees a Baka individual as educated, abreast of social change and taking advantage of some of the material comforts that the modern world has to offer. Most Baka adults especially wish for their children to have an education, which they believe will be the key to taking on this new idealized identity. Mengbwa
thus represents a role model of the ideal Baka of the future, one that many Baka people wish for their children to emulate and even surpass.

6.5. Bride-Service and Bridewealth

According to Köhler (2005), bride-service among the Baka is gradually being replaced by bridewealth. This may well be part and parcel of a general shift towards the patrilineal big man ideology of their neighbours.

Bridewealth has important political implications in that it has the capacity to create both gender inequality and inequalities between different households, as authority is bestowed to the male head of the house, at least in part due to his having paid the bridewealth for his wife. Bride-service does not have the same implications because it involves the wife staying in her natal community for at least the duration of the bride-service period. This can serve as a trial period during which the suitability of the new husband can be vetted by the bride’s own consanguineous family, and may even be a period during which she gives birth to her first child or children. Richard Lee (1982) reports that the !Kung San gave the following reasons for bride-service: 1) it must be seen that the man treats the daughter well; 2) he must prove his hunting abilities by providing meat; and 3) the bride is too young to leave her mother.

According to Chris Knight (2008), patriliny involves a husband increasing paternity certainty over his children by managing his wife’s fidelity, and a decrease in the solidarity between sisters and brothers as a result of patrilocality. Alienable property is likely at the root of patriliny and weakening brother-sister solidarity, along with the
need to ensure paternity investment in sons by rigorous control over women’s reproductive capacity.

Knight's hypothesis is backed by a behavioural ecology study by Holden, Sear, and Mace (2003), who confirm that paternity uncertainty is associated with matriliny while heritable wealth is a likely cause of patriliny, and that matriliny is based on a daughter-biased investment model on the part of parents and/or grandparents. There is also a difference between property that needs to be defended (e.g. livestock) versus property that does not (e.g. land in places where land is not a limited resource). In the former case, a pastoral society will tend towards patrilineal inheritance of livestock; in the latter, land may be inherited as a form of daughter-biased investment (Holden, Sear & Mace 2003; Mattison 2011). Thus there are two predictable factors in unilineal societies: paternity certainty and alienable property.

Richard Lee (1976, 1982) noticed that the residence patterns of !Kung San hunter-gatherers showed a core group of women as often as a core group of men; moreover there was a statistical predominance of mother-daughter bonds, followed by sister-sister and then brother-sister bonds in residence groups. Knight (2008) also points out that genetic data on sub-Saharan African hunter-gatherers indicate a matrilocal residential bias (Destro-Bisol et al. 2004), and that cross-cultural surveys reveal that the more a society relies on hunting and gathering, the more likely it is to have uxorilocal postmarital residence patterns and a statistical bias in favour of mother-daughter links (Alvarez 2004, Marlowe 2004).

Recently, population genetics has shown a long-standing tendency to matrilocality for Kalahari Khoisan (Schlebusch 2010) and Congo Basin hunter-gatherers (Verdu et
al. 2013). While most Congo Basin hunter-gatherer populations are described as having patrilocal customs in the ethnographies, their sex-specific genetic inheritance patterns resemble those of matrilocal populations, which is consistent with a lower prevalence of polygyny and patrilocality in hunter-gatherers compared with neighbouring farmers. It also indicates a potential female transmission of reproductive success in Congo Basin hunter-gatherers (Verdu et al. 2013). Dyble et al. (2015) have devised an agent-based model suggesting that observed within-camp relatedness and co-residence patterns of Mbendjele BaYaka and Agta hunter-gatherers is caused by women's equal influence in selecting camp members.

For Knight (2008), bride-service is the fundamental economic institution of hunter-gatherer societies, where a young hunter’s in-laws will try to maximize the incoming provisions they receive by supervising him. Opie and Power (2008) also argue that modern humans evolved under conditions of matrilocal bias, with a form of bride-service where females who are provisioned by their own mothers, and who also have wider kin support, are in a better position to get males to provision as a condition of sexual access. Such a Darwinian explanation, which takes account of the high energy costs of reproduction for female Homo sapiens, is likely the origin of bride-service practices in general, as these energy costs are unlikely to be met by either female kin or provisioning males alone.

Bride-service is thus a practice that is conducive to female-centred control over reproduction, and is observed often in African immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies, e.g. Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, San, and Hadza, who are also known to have relative gender equality. Robert L. Kelly (2013) has measured from the Standard

Cross-Cultural Survey (Murdock and White 1969) that 36% of the hunter-gatherer societies sampled have bride-service, 33% have no specific practice of labour or gift exchange for marriages, and only 14% have bridewealth, with the remaining 17% spread over those societies who have female kin exchange, minor gift exchange, token bridewealth and dowry.

Through cross-cultural comparison Jane Fishburne Collier (1988) created a three-part classification system consisting of the bride-service model, the equal bridewealth model, and the unequal bridewealth model. In this system of classification, she noted that bride-service societies tend to be those that are band societies or simple egalitarian societies - those that have a simple division of labour by sex (and not by rank or age), and those who do not have high regard for property and do not accumulate possessions or practice storage. This description accords with Woodburn’s immediate-return ideal type. Collier also notes that bride-service creates an uxorilocal tendency in that the husband will tend to spend many years living with the wife’s family even if an extended uxorilocal rule is not enunciated, and that in these societies gender relations are fairly equal, women have a high degree of autonomy, divorce is relatively easy, and violence against women is mild to non-existent (at least in those bride-service societies that were not drawn into warfare during the 19th century).

Bridewealth, however, is not conducive to female-centred control over reproduction, and it is not correlated with relative gender equality. As noted by Goody and Tambiah (1973), bridewealth is regarded by those who practise it as a compensation for the loss of the labour and reproductive capacities of a woman. In this, Goody and Tambiah follow Meyer Fortes (1962), who argued that bridewealth payments give husbands jurisdiction over their wives with respect to her labour, as well as her sexual and reproductive capacities. Goody and Tambiah further argued that
bridewealth is especially linked with agricultural societies in which women are food producers. However, bridewealth is also a feature of cattle-owning societies. As Holden, Sear and Mace (2003) show, livestock-owning societies have a negative correlation with matriliney, and livestock are used as bridewealth, which leads to polygyny.

Different forms of bridewealth have different implications for social organization, claim Goody and Tambiah (1973), and particularly for women’s access to property, based on 1) content (the relative value of the payments); 2) returnability (whether the payments are returnable in the case of death or divorce); and 3) variability (whether they are fixed or variable). In matrilineal societies, where the bride stays in her natal community after marriage, and in bilateral societies, bridewealth payments are usually negligible or token. However, along with the appearance of bridewealth, there is also the emergence of patrilocal post-marital residence, important patrilineages and the disappearance of bride-service, according to Goody and Tambiah.

One of the functions of bridewealth is to secure the affiliation of the child to the father’s kin group. The higher the value of the bridewealth, the more the marriage becomes impossible to dissolve. This, and whether a payment is returnable or not, have important implications for women’s rights, as a wife who needs to flee an abusive husband may find that her consanguineous relatives will be reluctant to take her back for fear of having to return the bridewealth payment to her husband. Bridewealth is also linked with a lower age of marriage for the bride, and polygyny (which exploits a large differential between the age of husband and wife).

Frost and Dodoo (2010) have demonstrated that traditional bridewealth exchange among the Akwapim of Southern Ghana causes adolescent boys to have increased
expectations of authority in marriage. This applies not only to labour and sexual and reproductive rights, but also more broadly to other issues, such as that a husband may easily divorce his wife but she cannot leave once the bridewealth has been paid by her husband even if he subjects her to domestic abuse. He is entitled to expect control over her and obedience from her such that she needs to ask permission in order to go about her daily activities, and some boys believe that paying bridewealth gives them the right to subject their wives to domestic abuse.

Kamil Fuseini (2012) has shown that as the proportion of bridewealth that has been paid increases, norms constraining women become more restrictive among patrilineal societies in the North Tongu District of Ghana, most especially with regard to a woman’s fertility or child-bearing capacities.

Bridewealth, and its capacity for inflation, can be a major factor in creating inequalities within a community (Goody and Tambiah 1973). In his study of how Mukogodo hunter-gatherers of Kenya transformed into Maa-speaking pastoralists, Lee Cronk (2004) emphasizes the economic importance that a type of inflation of bridewealth had in this process. Due to changes brought about by British colonial policies, the Mukogodo came into closer contact with the high-status Masai, whom they began to emulate in a manner that is reminiscent of the way that the Baka of Asoumondélé are mimicking the Njem (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

The Mukogodo had been a delayed-return society of hunter-gatherers who kept beehives in the past, and beehives were used as a form of bridewealth. As the Mukogodo began to intermarry with Maa-speaking pastoralists there was an inflation of bridewealth, with livestock becoming the new standard that was acceptable to Mukogodo parents as bridewealth for their daughters. As a result Mukogodo men
started losing out on marriages, as the rate of marriage between Mukogodo women and non-Mukogodo men increased, leading inevitably to the adoption of pastoralism by the Mukogodo. Those Mukogodo men who failed to become pastoralists also failed to marry, and thus failed to produce legitimate heirs. The result of this was the termination of their hunting and gathering way of life.

Axel Köhler (1998, 2005) has traced the practice of bridewealth among the Baka back to the beginning of the 20th century when colonial demand for ivory was at its peak, but he also links Baka involvement in the period of Atlantic trade and their assimilation of precolonial iron currencies with the emergence of bridewealth as a token supplement to bride-service. He argues that during the peak of the ivory trade, some Baka individuals who were especially skilled at the hunt became powerful, and took many wives, possibly even Kaka wives in some cases.

Kairn Klieman (2003) notes that around five million slaves from Central Africa were imported into the Americas between 1519 and 1867, and that this Atlantic trade period was replete with devastation and tragedy. Ivory, as well as slaves, became important items of trade during this period, which involved warfare, dislocation, famine, and the introduction of new diseases. It was also a period during which great hierarchies arose:

*Perhaps the most significant transformation for west-central Africans was the development of thoroughgoing forms of social, political, and economic stratification at the local level. This phenomenon was brought about by economic transformations set in motion by the introduction of large quantities of European imports and Africans’ willingness to enter into new systems of merchant capital and trade.* (Klieman 2003: 176)
These social transformations were profound for Bantu (farmer) and Batwa (hunter-gatherer) relationships because material goods became the fundamental values of the extended society, and the demand for forest products such as ivory increased. During this period, relationships of dependents and dependency underlying the patron-client relationships between farmers and hunter-gatherers were established.

During the latter period of the Atlantic trade, rubber also became an important commodity fuelling industrialization in the West. An elder in the Baka community of Asoumondélé told me that their ancestors had come from the Yokadouma area near the Central African Republic, but that they had migrated to the current locale to take part in the rubber trade, forming the basecamp of Bissobilam not far from where Asoumondélé is today. The Bekwil people of the Sangha River valley near Souanké, not far from Asoumondélé, were major players in the ivory trade, obtaining raphia cloth that was used for bridewealth and trading it with the Njem, according to Klieman. As the Sangha River valley was one of the major centres during the Atlantic trade period and an attractant to people from more remote parts, the Baka elder’s story seems plausible enough. He said that the Njem were recruiting people to collect rubber at that time.

According to Köhler (2005), the use of money in bridewealth exchanges dates back at least as far as the period of Baka involvement in the cocoa boom since the 1970s and 1980s. His informants told him that they used to give bridewealth payments of a much greater value during that period, which was also before an international ban on ivory trading came into effect. Köhler also claims that the Baka practiced a form of sister exchange in the past, and that the bridewealth of a sister can be used by her brother to pay for his own bride (1998). The Baka that Köhler worked with in the late 1990s had a very intense period of bride-service, during which the in-laws demanded
a house to be built for them in addition to hunting and other labour, as well as bridewealth consisting of money, cloth and machetes. However, he says that it was possible for a young couple to be united in marriage (gbako) and yet still avoid both bridewealth and bride-service.

The prominence of house construction signifies the acceptance of sedentary village life. According to Köhler (1998), young men were actively encouraged to acquire the necessary skills. The same can be said of the Baka of Asoumondélé, where young men can often be seen building houses. During my stay, it was known that I had a large supply of nails (which I had brought myself from Yaoundé to avoid the inflated prices of the local traders), and a handful of nails was often demanded from me from the young men who were eager to build new houses for themselves or for their in-laws. In fact, a flurry of housebuilding began after the arrival of my bag of nails.

Building a house was also often listed as a type of bride-service by participants in my kinship survey (see list below). A large and well-constructed house is considered to be a marker of status. The Baka of Asoumondélé insisted on building me a larger house than I had asked for, and they clearly took great pride when Njem people came from all around the vicinity to look at the house once it was completed. A few of these Njem visitors took me aside to tell me that the house was poorly constructed and likely to fall down on top of me, which indicated to me that they may have felt some envy.
Figure 6.14. Young man constructing *nda*

Figure 6.15. Women constructing *mongulu*
Dörte Weig (2013) argues that the transition from a system in which women were the primary home-builders, during the time when the Baka were more mobile, to one in which men are the primary home-builders is significant for gender-based inequality. The type of home that is constructed in the forest is a temporary igloo-shaped hut (mongulu) made from supple branches and liana leaves, ideal for moving from camp to camp. The type of house built in the village setting (nda) is a more permanent construction made from solid wooden poles, mud and a roof thatched with leaves, which is of the same design as that of the Kaka houses. Köhler (1998) notes that the construction of nda on the part of would-be husbands is a practice that lies somewhere between bride-service and bridewealth, as it results in the in-laws acquiring a valuable piece of property.

According to Koichi Kitanishi (2006), bridewealth payments of large denomination CFA bills were a factor preventing economic inequality among the Baka in Ndongo village, Cameroon, at the time of his fieldwork in 1999 and 2000, because bills of high denomination were used exclusively for bridewealth payments, separate to the low denomination bills used for daily transactions. This apparently resulted in no individual being able to accumulate high denomination bills, however Kitanishi foresaw that inequalities could arise if the distinction between these two forms of currency broke down.

The following are descriptions of bridewealth payments (ëlùwà) and bride-service (bèlà-na-gi-lè-o) that some of my respondents to my kinship survey gave me. Köhler (1998) claims that bridewealth payments were on the decline during his study due to the collapse of the cocoa boom and the ivory ban. However, ivory is still sold by the
Baka in Asoumondélé, and smuggled to Yaoundé via the traders in the village, and the community has experienced an increase in cash-flow since the arrival of the mine. It is therefore likely that during my fieldwork bridewealth inflation was occurring.

**List of responses regarding bride-service and bridewealth:**

Participant 1 (Female): A suitor has to do some work for the bride’s family including looking for firewood, building a house, and looking for honey. This work can last from one to two years before her family will say, “It is okay now for you to go away with your wife”. He also has to give her family many things like elephant tusks, spears and a leopard skin. He must also give pots, salt, machetes, knife sharpeners and spoons. All of this should have been given to my father but as he was already dead, it was my brother who benefitted from this. In fact, my brother, my mother and my sisters all benefitted from this.

Participant 2 (Senior Male): I did some work for my wife’s family including trapping, clearing farms and building a house. I worked for two months before they gave me permission to go with my wife. I took her to my village and we spent a year there. But I came back because we had news that one of my in-laws was ill. I then came back to stay for good in my wife’s village. I also gave some things to my wife’s father. I can’t actually remember what I gave but probably around 200,000 CFA (about GBP230). I continue to give money to my in-laws whenever it is possible, up until now. Even if the relationship breaks down, I will continue to give my formal in-laws things whenever they see me. I’ve also given them some pieces of clothing.

Participant 3 (Male): I paid the bridewealth twice for my wife. This is a permanent process. Each time my in-laws need something, I have to give it to them. All my life.
I have been giving them things like clothes, a bag of salt, plates and some money 20,000 CFA (about GBP23) the first time, and 7,000 CFA the second time (about GBP8). The first time, I cleared a farm for them. I spent a year working for them before I had the right to take my wife. The second time, I did trapping and honey collection. Along with my in-laws we created an artisanal gold mining site in the forest, and I cleared a farm for them. I spent six months with them. While on the way back to my own village, I was stopped by the paternal uncle of my wife and spent another six months with him doing some work.

Participant 4 (Female): My husband gave clothes and some money to my father. He did some work too, like building a house and clearing farms for my parents. He spent two months with my family before taking me.

Participant 5 (Male): I gave goods and money to my in-laws. I gave 45,000 CFA (about GBP51) to my father-in-law. I also did some work for my in-laws like working on their farms. I gave six pieces of clothing, three pots, one bag of salt, two machetes and two knife sharpeners.

Participant 6 (Female): My husband gave three pieces of cloth (búbú) to my mother. He gave money to my father. He didn’t do any work for my family.

Participant 7 (Female): My husband is still paying bridewealth to my mother because my father is dead. My husband has already cleared a farm for my mother and built a set of shelves for her. He also gave her a small amount of money.

Participant 8 (Female): My husband gave clothing, money and two tusks of ivory to my parents. He did some work like farming, and built a house for my parents.
Participant 9 (Male): I gave some clothes and some money to both my wife’s mother and her father. I collected honey and hunted. I also gave two elephant tusks to my father-in-law. I cleared up some farms too. I also built a large house.

Participant 10 (Male): I gave clothes to my father-in-law. I didn’t give a lot of money. I built a house for him, and cleared up a farm.

Participant 11 (Male): I gave 20 pieces of clothing to my in-laws – ten trousers and ten bübü. All of these I gave to my father-in-law and he shared it out among his family. I did some work too. I cleared space for five farms, I built two houses, and I hunted for antelopes and gorillas and collected honey.

Participant 12 (Male): My wife was originally married to another man. So I just reimbursed her former husband. I gave him 10,000 CFA (about GBP11), two pieces of clothing, and I gave him another 5,000 CFA to pay back for the harm that I had done him by committing adultery with his wife. I also did some work for my wife’s parents. I cleared up a farm and I gave them some meat and fish, and honey.

Participant 13 (Male): I’m still in the process of getting married. I’m still studying the girl’s behaviour before giving the bridewealth. But I’m doing some work like hunting and making mats (of leaves for roof tiling). Before giving the bridewealth, I will have to inform my family in Mintoum so that they can come here for the formalities of handing over the bridewealth and we can return to Mintoum with the girl as my wife.

One feature that is noticeable in these various descriptions of payments is that they differ quite substantially both in the total value of payments, as well as in the types of goods involved. The period of bride-service mentioned and the work required during the bride-service also varies quite considerably. This is likely to be the result of wealth
discrepancies between different Baka men, as well as an inflation of bridewealth since the inflow of cash into the Asoumondélé community increased as a result of the mine and the road. A negligible or absent bride-service period (0-2 months) may also be indicative of the change in practices away from bride-service towards bridewealth that Köhler (2005) mentions. It is possible that the demands of the brides’ families may vary due to differing values and expectations of what is required of a son-in-law and the inflation of bridewealth payments.

Domestic violence is an issue in Asoumondélé, especially when large amounts of alcohol have been consumed. Bridewealth payments may reinforce some of the attitudes of ownership and entitlement that Baka men sometimes use to justify beating their wives, as was the case in the Ghanian study of adolescent boy attitudes by Frost and Dodoo (2010). Bridewealth may also lead to a decreased sense of autonomy on the part of women, resulting in less female opposition to domestic violence as demonstrated by Fuseini (2012). Cronk (2004) says that wife-beating is routine and expected among the Mukogodo of Kenya, who have seen the inflation of bridewealth payments since they adopted cattle-giving as a replacement for beehives as the accepted form of bridewealth payment. Bridewealth is likely the primary means through which gender-based inequality is established in an immediate-return society that is transitioning towards delayed return as the result of stronger property rights.

In order to explore some possible routes through which immediate-return systems may transform into delayed-return systems, and the role of property, bridewealth and gender relations in these processes, it is useful to compare and contrast two delayed-return societies, Okiek society in Kenya, and various Aboriginal Australian hunting and gathering societies as they were in the 20th century.
The Okiek present an example where male control over material production had led to control over women. The Okiek were hunters and honey-collectors. Most had come to keep domestic animals and practice small-scale cultivation by the 1980s (Blackburn 1982, 1986; Kratz 1988). Okiek hunter-gatherer practices were almost exclusively male, as there were few vegetable foods to collect in their montane forests. Their social organization is atypical of African hunter-gatherer societies in that it is a clear example of delayed return.

Time spent in the forest was devoted by Okiek men to collecting honey from individually owned hives, repairing and creating hives, hiding hives in trees away from the reach of honey badgers and human thieves, and storing honey in caves. The Okiek also had a land- or resource-tenure patrilineal inheritance system exclusively based on honey collection. These are delayed-return practices because they involve storage, require an investment of time for future economic gain, and because privately owned property is not shared by demand.

Elder men in Okiek society came to dominate primarily through delayed return economic practices. However, inequalities of gender and age in Okiek social organization were also elaborated at the religious level. Corinne A. Kratz (1988) has argued that Okiek blessings, usually performed by elder men, function as a genre of power in which their ideological privilege and authority is both reflected and reinforced. In the economic domain, male prerogatives such as patriarchal inheritance and bridewealth exchange were framed within an ideology in which women were compared to children and dogs, the property of men.

Kratz (1994: 294-96) says that it is unclear whether the increased prominence of men as blessing-ratifiers from the early 20th century may have been related to shifts in
gender relations. However, there was an increase in the materialization of initiation practices, involving money or other gifts, as well as payments for blessers, beginning from around 1975, which coincides with an increased emphasis on the delayed-return practices of animal husbandry and cultivation.

Okiek marriages were arranged by lineage seniors at the instigation of a would-be husband, and the girl (marriage age for females was approximately 16 years of age) was not consulted (Kratz 2000). Negotiation was a complex multi-stage process culminating in a bridewealth payment, where both the bride and her mother could be beaten if they tried to refuse the union. The groom was told “that he has been given a wife, the bride that she has been given away” (2000: 158). Marriage is represented not only as a transfer of bridewealth but also as a transfer of control, upon which the husband becomes the bride’s new “owner”. If the bride resisted the marriage, perhaps due to mistreatment, her consanguineous family would be responsible for repaying the bridewealth.

In the case of Aboriginal Australian patriarchal culture, control over ritual or ideological production has led to conventions of male superiority, polygamy and the domination of younger men by elder men. Elkin (1945) described how the male initiation rites of Aboriginal Australian groups took place in a series of degrees extended over several years in order to gradually introduce the neophyte into a life of esoteric knowledge and power related to the Dreamtime. Male initiation rituals re-enacted ritual births, and female reproductive power was devalued by the ritual and symbolic appropriation of these reproductive processes.

Mervyn Meggitt (1962) described significant inequality between men and women among the Walpiri (Walbiri) of Northern Territory Australia during the 1950s, despite
the fact that women were at least equal contributors to Walbiri economic life. For example, a high degree of physical violence was directed against noncompliant wives. It could be meted out by the husband or the wife’s own kin, as rights over women were exchanged in marriage for a bridewealth payment, and non-compliant wives could be repudiated. Also, alliances between families were created through marriage exchanges. These alliances were deemed important in case of conflict with other groups, and for shared access to water holes and hunting grounds in times of need, but they could be undermined by non-compliant wives.

The ideal and most common way for a man to acquire a first wife would be as a result of being circumcised by an elder man, a union between two lines of descent in which an unborn daughter was promised to the adolescent boy. Without the series of rites administered by elders of the marriage line so established, a man could not legitimately marry nor participate in religious life. Thus elder men obtained political ascendancy primarily through ideological means, and the ritual control over female reproductive rights, which were exchanged between men as a form of property.

These examples illustrate that bridewealth payments, and their role in creating relationships of gender inequality, are likely to have been instrumental in many transitions, through the ages, from an immediate-return to a delayed-return political style. Bridewealth is associated with the emergence of alienable, privately owned property, which is at odds with the principle of demand sharing.

In Asoumondélé, there are a variety of indications that a similar effect has been created through the adoption, and inflation, of bridewealth among the Baka. The Aka, to whom the Baka are ethnically but not linguistically related (Bahuchet 2012), practice predominantly bride-service (Meehan 2005; Hewlett 2001, 2006). Mothers of
young children express a preference for living with their own kin, and mothers who live with their own kin are more likely to find an alloparent for their child at any given time, which increases their reproductive success (Meehan 2005). Barry Hewlett describes the bride-service practices of the Aka as follows:

* A man acquires a bride through service to his wife’s family, often until the first infant of the married couple walks well. Men conducting bride service in the same camp usually become close friends for life. Bride service takes place regardless of the age of the woman, but as a woman gets older the length of bride service diminishes. (2001: 27)

The Aka also have high gender equality, women’s autonomy and the absence of violence against women (Kisliuk 1998, Hewlett 2001, Lewis 2002a).

As I have mentioned previously, violence against women among the Baka of Asoumondélé is considerable, and occurs often during episodes of heavy drinking. I have also seen this occur among Baka communities in other parts of south and south-east Cameroon, on one occasion leading to the hospitalization of a Baka woman near Mintoum due to an axe wound to her chest. Dörte Weig (2013) observed the same of the Baka in the Ivindo region of Gabon.

I have also witnessed arguments and fights between couples where the wife was issued with the threat that her husband would demand the return of the bridewealth should she tried to leave or should she not comply with his wishes. It seems that such demands for the return of bridewealth have the potential to cause tension between the wife and her own family, and thus serve as a deterrent for a wife to seek the support of her own kin in the event that she has difficulties with her husband.
6.6. The New Patriarchal Order

To summarize, in this chapter I argue that there is emerging competition between Baka households, or the *segments* of old (Moïse 2014), such that they are coming to resemble Kaka Houses like those of the neighbouring Njem. The Baka of Asoumondélé now hold a man as the central authority of the house, and there are inferior dependents such as women and children, and possibly clients. Patriclans are becoming more important as a household identity for the Baka of Asoumondélé, associated with the patriclan membership of the male authority figure in the house.

I have shown that the Baka have increasingly begun to emulate the kinship patterns and political organization of their Njem neighbours in that a patrilineal ideology is being superimposed onto a largely cognatic kinship system, and that the big man status and wealth of a Baka chief has been accepted, by and large, among the Baka population. There is variation in the extent that different members of the community subscribe to the patrilineal ideology. The data from the quantitative survey shows that the majority of respondents said that they are equally close emotionally to both their mother’s and father’s relatives, but almost a third of respondents said they are closer to their father’s side of the family, reflecting patrifilial tendencies.

Property inheritance appears to be idiosyncratic; it is more often cognatic rather than simply patrifilial, however there was a patrifilial bias. It is likely that this tendency towards the adoption of the Njem patrilineal big man ideology became a stronger social influence at the time of sedentarization, when the Baka began building permanent mud houses like those of the Njem, and also mimicking the gender inequality of their neighbours. Bridewealth payments have provided a means through
which gender-based inequality has come to be established among the Baka, and seeing as token forms probably date back to the beginning of the 20th century, incipient gender inequality must have gradually been established over several generations.

As cross-cultural comparative analysis demonstrates, the more that bridewealth replaces bride-service the less likely it is that a couple will practice uxorilocal residence while the first children are born, and the less likely it is that a wife will have the support and protection of her own brothers in the case of physical abuse from her husband. She will also have less reproductive control, for example in getting help from her relatives with childcare, setting boundaries to sexual access, and preventing her husband jealously controlling her autonomous daily activities.

Baka women endure considerable gender-based inequality. This chapter serves to highlight the theoretical role of bridewealth in the emergence of the gender-based inequality that I observed, and also how inflation in bridewealth payments can create inequality between men of the same ethnicity because it creates wealth-based competition among men over marriage partners. The turn away from bride-service practices and the adoption of bridewealth is also linked with the rising importance of a patrilineal ideology and patrilocal post-marital residence.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Baka Ritual Flow Diverted

7.1. Ritual Flow

Ethnographers of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers have hitherto emphasized ritual as a levelling mechanism that mediates power evenly between individuals and subgroups and strengthens community spirit (Turnbull 1978; Kisluik 1998; Lewis 2008; Fürniss 2006, Finnegar 2013). Polyphonic singing and dancing is thought of as a metonym for the thoroughgoing, or immediate return, egalitarianism of these peoples (e.g. Fürniss 2006, Lewis 2013). But what becomes of the ritual dynamic of levelling when, through a process of social transformation, an egalitarian group starts to become politically differentiated?

My experiences of ritual in the Baka community at Asoumondélé suggest that alterations to ritual structure and performance are best viewed as both causes and effects of the identity crisis discussed in Chapter 4, and the resulting rapid transformation towards a less egalitarian mode of sociality. In other words, ritual is involved in a feedback loop with social organization. Ritual has become an arena in which Baka individuals grapple with a widely experienced ethnic identity crisis, leading to structural changes in ritual that in turn encourage further social transformation. Ritual flow refers to the continuity that has been ethnographically observed in the ritual practices of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, characterized by the levelling of power. Ritual diversion refers to changes being explored experientially
and mimaetically in ritual spaces, resulting in the changing character of ritual. Ritual diversion supports a hierarchical flow of power, and an infusion of commercial values.

7.2. Social Organisation and Ritual

The ethnographic data suggests that there may be two mechanisms by which rapid socioeconomic upheaval in the geographic area has led to the concomitant diversion of ritual:

1) Ritual infusion: the character and performance of ritual activity is influenced by new external factors, for example new technologies, cheap alcohol, and highly-acquisitive values.

2) Ritual rebellion: a social crisis relating to challenged ethnic identity is expressed through ritual in a variety of ways leading to structural changes to ritual.

I will discuss these factors separately, though they are interrelated. They, in their turn, feed into further alterations to the shifting social order by means of a positive feedback loop.

In order to gauge the extent of the resulting transformations to ritual, I compare the character of the ritual activities of the Asoumondélé Baka with what I refer to as the ritual dialogue model for Congo Basin hunter-gatherers, which exemplifies what I also refer to as ritual flow because it represents a macro-level of continuity in the rituals of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers across time and space. The model is based on Morna Finnegan’s (2008, 2013) synthesis of various ethnographic accounts from Congo
Basin hunter-gatherer societies (notably Colin Turnbull 1978, Michelle Kisliuk 1998, and Jerome Lewis 2002), in which she describes a type of egalitarian ritual themed around the procreative power of the body as “a recurrent ritual dialogic hung around sexual duality” (2013: 698). Lewis (2002) describes the mechanics of this process as one in which one gender coalition sporadically prevails while the other works on undermining or overthrowing such dominion.

Finnegan uses the analogy of a political pendulum to describe the “somatic conversation” involved in maintaining gender equality (2013: 713). She argues that the prominent social position of women in the societies concerned is not a result of their egalitarianism, but a causal factor in it, asserted by women’s coalitions in “the ritual theatre of conflict” (2013: 705). In Finnegan’s view, egalitarianism is profoundly dependent on public ritual exchanges between the sexes, which form the very structure of social life:

*Public ritual performances among the Mbendjele Yaka, the BaAka, or the Mbuti operate as a powerful bodily statement on behalf of egalitarian reality. These exchanges are a means of creating society, not one of society’s tools.* (Finnegan 2013: 712)
Figures 7.1.a) & b) Baka polyphonic music-making
The Asoumondélé case indicates both that changes in social structure are encouraging changes in ritual and that these changes in ritual then cause further changes to the social structure. The situation is one of mutual causal interaction between social organization and ritual such that x affects y, y affects x and so on. In other words, there is a positive feedback loop between ritual and other factors that contribute towards transforming the social order of the Asoumondélé Baka. As a more general principle, this illustrates that ritual may be involved in feedback loops during the process by which social order is in constant co-creation by its members. Finnegan’s ritual dialogue model is thus an illustration of ritual continuity, or flow, that may come under revision through interaction with other social factors.

The changing character of rituals in Asoumondélé are suggestive of the terms “ritual failure” or “ritual imperfection” (Geertz 1957, Hüsken et al. 2007) in that they may have outcomes that differ from the conventional outcomes of specific rituals. However, as ritual is a process which the community appears to be using to cope with radical change, I prefer the term ritual diversion, or Kisliuk’s (1998) term “distress performed”. Yet “distress performed” is perhaps not specific enough, as a mourning ceremony is also distress performed, but of a different quality to the on-going expression of loss of value, purpose and legitimate ethnic identity that the Baka are experiencing and expressing through ritual. Also, not all of the ongoing changes to ritual are necessarily experienced in terms of distress; there is also a certain optimism.

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72 It is possible that evolutionary modelling and Approximate Bayesian Computation could shed some light on these processes by ascertaining the relative probability of ritual and day-to-day causal factors of social change (see Kandler and Laland’s 2013 model). But this would require the identification of appropriate cultural variants to describe the social dynamics involved and subsequently the collection of sufficient frequency data, a major project.
and excitement about modernity. Failure or imperfection, on the other hand, both have unfortunate judgmental connotations, and they gloss over the important social dynamics taking place through ritual transformation, for example mimetic take-up of the new, and a battle between two social orders where the new confronts the old.

7.3. Vignette: A Ritual Diverted

The following vignette traces the course of a ritual that diverges from an egalitarian flow of power in a variety of ways. These are analyzed in terms of two mechanisms of divergence in the subsequent discussion, namely ritual infusion and ritual rebellion.

It is almost midday. Groups of people meander in and out of the courtyard, fenced by wooden stakes and raffia mats that have been erected in the past few days. They have come from as far as Ntam to participate in this lifting of mourning ceremony that has been the subject of much preparation and planning.

Most of the carousing passed during the early hours in a blur of noise and energy, occasioned by the sound system and lighting hired for the event.

Many have made a special effort with their appearance. The men’s attire is at least as eye-catching as the women’s, with the exception of a prominent Baka woman from Ntam, who is wearing skin-tight trousers, a colourful top and a silver tinsel wig.

The exuberant ambience of the departed night has faded. Many people are exhausted after hours of drinking and dancing to pop music, followed by polyphonic singing and drumming, but six persistent Baka women chant and
clap with abiding rhythm as they shuffle and gyrate around the two drummers in the middle of the courtyard. A scattering of individuals cavort, reluctant to end the fun.

The few Njem vendors who have not yet abandoned their stations sit slumped over their colourful plastic baskets of cigarettes, lollipops, 50 ml “whiskey” sachets and bottles of ngolongolo (strong moonshine). A woman of middle years, known for her propensity for drink, paces back and forth, pausing intermittently to yodel aggressively and gyrate her hips at small groups of men standing nearby. Their reactions range from mild amusement, to disapproval, and outright vexation on the part of a tall man I have not seen before. He is a Njem visitor from the Congo, come to see relatives in the village.

A small boy darts surreptitiously into the mud house annexing the courtyard. When he slips out again, a group of men, including the village chief, Mengbwa, draw together authoritatively. After a brief conference Mengbwa sallies forth, whistling loudly. “Bo na nda a do!” he announces in Baka, repeating the words in Njem (The people of the house are coming!). A Njem man moves towards the front of the mudhouse, and crack! He fires his shot-gun over the raffia rooftop, followed by an eruption of cheering and whooping from the assembled crowd. On cue, the drummers strike up a slow beat, and the crowd falls silent, waiting.
Gradually the mourners appear, spilling out of the mud house and into the courtyard one by one. Their heads downcast, six Baka men and seven Baka women emerge from their overnight confinement, marching forward very slowly, with stiff clockwork movements. They proceed towards a bench positioned to one side of the courtyard. Tears stream down their faces as they mourn their beloved Sawa for the last time. He died many moons ago, and his widow and relatives are due to take off their dark mourning clothes, and move on with their lives.

When the bereaved are finally seated, members of the community, both Baka and Njem, come forward to incentivize them, and remove the head-dresses that have been worn during mourning. Some people reach out to the relatives by rubbing their arms and heads, each in turn. Others provide a sip of alcohol or a coin or
two to each. To my surprise and consternation, an old woman takes her turn to
provide solace to each of the bereaved by shouting and slapping them across the
face repeatedly. She takes particular care to admonish the distraught widow, a
normally vigorous woman who is now unable to contain her tears. I observe
from the reactions of others that this is an acceptable practice in these solemn
proceedings. I turn to ask someone why this is happening, and I am told that the
mourners must “come back to life”.

Once everyone has paid their regards, the bereaved resume their shuffling
procession. They spill out of the courtyard en route to the burial ground in the
nearby forest. Wild flowers decorate the path to this sacred space. The drummers
and singers accompany the mourners’ ponderous motions with music. I find
myself moved by the atmosphere of deep respect that has been created.

Suddenly, there is a disturbance on the periphery of my consciousness. Strident
male voices rise above the pensive melody, and I turn to see two Baka men
shouting and pushing each other. Within seconds, a punch has been thrown, it
all happens so quickly, and a third man has entered the fray, trying to separate
the pair. They turn their fury on him.

The fracas erupts into a ball of violent energy, noise and red dust. Attempts by
bystanders to quell the fight only seem to fan the flames, and soon several men
are involved. Alarmingly, an agitated and heavily pregnant woman runs up to
the mob, trying to draw her husband out by tugging on his arm. He is one of the
pair who began the altercation, and she is too distraught to take heed of the
peril. The mourning procession has stopped in its tracks, and the singers have
dispersed into the general melee. The attention of the crowd has completely
shifted from the commemorative rite towards the drunken brawl, everyone babbling excitedly about its speculated cause.

Mengbwa approaches me, explaining that the two rivals are fighting over the privilege of taking the widow as a second wife. He thinks the situation is becoming dangerous, and asks me to get myself safely indoors. I do not argue but begin my retreat down the path to my own mudhouse. At that moment, the tall Njem visitor from the Congo and his local relative come charging into the fray wielding whips. I break into a run for cover.

Once inside, I lie down on the bamboo bed to try and get some rest. I know from experience that I will soon have a bevy of visitors seeking first aid. Exhausted, I quickly drift into blissful oblivion. A crack of a gunshot startles me back into the present. In my agitation, I open my shutters to peek out of the window but my house is set well back from the ritual centre, and I can see no activity. I only hear the shouts and screams that ensue. I daren’t move. Another shot is fired.

In the aftermath of Sawa’s miscarried commemorative ceremony, I learn the extent of the chaos that transpired. Just before nightfall, I treat several people for injuries and receive visits from Mengbwa, and the Njem village chief, who is a very angry man. I learn that the occasion descended into an ethnic clash. The Baka villagers resented the Njem villagers’ interference in what they perceived as a Baka matter, and a battle ensued. The shots had in fact been fired into the air by a level-headed Njem villager in order to scare people back into their houses. Luckily on this occasion, it worked.

The ritual sees in what were to be several especially sour weeks of Baka-Njem interaction. Many Baka people resent what they perceive as draconian
interference from the Njem, with their use of whips and guns. The Njem chief, for his part, has decided that the Baka need to be clamped down on, like errant children. He publicly admonishes the Baka chief, Mengbwa, about the fight.

Inter-Baka relations are not much better. Sawa’s widow confides in me that she is worried that her husband’s spirit (mԑ) has not safely departed for the forest but is still present within the household, entering her dreams at night. She is afraid that he will lead her into the world of the dead. Stated beliefs about a spiritual afterlife are idiosyncratic among the Baka of Asoumondélé, which corresponds with the differing accounts of Baka eschatology in the ethnographies. Some individuals say that the mԑ departs the body and goes to the forest, to heaven, or to an unknown place; some that they are reincarnated as people or animals; others say that there is no afterlife.

The pregnant wife of one of the original brawlers is highly distraught about her husband’s frenzied ardour for another woman. Polygyny is not common among the Baka, and older Baka women sometimes express disapproval of the practice. She goes to stay with her sister’s household, and in bad grace he demands that her family return his bridewealth payments. The rest of the community seem intent on forgetting Sawa’s commemoration.

7.4. Mechanisms of Ritual Diversion: 1) Ritual Infusion

The first mechanism of ritual diversion is the infusion of new economic and political values into the Baka community at Asoumondélé, causing change to the social order, which in turn alters the way rituals are conducted. A new preoccupation with
development, integration and wealth infuses the Baka ritual activities of music-making and dance. The recent influx of material goods such as money, cheap alcohol, electric generators and sound systems has also changed the character of ritual events towards that of the nightclub or *boîte*, where recorded pop music is often preferred to polyphonic singing. In my experience, the Baka of Asoumondélé spend relatively little time making music, compared with the Mbuti hunter-gatherers of the Ituri Forest, Democratic Republic of the Congo\textsuperscript{73}, who seem to conform more closely with the ritual dialogue model (see also Turnbull 1978, 1983).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Mbuti_daytime_music-making.jpg}
\caption{Mbuti daytime music-making}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{73} I visited the Mbuti for a field trip during 2009.
On a Saturday night, many of the younger Baka generation in Asoumondélé walk 7.5 km to attend the boîte that recently opened in the border town of Ntam. This involves dancing and socializing with an ethnically-diverse collection of people, who are likely to be itinerant, or have an otherwise transitory status in the region (for example truckers, small-scale entrepreneurs, or Congolese prostitutes cashing in on a few weeks of cross-border business). These people have come to Ntam to make money from the emerging commercial opportunities. I estimate that the population of Ntam tripled in size during the course of my fieldwork.

The atmosphere of the boîte is generally raucous; gambling and heavy drinking are the order of the day, and brawls, swindles and thefts are not uncommon. A massive generator runs throughout Saturday night, to chill the beer and to power high-decibel pop music and flashing lights. Nightclub goers, including the Baka, typically dress up in flashy clothes (influenced by the hip hop *bling bling*\(^{74}\) fashion popular in urban Cameroon). Sunglasses and baseball caps are prestigious items in this local context, and these are often shown off at the boîte. Baka youngsters may spend a large proportion of their hard-earned cash on buying the jauntiest outfit they can afford, which they reserve for nights out.

Many urbanites in Central Africa have a pronounced interest in sartorial exhibitionism, increasingly with a hip hop flavour amongst the younger generation. This is akin to the *sapeur* phenomenon in urban Congo, where the consumption of imported European clothing is an expression of high status. Friedman (1994) analyses this conspicuous consumerism as borne out of colonial transformation during which “an existing hierarchical praxis” (1994: 7) became inscribed with a mythologized

\(^{74}\) A slang term referring to showy jewellery and ornamentation in hip-hop culture.
vision of the West. Friedman’s key insight is that consumption is an instrument of identity creation, a way of fulfilling desires associated with chimerical lifestyles.

Locals in the rural context in the Asoumondélé locale emulate the style of urbanites as they aspire to appropriate the glamour of the city. In the same way that urban *sapeurs* acquire Western status by donning Western clothing, the Baka acquire the credentials of modernity by donning the clothing of urbanites. And the Baka villagers, at the bottom of the local hierarchy and yearning to establish their equal status, conspicuously consume the marvels of modernity as they try to establish their place in the new utopia promised by development. They actively explore the opportunities of modernity, seeking to acquire its mystical powers by ritually consuming and displaying its material manifestations. This is analogous to how more traditional polyphonic rituals draw forth the abundance of the forest by mimicking its sounds and feeding the forest spirits with the resulting music.
Figures 7.4.a) & b) Baka youngsters at the boîte in Ntam
Back in the village of Asoumondélé, the influence of the boîte seeps in. The Baka villagers now mark some of their important ritual events by collecting money for a kitty to hire an electric generator and sound system. Alcohol and cigarettes are also bought with this money, to be shared out during the events. On some ritual occasions, polyphonic singing only takes place once the fuel for the generator runs out, which fundamentally changes the form and character that those rituals take, as illustrated by the vignette of Sawa’s commemorative ceremony.

Lewis (2013) demonstrates that communal music-making is critical for cultural transmission and social cohesion, with special reference to the polyphonic style of Congo Basin hunter-gatherers. Takanori Oishi and Koji Hayashi (2014) have noticed both the influx of outdoor discos as a replacement for polyphonic rituals, and the “commoditization of the Baka labour force” further afield in Cameroon (2014: 145). In Asoumondélé, rituals that lack the socially binding activity of polyphonic music-making also lack the cooperative and egalitarian spirit of polyphonic rituals.

Commercial mores have also become mixed into Baka rituals, in the form of status symbols from the emerging nightclub scene, for example the flashy hip hop clothes, sunglasses, and (slightly) more prestigious brands of liquor for the emerging Baka elite who can afford them. These new infusions indicate that some of the force of ritual flow is being diverted away from creating egalitarian cohesion towards providing an outlet for competition and conspicuous consumerism. For example, at an Ejengi ritual performance in Asoumondélé, a young Baka man, one of my next-door neighbours, asked me for a little money to buy alcohol sachets for himself and his cohorts. I gave him 1,000 CFA, which would have been enough to purchase ten double tot sachets of
liquor, the standard drink on such occasions. I then observed that he did not buy sachets to share among the other young men of his household but spent the entire amount on a beer from the village shop, a prestige item not generally affordable to locals (passing truck drivers are the target market).

As documented in previous chapters, many Baka villagers have a severe problem with alcoholism, a problem that intensified with the opening of the road. This is partly because the local economy has become rapidly monetized (see Köhler 2005, Kitanishi 2006 and Oishi 2012 for descriptions of how cash is expended in order to purchase alcoholic drinks and consumer goods by Baka people in other places).

The arrival of the new road in Asoumondélé has effectively set up a new frontier situation in which alcohol has aggravated relationships of inequality between the two local ethnic groups, and between locals and newcomers, as illustrated in the tensions between Baka and Njem on the occasion of Sawa’s commemoration. Oishi and Hayashi (2014) have documented how alcohol has become part of the village way of life for Baka in the East Region, and they argue more generally that the consumption of large amounts of alcohol at dancing rituals is a recent development.

The newly intensified problem of alcoholism, along with the influence of the boîte, means that ritual flow is sometimes diverted to accommodate heavy drinking sessions, drunken forays, and consequent discordance. Njem individuals also frequent ritual occasions held in the Baka quarter of Asoumondélé, often in order to sell alcohol sachets and bonbons to the Baka participants. The (sometimes uninvited) involvement of the Njem at Baka ritual occasions is potentially disruptive because of the ethnic tension that exists between the two communities, in conjunction with the excessive alcohol consumption that is itself predicated on exploitative alcohol-driven
relationships. This tension appears to be diluting the potential of ritual to facilitate solidarity and positive identity-making processes among the Baka. As argued in Chapter 4, collectively the Baka villagers show signs of a challenged sense of ethnic identity due to discriminatory attitudes to their partially egalitarian hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

Alcohol-instilled violence often disturbs the ordered flow of a ritual event, as an outbreak of chaotic brawling ensues. This is probably not unique to Asoumondélé. Susanne Fürniss (2008) observed an incident in which one drunkard almost caused the suspension of a bèkà circumcision ritual among the Baka of Messéa, Cameroon. The scale of disruption may vary quite a lot in different scenarios, and may depend both on how much alcohol is available and on existing social tensions.

Once people in Asoumondélé are spurred to begin drinking excessively, this continues until the drinkers’ resources and energy have been exhausted. After days of mass drinking, the community is left in a state of despair. Some people are seriously ill, and others too weak to resume their work. Some have horrible injuries, most notably women who have been attacked by their husbands. Elderly women must work harder during these times to shoulder the burden of childcare, and children may go hungry because nobody has prepared food. The young are also traumatized by witnessing uncharacteristically violent behaviour from the older generations. Sometimes the desire to continue drinking more on such occasions leads to thefts of money or household items to sell. It is no accident that Baka terms for hard liquor are

75 In fact, alcoholism may be affecting the rituals of Mbendjele who live in large villages too, as the Mbendjele of Kabo, in the northern Republic of Congo, aren't permitted to dance Ejengi without a police escort anymore because of the scale of alcoholism and brawling. (Gill Conquest, personal communication, September 2015).
Alcoholic disruption has the capacity to permanently alter the type of ritual activity performed by immediate-return societies insofar as this activity functions to maintain political equilibrium. Woodburn (2005) notices that in Hadza and Central African hunter-gatherer societies, male and female cults exist, and there are “attempts to build a simple gender hierarchy of ritual privileges” (2005: 26) within ritual life. Gender and age distinctions are more marked in ritual life than in day-to-day secular life, and property rights held exclusively by initiated members of a gender cult are stressed in opposition to the minimization of property rights in day-to-day life. Woodburn theorizes that ritual potentiates the appropriation of power by men, that “we should see male ritual privilege as a weak point in the operation of immediate return systems and a possible opening for one of the potential routes to delayed return” (2005: 27).

This is precisely what the descent into violence by the Asoumondélé community facilitates, due to the superior physical strength of men.

Ritual occasions can become a stage for machismo performances involving the physical domination of women. This phenomenon is marked within the Baka community when the ritual events involve the broader community. For example, after a Labour Day celebration held at Mbalm in 2011, most of the Asoumondélé men arrived back home in the evening drunk and angry about the fact that the women had independently left the village to attend the festivities. Throughout Cameroon, national holidays are important occasions which involve extensive festivities and the consumption of alcohol. These occasions are collectively known as fête. On this

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occasion, the Baka men had come under ridicule from a group of Njem men for not being able to control their wives.

Their collective masculinity slighted, the Baka men stoked up each other’s anger to the extent that immediately upon arriving back in Asoumondélé, a number of domestic arguments began which quickly escalated into violence. There was general chaos and discord through the night, leaving the community in upheaval for several days afterwards. Three women were seriously injured. One had nine deep bite wounds, another had a torn ear and a large gash on her forehead, and the third – suffering from apparent concussion – was obliged to take refuge in my house with her infant until her irate husband was persuaded to leave on a hunting trip the following day.

During fieldwork conducted within the period of 1986 to 1995, Michelle Kisliuk (1998) became an apprentice of women’s dances among the Aka hunter-gatherers of the Central African Republic. She noted that when Aka people spent extended periods near a village, there was increased tension surrounding the women’s dances. In the village context, Aka men seem to have felt threatened by the assertion of female solidarity that these dances entailed.

Kisliuk describes the tension she witnessed as distress performed, and attributes the hostility displayed by the men to the blow felt to their male identities within the village context (caused by the influences of misogynistic and patriarchal village ideology, discrimination, modernity, and social flux). For example, due to the diminishing role of hunting in village life and the inferior status that Aka men held in their increased dealings with non-Aka, the men felt emasculated and thus found the assertive women’s dances more threatening than in the traditional forest context, where the men felt more assured.
The Labour Day violence at Asoumondélé can be seen as a full-blown version of performed distress relating to the challenged self-esteem and masculine identity of hunter-gather men in the village context of Equatorial Africa, a phenomenon first noticed by Kisliuk. For the Asoumondélé Baka, the village context is their everyday reality, and forest life is only an occasional interlude. This possibly amplifies the levels of distress incurred as a result of undermined masculinity.

Another indicator of a ritual imbalance of power resulting from external patriarchal pressure is that male-conducted rituals, such as the Ejengi ceremony, are performed regularly, whereas women’s rituals, such as Yeli, are seldom performed. When asked why Yeli is not performed, female informants replied that it is a thing of the past, or that women have become weak and/or negligent (wùbà). The purpose of Yeli is to aid men in the hunt, and as hunting has diminished as the primary economic activity of men, it follows that Yeli has diminished in tandem.

Within the context of the competitive and alcoholic aura of the village, cliques of opportunistic Baka men have realized the commercial potential of the Ejengi spirit play, which is recognized far and wide among non-Baka as a powerful curative ritual (this etic usage does not accord strictly with the Baka interpretation of the Ejengi ritual as one of thanksgiving). In the past, the Ejengi ritual was exclusively conducted by initiated Aka and Baka men, who possess the secret ritual knowledge required to summon a visitation to the community of the powerful male Ejengi spirit (Joiris 1996, 2013). But in Asoumondélé, men from other ethnicities can now become initiated into the Ejengi society in exchange for payment and alcoholic rewards77. I myself was

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77 This practice is widespread in logging towns too, according to Jerome Lewis (personal communication).
offered the opportunity to become initiated into the Ejengi society, which is normally forbidden and dangerous to women.

7.5. Baka and Njem people waiting for Ejengi to perform a curative ritual

Apart from outbreaks of violence, the habit of alcohol abuse disrupts community-enhancing ritual, as it is perceived as an essential motivator to bring people together for song and dance. Events that are called by families who do not have the money to provide any alcohol are often poorly attended by the rest of the community. Oishi and Hayashi (2014) have also observed that Baka families who wish to call a ritual are now obliged to provide large quantities of alcohol and tobacco for the attendees. Although it has always been the case that the families were expected to provide some provisions for guests, including food and alcohol, the emphasis on large quantities of hard liquor seems to have increased.
Alcohol dependence creates competition for resources to drink that undermines an atmosphere of sharing, and sometimes excludes the less enfranchised Baka from participating actively in ritual events or from initiating them. For example, a family whose two-year-old child died of illness and lack of medical care could not afford to buy alcohol for the mortuary ritual, thus only a handful of participants performed the singing and dancing required compared with another two mortuary rituals for infants that I witnessed, which were both better supplied and better attended. A more comprehensive ceremony was planned for a few weeks later but failed to transpire as the family’s economic doldrums continued, causing the family prolonged disquiet.

It has been argued (Shaw 1979, Altman 1987) that alcohol-fuelled rituals serve as a levelling mechanism among Aboriginal Australians because they involve balanced reciprocity over long periods of time and prevent individuals from becoming too successful economically. However, David McKnight (2002) suggests that excessive violence associated with excessive drinking led to normal processes of control and ritualization breaking down when Aboriginal Australians became disempowered.

In a similar vein, there is undoubtedly pressure on Baka individuals to spend newly earned cash on drinks for others, and it is an ostentatious way of displaying sharing behavior, an effective means of displaying that money is shared to avoid accusations and envy. Alcoholic rituals are also a temporary release from the stresses of a rapidly changing world, and a psychological means of escaping the amplified inequality and disempowerment it has brought thus far to the Baka. Oishi and Hayashi (2014) argue that in the Moloundou District (East Region, Cameroon) Baka youths create outdoor discos instead of using “traditional practices of song and dance” (2014: 143) in their attempts to forge solidarity amidst drastic socioeconomic change. However they also
note the “escalation of alcohol-related conflict after continuous co-drinking” (2014: 154).

According to the alcohol myopia model, a cognitive-physiological theory of psychology first developed by Steele and Josephs (1990), alcohol can reliably reduce anxiety and depression in drinkers, provided that a distracting activity is available. Alcohol also inflates the self-evaluation of drinkers. Both of these effects are due to impaired attention allocation, but the temporary relief they provide from psychological stress appeals to the Baka community of Asoumondélé, who face challenging questions of social identity. The community looks forward to ritual occasions as a chance to escape from the gritty realities of everyday life, as they provide the opportunity to relax and have fun.

Anthropologists have long noticed that alcohol can create social communion through the suppression of inhibitions, that it aids the ability of people to “let go” of their concerns for a brief period by creating an ideal world in which self-judgment and anxiety are suspended, and that it is a gatekeeper of inclusion and exclusion in social identity, often turned to by minority groups experiencing marginalization (Yudkin 1978: 4, Douglas 1987, de Garine 2001). Moreover, the ephemeral release that alcohol provides is in tune with an immediate return ethos in which celebrating the abundances of the present is highly valued, and concerns about the future are minimized (Woodburn 1982a, 1982b). Given their circumstances, it is small wonder that many Baka individuals seek to alleviate their anxiety about the future and their identity within it through drinking and revelry.

The alcohol myopia model (Steele and Josephs 1990, Giancola et al. 2010) holds that the attention-dulling properties of alcohol mean that attention is allocated to immediate, salient environmental cues at the expense of less salient cues causing
extremes in social reaction, whether empathetic or aggressive. Thus, if cues in the ritual environment are those of communion and animation, such as sharing, joking, laughing, singing and dancing, the individual drinker is likely to join in with abandon. In fact, the model predicts that given an appropriate context in which inhibitory cues predominate, alcohol consumption can actually decrease aggression, below levels observed in sober individuals.

The downside of this is that a hostile or provocative cue is likely to be highly salient, and overpower less immediate and less salient cues (such as thoughts about the consequences of aggression). Alcohol thus has the capacity to provoke an aggressive Jekyll-to-Hyde reaction on the part of a drinker who may be predisposed for various reasons. The myopia model also indicates that alcohol’s attractive effects of self-inflation and relief are likely to reinforce addiction, especially when individuals are dealing with chronic inner conflicts (Steele and Josephs 1990, Giancola et al. 2010).

In Asoumondélé, boîte-styled events generally pass through the initial phases with plenty of bonhomie reaching a peak about midway through. As time goes by and people drink more, there is a gradual lessening of empathetic ambience and drinkers show signs of frayed tempers, clumsiness, boisterousness, as well as impulsive and inconsiderate behaviour. When a ritual event lapses in benevolent energy, individuals may display marked anger or aggression, paranoia and depression, depending on how heavily they have been drinking. At these moments, negative emotion, a cue which can precipitate alcoholic aggression according to the myopia model, may break through the otherwise distracting effects of ritual communion. For example, the two men at Sawa’s commemoration began their fistfight when the benevolent ritual energy had slumped, and the violent cues from the fistfight were taken up rapidly by bystanders, leading to a generalized brawl.
The fervour of alcoholic individuals to keep drinking may undermine any camaraderie or solidarity that was gained at the start of a ritual drinking session. People are often left debilitated and depressed after such events, as was the case after Sawa’s commemoration. On another occasion during my fieldwork, the aftermath of a drunken ritual saw a Baka man attempt suicide at the smaller Baka village of Séé, after his wife fled from his abusive behaviour to find refuge with relatives in Asoumondélé. Resentments caused by fighting are not easily dispelled, especially in a community that is no longer highly mobile and cannot practice the avoidance mechanism as easily as their previously mobile lifestyle would allow.

7.5. Mechanisms of Ritual Diversion: 2) Ritual Rebellion

Alcoholic excess among the Baka of Asoumondélé goes hand-in-hand with outbreaks of arguments, violence, and appropriated property during the course of ritual performances. This may simply be due to the prevalence of alcohol on such occasions. But, as argued by Max Gluckman (1954, 1963), ritual may have a cathartic effect during which rebellions are staged and social tensions released. De Garine (2001: 7) notes that the consumption of alcohol creates an atmosphere in which it is more permissible to challenge the social and political order, and Douglas (1987: 11) claims that alcohol facilitates the performance of ritual’s task through the creation of a transient ideal world.

Rebellion can be observed in Baka rituals where individuals ostentatiously defy the egalitarian norms of the past, and experiment with new ideas and lifestyles. This rebellion may be an independent cause of discord, which is then provoked by alcohol.
Violent ritual eruptions in Asoumondélé do not seem to aid social harmony by serving as a standardized pressure valve to expunge tensions however. Rather, the effect in the community is experienced as an ongoing part of a transformative crisis during which the Baka experiment with the social aesthetics of capitalist consumption, which is how modernity is instantiated for them. The stark contrast between the new aesthetics and the former egalitarian ethos is what constitutes rebellion, leading to the shockwaves and moments of ordinary-life crisis that are so in evidence.

Gluckman originally conceived the cathartic effect as a conservative phenomenon that comes about through the simulation of revolutionary moments. These “rituals of rebellion” (1954) uphold the status quo by defusing the potential energy from politically unequal relationships. But in a society undergoing rapid and stressful change, is ritual rebellion revolutionary rather than conservative?

In the case of Asoumondélé, the Baka are transforming their rituals into an arena in which key aspects of the new market-connected world can be appropriated. These new forms may have an exploratory role in allowing the new to be compared with the old, so that individuals can gain first-hand experience with them. The boîte, with its mystically-generated music, flashing lights, and its abundance of sex, flirtation and drink, is the theatre in which mimetic performance takes place, one that mirrors an idealized modern world. Here the community can experiment with casting off old ways that no longer serve them well, and appropriating new ways of life from the milieu they now find themselves in, suffused as it is with the politics of differentiation.

In old-school spirit play performances, known as be for the Baka and massana for the Yaka, one mimes or mimics the thing one wants to hunt, appropriate or know (as described by Lewis 2009). Ritual mimicry is about establishing channels of communication with the object desired. The new process of mimetic performance is
not dissimilar in this respect, but what is being learnt about here is how the new worldly protocols produce different emotional dispositions and enable novel types of relationship. What is desired is modernity. In the old-school performances, music is made to imitate the sounds of the forest and ensure that it provides abundantly, and by the same logic music made with modern sounds and equipment may be a way of ensuring that modernity opens itself up to the Baka, providing for them abundantly. The tensions created in playing with the clash between old and new can perhaps spark unexpected violence.

Clifford Geertz (1957) attributed ritual failure at a Javanese funeral to psychological tension that resulted from discontinuity between a changing sociopolitical order and a more conservative cultural sphere of meaning. Geertz challenged functionalist models that emphasize the conservative role of ritual over its transformative potential, pointing out that the failed funeral occurred within the context of ordinary historical change and not exceptional circumstances or anomie.

Notwithstanding this everyday transformative potential of ritual, the rituals of rebellion in Asoumondélé clearly have radical transformative potential, and the historical circumstances of their creation are indeed critical. Some of the Baka villagers talk of experiencing a time of hardship (tie na siti), which is a gloss for generalized social crisis. This is borne of exceptionally rapid change, where they now perceive their former lifestyle as deficient and complain about suffering and poverty, a complaint that appears to be relational in origin, aggravated by their degraded ethnic identity. Within this turbulent context, the tension-producing aspects of ritual sometimes seethe up into periods of social agitation, where violence and conflict are rife and aided by alcohol’s myopic effect.
The idea that rebellion in ritual may be influenced by overall social stress has been developed by theorists studying politically unequal societies. Victor Turner modified Gluckman’s characterization of the political potential of ritual, by coining the term *communitas* (1969, 1982). Communitas is an ephemeral experience of egalitarian solidarity, primarily constituted in “liminality and the ritual powers of the weak” (1969: 102). It is the result of a ritualized co-experience that aligns individuals as statusless and possessionless equals, contrasting with the hierarchical structure of temporal social life.

Communitas resembles the cathartic rituals of rebellion described by Gluckman, in that it involves ritualized occasions or subcultures where the everyday political order is turned upside down. Differing from Gluckman, Turner thought that the powers of the weak hold the capacity to transcend ritual, and that to the conservatives of hierarchy, “all sustained manifestations of communitas must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions” (1969: 109).

Turner’s concept of communitas stands in a theoretically useful relationship to the ritual dialogue model, in which Finnegan (2013) argues that ritual is the fabric of egalitarian social structure. In prioritizing the role of ritual, Finnegan perhaps does not give due weight to factors such as division of labour, sharing behavior, mobility, access to lethal force, free individual access to resources, levelling mechanisms such as mockery, ethical constraints such as taboo, political jostling, conflict resolution and the influence of external sociopolitical models. By comparing Turner and Finnegan’s models however, we can see that, in hierarchical societies, rituals that contain a contrasting politics of equality abound, whereas in extremely equal societies, the ritual
contrasts with the quotidian political system in that the possibility of domination is encountered and overturned.

In the egalitarian ritual dialogue model, the repeated contest for power between men and women, which always evens out, is a form of political negotiation that normally has a conservative egalitarian outcome despite the potential for the emergence of inequality being explored. This implies that in extremely egalitarian societies ritual communitas favours explorations of inequality, whereas in hierarchical societies it explores equality. As James Woodburn (2005) has noted of immediate-return political systems, they are societies of equals because inequality is actively resisted through institutional procedures, which constitute an extreme resolution to “the coexisting pressures for equality and for inequality which are present in the desires of every one of us as an individual and in the operation of the political systems, and indeed of the kinship systems and religious systems, of every human society” (2005: 22).

Expanding on the ideas of Gluckman and Turner, contemporary scholars have traced various permutations of the revolutionary or conservative potential of ritual in politically unequal societies. Susanne Schröter (2004) redresses what has been considered an imbalance in the “rituals of rebellion” theory initially developed by Gluckman. Schröter argues that in contextual situations of rapid social change, the rebellious aspects of ritual are not always conservative but may upset the status quo beyond and outside of ritual time-space. For example, cargo cults in Melanesia tried to develop, through ritual, a system in which wealth would be equally distributed in order to restore the political imbalance created by colonialism.

78 See Teeffelen (1978) and Hutt (2012) for a critique of Gluckman’s theory on account of its inadequacy to theorize social and political transformations.
Schröter's general point about ritual is that: “political rebellions can drift to mere rituals and ritual rebellions can reveal themselves to be more political than ceremonial” (Schröter 2004: 54). Ritual analysis is crucial to understanding social and political rebellion for this reason, because ritual is often focused on joining groups of people together in sharing intentions that produce coordinated and purposeful action, which may lead to a political outcome in quotidian life.

Similarly, historian Curtis Hutt (2012: 35) argues for a “dissipative model of ritual system change”, in which rituals are seen as open and complex systems that may adapt in unexpected and nonlinear ways. Analyzing striking changes in Jewish, Christian and Islamic pilgrimage in sites in Israel and the Occupied Territories over the last 100 years, he shows that they have undergone profound transformations, including restructuring, birth, death, and failure. During periods of abrupt change and conflict, material or political contextual factors may catalyze ritual alteration, which can itself be extremely destabilizing to the status quo – causing conditions in which new beliefs, practices and leaders are likely to emerge.

The aforementioned theories all apply to societies where there is already an unequal political system in place, thus conservative ritual energy is assumed to sustain the hierarchical flow of power, and revolutionary ritual energy is seen as a kind of levelling device. But what happens when these situations are reversed, when an egalitarian system starts transforming into an economically and politically-differentiated one? What befalls the conservative ritual dynamic of levelling in a rapidly changing context like Asoumondélé, where differences in status, power and wealth are emerging out of a recent history of immediate return egalitarianism? Is it something close to subversive communitas, as described by Turner, or the conservative rebellion described by Gluckman?
Music-making is an element of ritual that enhances social bonding and relies on specialized cognitive functions. Jerome Lewis (2013: 65) notes that music, through its aesthetic qualities, provides a resilient medium for “the way culture is held in human brains and transmitted down the generations”, and is “biased toward long-term interaction and cohesion of social groups”. Following musicologist Richard Widdess (2012), Lewis links this flexible semantic capacity of music with the “cultural foundational schemas” described by cognitive anthropologists Maurice Bloch (1998) and Bradd Shore (1996).

It is likely that music, and the ritual activities that it facilitates, played a crucial role in the evolution of hunter-gatherer egalitarianism. Biological anthropologist Christopher Boehm (1993, 1999) coined the term reverse dominance hierarchy to describe a system in which the communal majority collectively control would-be dominants or upstarts79, while Whiten and Erdal use the term counter-dominance (1994, 1996). Dor, Knight & Lewis (2014), using Power’s (2009, 2014) sexual selection model of ritual, suggest that ritual and music were central to establishing the counter-dominance that allowed symbolic culture, and thus language, to evolve (a compelling multi-disciplinary argument beyond the scope of this essay). Lewis (2009, 2014) adds mimesis to the equation. Given that ritual co-experience in an egalitarian society may be geared towards maintaining the political order of “counter-dominance”, when there is ritual rebellion in a society transitioning towards the hierarchical dominance structures of the outside world, the logical (if counterintuitive) hypothesis is that the revolutionary ritual motion would swing in the direction of political inequality.

79Boehm’s model is useful, but does not adequately address the centrality of gender equality in non-competitive egalitarianism.
There does appear to be evidence of this in the context of Asoumondélé, where the rebellious impulses bubbling up in ritual practices are not conducive to counter-dominance and equable communion but rather to differentiation, status-seeking behaviour and gender conflict. However, bubbles of rebellion, often alcohol driven, work against the backdrop of more traditional rituals of equality, which have the tendency to seem mundane and lacklustre by comparison with boîte-styled events.

The night that I moved into the house the Baka community had built for me, a surprise party with a celebratory ritual was held outside my house. As it was situated far away from the road, at the border of village and forest, the ritual could be kept secret from the broader community. This ritual was unexpected by me, as a larger housewarming party that included the Njem had been held only a few days before (with unfortunate consequences, as described in the Stolen Money vignette in Section 3.1.). The surprise ritual involved comic dance performances by male *Mbouamboua* spirits. The antics of the spirits, who wear baskets and leaves on their heads, are enjoyed by all. They dance, writhe around on the floor growling profanities, and exchange banter with the women. The polyphonic singing, drumming and dancing was vibrant up until around midnight, when a group of men approached me to ask for money to buy alcohol. Uncomfortable with this request, I decided to go to bed. The spirits then quickly departed and the village fell silent as people went home earlier than boîte-styled events, which would continue through the night.
7.6. A Revolution of Inequality

The socio-economic impact of the new road and mine on the social world of the Baka community of Asoumondélé has been sufficient in scale and rapidity to provide a case study illustrating how ritual can be transformed by socio-economic change. I have outlined why the alterations to ritual structure and performance are best theorized in terms of a positive feedback loop with social transformation towards less equal ways of living.

The theoretical model can be summarized as follows: a continuum of day-to-day social transformation leads to changes being explored experientially and mimetically
in ritual spaces, resulting in the changing character of ritual (veering from sharing, polyphonic and harmonious to competitive, exclusive and discordant).

The case study suggests two mechanisms by which rapid socioeconomic upheaval in the area has led to the concomitant diversion of ritual flow, through ritual infusion and ritual rebellion.

Rather than harmoniously consolidating the Baka community’s former ideals and levelling power relations, the new boîte-styled alcoholic events agitate society. They challenge the once-egalitarian order by allowing the rapid infiltration of practices inspired by paternalism, patriarchy, commercial values and hierarchical flows of power. Given that ritual co-experience in an egalitarian society may be geared towards maintaining the political order of counter-dominance, when there is ritual rebellion in a society transitioning towards the hierarchical dominance structures of the outside world, the logical (if counterintuitive) hypothesis is that the revolutionary ritual motion would swing in the direction of political inequality.

These various dynamics – catalyzed by external factors – sporadically divert the character of ritual events from the creation of collective “effervescence” (Durkheim 1915: 157-8, 163-4, 283-4) towards competitive pandemonium, potentially leading to more gradual, but also more permanent, change. However, discordant events may exist alongside events involving resilient cultural elements (e.g. polyphonic music, ritualized sharing and the appearance of forest spirits), which emphasize social continuity and an egalitarian cosmology.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Property, Demand Sharing and Exchange

8.1. Immediate or Delayed Return?

It was apparent during my fieldwork in Asoumondélé that the demand sharing of goods by Baka inhabitants is often replaced by reciprocal exchange mechanisms, such as barter, debt or monetary transactions. Baka households may elect to share any surplus produce with one another, but they may also choose to accumulate it, or to sell it on to outsiders, or even to another Baka household. The Baka of Asoumondélé now practice many delayed return activities, both in the production of goods (cultivating farms is the most important means by which food is secured), and the types of transfer by means of which goods are distributed through the community (either sharing or exchange). Koichi Kitanishi has traced the increasing importance of reciprocal exchange as the result of the cash economy in his various papers on the economics of Baka society (2000, 2003, 2006). Through the course of his researches with the Baka around the turn of the millennium, he had come to observe that a conflict between sharing and the selfish usage of goods had gradually become prominent (2006).

Baka ethnographers (Köhler 1998, Kitanishi 1995, Maatsura 2009, Oishi 2012, Weig 2013) classify Baka society as immediate return using Woodburn’s (1982a) categorization of human societies into two basic types – immediate return and delayed return – while acknowledging that the Baka as an ethnic group have been engaged in agricultural activities on an ad hoc basis since the 1950s, and that they are fairly adept
at operating within the delayed-return systems of others. However, in light of the extent to which many Baka people of today are interested in accumulation, and because they feed themselves primarily through the delayed-return practice of shifting cultivation, conceptualizing Baka society as primarily immediate return is becoming increasingly difficult to support. That said, the two ideal types were always only intended by Woodburn to describe two extremes at the opposite poles of a spectrum. It should therefore be acknowledged that although the Baka evidently engage in many delayed-return practices, an immediate-return and egalitarian ethos still impinges upon Baka ideology and practice. This is especially evident with regard to the expectations that Baka people have of the outside world, and the demands that they bring to bear on it.

The Baka of Asoumondélé alternate between a range of immediate-return and delayed-return activities in different contexts. For example, during forest trips food is rigorously shared between everyone in camp, regardless of kinship ties. Sharing is also practiced more extensively between forest camps than between households in the village. For example, on occasions when I have been out on forest excursions, when coming across other groups of Baka people out on excursions, sharing occurred between my group or camp, and the other camps. Typically, I would take along rice, seasoning and onions on forest trips. These were much appreciated by other camps, especially by the small all-male hunting parties, who would typically contribute game to the pot on occasions where there was also shared companionship between the different parties around a campfire, or else a messenger would be sent to a nearby camp to request a particular item (usually at dusk).

Nonetheless, when in the village, the same Baka people will shift towards the competitive exchange patterns between households that now predominate in the
village context. Given that for most of the Baka people of Asoumondélé the majority of their time is spent in the village, they are mostly engaged in delayed-return practices of production and exchange, such as producing, selling and exchanging cultivated foods, tobacco, ivory, meat, honey and gold. There are some exceptions to this, such as during the dry seasons when small groups of Baka men will spend longer periods in the forest hunting for big game like elephant, and there are some households that will choose to spend a few weeks in a forest camp not too far from the village during the dry seasons. Thus, if a categorisation is to be given, the current practices of Baka society are perhaps best classified as lying at a central point on an imaginary continuum between immediate return and delayed return, but slightly closer to the delayed-return end. Yet, as former hunter-gatherers, the Baka still practice more immediate-return economic activities than the vast majority of other human societies today.

Dörte Weig (2013) discusses both immediate- and delayed-return practices among the Baka of Ivindo, Gabon, noting that there has been “a general movement of ‘leaving the forest’, a change in livelihoods, dwellings, and practices, and an increased desire for material possessions” (2013: 85). Yet Weig observed both the claims to personal ownership associated with delayed return and the levelling mechanisms associated with immediate return in her fieldwork of 2011.

The transfer of goods between Baka households in Asoumondélé village have come to be centred around exchange rather than sharing, and the economy is no longer based primarily on hunting and gathering but rather on cultivation and waged labour. In these respects, the economic practices of the Baka community are now those of a delayed-return system. Extensive sharing still occurs within Baka households, as is also the case within the delayed-return households of the Njem. In other respects, the economic
practices of the Baka community are still immediate return. There is residual social pressure on Baka individuals to share goods on demand – especially when it is known that a person has come into a sum of money. There are also elective sharing networks between households, for example neighbouring households will often send around pots or plates of surplus food to each other, or demand specific items from each other.

The discriminatory client-patron-styled relationships between Njem and Baka people have become more central to Baka livelihoods in Asoumondélé. The village has become a space where newer commercial practices, such as those performed between vendor and buyer, or employer and employee, now also organize social relationships.

According to local ethnic categories, in the past the Njem had concentrated on growing plantain, cassava and maize, whereas the Baka focused their efforts on hunting and gathering. This line of differentiation is now very blurred, and in addition both ethnic groups have begun to experiment with new economic strategies, such as artisanal gold mining, the selling of bushmeat (and other forest resources) to merchants for resale in the urban market, waged labour, and various entrepreneurial schemes such as the selling of alcohol. In formal interviews and informal discussions, Baka people clearly stated that these are relatively new practices in the community that have gradually come about since leaving the forest (in the case of artisanal gold mining), and since the road arrived (exposure to urban markets).
8.2. Demand Sharing and Reciprocity

In delayed-return societies, work is generally invested over extended periods of time before any output is either produced or consumed. The delay between labour investment and consumption results in authoritarian structures by means of which assets can be controlled and the outcomes of labour are distributed. According to Alan Barnard and James Woodburn:

*All societies operate implicitly or explicitly on the principle that whatever I, as an individual, obtain from nature, or make by myself using my own labour is residually recognised as in some sense my property, that is, it is mine unless some other explicit principle overrides this basic one and the yield of my labour is alienated from me* (1988: 24).

In other words, the basic principle is that work transforms material things into property, and sometimes also non-material things, such as intellectual property. The three ideological principles regarding property that perpetuate an immediate-return society, as theorized by Woodburn (1998), are: 1) demand sharing (in which donor obligation and recipient entitlement is stressed); 2) the rejection of reciprocal relations of exchange; and 3) the lack of property rights over fixed resources such as land. Demand sharing, as outlined by Barnard and Woodburn (1988), is central to this.

Whilst all members of the society will have equal access to resources, this does not necessarily create equality of output. Due to luck, skill and persistence, some individuals are able to produce more than others. This has the potential to create political inequality, because individuals who accumulate more could use their property to create relationships of dependency with others. However, in immediate- return
societies, demand sharing acts as a levelling mechanism to prevent the rise of inequalities of property. Demand sharing amounts to the social obligation for an individual to share any surplus created through their own labour, as well as to be humble about their achievements.

It has been suggested that demand sharing is itself a form of reciprocal exchange, or delayed reciprocity, where an individual donates to others in the expectation that they will reciprocate at a later time. Woodburn argues that this is not the case. He asserts that entitlement does not depend on donation and some individuals who are regular recipients never themselves contribute. His interpretation is that it is something imposed on the donor by the community, much like taxation.

‘…I would suggest we treat it as analogous to taxation on incomes of the successful in our own society. The successful pay more than the less successful and are obliged to do so. They are not able to establish greater claims in future through having paid more in tax and do not derive much prestige from having contributed more to the tax pool than they have withdrawn from in benefits.’

(Woodburn 1982a: 441-2)

8. 3. The Material and Ideological Conundrum

The bridge between material and ideological, or economic and cultural, is well-trodden in anthropology, and in the social sciences in general. Going back to 1844, Karl Marx hypothesized that social inequality is always tied to the alienating modes of production that stem from private property ownership. He asserted that cultural representations
are subordinate to the economic foundation of a society, so that it is possible for a false consciousness to privilege the economic interests of an elite group. Max Weber (1905), on the other hand, was concerned with demonstrating how cultural ideas and values are interrelated with economic life and not necessarily defined by it. Elective affinity is the phenomenon whereby ideas that benefit an elite group tend to survive better (Weber 1948).

In 1976, Marshall Sahlins launched his critique of economic determinism and of Marxist-inspired praxis theory, or the standpoint that human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and utilitarian interests alone. Sahlins noted what he termed “the procrustean opposition of ‘idealism’ and ‘materialism’” (1976: ix); Culture and Practical Reason was an attempt to leave this dualism behind. He disputed the notion that the human mind passively responds to situations that it does not itself create or organize, privileging instead the ideological or symbolic in the creation of society.

In a similar vein, in 1984, Maurice Godelier hypothesised that human beings are able to produce society precisely because they are able to transform nature through their ideas. Thus both Sahlins and Godelier reconceptualised the relationship between ideological and material, from one of separation to one of interconnectedness, by using detailed ethnographic information and indigenous categories from across the panoply of human societies.

Nonetheless, as a self-proclaimed Marxist, Godelier upheld the determinate role of the economic by claiming that those social relations that support productive processes are the most influential in a society’s functioning and transformations. Meanwhile, Sahlins concluded that it is, in fact, culture which constitutes utility. Evidently, despite their intentions to transcend dualism, each emphasised one aspect of this duality over
the other, hence spiralling back into the old conundrum. This experience in anthropology indicates that it is virtually impossible to avoid such dualism, at least within the conceptual schema that have emerged from the Enlightenment.

I myself have grappled with the categories of material and ideological in my attempts to understand and describe the sources of change among the Baka of Asoumondélé. While it is practically impossible to make a clean distinction between these two concepts, it is also extremely difficult to avoid their classificatory function in my analysis. I therefore have used the categories of material and ideological as a methodological necessity. The distinction informs my usage of the term *economic*. In general, what is meant by *economic* is that the practices so described pertain directly and primarily to the procurement, production, transfer or exchange of the material goods that are both necessary to support life, and which may also serve social functions such as creating obligations or attachments. The transfer of knowledge, when not exchanged for material goods, is non-economic cultural transmission rather than economics in terms of my definition.

When a parent teaches their child the skills related to any subsistence activity, one motivation they may well have is to ensure they are fed by their child when they become too old to care for themselves. This is an example of a situation in which it is difficult to distinguish between the ideological and the material, or non-economic cultural transmission from economic transfer. Notwithstanding this difficulty, the example classifies as non-economic transmission because it may be assumed that delayed reciprocity is not the primary motivation for the parent but rather the same love and care naturally given by a parent to a child in all spheres of life (aiding the reproductive success of the parent in terms of evolutionary theory).
Max Weber was on the right track with his concept of elective affinity, and Godelier (1984) is also correct in his argument that the social relations which support the productive processes are the most influential in a society’s functioning and transformations. These respective concepts broadly support the same hypothesis, namely that ideology and social practice are ultimately more constrained by the functioning of the economic system than ideas and values can generally constrain the economy.

The hypothesis that social ideology and practice are more constrained by the economic system than vice versa is distinct from the notion, generally attributed to Marx, that the economic base determines the cultural superstructure; it is not economic determinism per se. This hypothesis is implicit in the assumptions of behavioural ecology and optimal foraging theory, in that the type of economic practice of a cultural group has a predictable effect on other social practices, including those of reproduction and kinship (discussed further in section 8.8.).

Weber (1948) is likely correct insofar as elective affinity pertains to hierarchical societies. However, the concept loses explanatory power when applied to a consideration of how the economic practices of immediate return societies are perpetuated. In these societies, ideological principles that alienate individuals from the yield of their labour prevail (Barnard and Woodburn 1988, Woodburn 1998). This benefits the economic interests of all members of these societies equally.

There is some evidence from hunter-gatherer studies that points to the veracity of Godelier’s claim. The first tendency is that immediate return societies, and rigorous egalitarianism, are only found in tropical geographic zones in which it is possible to
procure food without significant storage or investment in labour over time. Tropical environments have very different resource constraints for hunter-gatherers than those of high latitude environments in which storage is a necessity (Hayden 1981). Storage usually emerges as a response to seasonality and unpredictably (Morgan 2012). Once established, it potentiates the emergence of inequality because it in effect creates private property that can be used by an individual or clique to gain political leverage over others, and it affords greater population density and sedentary aggregations (Testart 1982, Sofer 1989, Wesson 1999, Morgan 2012).

The second tendency is that the transition to delayed-return subsistence practices such as farming, which usually involves the creation of significant individual property rights, almost invariably leads to inequalities and authoritarian structures even though aspects of the egalitarian ethos may persist alongside these practices. Private property rights come about alongside the accumulation of surpluses, usually in environmental conditions of seasonal abundance. Price and Bar-Yosef (2010) argue that prior to the adoption of agriculture, inequalities of power and wealth were limited to a few complex societies of hunter-gatherers, such as those of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Successful cultivation afforded population growth and political domination by individuals who accumulated surpluses. Hayden and Villeneuve's (2010) case study of Futunan transegalitarian pig farmers in Fiji demonstrates that ambitious individuals, or self-aggrandizers, are instrumental in creating hierarchical social structure because they seize control of surpluses in order to gain political power.

Another form of this transition to delayed-return subsistence practices centres around the role of fixed critical resources. Those hunter-gatherer societies that come to rely intensively on fixed critical resources as a group also tend to develop ranks and role differentiation in order to manage such resources intensively, maximize the wealth
that accrues from them, and to defend these resources and wealth from others. For example, the salmon run streams belonging to extended households were instrumental in the emergence of inequality among Pacific Northwest Coast hunter-gatherer-fishers such as the Kwakiutl (Ames 1994, O'Neill 2014).

In the large population of pre-contact Kwakiutl, year-to-year and geographic variation in the size of salmon run yields led to, firstly, violent competition between wealth-maximizing individuals seeking to establish private property rights over streams. Subsequently, a ranked system of social prestige between groups and individuals based directly on differential wealth (as determined by competitive performance in potlatch giving ceremonies) emerged in order to protect private property rights through less costly means than violence (Johnsen 1986). Potlatching may also have had the effect of distributing surplus stores during periods of salmon run depletion and the shortfalls of the winter months, acting as a form of insurance against the temporal and spatial variation in salmon run yields\(^80\) (Suttles 1968, Piddocke 1969, Ames 1994, Taylor III 2009).

Thus, while a hunting and gathering economy and a tropical environment do not determine that a society will be egalitarian, they do make it possible. Where environmental resources do not support a functioning economic system in which there is both limited storage and investment of labour, the practice of egalitarianism is much less feasible and thus inequalities and hierarchy almost invariably emerge. This principle has important implications for those immediate-return societies that are facing new environmental pressures due to international resource extraction and consumption.

\(^{80}\) Salmon runs are highly variable between species, streams, and annual cycle.
As Thomas Widlok (2005) describes the relationship between property and equality:

…institutionalised property and the division of labour raise the likelihood that inequalities emerge; they seem to be sufficient but not necessary as factors in the emergence of inequality (Widlok 2005: 2).

Thomas Gibson’s (1985,1989) analyses of two dialectical cultural constructs in Buid society presents a counter-example to the formula that, for a society to be rigorously egalitarian, its subsistence must necessarily be based on immediate-return practices, or even on gathering and hunting. The two constructs are the positively valued sharing of companionship (food, labour and sex) associated with equality and autonomy, and the negatively valued sharing of substance (spiritual and physical kinship) associated with domination and dependency. The Buid are shifting cultivators of Mindoro, Philippines, but they share some features of social organization with egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies despite having a primarily delayed return economy.

Gibson (1988) addressed the difference between the Buid and immediate-return hunter-gatherers. He claimed that the latter are able to tolerate a greater degree of social differentiation (into gender and generation groups) as well as interpersonal dependency between affines (in the form of bride-service) without releasing their egalitarianism. The Buid emphasize principles of autonomy because of the potential of their delayed-return subsistence practices to create inequalities between people. For Gibson this indicates that there is a form of elective affinity between the hunter-gatherer way of life and non-competitive egalitarianism, and that:
....it is because there is a certain tension between economy and polity among the Buid that the principles of sharing and individual autonomy from kin, spouse, and creditor receive such a clear and definite formulation. (Gibson 1988: 22).

As Aboriginal Australian hunter-gatherer societies have been shown to exhibit severe gender and generational inequality despite having a largely immediate-return subsistence economy (Woodburn 1980b), it is clear that the hunter-gatherer subsistence economy does not determine or guarantee that there will be a political system of equality in such a society. Nonetheless, to reiterate, the fact that the vast majority of non-competitive egalitarian societies do have a hunter-gatherer economy demonstrates that this style of economy helps to make egalitarianism possible.

8.4. The Accumulation of Private Property

The Baka of Asoumondélé are embracing the idea that accumulating possessions will lead them to a happier future. Their beliefs about themselves and the world around them seem to be changing too, as they increasingly compare themselves to outsiders. Nowadays more time is spent farming and pursuing commercially oriented activities than gathering and hunting. Individual interests and those of households have become more sharply defined, and the previously interdependent economic relationship between the genders has been knocked off-balance because the monetary earning power of men is greater (quantitatively demonstrated in Section 8.6.). Money is important because it is required to purchase the new goods that are now considered essential to modern life.
The work of women in cultivating, gathering and preparing vegetable foods is indispensable, as this is the staple diet and meat is scarce. Women obviously also perform invaluable labour services to the community such as child rearing, cooking, cleaning, and collecting firewood and water. However, the increasingly monetarized economy in Asoumondélé has created a situation in which men are able to surpass women in terms of earning power. Men are able to fetch higher wages than women for their labour; the lucrative gold mining work requires the strength of a man; and animal products like meat, ivory and honey have a higher monetary value than the largely vegetable items that women procure and produce.

Baka households occasionally sell meat to each other. For example, if a household requires a large amount of meat (such as an entire large game carcass) in order to host visiting relatives, they may purchase it from one of the specialist hunters in the community. This may have begun as a result of new opportunities to earn money by selling bushmeat to outsiders, but nowadays Baka individuals do sell both meat and honey to each other as well. In fact, if a hunter kills an animal surplus to his household’s requirements, the usual course of action is to sell it to outsiders rather than share it more widely within the Baka community, unless a special ritual event is involved. An animal carcass might be sold also to the entrepreneur who has established a shop in the Baka quarter of the village. The shopkeeper’s wife then prepares the meat, along with some kind of starch, and they sell it back to Baka individuals by the plate, at 500 CFA (about 54p) per plate. Monetary transactions have come to exist alongside sharing practices in the community, which means that certain individuals have better access to food in times of scarcity – notably young to middle-aged men, who are the biggest earners by dint of the proceeds of labour-wages, gold mining and hunting with traps and rifles.
Koichi Kitanishi (2006) noticed that meat in particular had come to be regarded as a commodity, and was generally sold rather than shared (although still shared during forest visits) by the Baka community he observed in Ndongo village (near Moloundou, Cameroon) during fieldwork in 1999 and 2000. He also observed Baka-to-Baka selling of meat in Ndongo, as I did among Baka households in Asoumondélé. However, he noticed that locally produced alcohol was always shared between Baka individuals, and never sold. In Asoumondélé, I observed that one middle-aged Baka woman started copying the practice that some Njem men and women have of selling sachets of manufactured spirits for 100 CFA (0.11 GBP) apiece by walking around the Baka part of the village, particularly at public gatherings. A sack of around 30 sachets can be bought from 2,000 CFA (2.24 GBP) upwards, depending on the vendor.

Kitanishi claimed that some activities were appearing in Ndongo that indicated the emergence of the Baka commoditization of Baka labour. Although he did not observe any inequalities of wealth between different “families”, he did notice that inequalities in wealth were emerging in the home between men and women as men: a) earned more for their labour working on farms; b) were the sole recipients of bridewealth payments; and c) benefitted from the high cash value of bushmeat. However, Kitanishi suggested that this wealth inequality between the two gender groups did not result in relationships of inequality in daily life.

Rather than a hunting and gathering economy, the economy of the Baka should now be considered to be an economy of mixed subsistence strategies, but arguably based primarily on horticulture. Although I did not measure caloric intake, the day-to-day diet of Baka individuals in Asoumondélé village is based on cultivated carbohydrates, primarily cassava (bómá), but also plantains (ndo) and maize (mbómbò).
Fig 8.1. Pounding cassava leaves

Priority is given to working in the fields during the clearing, sowing and harvesting seasons (encompassing the wet seasons). There are two rainy seasons (*sokò-*ma); a heavy rain season runs from August to the end of October and a lighter rain season runs from mid-March to June. There are also two dry seasons; a longer dry season (*sokò-*yaka) runs from November to early March, and a shorter dry season (*èlàngà*) runs from June to the end of July or early August. Both women and men work the fields, but the clearing of farms is usually a male activity, while the hoeing, tilling, sowing, and harvesting are female tasks. Fields are referred to by the names of the specific women who work on them (e.g. *gbie na Mendom* / farm of Mendom), but in fact the entire household will share in the yield of farm produce. Seasonal shortages in these crops can occur, especially during a delayed or otherwise erratic rainy season,
when there may be short periods of famine. There are also food shortages at the beginning of the rainy seasons before any harvest, when time spent preparing the soil and tilling prevents women from foraging activities.

The carbohydrate based Baka diet is supplemented by protein acquired by trapping animals with wire snares, providing mostly small mammals such as duiker (déngbè: blue, mònjombe: red), rat (bìlì), squirrel (tendelibèndì), mangabey monkey (tamba), porcupine (mbòke) and pangolin (kokòlo, giant: kelepa), but also occasionally larger animals like chimpanzee (sèkò), gorilla (èbobo), red river hog (pàme) and elephant (yà). Animals that burrow beneath the ground, such as rat, pangolin, civet (liàbò) and honey badger (ndime) are also dug up by hand. Both men and women do this type of hunting, though it is far more common for men to set the traps. During mid May to early June 2011 there were severe food shortages in the village due to crop failures. A number of Baka households went on hunting and gathering excursions for a few weeks in the forest, which is uncharacteristic during a wet season.
Figure 8.2. Rat caught in a snare

Figure 8.3. Hunter and porcupine
Wild animals are no longer abundant around the village. People told me that the game had been scared away by noise from the machinery operating at the mines, although it is likely that the surge in the bushmeat trade since the new road has been opened has been a major factor in the perceived scarcity of meat. In fact, it was repeatedly mentioned to me by various Baka interlocutors that the Mbûnge (white people) at the mine should bring domestic animals such as pigs, goats, sheep and chicken to replace the wild meat source that has been lost. The nkukuma, Mengbwa Samson, was a vocal advocate of this plan. One man objected to the plan on the grounds that he cannot eat village animals, a taboo also observed among the Mbendjele (Lewis 2002a).

The dry seasons are focused on forest activities. Wild honey (pôkì) is harvested when in season (dependant on blossoming of various species), either by tree climbing or tree felling. Skilled hunters will go on hunting trips in the forest taking their families with them, typically for a week to two weeks (mâka), but sometimes for longer when hunting for elephant and other large game as it is usually necessary to go deeper into the forest for these. Generally, this is done with a shotgun borrowed from one of the Njem men in the village, which entails the obligation that the shotgun owner will get his share of the catch (typically one hindquarter of an antelope). Only one shotgun is required for the party of men (which will be at least three strong), the others carrying spears. Spears are also still used for opportunistic hunting when walking in the forest to set traps. However a longer hunting trip that involves small groups of men spending as long as a month or two in the forest (môlongô) is generally considered a wasted effort unless there is a shotgun available. None of the Baka of Asoumondélé own a shotgun.
During the dry seasons, women’s collective dam fishing is another primary source of protein. Small dams are made in the depleted streams of water nearby (there is no large river in the vicinity), most of the water is scooped out, and then the tiny fish, eels and freshwater shrimp are seized by hand and placed into buckets. Eels and catfish are dug out of their tunnels, though care must be taken as some of these can administer electric shocks as a defence against predators. The catch is then shared equally among all the women who participated. This is cooked up into a soup with chilli and grindings from the nuts of wild mango or pekè (collected seasonally, cooked, and dried). Blocks of this pekè have a relatively high cash value as it is a favoured seasoning in urban Cameroon and Gabon.

Figure 8.4. Collecting wild mangoes
The following are the activities that Baka household representatives listed as the types of work (*bèlà*) that their household members were engaged in:

**Table 8.1. Baka work activities, seasonal & year-round**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasonal</th>
<th>Year-Round</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming (<em>bèlà na gbiè</em>) (own farms and jobs on Njem cocoa farms), clearing during the dry seasons, tilling and sowing done just before wet seasons, harvesting towards end of wet seasons / beginning of dry seasons.</td>
<td>Gold mining and selling gold (<em>or</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting elephant (<em>yà</em>) for ivory (<em>èsémbò</em>), especially during the long dry season</td>
<td>Hunting or trapping and selling meat (<em>so</em>) to Kaka and to fellow Baka (more hunting trips into the forest occur during the dry seasons); hanging meat to smoke on the smoker (<em>pépulò</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing and selling large fish (<em>sì</em>) during the wet seasons (using fishing rods) and small fishes (<em>lk-sío</em>) during the dry seasons (using dams)</td>
<td>Selling farm produce, especially plantains (<em>ndo</em>) - plantains are harvestable year-round but there are relatively few grown in the locale, perhaps due to lack of plantain planting implements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting, preparing and selling wild mango / Irvingia gabonensis (<em>pekè</em>) and moabe / Baillonella toxisperma (<em>màbè</em>) seed oil (<em>mità / karité</em>) (short dry season, June-August)</td>
<td>Domestic chores (<em>bèlà na nda</em>), cooking food for the household, carrying firewood (<em>wà</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collecting and selling honey (<em>pòkì</em>). Heavy flow during June and October/November.</td>
<td>Weaving mats (<em>bingù</em>) and baskets (<em>giè</em>) for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing and selling tobacco (<em>ndàkò</em>) to Kaka and to fellow Baka (long dry season to short wet season)</td>
<td>Building a house (<em>na sì nda</em>), making thatched leaf roofing (<em>èbòo</em>) for houses, jobs helping Kaka to build houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngàngà</em> (traditional healing) work for the Kaka (fellow Baka do not pay for these services), midwifery (<em>ngàngà nà jùù</em>)</td>
<td>Making and selling sticks of fermented cassava paste wrapped in leaves (<em>lùbu / bobolo / baton de manioc</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working on a government campaign making the road (<em>ngbe kpàje / gbàà</em>) (in the recent past)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of the economic activities of the Baka villagers are inextricably connected with the economic activities of both the Njem, and newcomers to the region. Labouring on the farms of the Njem may involve payments such as some agricultural produce and/or some distilled liquor or a small amount of money (as little as 500 CFA (0.56 GBP) for a day of hard labour for a women or child, but generally about 1,500 CFA / GBP1.69 for a man). Many Baka people will insist on being paid in cash when not desperate for money due to seasonal food shortages or to an alcoholic drinking habit. They say they have had enough of the old system.

Hunting for ivory is very lucrative. Ivory from an average elephant fetches around 200,000 - 210,000 CFA (GBP219-GBP236) at 70,000 CFA (GBP79) per kilogram. Artisanal gold mining can also be lucrative, with traders paying 20,000 CFA (GBP22) per gram in Asoumondélé. The presence of entrepreneurs in the village and visits of merchants from Yaoundé to the vicinity means that the Baka have new opportunities to engage directly in business deals with these outsiders, thus reducing their reliance on the Njem to provide a cash income and supplement Baka farm produce. Consequently, the power dynamic between Baka and Njem is unsettled and possibly changing permanently as the Baka seek equality with others. Nonetheless, it is currently difficult for some Baka people to compete on the same terms as the Njem due to a relative lack of village-related skills and farming equipment. Economic independence for these Baka people does require an intact, biodiverse forest, where they can apply their knowledge and skills.

The mining company itself does not provide much waged labour to Baka people, although a few Baka people were employed at the outset. During my fieldwork period, only one Baka person from a nearby village was employed at the mine. The mining company does outsource labour however, as they buy up alluvial silt from enterprising individuals who procure piece-work labour from locals to dig it up, transport it, and load it onto a truck belonging to the mining company. Typically this labour is done by Baka men, and the procurement of labour is done by a Hausa trader.
or a Njem farmer, who is called the “owner” (propriétaire) of the sand. Camiron apparently pays 120,000 CFA (about GBP131) for a truckload full of sand, which they use in their building activities. Typically 100,000 CFA (GBP112) goes to the propriétaire, and 20,000 CFA (GBP22) is shared out between those who have dug up, transported and loaded the sand onto the truck.

There is a widespread sense of resentment among Baka people that they are economically exploited by both their Njem neighbours and by the Mbûnge who have opened up the mine. At the same time, many Baka people increasingly desire to emulate these other groups, particularly with regard to possessions and property. The Baka are worried that the Njem have accumulated a lot more wealth since the advent of the mine, and that all the jobs at the mine are going to Njem people and to outsiders rather than to the Baka. In this, they feel cheated, as it was a group of Baka men who initially guided the Mbûnge explorers to the hill of Ndimayo, where the iron ore deposits lie.

The Baka of Asoumondélé also compare their situation negatively with other Baka communities that have long been sedentarized alongside well-established roads, where there are some very economically successful Baka individuals, as well as those who have had great success in schooling. They want development projects to come to them, and to give them things like domestic animals, fishing dams, and houses with aluminium sheet roofs.

Since settling in the village, Baka livelihoods are becoming less attached to the forest and less easily distinguishable from those of the Njem. The circulation of money

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81 I met some literate Baka people at Moangue Le Bosque near Lomié, and also those working for NGOs in the larger towns of the Eastern Region (e.g. Messe Venant, director of Okani & Cameroon Programme Coordinator for Forest People's Programme). I have heard tell of, but never met, Baka individuals who have their own successful cocoa cash crop farms. Baka cash cropping has been studied by Takanori Oishi in Ndongo village, which is further east along the border of Cameroon and the Republic of Congo than Asoumondélé (Oishi 2012).
in the village since the arrival of the entrepreneurs, the first of whom arrived in 1981, has infiltrated social relations within the Baka community, which is apparent in their production and distribution practices. This first entrepreneur claims to have introduced the Baka to artisanal gold-mining, and seen them move out of their forest base-camp, called Bissoublam. He told me that when he first arrived, the Baka were very unfamiliar with using money, and could be cheated easily into accepting a very low value coin, e.g. a 5 CFA coin for a week’s labour. Nowadays, the Baka of Asoumondélé are much more astute in monetary transactions, although the tendency is to spend rather than save upon being paid a sum of money. The shopkeeper in the Baka quarter of Asoumondélé told me that men spend most of their money on alcohol, and women are more likely to buy household goods or clothing for their families.

There are other ways that monetization has caused the Baka of Asoumondélé to diverge from Woodburn’s (1982) categorization of immediate return. According to Woodburn, the immediate-return society has certain ideological principles that disengage people from the potential that property ownership has to create differentiation (1982: 445). The Baka villagers seem to have now largely accepted significant individual property ownership, and, in many instances, aspire to it. However, those who have less still expect those who have more to share their money and goods out in the community, leading to double standards as far as the accumulation of property is concerned, or an “I can do it but nobody else should be allowed to” attitude. This is sometimes the cause of interpersonal conflict, resentment, secrecy, hoarding and avoidance.
Surveying each Baka household\(^\text{82}\), I asked whether property accords people more status or respect, and most respondents seemed to agree that it does, although their responses are often ambiguous.

The following are what some respondents had to say on the topic of other people’s reactions to their acquisition of possessions:

Nana Catherine, self-described as *mbotâki* (a middle-aged woman):

*Some people seem to be jealous of me but this is not always obvious. It can just be from the expressions on their faces. Some people respect me for what I have, and others do not.*

Bilangué Cécile, self-described as *mbotâki* (a middle-aged woman):

*Some people are jealous of me because of the things I have, but others are happy for me. Personally, I don’t know if people are really jealous of me, it’s others who tell me that “this person is jealous of you”. Some people respect me because of the things I have. Others take me as an example and ask their husband to buy them the things that I have.*

Mboyo Samedi, self-described as *mbotâki* (a middle-aged man):

*Some people are jealous of what we have but others try to imitate us by buying the same things we have. All these things change our status because it is good to have farms, houses, and gold-mining sites. It permits us to have money and food to eat or sell. With the money, we can build a house and buy things. Your status changes because people give more respect to a person who owns houses and farms rather than to a person who has nothing.*

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\(^{82}\) The survey took place between 30/04/12 to 9/05/12, names have been changed.
Ngadjè Anika, self-described as *mbotàki* (a middle-aged woman):

*People in this village see us as they always do. The things we have make no difference. We are still the same and our relationships with others have not changed.*

Ngoma Martin, self-described as *mbotàki* (a middle-aged man) and *kobo na nda* (head of house):

*I don’t know what people think. They don’t tell me. Maybe they speak among themselves. Of course, with what I have, people do respect me because I have my own things, like pots and plates. I don’t need to go asking for things at other people’s homes.*

Samoum Jean, self-described as *mbotàki* (a middle-aged man):

*When people come and see what I have, maybe they take it as an example and try to buy their own. I don’t know what people think. When I see what the nkukuma has, I try to follow his example and also get what he has. I don’t know if there are also other people taking me as their own example.*

Tata Pierre, self-described as *mbotàki* (a middle-aged man):

*I have to continue looking for more money so that people can see that I have at least something in my house.*

Mangué Dieudonné, self-described as *mbotàki* (a middle-aged man):

*I don’t have more money and things than the other houses but there are some houses that are wealthier than mine. Two years ago, we didn’t have any money but now, with the money I have earned, I bought some things like pots, cups and*
plates. Some people respect me because of the things I have, but some don't. As for me, I respect others because of the things they have.

Most of the responses indicate that having more possessions is a cause for increased respect from other Baka individuals. Some responses indicated that it is possible that jealousies may be created by some Baka people having more possessions than others, but generally respondents seemed reluctant to admit that they thought others might be jealous of them. The idea that those Baka who have fewer possessions will try to imitate those who have more possessions was raised several times over. Those who have less did not admit to being jealous or resentful of other Baka, but they said that they aspire to have more themselves.

8.5. Projecting Demand Sharing Outwards

While property ownership is changing the politics of the Baka villagers to some extent, the Baka also seem to project their demand-sharing ideology onto the advancing capitalist economy, creating a set of assumptions and expectations that are the inverse of how an anthropologist might understand capitalism – as an economic system in which trade and industry is controlled by private owners for the express purpose of maximising individual profit. The following are extracts from a focus group I held on the topic of money:

Amane Roberte, self-described as kobo (an elder man):

83 The focus group was held on 30/04/2012, names of participants have been changed to protect their identity, apart from Mengbwa.
Since I’ve had white hairs, I have no longer wanted to work for the Njem. The money that the Njem give you is never enough. We need to be given money by the Mbûnge. We need to get money from the Mbûnge, so that we can be happy. The Baka are leaving the Njem. The Njem have too much pride.

Wenda Cécile, self-described as sia (a young woman):

*We want the money to come here to us. We suffer when we work for the Njem. The way it is now is that if you don’t do jobs for the Njem, you can’t find happiness. The money must come to us. So that we can buy things together.*

Mentouma Veronique, self-described as mbotàki (a middle-aged woman):

*To receive the money... it’s the same as what we’ve already said. If you do not suffer, you will not earn money. But we want money to come to us. We love what we do with things. We do good things with money.*

Aba Chantelle, self-described as mbotàki (a middle-aged woman):

*These are the only words we have. We are like that. If we do not work with the Njem, we cannot receive money. I am a basket weaver. If I did not weave baskets, I could never earn money. If I do not braid mats, I don’t earn money. Give us those things we desire in our hearts. We want to live in happiness. Do! Get us out of this poverty.*

Mengbwa Samson, Baka chef de village:

*I am the leader of Asoumondélé; that is why I say this. I am talking about the problem of money, which all of Cameroon must hear. We see in this land, the currency is of use to us.*

*The way that others receive, we want the money to come to us. We want the money to come to us so that we can fix the village. Money helps with everything. Money should come to this house.*
Ngan Théodore, self-described as *mbotàkì* (a middle-aged man):

*I will speak. We have all worked on this earth. In this land of Komba [God]. If we have people on this land... Through the words that I'm going to say right now... We must see some good while there are still not too many of us here. The Mbùnge should do us some good. They need to get us out in the same way that they got the others out. They should send us money to buy clothes for children. We must all be acknowledged. We need to be known in the same way that the Njem are. We must be like them.*

The Baka villagers believe that the new economic order is one in which money should arrive – at their demand – from outside, and be shared out within their community in order to create an equally good future for everybody and to become the equals of people like the Njem. In reality, these attempts are resulting in inequality of outcomes, despite the original motivation to create equality of outcomes. Nonetheless, contrary to my initial understanding of what the Baka villagers were trying to tell me, they are not the passive recipients of capitalist ideology and competitive materialism. Rather, they are adapting their existing ideology, which includes a strong emphasis on sharing, to accommodate a new world full of belongings, which they compare to the freely accessible material abundance of the forest. Their assumption is that the sharing ethic should apply to everybody, thus the *Mbùnge* should come and share their enormous reserves as wealth, just as an elephant hunter would share out meat and the proceeds of an ivory sale.

In order to obtain equality with other people, which they believe is their due as human beings, they infer that they must acquire an equal share of the material and technological abundance that they have become aware of. They have noticed that this abundance is in particularly large supply for those who are associated with activities
surrounding the mine. The manner in which the Baka villagers of Asoumondélé are responding to economic challenges from outside is not the inevitable outcome of such exposure, but is also shaped by the antecedent cultural framework of forest life, e.g. demand sharing and equality with others. They are experimenting creatively with a cultural model that served them well in the forest, which is to use a variety of methods to target the full diversity of resources. This has led them to adopt a mixed subsistence strategy for the new conditions.

8.6. Results of Property Survey

I conducted a survey\textsuperscript{84} to understand the relative economic value of the property owned by each household in both Asoumondélé and Quartier Didjua (the hamlet introduced in Chapter 6). In Asoumondélé, 14 out of 15 households completed the survey. In Quartier Didjua, both of two households completed the survey. The survey involved making an inventory of every item of property that the household possessed apart from clothing and cash. These two items were omitted because it would have been too intrusive to ask to go through people’s clothing or to ask them to show me how much cash they had. Another problem with cash would have been that it is easy to conceal and therefore would have been easy for respondents to deliberately provide misinformation, which they would have had plenty of motivation to do. There is reason to believe that this will not have skewed the results of the survey too much because

\textsuperscript{84} The survey took place in April and May 2012, names have been changed.
Baka people generally do not save large sums of money but quickly either spend their income on consumables or transpose it into household goods or personal possessions.

Disclosing the amount of cash one owned would have presented a security risk, and also if it were to become known that any Baka person had a large amount of cash stored away that person would become a target for high-pressure demands from other Baka people to share it out, for example by buying alcoholic drinks for others. Another possible motivation to conceal cash is that disclosure of any such wealth could undermine the Baka strategy of obtaining goods from outsiders (including myself) by pleading poverty. This is especially likely seeing as it was clear that the community hoped that I would advocate on behalf of the Baka for wealth to be brought to them from Mbûnge. In fact, I believe that one of the wealthier families successfully concealed the extent of their property from my inspection by claiming there was nothing in a small locked room that I know was used for storage because I myself had stored valuables there on an earlier occasion during a trip into the forest.

In addition to counting the number of household goods, I also asked respondents how many farms and artisanal gold mining sites household members owned, and how many livestock such as chickens (used for trading) or dogs (sometimes used for hunting) that a household owned. Farms and artisanal gold mining sites do not vary much in size, perhaps 2,000 m² per farm and 150 m² per gold site. I also counted the number of wattle-and-daub houses the household owned, and the approximate size of each house (ranked as small, medium and large). The monetary value I have assigned

85 See my discussion of this mimetic strategy in the context of Bird-David’s (1988) theory of encompassment (using outsiders as economic and social resources) in Chapters 1-3, and see also Köhler & Lewis (2002).

86 This is an estimate only. The farms and gold sites were not all systematically measured.
to such items is an estimation of the costs involved in producing these assets in terms of raw materials and labour. The monetary value attached to Baka-crafted items such as traditional brooms, spears, woven mats, bamboo beds, benches, chairs, fishing rods, crossbows, baskets and fishing nets have been assigned on the same principle, although sometimes such items do have a local cash value, in which case I use it.

Note that the items that have a higher monetary value in terms of the national economy (such as houses, farms and artisanal gold mining sites) are all procured primarily through the labour of men. Trees are not cut down by women, nor do women dig up the tonnes of soil required to create a gold mining site. In Appendix 8.1. is a list of the types of property that households owned at the time of survey, and an approximate economic value in CFA for each item.

**Total Household Wealth**

After summing up the items of property, and multiplying the sum of each item by its economic value, I reached a total economic valuation of each household measured by the variable *total value*. The wealthiest household was the household of the *nkukuma*, or *chef de village*, Mengbwa Samson, valued at 909,400 CFA (about GBP985). This household consisted of 22 adults (11 women, 11 men) and 11 children. The poorest household was one of the households at Quartier Didjua, valued at 104,400 CFA (about GBP113). This household consisted of four adults (two women and two men) and two children. In the wealthiest household, this amounts to 41,336 CFA (about GBP45) per adult. In the poorest household, this amounts to 26,100 CFA (about GBP28) per adult.
The average economic value of all the households is 298,150 CFA ($SD = 201,091.54$). As it is obvious that there are clear outlier cases that are skewing the mean, a better measure of the central value, or average, of the data may be the median ($Mdn = 232,450$). The median represents the actual household economic value that lies in the middle of the range of values. The median is considerably less (676,950 CFA) than that of the richest household, which is valued at 909,400 CFA. These statistics suggest that there are large differences in value between households, but they are not conclusive because they do not take per capita values into account.

Figure 8.5. Frequency of total household wealth

Figure 8.5. details the frequency of the total household wealth (represented by the variable *total value*, shown on the x-axis). The bars indicate how many households fall into each wealth bracket (frequency on the y-axis).
The variance of this data is as follows:

Range = 805,000 (minimum 104,400, maximum 909,400)

Skewness = 2.1

The range means the difference between the maximum value (richest household) and the minimum value (poorest household). The skewness shows a heavy positive skew, which refers to the fact that the frequency of the data depicted in the histogram (Figure 8.1.) is stacked towards the y-axis. This means that there are more households towards the bottom of the range of economic values than towards the top. The outliers (which represent the long tail of the distribution curve as illustrated by the histogram) are the households with the high economic values. As is apparent in the histogram, most households (12 out of 16) lie in the 100,000 – 400,000 CFA range of economic value. Just three households lie in the range between 400,000 CFA and 600,000 CFA. Finally, only one household lies in the range of 800,000 CFA to 1,000,000 CFA. This rich outlier is the household of the nkukuma, which is valued at 909,400 CFA.

The Gini coefficient for total household wealth in my sample is 0.3173, which can be rounded up to 0.32. The Gini coefficient is a cumulative distribution function. It is a statistical measure of the inequality among values within a frequency distribution by calculating the ratio of the area between the Lorenz Curve and the equi-distribution line (a hypothetical point of absolute equality), however it does not give any indication of the characteristics of the distribution (Bellù & Liberati 2006). It can be used to measure inequality in either income or wealth. A Gini coefficient of 0 would mean perfect equality (if all households were of equal economic value), whereas a
coefficient of 1 would mean absolute inequality (if all the wealth was owned by one household).

To give an indication of where a coefficient of 0.32 stands relative to other real life situations, a Gini coefficient has been calculated to measure the economic inequality between households within different countries by the World Bank. The highest Gini coefficient recorded by the World Bank since 1990 is 0.67, based on consumption levels in South Africa during 2006. The lowest Gini coefficient recorded by the World Bank since 1990 is 0.25 based on consumption levels in the Ukraine measured in 2010.

Interestingly, the overall Gini coefficient measured in 2011 for Cameroon, based on consumption, is also 0.32 – the same coefficient calculated in my survey of Baka communities during roughly the same timescale (my survey took place in early 2012). Thus the wealth inequality in the Baka communities of Asoumondélé and Quartier Didjua as measured by a Gini coefficient of 0.32, is consistent with the national level of inequality so measured, albeit on a much smaller scale. However it should be noted that the small sample size of my survey may be a distorting factor, as the Gini coefficient has a downward bias for small populations (Deltas 2003). Thus in real terms, the level of actual wealth inequality in the given Baka communities may in fact be higher than the actual level of national wealth inequality.

However, there is another problem with taking these data at face value. That is, households vary enormously with respect to the number of adults they include. One would certainly expect a larger household to have a higher economic value because

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87 The World Bank: World Development Indicators: GINI index.
88 The Gini coefficient for the Republic of the Congo during 2011 was 0.4. The Gini coefficient of the United Kingdom during 2010 was 0.38.
they have more potential earners and probably also more children to provision. The nkukuma’s household has 22 adults and 11 children, the highest number of people per household in the survey, and also the highest number of adults. It is thus far still unclear to what extent one could speak of economic inequality between households based on these data.

**Average Wealth per Adult**

The next step was to consider the average number of adults per household and how that squares out with the wealth of each household. The variable used for this measure is *adults*.

Each household has an average of 6.25 adults (*SD* = 5.27). The median is 4.5.

The variance is as follows:

Range = 20 (minimum 2, maximum 22)

Skewness = 1.93.

The skewness of the distribution is 1.93, a heavy positive skew. This means that the data in the histogram (Figure 8.2) is stacked towards the y-axis and that the number of adults per household is in the lower range of the distribution (about two to ten adults) in most cases.
Following on from this, I then looked at the descriptive statistics in terms of the average wealth per adult as measured by the variable *average wealth*.

*Average wealth = total value* divided by number of *adults*.

The average household wealth per adult in the entire population is 63,130 CFA (SD = 38,574). The median is 55,652 CFA.

The variance is as follows:

* Range = 139454.6

* Skewness = 1.28
Figure 8.7. Frequency of the average household wealth per adult

There is a moderate positive skew in the distribution. This could mean that most adults are in the 0 CFA to 100,000 CFA wealth bracket and much fewer in the 100,000 CFA to 200,000 CFA wealth bracket, although this is working with an average per adult per household (average household wealth per adult) rather than a real value. The actual contribution to household wealth by individuals in terms of a monetary value is unknown. Those adults in the very lowest wealth bracket – 0 CFA to 25,000 CFA – could be the very elderly who are relatively housebound.

The property owned by a household, and any yield from that property (e.g. farm produce), is generally shared throughout the household. However, the gain from a piece of property like an artisanal gold mining site, which has a high cash value, might be amenable to individual hoarding or non-sharing, as was the case in the anecdote about the argument between two brothers who shared a site (see Section 4.4.).
Gini coefficient for the average household wealth per adult is 0.31. This is very similar to the Gini coefficient of 0.32 for total household wealth.

I then performed a comparison of household wealth and individual wealth by correlating the scores for the average wealth per household with the total wealth per household using Spearman’s rank correlation test. There was no significant correlation 
\[ r (14) = .348 \text{ (one-tailed), } ns. \] This result is open to interpretation. However, it is consistent with my hypothesis that there are a few, or a single, high earner/s per household. In other words, in the case of a richer household, not all the individuals belonging to it are higher earners – quite the reverse in fact.

As noted in Section 8.4., men are now able to surpass women in terms of cash income because of the high cash value of the forest goods they procure (meat, ivory, gold, honey) and the higher rates they get paid for waged labour. Also, it is the labour of men that creates high-value property such as farms, houses and gold mining sites. This, along with lack of a significant correlation found between the average household wealth per adult and the total household wealth, led me to reconsider the data in terms of the average household wealth per adult male, which excludes or discounts any possible contribution that women may have made to the accumulation of property, which is likely to be negligible due to their much lower earning power.

**Male Wealth**

Household wealth per man was calculated by dividing the total value of a household’s wealth by the number of adult males in the household. This is measured by the variable male wealth. The average male wealth per household in the entire sample is 139,358 CFA \((SD = 73,425)\).
Figure 8.8. Frequency of the average household wealth per male

The variable *male wealth* does not correlate significantly with the *total value* of a household $r (14) = .356$ (one-tailed), *ns*. The statistical test used was Spearman’s rank. This could mean that it may be only one man in each household bringing in a high income, and the more men there are per household the less they all contribute to the total household wealth relatively speaking. Consistent with this hypothesis is the fact that *male wealth* does correlate almost perfectly with *average wealth* $r (14) = .91$, $p <0.001$. This means that it is likely that it is only men that contribute to a household’s accumulated property. The odds of that not being the case are less than one in a thousand. However, the men do not all bring in an equal income. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the Gini coefficient of 0.72 for *male wealth* per household in the sample is extremely high. This coefficient indicates that the economic contributions of the different men in a particular household are uneven.
8.7. Impact of Sedentarization on Subsistence and Health

Robert Hitchcock (1988) demonstrated that among sedentarized Tyua Basarwa of Botswana a shift from gathering and hunting to cultivation or herding resulted in increased susceptibility to seasonal shortages, whereas the traditional methods they had used to deal with temporal variation were more robust.

At the time of Hitchcock's research, the Tyua had come under resource stresses due to encroachment on their land by agriculturalists and pastoralists, which undermined their traditional strategies. There were some indications that those who adopted a mixed strategy of foraging, farming, wage labour, and craft production were more resilient to resource stresses during both dry and wet seasons. Those who came to rely on agriculture and employment due to government resettlement programmes were subject to reduced self-sufficiency and severe shortages, both seasonally and in the long term, especially when they could not find employment or lacked the means of production e.g. land, livestock and tools.

Hitchcock also noticed that there were differences in the degree to which households experienced seasonal shortages, and that there was emerging inequality among the Tyua:

*There is growing evidence of socioeconomic stratification among the Tyua. Some households have managed to accumulate productive assets which are then not shared widely. Examples of these include guns, plows, livestock and wagons. A tendency toward lineal inheritance of those goods is also emerging. If present trends continue, there will be a much less egalitarian system in place among*
Tyua, and there will be pronounced differences between the haves and the have-nots (1988: 81).

Susan Kent (2003) has argued that “aggregation had a much larger role in promoting higher morbidity among hunter-gatherers past and present than is usually attributed, especially when coupled with sedentism” (2003: 1). She bases this claim on case studies of high morbidity among aggregated and recently sedentarized hunter-gatherers observed from 1987 to 1990 at Kutse (Kutse Basarwa) and Dobe (Ju/'hoansi !Kung) settlements in the Kalahari.

According to Kent, Kutse sharing was primarily motivated by social concerns. Short-term or long-term economic concerns were at best secondary. The continued sharing behaviours of these highly egalitarian communities when they became sedentary and aggregated led to the unintended consequence of the sharing of pathogens in addition to the sharing of food, hearths, other goods and knowledge.

Dounias and Froment (2006) have analyzed the impact of sedentarization on the health of former forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer societies, including the Baka, Aka, Kola, Medjan, Efe and Mbuti of Central Africa, and the Punan of southeast Asia. They argue that changes in the diets of these former hunter-gatherer populations leading to malnutrition and new exposures to diseases are indicators of the costs of sedentarization, which hunter-gatherers pay in order to become incorporated into modernity.

In addition, enormous pressure is exerted on the natural environments and the cultural systems of these sedentarized peoples. For example, once aggregation of people occurs, the proliferation of a heavier pathogen load is encouraged. In addition, environmental changes caused by settlement may disrupt the ecosystem leading to
increased transmission of viral and parasitic infections to humans, in particular malaria. Those hunter-gatherers who do not choose to shift to agriculture will also inevitably find wild resources under pressure from expanding farming populations and resource extraction industries, which consequentially may force them to become more sedentary.

Yet another pernicious phenomenon is the insecurity and discrimination caused by social prejudice, which causes sociocultural maladaptations:

For the forest dwellers, the illusion of development gives way to frustration and the feeling of being left behind. Social support such as mutual aid, collective activities and food sharing is in constant decline and is being replaced by more individualistic attitudes. (Dounias and Froment 2006: 31).

The mental stress caused by social prejudice may lead to increased domestic violence, and addictions such as heavy alcoholism and smoking. According to Dounias and Froment, “alcoholism is a new rampant social pathology among sedentary Baka villagers” (2006: 31).

There are clear indicators that the causes of epidemic alcoholic addiction among the Baka are related to social factors such as discrimination and exploitative labour relations in which alcohol is used to secure cheap labour from the Baka. The most well understood genetic predisposition to alcoholism is the absence of a protective mutation in the genes for the enzymes alcohol dehydrogenase and aldehyde dehydrogenase involved with metabolism of acetaldehyde in the liver (Li and Bosron 1986, Foroud et al. 2010). Also, there is an association between alcoholism and the genes that encode for GABA-A and other neurotransmitters, which have a role in mediating the effects of alcohol through interaction with neurotransmitters, and may be related to a dysfunction
of serotonin regulation (Foroud et al. 2010, Fahlke et al. 2012). However, the relationship between genetic and environmental factors – including family, peer and societal influences – is crucial for determining risk, and this interaction is poorly understood at present. Regarding genetic risk factors, a group of molecular biologists researching for the USA’s National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism have explained, “it would be a gross overinterpretation of the results obtained in human association studies to date to suggest that we currently have a means to identify people at greatest risk for alcohol dependence” (Foroud et al. 2010).

As shown by Levang, Sitorus, and Dounias (2007), sedentarized Punan Tubu hunter-gatherers of East-Kalimantan, Indonesia, are experiencing identity problems due to the conflict between the traditional hunter-gatherer way of life in the forest and the desire for integration and modernity. In a similar vein, an ethnic identity crisis afflicts many Baka individuals in Asoumondélé, contributing to alcoholism as well as outbreaks of internecine and domestic violence, as discussed in previous chapters.

**8.8. Behavioural Ecology and Risk**

As the relationship between change in the subsistence economy and change in political organization would appear to be central to the manifestation of identity crisis among the Baka community at Asoumondélé, I would like to touch briefly on how risk mitigation works from the perspective of behavioural ecology. In behavioural ecology, risk is understood as being “about unpredictable outcomes of behaviour and decisions, and their consequences for fitness or utility”, thus risk is defined as “unpredictable variation in an outcome with consequences that matter” (Winterhalder 2007: 433). The
assumption is that organisms have evolved to avoid harmful outcomes and to have risk-sensitive adaptations.

The behavioural ecology approach has been especially useful in the study of hunter-gatherer economies, resulting in a school of enquiry known as optimal foraging theory. As propounded by Winterhalder and Kennett (2006), behavioural ecology adopts concepts from economics that have demonstrable utility in explaining the adaptive decision-making of not just capitalists but also of hunter-gatherers, horticulturalists and agriculturalists in the human world, and even the adaptive decision making of other species such as bats. The basic economic concepts concerned are marginal valuation, opportunity costs, discounting and risk sensitivity. Introducing the idea of risk into optimal foraging models affords a stochastic element to the relevant environmental variables, which results in more accurate explanations of outcomes based on statistical probability.

Whereas early foraging theory models focused on the goal of maximizing the acquisition rate during foraging, later models assume that the forager has the goal of risk minimization. These risk-sensitive models have brought an interesting predictive principle into our understanding of how risk works in hunter-gatherer societies, and even in hunter-gatherer societies that are turning towards agricultural activities. This basic model predicts that foragers who are not meeting their average requirements will be risk prone, i.e. they will adopt risk-seeking strategies, while foragers who are meeting requirements will be risk averse (Winterhalder and Kennett 2006: 18).

Ecological theory, in a broader sense, leads us to expect actors to be risk-seeking under conditions of instability. More specifically, in forager theory, hunting and gathering has generally been assumed to be an inherently risky and uncertain strategy.
This assumption conflicts with anthropological findings on the negative impact on health of the sedentarization and concomitant switch to farming of former hunter-gatherers, reported in Section 8.7 above. Social anthropologist Richard Lee (1979: 301) long ago suggested that nutritional stress among African hunter-gatherers is considerably less than among agricultural populations based on a wealth of data collected on the small group sizes, low population densities, dietary diversity, constant work effort and extensive environmental knowledge of hunter-gatherers. Moreover, a recent cross-cultural global survey in behavioural ecology itself has shown that if habitat quality is controlled for, hunter-gatherers actually have significantly less famine than groups using other subsistence modes (Berbesque et al. 2014).

The risk reduction strategies adopted by immediate return hunter-gatherers tend to be the pooling of resource harvests within a sharing network, as well as mobility and/or fluid local-group composition (Smith 1988). However these risk reduction strategies may change in differing environmental conditions, for example the storage of excess production.

Also, there is a tendency among hunter-gatherers to opt for what is known in behavioural ecology as discounting; that is when an organism decides to opt for a small reward immediately rather than a larger one at a later time. Discounting accords with the immediate return classification of hunter-gatherers, who tend to emphasize the subsistence needs of the present according to Woodburn’s definition (1982). Bram Tucker (2006) has shown that among the Mikea of rural Madagascar, the discount rate of individuals who are primarily hunter-gatherers is significantly greater than those who have transitioned towards depending primarily on farming. Salali and Migliano
(accepted) have come to a similar finding among the Mbendjele of the Congo Republic.

With this predictive success in mind, is it possible to intuitively analyse the risk-seeking behaviours of the Baka of Asoumondélé in terms of a formal risk-sensitive model, as devised by behavioural ecologists? Based on their new experimental and mixed set of subsistence strategies (agriculture, gathering, hunting, wage labour, trade, entrepreneurial pursuits), problems with alcohol and violence, and also their experimental ritual activities that explore the effects of status and inequality, the evidence suggests that due to the unprecedented population and resource pressures in the Asoumondélé district, and the health implications thereof, the Baka have assessed their situation to be precarious. They may have done so consciously or their actions may be the result of physiological responses to stress, disease and famine.

The old risk-avoidance strategies available to mobile hunter-gatherers are no longer available to these Baka people, and therefore they can no longer be relied upon to have beneficial outcomes. For example, sedentarization means that people can no longer distribute themselves as widely as they once would have done in order to overcome resource patch depletion and seasonal resource variation, hence they must rely more extensively on the delayed return activities of farming. In turn, a greater reliance on farming requires that long-term investments of labour and storage are required, which means that future discounting is no longer an option. As they have come face-to-face with destabilizing social and environmental factors beyond their control, they are compelled to take up new risk-seeking activities and an even more diverse subsistence repertoire than before. These changes may result in innovations and a successful socio-economic strategy with new risk-avoidance strategies that could lead them to a better, less harmful, overall outcome.
In fact, the observation that negative affect or emotion related to both identity crisis and resource stresses could cause physiological changes that lead to changes in risk-mitigation strategy (e.g. adoption of entrepreneurial endeavours, storage and accumulation, increased reliance on non-foraging activities such as cultivation, less sharing), and consequently social organization, is a central hypothesis that this Baka case study brings forward for consideration. It suggests that affect is one of the real-life mechanisms that causes the risk-sensitive model to have predictive power. This hypothesis is strengthened by a social psychology study by Herbert Bless and Klaus Fiedler, who argue that mood states “play an important role for the adaptive regulation of cognition and behaviour” (2006: 65), and that these affective states may reflect the nature of an ecological situation. Negative emotions are a cue to threatening situations, and may motivate an individual to engage in systematic and detailed cognitive processing strategies, which are usually adaptive in handling problematic situations.

As Eric Alden Smith (1988) has pointed out, far from obscuring our understanding of social relations, the behavioural ecology approach allows us to pay greater attention to the precise impact of risk and uncertainty on individual choice, thereby also compelling us to pay explicit attention to how social interaction and structural constraint may affect personal decision-making.

Winterhalder (2007) notes that “cultural decision heuristics” may be one of the mechanisms by which individuals make risk-sensitive decisions, while Smith (1988) acknowledges that in the human species both cultural inheritance and the cognitive ability to make complex individual decisions are uniquely evolved, leading to a cultural channel for evolution. This is why, in my view, the behavioural ecology approach is not necessarily at odds with Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (1982) when they argue that risk is “a collective construct” and that the selection of dangers
to be concerned about, and the choice of social organization, “run hand in hand” (1982: 186).

According to Winterhalder (2007), the point at which a conversion from a risk-seeking to a risk-avoidance strategy may occur (the sigmoid inflection point in statistical terms), may not be a starvation threshold but rather an aspirational level. In a stratified society, individuals may be risk prone at a lower level of the hierarchy as they aspire to join a higher social stratum that is socially attractive to them, then switch to a risk-avoidance strategy as they advance up the scale and become intent on consolidating their gains rather than slipping backwards. Although this hypothesis comes from within behavioural ecology, it is in fact a simple example of how a particular form of social organization and the social construction of risk may influence individual behaviour. It supports the theory that risk-oriented behaviour may be deeply embedded in, and contingent upon, both culture and social position and not solely on economic utility maximization.

The precarious situation that the Baka of Asoumondélé find themselves in extends beyond the increased exposure to disease, violence, intermittent famine and economic exploitation that has come upon them. They have also come to see themselves as impoverished, although they now have more material property than ever before, which goes to show that a precondition for poverty is differential social relationships – poverty is always a relative position. Sedentary life in the village forces the Baka to confront their precarious social and economic position and the degraded ethnic identity allocated to them within the national hierarchy on a day-to-day basis. The various mimetic, experimental and risk-seeking behaviours that I have glossed with the term crisis can be interpreted as a reaction to the instability provoked by the influx of
centripetal and neo-liberal capitalist pressures on a previously stable economy that included both demand sharing and exchange with non-Baka people.

The recent risk-seeking behaviour may provide successful new strategies for some Baka individuals while others may fall by the wayside. There are likely to be winners and losers in the short-term. As Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (1982) have noted, resilience is the capacity to use change to better cope with the unknown; it is learning to bounce back. A system can be very resilient even while fluctuating greatly due to low stability.

In the longer term, as the Baka try to encompass new worldly cultures and level-up to the status of others, do they notice the new risk of slippage into inequitable relations of production and consumption as the global economy stealthily encompasses them into a fourth world position at the bottom of the global hierarchy? With little or no prior knowledge of how the capitalist global economy and international law works, the Baka have not only insufficient negotiating power within the global hierarchy, but they also face massive uncertainty. That is, they have insufficient information with which to choose the most optimal strategy when it comes to facing these new dangers that make them precarious. Such dangers include the way that their environment and natural resources can be appropriated and degraded by others, and how new activities such as hard drinking may have a harmful effect on their wellbeing. Nonetheless, it is possible that, in time, the Baka may hit collectively upon some winning new survival strategies and thus live on as a viable ethnic group with a distinctive and sustainable Baka culture.
CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

9.1. Findings of the Research Questions

This thesis was intended to investigate three research questions:

1) *How is the balance of power overturned in egalitarian societies?*

2) *Is social inequality always tied to the alienating modes of production that stem from private property ownership as Marx (1844) suggested?*

3) *Is the ideological dimension of human life just as likely to generate social change as the material?*

*How is the balance of power overturned in egalitarian societies?*

The first of these questions was a general one, intended to elicit insight into some of the ways that inequalities might emerge in previously egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies. I started out by considering the material and ideological dimensions of human life, which had been suggested in the literature on the emergence of inequality as possible routes (Woodburn 2005, Rousseau 2006). I found that both of these routes were instrumental in the emergence of inequality among the Baka of Asoumondélé. However there have been some key economic transitions that have provoked three
definite stages of change namely: 1) the adoption of bridewealth practices due to involvement in the ivory trade, which may date back to the precolonial Atlantic trade period or to the height of the ivory trade in the 20th century; 2) sedentarization and the concomitant switch to delayed-return subsistence practices since the 1980s; and 3) exposure to the neo-liberal, capitalist, global economy due to the arrival of the mine in the late 2000s. It was only during the last of these three stages that I have been able to record first-hand empirical observations, while information concerning the first two stages was pieced together from other ethnographies, historical works, and from the oral history of Baka people in the vicinity of Asoumondélé. Each of these three stages have been analysed from an economic perspective, as they are all, at least partially, economic events that have allowed private property to become part of the Baka way of life. Private property, such as bridewealth, and the accumulated yields from delayed-return activities such as gold mining has created economically-based inequalities between men and women. The most important finding of my research is that the emergence of gender-based inequality can form the basis by which other types of social inequalities are established because reproductive competition between men intensifies as a result (see section 9.2.).

In my historical analysis, I have assumed that before the adoption of bridewealth practices, Baka society was largely immediate return. This assumption rests on evidence from the ethnographic writings of the 20th century and early 21st century, which trace the gradual switch from a mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a largely sedentary lifestyle with the adoption of agriculture. Previous ethnographic works also document the increasing importance of the competitive and market-driven village lifestyle, which contrasts with the intensely egalitarian lifestyle of the forest in which
mutual aid prevails. The assumption of an immediate-return foundation to Baka culture also rests on the fact that the Baka ethnic group splintered off from the immediate-return BaYaka, adopting a new language and encountering intensive trade networks during their migration westwards, which culminated in their adopting patrilineal bridewealth practices (See Section 2.1., 5.7. and 9.2). The most important point is that whatever changes have occurred have taken at least one century to unfold, with a recent acceleration of transformation as the global market economy reaches previously isolated parts of the rainforest.

Recently, archaeologist David Wengrow and anthropologist David Graeber (2015) have drawn upon Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat’s study (1904-5) on the seasonal variation between equality and hierarchy in Inuit social organization, and other classic ethnographies on seasonal variation in socio-political organization, to argue for an alternative model of Paleolithic politics. Wengrow and Graeber's approach emphasizes “the ability of hunter-gatherers to alternate – consciously and deliberately – between contrasting modes of political organization, including a variety of hierarchical and egalitarian possibilities” (2015: 1). This argument led me to consider an additional research question - the extent to which people can consciously and deliberately alternate between egalitarianism of the non-competitive kind, and political hierarchies.

Wengrow and Graeber (2015) propose that: a) such alternations in political style were an emergent feature in European Pleistocene hunter-gatherer societies during the last Ice Age, and b) the distinction between simple and complex hunter-gatherer societies is questionable within this model. The ethnography detailed in my own thesis suggests that while proposition a) is supported to the extent that some degree of oscillation between relative egalitarianism and hierarchy seems to have been an emergent feature in the slow process of social transformation from egalitarian to
political differentiation in Baka society, proposition b) is problematic given the robust social institutions and ethos of non-competitive egalitarian societies, which largely curtail transient cycling between egalitarian and non-egalitarian states (with the caveat that immediate-return hunter-gatherers are able to encompass the delayed-return political and economic strategies of outsiders in order to facilitate interactions with such outsiders).

The fact that Baka people are simultaneously able to conduct relatively egalitarian relations among themselves while employing the social and economic mores of political differentiation with outsiders strongly supports Wengrow and Graeber’s contention that hunter-gatherers have the cognitive capacity to consciously alternate between hierarchy and egalitarianism. This is not in doubt. Nonetheless, as this thesis demonstrates, it has taken at least a century since the inception of private property in Baka society for the Asoumondélé Baka to transition towards the delayed-return end of the spectrum. The barriers to earlier transitioning have been tenacious social institutions and psychologically instilled social conditioning.

All hunter-gatherers are capable of encompassing other political and economic systems into their own, in a way that keeps the two systems separate and allows hunter-gatherers to utilize the social and economic resources of other peoples, as argued by Bird-David (1988). Yet in an immediate-return society, the two systems remain largely separate. I suggest that once an immediate-return society does start to incorporate delayed-return economic practices, it becomes incrementally more susceptible to transitioning towards inequality. This is analogous to the way that capitalism has been theorized to cause an inexorable rise in inequality unless it is deliberately regulated, and moderated by high taxation of both income and wealth (Piketty 2013). Thus the capacity of immediate-return hunter-gatherers to encompass other systems may
ultimately lead to an erosion of their own egalitarian system in circumstances where the contrasting systems can no longer be kept separate, for example due to sedentarization.

As Woodburn explained in his famous article 'Egalitarian Societies', he chose the term egalitarianism because it "directly suggests that the equality that is present is not neutral, the mere absence of inequality or hierarchy, but is asserted." (1982: 431, emphasis in original). It is the assertive behaviour, the non-competitive ideology, and the levelling mechanisms of immediate-return society that would make it difficult for such a society to transition regularly, or seasonally, between assertively non-competitive egalitarianism and hierarchical organization. These cultural practices are more or less consciously used by immediate-return hunter-gatherers in order to counteract the self-aggrandizing tendencies within human nature.

The aim of Chapter 5 of this thesis was to demonstrate that egalitarian values, and especially gender egalitarianism, remain embodied within Baka people and reflected within their mimetic cultural acquisition and transmission practices, even though Baka society has already gone some way along the path to inequality. Changes to the egalitarian habitus thus may not be possible without a psychologically wrenching process of identity reconfiguration, and significant intracultural tension and conflict. This is certainly the case for the Baka, as was illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5, which describe the widespread ethnic and gender identity crises that Baka people of Asoumondélé have been experiencing.

Wengrow and Graeber's (2015) alternative proposition to what they call "the characterization of Paleolithic societies in binary terms (‘complex’ versus ‘simple’, ‘hierarchical’ versus ‘egalitarian’)" (2015: 3), is that there is a relationship between
seasonality and the conscious reversal of political structures, between communal and hierarchical modes of governance. Their application of early 20th century ethnographic findings on seasonal variation in the political organization of delayed-return acephalous societies to the Pleistocene in Europe is a conceptual step that will no doubt increase the scientific understanding of hunter-gatherer societies. In particular, their insights do seem to help explain the evidence of grand burials and monumental construction in the Upper Paleolithic in Europe, and perhaps of other geographic zones that were both highly populated and subject to a high degree of seasonal variation in the environment during prehistoric times.

The proposed application of this model to the whole of the Paleolithic period and as a challenge to the conceptual distinction between egalitarian and non-egalitarian societies and/or simple and complex hunter-gatherers is knottier. This is mainly because the ethnographic findings on seasonal variations in political style only apply to the delayed-return style of socio-political organization, which is in any case not truly egalitarian.

For example, one of the ethnographic examples cited by Wengrow and Graeber is an argument from Randall McGuire and Dean Saitto about the Prehispanic Western Pueblo peoples of the American Southwest. But the article refers to a debate about whether the Pueblo were "lacking in formal hierarchies beyond age and sex" or whether they were "hierarchical polities that may manifest significant inequalities of wealth and power" (McGuire and Saitto 1996: 201). They were not mobile hunter-gatherer societies. The Pueblo have practiced agriculture and property ownership since pre-colonial times, and their politics is characterised by "the facade of equality masking power differentials" according to Jérôme Rousseau (2006: 183). Pueblo
peoples are ruled by secret societies that appear to be representative but are, in fact, run by male hereditary leaders, with women routinely excluded from decision-making.

Due to the fact that the seasonal variations in political style described by Wengrow and Graeber (2015) seem to apply only to delayed-return societies where perennial inequalities, such as gender-based inequality, have a foothold, I suggest that it is preferable to refer to seasonal cycling between acephalous / communal and hierarchical politics. The case for this alternative terminology is based on my argument (in Chapter 1) that it is necessary to keep egalitarian and acephalous societies conceptually distinct. It seems likely that seasonal variations in environmental resources are a direct cause of seasonal metamorphosis of socio-political systems. For example, seasonal aggregation in a resource-rich zone may create the need for hierarchical governance of dense, temporarily sedentary, populations; or else inequalities and even violent competition over resources could emerge. Either way, such an environmental scenario is likely to create hierarchy.

My own hypothesis is that these same seasonal phenomena, and/or resource scarcity related to cold weather, will have caused societies to transform from immediate-return egalitarian societies to delayed-return acephalous societies with gender-based inequality many times over in history and pre-history. Such transformation would have facilitated cycling between communal and hierarchical styles of governance because it would have weakened or transformed the rigorous levelling mechanisms of non-competitive egalitarian societies, and allowed the invention of new practices and ideology that support hierarchies.
Is social inequality always tied to the alienating modes of production that stem from private property ownership as Marx (1844) suggested?

The second research question was aimed at testing Marx’s key insight that private property is always at the root of inequality because, in the pursuit of wealth and power, an elite group establishes and sustains itself by appropriating the means of production from others. This in turn leads to the alienation of an underclass from their own labour, according to Marx (1844). What is evident as the result of comparing the case study of the Asoumondélélé Baka with other hunter-gatherer studies is that the process of sedentarization by necessity creates private property ownership, and that sedentarization is also heavily implicated in social transitions towards inequality and stratification.

Private property is created in the process of sedentarization because the community must subsequently rely heavily on fixed resources which need to be protected and managed by individuals or households due to the reduced capacity to exploit multiple resource patches that sedentism brings about. When fixed resources are scarce in relation to the population size, this could lead to the appropriation of the mode of production by individuals or households. Examples of fixed resources discussed in this thesis include bee hives, farms, salmon runs and artisanal gold mining sites.

Sedentism also affords the possibility of large-scale storage, and even creates the need for it, as there may be seasonal or periodic food shortages due to resource depletion in the vicinity of the settlement and/or heavy reliance on limited seasonally available resources near the settlement. As storage replaces sharing, stored surpluses can be used by those who would appropriate control over them to manipulate and gain leverage over others. Both the necessity of storage and reliance on fixed resources
during the European Ice Age may be the underlying cause of the emerging inequalities in the Upper Paleolithic that are described by Wengrow and Graeber (2015), and possibly also the cause of seasonal cycling between acephalous and hierarchical politics during that period.

In the Baka case study, alienable private property was first established as the result of bridewealth payments and ivory trade\(^9\), followed by the gradual uptake of delayed-return subsistence practices such as farming, and finally incorporation into the capitalist global economy. It is possible that some Baka groups accumulated considerable amounts of wealth through the ivory trade and through cocoa farming during these ongoing transformations, as suggested by Köhler (1998). Perhaps some such groups also lost their wealth during the collapse of the cocoa boom in the 1990s and subsequently reverted to a more egalitarian way of life.

The exchange of bridewealth payments can become a means by which the labour and reproductive capacities of women are alienated from them and appropriated by men, as discussed in Chapter 6. This might be categorized as a form of control of the means of production as hypothesized by Friedrich Engels (1884) and subsequently by Eleanor Leacock (1972). As yet, this has not come to pass among the Baka women of Asoumondélé, or at least not entirely. Baka women control their own labour and generally still choose their own husbands. Farms belong to the women who work on them, just as artisanal gold mining sites belong to the men who work on them, and any person is free to choose a piece of available land in the forest to create either of these relatively fixed resources. That is, control over the mode of production has not come

\(^9\) As explained in Section 6.7., bridewealth payments impart a form of control over a woman’s labour and her reproductive capacities, which are then exchanged between men for alienable property such as currency, ivory, livestock, or other valuable goods.
about alongside the emergence of private property among the Baka of Asoumondélé, at least not from within the Baka community itself. On the other hand, resource scarcity due to the appropriation of land by the mine and newcomers to the region is in effect a seizure of the mode of production as it negatively affects the feasibility of the traditional Baka mode of subsistence. Moreover, the emergence of private property has caused economic inequality between the genders, with women restricted in earning potential while continuing to provide unpaid services to their households in a context in which money has become increasingly important. Also, the mode of reproduction, has partially fallen into the hands of men due to the adoption of bridewealth and patrilineal marriage practices.

In the words of Engels:

*According to the materialistic conception, the decisive element of history is pre-eminently the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements. This implies, on the one hand, the production of the means of existence (food, clothing, shelter and the necessary tools); on the other hand, the generation of children, the propagation of the species.* (Engels 1884: Kindle Edition Loc 162).

There is thus at least some evidence to support Marxist theory that social inequality is tied to the alienating modes of production (and reproduction) that stem from private property ownership, however it is likely that private property also has the potential to cause inequality through the means by which it is transferred. In other words, the mode of transfer may be as important as the mode of production, and here Woodburn’s (1998) article “Sharing Is Not a Form of Exchange” is salient. When property is exchanged, rather than shared, this can effectively cause unevenness in the distribution of resources, which is demonstrated empirically by the property survey in Chapter 8.
Most of the exchange that Baka people engage in is with outsiders, yet as most often the proceeds of such exchanges are not shared, the effect is still inequality between separate Baka households. This phenomenon highlights the power of external forces to alter the politico-economic status quo.

Jérôme Rousseau (2006) maintains that there is a significant difference between simple hunter-gatherer societies and complex hunter-gatherer societies. His description of the kinds of economic transfers that characterize the transition from simple hunter-gatherer to complex hunter-gatherer socio-political organization is enlightening in this respect:

*The social features of simple societies are incorporated into more complex systems in a transformed way. Demand sharing becomes generalized reciprocity, which is then transformed into accountable reciprocity* (2006: 232).

*Is the ideological dimension of human life just as likely to generate social change as the material?*

The third research question addressed the interrelationship between the material and ideological mechanisms by means of which inequalities begin to take hold. The Baka case study emphasizes the interdependence of the material and ideological dimensions of society. It also draws attention to the possibility that other dimensions of human life may be influential in socio-political transformations of this kind, highlighting in particular the role of affective states within the Asoumondélé community. Negative emotions seem to be especially influential insofar as they are related to physical stresses such as disease and hunger, which may push people to diversify their subsistence strategies, or insofar as they concern questions of social identity such as
ethnicity and gender, in this case pushing Baka people to mimic the patriarchal and status-seeking ideology of the dominant Kaka society.

Other dimensions implicated in the observed social change are ritual and mimesis. These are not themselves ideology but practices in which ideology is produced, transformed and embodied as habitus (Bourdieu 1977). The Baka case study indicates that there is mutual causal interaction between ritual and quotidian social dynamics. The experimental ideology that Baka people are currently preoccupied with performing during ritual time is the ideology of status-seeking and consumerism. Given that ritual co-experience in an egalitarian society is geared towards maintaining the political order of counter-dominance, my hypothesis is that the very ritual rebellion (Gluckman 1954, 1963) which undercuts established hierarchies in the unequal societies that prevail today, actually undercuts the established practices of equality when transferred to the context of a society transitioning towards hierarchy. The monumental structures described by Wengrow and Graeber (2015) in relation to inequality in the Upper Paleolithic in Europe, may have fitted into such a pattern of ritual rebellions against levelling mechanisms at the time when they were built.

Finally, the fact that the three key transitions identified in this research each have a substantial economic component suggests that ideology and social practice are ultimately more constrained by the way that the economic system functions than ideological values and beliefs can constrain the economy. In the Baka case study, ownership of private property and the (external) appropriation of the means of production has had a powerful disequilibrating effect on social relations.
9.2. The Role of Gender-based Inequality

This thesis has demonstrated that there is gender-based inequality in the Baka community of Asoumondélé, in particular bridewealth payments (which somewhat diminish women’s choices in marriage) and husbands using violence against their wives in order to control them (such incidents are usually alcohol-related). Using Frederick Engels’ (1884) theoretical framework on the origin of the family, Eleanor Leacock (1972) argued that gender inequality results from the transformation of women’s labour into a private service due to the separation of the nuclear family from the community, which in turn leads to the development of private property and individual inheritance. In a similar vein, it might be argued that mobility is linked to egalitarianism for some shifting cultivators such as the Buid, and for hunter-gatherer societies, not solely because it facilitates conflict avoidance but also because it serves as a mechanism that prevents economic privilege falling into male hands. Mobility has the effect of limiting accumulation of private property ownership, as it is difficult to store and guard goods and fixed resources if people are constantly on the move. However, if and when private property comes into existence, it is inevitable that it would empower men first and foremost because their superior physical strength allows them to seize hold of material resources and enslave or subjugate other people through physical coercion.

The principle that mobility and flexible living arrangements are prerequisites for non-competitive egalitarianism is backed by a study conducted by Patricia Draper (1975), who compared a nomadic Ju’hoan (!Kung) San group with a sedentary Ju’hoan San group in Botswana, concluding that sedentarization contributes to the
subordination of women. As women became more homebound in her study, work also became more sharply differentiated along gender lines and nuclear families moved towards economic autonomy. In the case of the Baka, the course that the emergence of gender inequalities took is perhaps more complex, but sedentarization has been a key factor that has caused relatively fixed households to come into being and to operate as separate and competitive economic units.

There are a number of other interrelated factors that have contributed to the way that gender-based inequalities have unfolded. The first of these is the fact that the Baka had already adopted the patrilineal ideology of farming peoples, as well as some of their patrilineal kinship and marriage practices, at an unknown time in the past.

It is possible that some of these conventions began to be adopted at the same time that the Ubangian language was borrowed from a farming group after the Baka had split from their Aka cousins. This split is theorized by Serge Bahuchet (1993b) to be at least as far back as the 15th century CE, though according to Lewis (2002a) the Mbendjele Aka say that it was only five generations ago (which would make it approximately 110-135 BP, or around the turn of the 20th century CE). Axel Köhler suggests that the Baka began to exchange bridewealth payments as a supplement to bride-service during the Atlantic trade period (1519-1867) when precocolonal iron currencies came into existence, and that the exchange of bridewealth peaked in the early 20th century CE at the height of the colonial ivory trade.

Overall, the late 19th or early 20th century CE seems to be the most likely period during which bridewealth and patrilineal practices were adopted by hunter-gatherers, as historian Kairn Klieman (2003) convincingly argues that this was the period during which agriculturalists widely began to use coercive methods to secure forest goods
from hunter-gatherers, which may well have included elements of ritual control such as regulating marriage.

It is also likely that bridewealth was first adopted in token form, in order to satisfy the expectations that Kaka people have about the legitimacy of marriage rites. The switch from token bridewealth to the type of bridewealth that is accompanied by a curtailment of the rights of women may have been a relatively recent phenomenon, caused by increased enculturation of Kaka values and practices as a result of sedentarization, and also as a result of the increased importance of accumulated wealth in Baka society. For example, the rights of Baka women to choose their own husbands, to divorce, and to remain free from physical coercion are all under threat, as described in Chapter 6.

The second factor in the emergence of gender inequality is that with the adoption of farming at the beginning of the 20th century CE, Baka women must have begun to spend less time together in large groups leading to the weakening of female coalitions. Whereas the foundational BaYaka culture sees women communally gathering food in the forest and influencing the social order through powerful female coalitions (Lewis 2009, 2014a), the Baka women of Asoumondélé typically work their farms alone or with one other woman of the same household. Female solidarity has likely diminished as a result of this, as evidenced in that female coalitions do not intervene when a man beats his wife in the way that Mbendjele women have been observed to do (Lewis 2002a).

The production of cultivated foods requires intensive investment of labour by both husband and wife, each with their own respective roles. The resulting farm produce belongs to a particular household, and women sometimes accuse each other of stealing
from one another’s farms. These tendencies likely intensified for the Asoumondélé Baka after they had permanently settled in the village, as doing so would have impeded the fission and fusion of residence groups, leading to fairly fixed, and often patrilocal households that subsequently began to operate as separate (and even competitive) economic units.

The third factor in the emergence of gender inequality is that with sedentarization in the early 1980s, the Baka people of Asoumondélé have lost their capacity to encompass external codes of social interaction within their own social system in a way that would allow them to utilize other peoples as economic and social resources in the manner described by Nurit Bird-David (1988). This means that, instead, the patriarchal social and economic conventions of the dominant society are imposed upon the Baka on a daily basis.

Alongside increased exposure to the racist stereotypes and discrimination directed against them by outsiders, and their desire to attain equality with others, patriarchal and accumulative conventions are more readily adopted by Baka people as they experience a generalized crisis of their ethnic identity (Chapter 4), and in the case of Baka men also a crisis of emasculation (Chapter 5). A crisis in gender identity is particularly stressful because it is a primary identity, and a mismatch between gender identity and sexual identity is psychologically intolerable. The resulting intensification of the importance of a patrilineal ideology and turn towards the practice of patrilocal postmarital residence has had the additional effect of separating women from their natal kin and deepening the rifts in female coalitions.

Yet another factor in the emergence of gender inequality relates to ritual, and the diminishing practice of female-centric rituals which serve as a counterbalance to male-
centric rituals. Women are increasingly sidelined in ritual performance, and the major female-controlled *Yeli* rituals related to large-game hunting are no longer routinely performed. A vacuum of female ritual power allows the foregrounding of male-driven competitive and status-seeking ritual experiments. The disruptive effect this has on egalitarian social structure is likely significant, as gender power balance in ritual is theorized to be an important component in the maintenance of egalitarianism (Finnegan 2013, Power & Watts 1997).

Finally, the impact of increased exposure to monetarization and the capitalist economy that the mine and the road have brought about has had the effect of creating economic disparity between men and women. Men have greater opportunities to earn cash than women, and are paid more for their labour. Consequently, men have more economic power than women and they also have more money to spend on bridewealth payments. The resulting inflation in bridewealth has led to the establishment of some of the subjugating effects that bridewealth has on women, and the facilitation of straightforward patrilocality without bride-service, which means that childbearing women are separated from supportive female kin.

Men also have more of a disposable income that they do not always use to benefit the household as a whole, instead satisfying their personal desires for alcohol, cigarettes, status markers such as flashy clothes and radios, convenience foods and so on. The rise in the consumption of alcohol has caused an epidemic of violence against women.

In addition to tracing the different ways that gender-based inequalities have been established in the Asoumondélé Baka community, this thesis also highlights that the emergence of gender-based inequality can form the basis by which other types of
social inequalities are established. The inflation of bridewealth is not only instrumental in the subjugation of women but it is also a potential cause of emerging wealth differences between men. Male-to-male wealth differences are evident in Asoumondélé in the competitive economic practices and status displays that Baka men have adopted, for example trading in gold and ivory, and buying radios and flashy clothing. The fact that there are emerging wealth differences between Baka men is supported by statistical analysis of the data from the property survey in Section 8.6.

The property survey shows that there is economic inequality between households in the Baka communities of Asoumondélé and Quartier Didjua that is equal to or higher than the national ratio of inequality (measured by a Gini coefficient) although the Baka are generally all much poorer than most other Cameroonians. It also indicates that the economic contribution of women to the net worth of a household is likely negligible, and that there is a tendency for men who are less economically successful to join the households of a more successful male relative, in effect creating incipient big man households. In these, the wealth of a big man is obtained through the labour of the people of his household leading to the incorporation of clients into the household (Guyer and Belinga 1995). A big man typically has multiple wives and children. Besides serving as an extra labour force, large polygynous families serve the evolutionary function of increasing a man's reproductive success, but at the expense of other men. The possibility of polygyny thus creates an intensification of male-to-male reproductive competition.

In her year-long fieldwork study of emerging inequality among Lanoh hunter-gatherers of Peninsular Malaysia, Csilla Dallos (2011) found that while resistance to what she terms social integration with outside communities was evident, there was a lack of resistance to emerging inequalities, and that inequalities thus developed very
quickly from the time that the Lanoh came out of the forest to settle in a village named Air Bah. Dallos found the rapidity of these changes and the ready acceptance of self-aggrandizement, leadership competition and inequalities perplexing, given the previous egalitarianism of the villagers.

Dallos's finding led her to contend that "this lack of resistance to developing inequality directly contradicts the notion of counter-dominance among egalitarian hunter-gatherers, suggesting that our notion of egalitarianism in small-scale societies needs to be reevaluated" (2011: 28). Her reasoning is that while Lanoh villagers are constantly comparing the past and the present, they are more likely to complain about crises of subsistence rather than sociopolitical change. The same could be said of the Baka villagers of Asoumondélé, who are embracing individualistic entrepreneurial activities while at the same time relaxing the suppression of status-seeking behavior, allowing inequalities of gender and wealth while complaining about poverty.

My interpretation of the failure of levelling mechanisms among the Baka differs from Dallos's hypothesis that "human production systems, including those of immediate-return hunter-gatherers, can only be comprehensively understood within the framework of categorical age" (2011: 224). Dallos dismisses the explanatory power of pair-bonding theories, sexual selection theories and human behavioural ecology on the grounds that these approaches are too narrow in their respective foci and that they neglect the human social context. She cites Ingold's (1988) critique of ecological approaches in support of her argument. Sexual selection theory and behavioural ecology are, however, useful factors in explaining how the power balance became unsettled in previously egalitarian Baka society. The gender imbalance phenomena concerned have exerted effects gradually over several generations, thus the full effects would not have been discernible from a cross-sectional participant
observation research project alone. A degree of historical analysis of kinship and marriage patterns, and attention to evolutionary theory were required to collect the necessary data to analyse emerging inequality in the Baka case study.

Cross-cultural comparison of data from similar contexts of emerging inequality, employing methods from both social anthropology and behavioural ecology, could reveal the true extent to which the combination of private property and gender inequality is implicated at a global level. The aim of contemporary human behavioural ecology is to thoroughly illuminate how the dimension of economic risk and uncertainty places constraints on the multi-faceted dynamics of human life, rather than to reduce the human being to a purely rational *homo economicus*, as its critics sometimes claim. Behavioural ecologists proceed by generating testable propositions and sound empirical results using the tools of evolutionary theory, thus enabling a sharper focus on other dimensions of human life (including social relations, social structure, and cultural transmission), and by acknowledging limitations and needed improvements to the approach (Smith 1988, Winterhalder & Smith 2000, Winterhalder 2007).

Given the results from the Baka case study, I suggest that ethnographic studies of emerging inequality in extant hunter-gatherer societies are applicable to scientific knowledge on the evolution of equality during human speciation, and also on the re-emergence of inequality in the period before complex societies first began to arise 40,000 years ago onwards. However, a single ethnographic study from a small sector of one ethnic group most certainly cannot serve as a stand-in or a template for human evolutionary history in its entirety. The Baka case study was never intended to serve as such, and a great deal of care should be applied when extrapolating from such studies when making universal generalizations. However, the elegance of the
behavioural ecology approach to anthropology is that it enables us to work within the parameters of definite physical constraints to human life, parameters that are broadly applicable across space and time in human evolutionary history.

Dallo's (2011) Lanoh case study falls into the trap of extrapolating too widely. For example, she argues that "in human societies younger men primarily produce in order to impress elders, rather than women, because producing, acting as 'net providers', paves their way to becoming an 'elder', the ultimate status in egalitarian politics" (2011: 229). Dallos thus appears to be contending that inequalities always gain hold primarily through the differences in status between young men and elder men. Elder men gaining power over younger men does seem to have been at least part of the journey to inequality among Aboriginal Australians, as I have argued in Chapter 6, however the other (equally implicated) part of that journey has been the power that Aboriginal Australian men seized over women.

In the Asoumondélé case study, there is no indication that younger Baka men compete to impress elder men, nor that age-seniority differentiation has been a significant path to inequality in the past. All Baka elders in Asoumondélé, both women and men, must increasingly rely on their closest kin to feed, clothe and shelter them once they begin to struggle to do so for themselves. Beyond the importance of younger men and women in provisioning the community, there is little indication of political differentiation between age groups. Baka elders do not have a special political status. They are respected for their knowledge and life experience but they do not have increased political authority based on their age or seniority.

Although the property survey in Section 8.6. shows that there are large economic disparities between men, the men who are the most economically successful in
Asoumondélé are those of middle years, or the indigenous category of mbotákí, rather than elder (kobo) or young man (éwanjo). Moreover, the search for opportunities to increase reproductive success does seem to be the primary factor motivating competition between Baka men, because the most politically and economically successful man in Asoumondélé, in his late thirties, has two wives, and many Baka men aspire to having multiple wives.

Dallos also suggests that "delayed-return egalitarian societies may be a more accurate model for the first human societies" (2011: 244) on the grounds that she thinks it unlikely that age-based authority would have evolved in a society where social organization and interpersonal relationships constantly undermine it, and because she thinks that it is easier to transition from delayed-return to immediate-return than vice versa. The problem with this hypothesis is, once again, that delayed-return societies typically have significant gender-based inequality and sometimes also age-seniority based inequality, thus the term egalitarian is a misnomer when applied to them.

Evolutionary anthropologists such as Camilla Power and Leslie Aiello (1997), Kirsten Hawkes (2000), and Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (2009) have theorized that cooperative breeding and bride-service are likely to have been major influences in the original emergence of cooperation and equality in early societies, with these also leading to a reduction of sexual size dimorphism. As I have explained in Chapter 6, cooperative breeding is facilitated by matrilocal post-marital residence with bride-service. African hunter-gatherer populations show genetic patterns that would be expected for matrilocal populations, for example Kalahari Khoisan (Schlebusch 2010) and Central African hunter-gatherers (Verdu et al. 2013, Verdu and Austerlitz 2015). This suggests that modern humans evolved under social conditions of matrilocal bride-service. Delayed-return hunter-gatherer societies typically do not practice matrilocal bride-
service. Scientific evidence available today thus suggests that the first human societies most resembled the immediate-return social structure articulated by Woodburn in his (1982) paper “Egalitarian Societies” though Woodburn himself has never made such a claim.

Just as gender relations seem to have been vital to the origins of equality among early humans, they may also have been instrumental in the prehistoric re-emergence of inequality. As the Baka case study shows, incipient gender-based inequality arising from the emergence of private property can be a major factor in the pathway to inequality in the contemporary world. The proximate cause of this is that private property has the tendency to empower men at the expense of women, leading to conditions in which individual men compete for wealth and power, and women have fewer choices. The ultimate cause is that male-to-male competition for reproductive success creates a situation in which an individual man can vastly increase his own reproductive success at the expense of other men, and this is facilitated by accumulating wealth and power over other people, both male and female. In other words, the final hypothesis that this thesis and this case study supports is that private property bestows evolutionary rewards for domineering behaviour in men. Without private property, the effect is muted. However, this remains a hypothesis, and one which must be further subjected to rigorous cross-cultural comparison before it can carry any weight in theoretical applications to our evolutionary past.
Section 9.3. What Does the Future Hold for the Baka?

While the Baka community that I got to know are active agents in the processes of change and the emergence of inequality in their midst, they are also not free agents operating in a context devoid of pressures. In fact, the pressures on the Asoumondélé Baka are enormous. The fact that the forest has, in effect, been appropriated from them, and the environment is undergoing transformation such that it will be beyond recognition by the next decade is a major challenge. It is a challenge that they are ill-prepared to face. There is already increased competition from outsiders for land and resources. Whatever new opportunities might arise will be highly competitive, as newcomers continue to pour into the region from overpopulated parts of Cameroon, such as the West Province.

The difficulties the Asoumondélé Baka now face include discrimination, economic exploitation, alcoholism, resource pressures and food shortages, epidemic diseases and lack of affordable healthcare, a struggle to secure a cosmopolitan education for their children, and their desperate attempts to earn enough money to make sedentary life work for them. Without money and property, they cannot live comfortably within the modern world outside of the forest, and they are well aware of this. They are also well aware that the respect of outsiders tends to be dependent on the accumulation of property.

The Baka community have been applying their existing cultural practices to explore the inequalities of modernity - mimicking outsiders, ritual experimentation with power imbalances, and diversifying their economic strategies. It has become clear through the course of this research that the emergence of inequality in the Baka community of
Asoumondélé is inextricably linked with the complicated and messy business of survival in an unequal world. It cannot be reduced to a single dimension.

Over many years, and on many fronts, an uncoordinated set of historical events have come together to incorporate the Baka of Asoumondélé into a new world order. They no longer have a choice. The Baka world view has irrevocably changed from proficiently encompassing the politically and economically differentiated structures of the outside world to effectively being encompassed by modernity. Baka people recognise that their incorporation is uneven, and that they are not getting their fair share of the benefits. They are also aware that this process of incorporation is an ongoing one, and that it will be a challenge that their children have to face.

The Baka community do not know what to expect as they have no equivalent prior experience. If their culture is to have a fair chance of emerging from the current state of social crisis, transformed but intact, then it is both necessary and incumbent for those in positions of power to do a lot more to assist the Baka and Njem inhabitants to cope with the changes to their environment. It is, after all, the government of Cameroon and Sundance International who have instigated these dramatic and ongoing changes to the environment, and not its local inhabitants.

In the words of the elder Mpako André:

*We do not see very well. We want the good on the Earth that Komba [God] has created. We want the good so that we too can see. We want to see.*
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GEF (Global Environment Facility),


Films


### APPENDIX ONE

#### Values of Baka Possessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooking pot</td>
<td>2,000 CFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry can</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamp</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucket</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basin</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortar &amp; pestle</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enamel bowl</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner plate</td>
<td>300 per plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoon</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of shelves</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden plantain knife</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain trowel / plantier</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spade</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional broom</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axe</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machete</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spear</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold mining pan</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basket</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woven matt</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo bed</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large house</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold-mining site</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small house</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knife</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron cable for traps</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manioc grater</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio set with sim card</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knife sharpener</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cup</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinding calabash</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generator</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelbarrow</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic barrel</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beehive</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold-mining spade</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemade fishing rod</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossbow</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammer &amp; pan for smelting iron</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoe</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosquito net</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinding board</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammer</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thin foam mattress</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing net</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>